Enhancing Governance and Decision Making at
the Students Commission of Canada

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in
Leadership

Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

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August, 2017

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Abstract

This study explored the research question: What strategies can the Students Commission of Canada (SCC) enact to enhance its governance and decision making? The SCC is a national charitable nongovernmental organization with a mission to partner with young people to put their ideas for improving themselves and their communities into action. The SCC's youth, staff, and board volunteers participated in the study. The methodology of the study was organizational action research engagement and participants provided their input through photovoice and focus group sessions. The study adhered to all Royal Roads University requirements. Participants wanted the organization to maintain open, adaptable, and flexible governance structures that support the engagement of diverse stakeholders in decision making. Recommendations that emerged from the study focused on proposing a 21st century model for governance for the organization. Namely, enhancing the complexity of existing systems and structures so that youth, staff, board members, and external stakeholders can more actively contribute to organizational governance and decision making.

   Keywords: youth, decision making, governance, NPO, nonprofit organization, complexity

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the unwavering support from my partner in love and life: Michael Tomlin. Thank you for your unconditional love throughout my master's journey. I am also grateful to live in a country where I can love who I want. I would also like to acknowledge the support and unconditional love of my family: Ann Durrell Mahdy, Medhat, Jasmine, and Kareem Mahdy. You have instilled in me a fierce determination to make the world a better a place. Thank you for the chats and pep talks when I doubted myself and for always encouraging me never to give up. Our family is tightly knit and dedicated to excellence in achievement and service to others. I am privileged to be surrounded by love that values me for who I am and pushes me to be better. I would also like to acknowledge the wisdom and guidance from my extended family. My Nana who spoiled me and always made sure I knew I was number one. My Gidi whose persistence, determination, and devotion to an ethical way of life have consistently grounded me. To my cousin, Greg Durrell who took me to Garibaldi Lake after my first residency, thank you for reminding me what matters.

Thank you also to Michael's family for providing me with encouragement and support. Your check-ins have meant a lot to me. Thanks in particular to Diane Tomlin, Anthony Tomlin, Katlyn Tomlin, Jonathan Tomlin, David Tomlin, and Jawad Kassab.

This study would not have been possible without the passion and commitment of my colleagues at the SCC who provided me the space and encouragement to get this done. I'd like to highlight the support I received from the SCC's Board of Directors and from my mentor and Executive Director, Stoney McCart. Stoney reminded me throughout the process to be patient and to let things unfold as they should.

To my friends—who haven't seen me as much these past 2 years. I am back!

My thanks to my Royal Roads University colleagues who helped me through CEDs, concept papers, philosophy statements, presentations, and leadership challenges. Particular mention needs to go out to the Thack Pack who helped lead the way on this truly Life. Changing. Experience. I had the privilege of working with Susan Thackeray in the residency and in an online course, and I am especially grateful for her support as my 'guide by the side' these past 2 years. Finally, this thesis would not at all have been possible without my supervisor, Alice MacGillivray. Alice, you have been a part of this journey since LEAD 618, when I developed the concept paper for this study. I have appreciated your support, encouragement, and feedback throughout this process and have learned so much from you because of your expertise.

"When the best leader's work is done, the people will say, 'We did it ourselves!'" (Lao Tzu, as cited in Goodreads, n.d., para. 1)

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter One: Focus and Framing

"Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™" (SCC, n.d., para. 14)—the Four

Pillars of the Students Commission of Canada (see also SCC, 2016a). The four pillars are the

core values and processes of this international youth-focused charitable organization. This study

focused on addressing a key challenge to the long-term sustainability of the organization:

governance and decision making. The SCC is grounded in youth–adult partnerships to achieve its

mission and objectives (SCC, 2016a). This study provided an opportunity for the SCC's various

stakeholders to develop a dynamic, leading-edge governance approach to support long-term

organizational sustainability. This study identified strategies and recommendations to enhance

the formal and informal governance of the organization.

Governance and leadership go hand in hand. I am a member of the SCC's Leadership

Circle. The Leadership Circle reports to the Board of Directors and is accountable for the day-to-

day operations of the organization. As director of the organization, my responsibilities include

executing and delivering mission-based activities for the organization. I am also responsible for

the long-term sustainability of the organization. I was interested in this topic because I wanted to

play a part in the development of a broad, inclusive governance approach that can be shared and

promoted with the wider youth sector. My specific interest lies in looking at how the SCC might

better engage youth in organizational decision making. The research question for this project:

What strategies can the SCC enact to enhance its governance and decision making? I also

explored the following subquestions:

1. How can youth be effectively engaged in governance and decision making at the

    SCC?

2. How can staff support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

3. How can the volunteer Board of Directors support enhanced governance and decision

     making at the SCC?

Significance of the Inquiry

Organizational governance and decision making play a critical role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) like the SCC. As a result, this inquiry project's change goal was grounded in identifying strategies to enhance decision making and governance at the SCC. At the onset of this research, I anticipated several benefits could emerge for the organization and stakeholders as a result of the inquiry. First, enhanced governance through a stronger Board of Directors could allow staff members to more effectively deliver on mission-based activities. For example, a stronger Board of Directors with clear roles and volunteer job descriptions could provide increased supports for administrative functions that are currently falling on staff. Furthermore, enhanced governance can improve the credibility of the organization with external stakeholders, such as funders, project partners, and the broader public. As Wells (2012) noted, increased credibility can have a positive effect on securing resources for the organization to achieve its mission.

Increased credibility could also lead to benefits for the SCC's primary internal stakeholders. This group includes the employees and volunteers from across Canada who drive the organization's mission. First, employee engagement could improve as a result of more formal and informal opportunities to have a voice in the direction of the organization. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) defined employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Second, an increase in employee engagement could also

result in greater productivity. Bridger (2015) described engaged employees as more involved and socially connected with their work, which can positively influence productivity. An increase in productivity could ensure that resources are being used effectively to achieve the SCC's (n.d.) mission. An engaged, productive group of employees and volunteers could result in better outcomes for youth who partner and work with the SCC.

Youth 12–24 years of age are at the centre of the SCC's (n.d.) mission. As a result, they represent the organization's primary external stakeholders. When I undertook this research, I anticipated several benefits could emerge for this group as a result of the inquiry. Youth who are engaged with the SCC will likely have an opportunity to be involved in SCC decisions that affect them. Youth who are not directly engaged with the SCC's programs could also benefit from an organization that more directly reflects the needs and interests of Canadian youth. Lawford, Ramey, Rose-Krasnor, and Proctor (2012) discussed how youth involvement in organizational decision making led to several positive outcomes for youth development and organizations, namely enhanced self-efficacy in youth and increased relevance for organizations that support youth. Increased relevance could result in more young people becoming positively engaged with the organization. I foresaw an improvement in organizational credibility, youth engagement, and access to resources as potential long-term benefits of the inquiry. Each of these benefits could positively influence the long-term sustainability of the organization.

This inquiry was urgently needed, as the SCC is at a crossroads in its organizational history. The SCC may experience long-term challenges to its sustainability and its credibility if the organization maintains its current form of governance and decision making. Since the organization's founding, governance functions have been held by the same Executive Director

(ED) with support from a small volunteer Board of Directors. Founder-managed NPOs can become overly dependent on those who established the organizations. According to Gedajlovic, Lubatkin, and Schulze (2004), this can make NPOs highly prone to long-term failure and cause stakeholders to question the organization's legitimacy. The current ED is planning to retire within the next 2 to 4 years. This impending retirement has resulted in an urgent need for SCC to address an opportunity for fundamental change in its governance.

Organizational Context

The SCC's (n.d.) mission is "to help young people put their ideas for improving themselves and their communities into action" (para. 1). The inquiry project's focus on exploring ways to engage youth in the governance of the organization aligned with the SCC's mission. Furthermore, the inquiry was geared towards addressing governance challenges that threatened the organization's ability to deliver on and achieve its mission. The inquiry also aligned with the organization's four pillars (SCC, n.d.), namely respect for the voices of a diverse set of stakeholders who can help to shape and influence the solutions to these challenges. This inclusive approach was also in line with the organization's 2017–2027 strategic planning process (SCC, 2016b). This process is focused on engaging a broad set of stakeholders in the development of a renewed mission, vision, and direction for the organization. These stakeholders include current and former youth participants, current and former staff, current and former board members, volunteers, funders, and donors.

The organization is currently led by a Leadership Circle, which includes an ED, a Director, and an Associate Director. The Leadership Circle is supported by a seven-member volunteer Board of Directors (SCC, 2016a). The ED is a cofounder of the organization and has

held most of the decision-making authority of the organization since its inception. As Gedajlovic

et al. (2004) noted, this kind of governance for NPOs can lead to initial advantages compared to

other organizations when entering and competing for new markets and/or ideas. Recently, the

ED began transferring the day-to-day leadership of the organization to the Director and

Associate Director. Stakeholders are now beginning to imagine the SCC as an organization led

by someone other than the founder. As a result, they are beginning to take ownership over

governance and decision making in the organization (D. Crewe, personal communication, May 6,

2016).[1]

The SCC (n.d.) has three key strategic priorities: to provide opportunities for youth, to

influence those who influence youth, and to plan for the future. A total of 45–60 different

organizations and foundations provide funding to the SCC in a financial year. These groups fund

projects that align with the organization's mission and three strategic priority areas. These

projects range from short-term contracts to multiyear grants. The leadership team of the

organization is responsible for ensuring that funding is secured to support the organization's

ongoing operations. In any given year, the organization engages close to 50,000 youth and adult

allies through 20–25 funded projects. The SCC employs 10 full-time and 20 part-time staff

across Canada to deliver these projects (S. McCart, personal communication, September 30,

2016).

From a governance perspective, the diverse funding sources have allowed the

organization to survive through difficult economic times. The SCC has also developed a track

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[1] All personal communications in this report are used with permission.

record amongst its funders and project partners for high-quality development and delivery of

projects and is known in Canada as the go-to organization for accessing the voices of young

people (A. Adair, personal communication, September 26, 2016). This model can result in both

creative and emotional tension as the Leadership Circle identifies opportunities for continued

funding. For example, the organization will often start off a financial year without guaranteed

funding for the year to run its existing operations. This tension often results in creative program

and project ideas. It can also often result in high stress for the leadership team. This stress

trickles down to an already overworked staff team and can have a negative effect on

organizational culture (M. Bernard, personal communication, September 26, 2016).

From a decision-making perspective, challenges have emerged from the project-based

funding model around perceived influence in the organization. The combination of a high

volume of funded projects and a small staff team often means that leadership is generating

project proposals and ideas. Therefore, staff may not be aware of what project they are working

on right up until they hear the news that it has been funded. In fact, project managers recently

identified a desire to have greater influence and involvement in project grant writing

(K. Agyemang, personal communication, September 26, 2016). Additionally, this combination

has often impeded the ability of the organization to focus on organizational development

(D. Crewe, personal communication, May 6, 2016). Staff members identified a need to shift the

balance in the organizational culture from doing to thinking. As a result, the SCC's (2016b)

current strategic planning process involves staff as key stakeholders. Currently, staff and

volunteers are in the midst of setting goals and defining the future state and organizational

conditions desired after the change. Beckhard and Harris (2009) defined this as a change process

focused on the future state of the organization (p. 687). This indicates that there is high readiness

for change in the organization (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, p. 693). This inquiry,

therefore, occurred at a time when key stakeholders were engaged in deep organizational

reflection.

Systems Analysis of the Inquiry

There are many different perspectives on systems. Szulanski (as cited in Bellinger, 2013)

defined systems thinking as "a way of looking at the world that focuses on the whole and not on

the parts" (Definitions section, para. 4). Similarly, Senge (2006) described systems thinking as a

"framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather

than static 'snapshots'" (p. 68). From Szulanki's (as cited in Bellinger, 2013) definition, systems

thinking is focused on "making visible possible places for taking actions that improve the

situation, and of serving as a framework for designing the best vehicles for implementation"

(Definitions section, para. 4). Leaders who take a systems thinking approach enable others to see

the possibilities of taking action. They also spend time observing the interrelationships that

influence their organizations. This systems analysis of the inquiry focuses on looking at the

whole system, at all influences that impact the SCC. The boundaries for this analysis included

the internal SCC organization, which is composed of the staff, volunteers and youth who deliver

the SCC mission. This analysis also explores the external system in which the SCC operates.

I begin this analysis examining the external system in which the SCC operates. The SCC

operates in the nonprofit sector. Wells (2012) noted NPOs do not focus on maximizing profits.

Thach and Thompson (2007) discussed how nonprofits "produce value that lies in the

achievement of social purposes" (p. 357). Similarly, Behn (1998) discussed how the missions of

NPOs can be "vague and conflicting" (p. 209) and that these agencies generally do not have enough resources to achieve their missions. As a result, NPOs are heavily dependent on external sources of funding to support mission activities. At the SCC, foundations, other organizations, and governments primarily provide this funding. Wells (2012) noted NPOs' dependency on external funding sources can sometimes make them subject to the whims of changing political, social, and economic contexts.

NPOs can also be charitable in nature. The SCC is a registered Canadian charity (SCC, 2016b). As a result, there are certain regulatory standards that the organization must meet in order to operate. Charitable organizations are required to disclose how they spend their money on an annual basis (Canada Revenue Agency, 2016). There is also a requirement to ensure that the organization restricts its political and advocacy activities (Canada Revenue Agency, 2016). As a result, the SCC has limited funding for self-promotion activities or donor fundraising. The SCC's charitable focus is geared towards improving the lives of young people. Therefore, the SCC also operates in the Canadian youth-serving sector and is a member of the National Youth Serving Agencies, which represents a cross-section of organizations that partner with and support youth.

When looking at the internal system at the SCC, it is helpful to consider Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames theory. Bolman and Deal (2013) defined a frame as "a mental model—a set of ideas and assumptions" (p. 10)—that people carry to help them understand the world. Bolman and Deal went on to identify four frames with which to look at organizations so that leaders can assess the challenges that their organizations are facing from different angles and points of view. The symbolic frame focuses on ensuring that solutions to challenges create faith,

beauty, and meaning (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 19), while the political frame grounds solutions in the development of an agenda and a power base (p. 19). The human resource frame aligns solutions to organizational and human needs (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 19). Finally, the structural frame attunes solutions to the task, technology, and environment of the organization. Below is an analysis of the SCC's internal system using Bolman and Deal's four frames approach.

First, from Bolman and Deal's (2013) symbolic frame, the organization is grounded in SCC's (n.d.) four pillars: "Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™" (para. 14). These four pillars act as the core values and processes of SCC and define the organization both for internal and external stakeholders. It is because of these values that the organization is currently engaged in a staff-initiated strategic-planning process. In fact, the organization's biggest challenges occur when there is a perception that these values are not being respected, namely when stakeholders perceive that they are not being respected or heard by the Leadership Circle or other members of the team.

Second, the symbols of the organization greatly influence the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Many staff describe the culture of the organization as one of family with a concerted attempt to limit hierarchy and formality. Staff members are given the option to choose their own job titles and there is no formal performance management process. Work assignments are structured around funded program buckets with staff assigned across buckets. There have been challenges with this approach, as staff members have yearned for formal feedback processes. There have also been challenges in ensuring proper accountability and responsibility for the completion of project deliverables due to the informal organizational structure.

Third, Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame also influences the human resource

frame. The SCC in many ways aligns with a core assumption of this frame, namely that

organizations exist to serve human needs, rather than the converse (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The

organization is committed to engaging youth and employing 67% of its staff as youth

(S. McCart, personal communication, September 30, 2016). As a result, the culture is quite

flexible and focused on serving staff and youth, rather than the opposite.
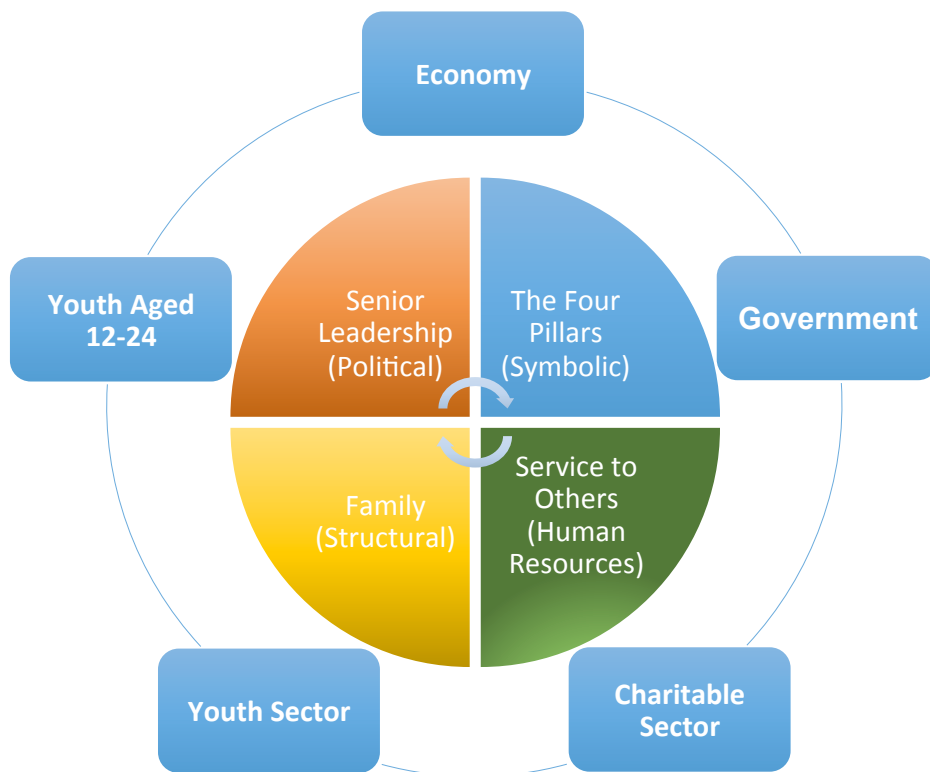
Figure 1. An adaptation of Bolman and Deal's four frames theory with the SCC system
embedded in the external system.

Note. Adapted from *Reframing Organizations*, by L. G. Bolman & T. E. Deal, 2013, San
Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 2013 by Bolman & Deal. Adapted with
permission by the Publisher.

Finally, I discuss Bolman and Deal's (2013) political frame, which in some ways was the

focus of this inquiry. Final say and accountability rest with the Leadership Circle and the Board

of Directors. This group makes some project decisions without input from staff or youth. This is

where tension sometimes emerges. For example, a project idea or approach may be proposed but

the senior leadership team (i.e., the political frame) may veto it in order to ensure a proper

distribution of organizational resources. Figure 1 demonstrates how SCC's internal system is

embedded and influenced by the external system.

Overview of the Thesis

The subsequent sections of the thesis are organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 presents

a literature review that brings forward research related to the research question and subquestions.

The chapter explores three topics: the theory and practice of governance, youth engagement and

participation in governance, and leadership. Chapter 3 is focused on describing the methodology

of the study. The chapter describes in detail the methods, project participants, study conduct, and

the ethical issues that were considered during the study. Chapter 4 explores the themes that

emerged from the analysis of data during the study. This chapter includes a description of key

findings, a discussion of key conclusions, and a review of the limitations in the scope of the

inquiry. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the study recommendations. This includes a detailed

description of the proposed recommendations for the SCC, organizational implications, and

implications for future inquiry. I conclude the thesis with an overall summary.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter explores research and theory related to the inquiry question: What strategies can the SCC enact to enhance its governance and decision making? The literature reviewed also addresses the subquestions:

1. How can youth be effectively engaged in governance and decision making at the SCC?

2. How can staff support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

3. How can the volunteer Board of Directors support enhanced governance and decision -making at the SCC?

This chapter begins with a discussion on the theory and practice of governance. This includes a discussion on governance definitions, theories, practices, and models, with a specific look at governance in the NPO context. This section of the chapter explores the relationship between stakeholder engagement and governance. This includes a review of the various theories and hypotheses that inform the emphasis on stakeholder engagement as a mechanism for NPO governance. Second, the chapter looks at stakeholder engagement more deeply by exploring the theory and practice of engaging the SCC's primary stakeholder in governance and decision making: youth. This includes a discussion on the various approaches and theories of engaging youth in governance and decision making. There is also a discussion on the outcomes and rationale of engaging youth in organizational governance and decision making. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion on leadership as a mechanism for governance in complex organizations. This section of the chapter is informed by complexity theory as it relates to

governance. It summarizes leadership approaches for organizations that operate in complex environments.

The Theory and Practice of Governance

The governance of NPOs: Definitions and theories. This study focused on identifying strategies to enhance governance and decision making in the SCC. It was, therefore, important for me to begin this chapter with a discussion on the theory and practice of governance. An initial scan of the literature revealed that the research on governance is primarily focused on corporate and government settings, with less emphasis on the not-for-profit sector. I found many definitions of governance in the literature. Each of these definitions varied depending on the context. Fukuyama (2013) defined governance from the government perspective as the "ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services" (p. 350). In contrast, Uhlaner, Wright, and Huse (2007) discussed corporate governance from the perspective of the shareholder. This definition related to the role of shareholders to influence decision making and ensure accountability. Similarly, Ott (2009) defined corporate governance more specifically as "a complex of rules, standards, procedures and institutions intended to guarantee good and responsible corporate management and to overcome deficits of corporate control" (p. 255).

Each of these definitions emphasized the technical nonparticipatory aspects of governance by focusing on themes of accountability, authority and the enforcement of rules. The literature on NPO governance also emphasized these themes but included a discussion on the role and influence of diverse stakeholders. Cornforth (2012) discussed how NPOs are often subject to overarching governing laws as well as implicit ambiguous expectations that emerge through shifting policy and community needs. Cornforth also suggested that the expectations,

functions, and services of NPOs are shifting and, therefore, governance structures and activities

should reflect this reality. Treib, Bähr, and Falkner (2007) highlighted this shift away from

traditional governance structures for NPOs by defining NPO governance "as a decision-making

system that provides for the involvement of different kinds of actors" (p. 7).

This definition aligned with Chhotray and Stoker's (2009) views on governance as

"concerned with the practice of making collective decisions" (p. 214). They discussed

governance as both theory and practice by emphasizing both the exploratory dimension and an

advisory character (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009). The emphasis in the NPO literature on collective

decision making and stakeholder engagement closely aligned with the unique community-based

approach and reality of NPOs. Carver and Carver (2001) highlighted the unique nature of NPOs

by emphasizing diverse stakeholder and community ownership. Salamon (2010) also emphasized

the unique role that NPOs play by highlighting the diversity of services that are offered for the

community, including civic, advocacy, culture, recreation, environmental protection, and

healthcare.

The diversity of services offered by NPOs requires the broad participation of

stakeholders. Van Puyvelde, Caers, Du Bois, and Jegers (2012) defined stakeholders in the NPO

context as "any person or group that is able to make a claim on an organization's attention,

resources or output who may be affected by the organization" (p. 433). Cornforth (2012)

elaborated on this definition by focusing on the stakeholders who influence the system in which

NPOs operate: funders and regulators. These definitions emphasized diversity and inclusion, but

did not include a discussion on the benefits and outcomes of engaging a broad cross-section of

stakeholders. Wellens and Jegers (2014) discussed possible benefits by framing stakeholder

engagement through the lens of accountability, namely that the more NPOs try to be accountable

to their various stakeholder groups, the more they will be perceived as being effective.

Furthermore, Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) noted, "Demographic heterogeneity on a board [or

governance structure or process] can facilitate sensitivity to stakeholders and innovativeness"

(p. 218). In contrast, they noted that homogenous boards may limit the perspectives and

information that are brought forward, which may result in the exclusion of critical voices

(Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012). This diversity of viewpoints can support organizations to remain

responsive to the changing needs of their constituents. In fact, drawing on complexity theory,

Goldstein, Hazy, and Lichtenstein (2010) noted that diversity of views in organizations can

contribute to emergence, novelty, and innovation.

A synthesis of the discussion on theory and practice so far points to a governance

approach for NPOs that includes the following key features:

- an orientation to community,

- emphasis on collective decision making,

- engagement of diverse stakeholders,

- flexible structures for ambiguous and shifting conditions, and

- consideration of overarching laws and institutions.

I will now explore more deeply the theory and practice behind the engagement of diverse

stakeholders in collective decision making.

The role of stakeholders in NPO governance. In the literature, I found discussions of

theories and practices of governance that take into consideration the role of stakeholders. In fact,

Beunen, Van Assche, and Duineveld (2015) proposed a theoretical framework that considers the

engagement of diverse stakeholders in collective decision making for organizations and institutions: evolutionary governance theory (EGT). Using an EGT framework, Beunen et al. (2015) defined governance as "a form of coordination in the taking of collectively binding decisions within a certain community" (p. 4). Beunen et al. also emphasized the role of diverse individual actors in governance by stating, "There are always some people with influence and one can always discern some form of coordination between more than one party in decision-making" (p. 4). This broad view of governance is inclusive of multiple stakeholders' roles in influencing an organization or context regardless of their positions in the organization. Beunen et al., in their discussion of EGT, also emphasized the emergent nature of governance by highlighting how diverse actors can shape institutions and likewise be shaped by institutions. Therefore, context matters: a particular approach to governance may work in one context but not in another, depending on the actors involved.

Wellens and Jegers (2011) explored more deeply the role of diverse stakeholders in the NPO context by proposing several hypotheses about the relationship between stakeholder engagement and governance. Each of these hypotheses focused on the influence stakeholders have in raising awareness about the organization. For example, if stakeholders directly interact with their governance structures, the organization is more likely to be aware of the quality and impact of the services being delivered. This specific hypothesis, as described by Wellens and Jegers (2011), is grounded in "resource dependence theory" (p. 178). Tillquist, John, and Woo (2002) described this theory based on the assumption that organizations must interact in their environments with others who control scarce and valuable resources that ensure survival. In fact, scarce resources are a hallmark of the NPO context. Vantilborgh et al. (2011) highlighted this

reality and noted NPOs increasingly need to apply "activities, strategies, practices, policies, and

knowledge from corporate for-profit organizations" (p. 645). Vantilborgh et al. specifically

emphasized how organizations are increasingly interacting with others in their environments to

acquire limited resources. This reality provides direct evidence for the resource dependence

theory described by Tillquist et al. I now shift into an exploration of NPO governance best

practices. The discussion will centre on the role of governance structures in engaging diverse

stakeholder groups.

NPO governance best practices. This study is also focused on identifying specific

strategies for the SCC's Board of Directors to enhance governance and decision making in the

organization. In fact, most of the research on NPO governance best practices placed a heavy

emphasis on the role of the Board of Directors in ensuring effective governance of NPOs.

Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) discussed how NPO volunteer board of directors often act as the

formal bridge between the organization and various community stakeholders. Tschirhart and

Bielefeld described this connecting role as follows: "Governing boards for nonprofits are an

important channel for civic participation and for establishing the legitimacy that allows

nonprofits to receive financial support and operate without heavy government regulation"

(p. 202). As discussed earlier, NPO boards have a set of standard responsibilities outlined by

government through laws, regulations, and policies. Tschirhart and Bielefeld noted, however,

that boards operate in different ways. They described how some boards may act as effective

champions for the organization in the community, while others may be "dysfunctional and

contribute very little to the organization" (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012, p. 202). Herman and

Renz (2013) noted organizational effectiveness was positively related to the activity level of the

board in strategic planning, board development, resource development, financial management, and conflict resolution. Herman and Renz found no clear consensus, however, from their study about what organizational effectiveness actually meant. This lack of consensus occurred because most boards analyzed in the study could not be compared to one another due to how different they were from one another (Herman & Renz, 2000).

        I did, however, note core competencies identified in the literature that were positively correlated with a healthy NPO. In fact, Chait, Holland, and Taylor (1996) identified six key competencies across a variety of NPO boards that contributed to organizational success. First, contextual competency, which is demonstrated when boards consider the organization's culture, norms, values, principles, and history when making decisions. Second, educational competency, which occurs when boards take time to educate themselves about the organization and its environment. Third, interpersonal competency, which arises when boards operate as a group of individuals, taking advantage of individual board members' skills. Fourth, analytical competency, which ensues when boards make better decisions when multiple perspectives and feedback are included. Fifth, political competency, which is a board's need to understand and be aware of the various interests of the organization's key constituents. Finally, strategic competency, which is when boards need to focus their limited time on key strategic priorities rather than the day-to-day operations of the organization. Chait et al. noted that a board may need to place emphasis on a specific competency or skill depending on the context or environment of the organization.

        Bradshaw (2009) identified five basic board configurations that could be used depending on the organizational environment of the NPO. First, policy governance occurs when boards are

clearly focused on big-picture strategy and policy setting. Second, in constituency or

representative governance, which is also formalized but tends to be more decentralized in its

decision making, power is held by committees and staff. Third, entrepreneurial or corporate

governance uses short-term task forces and project groups more than permanent committees.

Fourth, emergent cellular governance acknowledges governance as a complex system with little

formalization and bureaucracy and is organic and emergent in how it operates. Finally, a hybrid

configuration may be present, which does not fit with any of the configurations. Each of the five

configurations discussed can be used by NPOs to organize their boards depending on the context

and environment in which they operate.

It is important to note that I found controversy in the literature about the role of the board

of directors in supporting stakeholder engagement. There is agreement that the management of

diverse stakeholder relationships is a key aspect of NPO governance. As such, there is an

implicit assumption that boards are responsible for stakeholder relationship management, but

board members might not see this work as high priority. Cornforth (2012) reviewed NPO

governance research and concluded that researchers gave an outsized role to formal boards rather

than other stakeholder management mechanisms. Cornforth recommended that researchers

broaden their scope by looking at the formal and informal decision-making role of both internal

and external actors. Renz (2013) also addressed this overemphasis on boards by discussing how

"the domain of 'governance' has moved beyond the domain of 'the board'" (p. 2). Drawing on

complexity theory, Renz elaborated by emphasizing that complex problems require a network of

organizations to work together to address a challenge. Similarly, Blanchet-Cohen (2015)

discussed how nongovernmental, nonprofit, and community groups can act as "civil society's

conduit for promoting social change" (p. 265). Therefore, a network of organizations can provide

the collective governance required to address complex challenges or issues. With this framing in

mind, NPOs' individual governance structures or systems actually represent one part of a more

complex and interconnected governance structure that is less organizational in nature and more

issue or solution oriented.

Summary. It is clear from the research on NPO governance that there is not a one-size-

fits-all approach. Literature about governance theory and practice in NPOs revealed five key

features:

- an orientation to community,

- emphasis on collective decision making,

- engagement of diverse stakeholders,

- flexible structures for ambiguous and shifting conditions, and

- consideration of overarching laws and institutions.

These key features take into account both the environment in which NPOs operate and

the actors who make up the organizations. This section also reviewed theories and hypotheses of

governance. Beunen et al. (2015) articulated EGT and defined governance as a form of

coordination in the taking of collectively binding decisions within a certain community. Tillquist

et al. (2002) discussed stakeholder engagement hypotheses with an exploration of the reasoning

behind the need for stakeholder engagement in the governance of NPOs. Specifically, resource

dependence theory as described by Vantilborgh et al. (2011), which emphasized the limited

resourcing that exists in the NPO context, arose as a key reason for the engagement of a diverse

set of stakeholders. Furthermore, a review of NPO governance best practices identified by

Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) emphasized the role of the board of directors in facilitating

diverse stakeholder engagement. Interestingly, I found emerging evidence from Renz (2013) that

governance needs to be thought of more broadly by looking at the interrelationships between

organizations that operate in complex systems and those that are trying to solve complex

problems through coordinated action. I now look at exploring the engagement and participation

of the SCC's primary external stakeholder in governance and decision making: youth.

Youth Engagement and Participation in Governance and Decision Making

This study focused on identifying strategies for the involvement of youth in governance

and decision making in the SCC. As a result, I focus this section of the chapter on exploring

research on the engagement and participation of youth in governance and decision making.

Youth engagement and youth participation were the terms commonly used in the literature to

describe the involvement of young people in decision-making or governance structures and

social change initiatives. Bessant (2003) defined youth participation as "the 'involvement' of

young people in decision-making that relates to their care and education" (p. 95). Bessant also

emphasized that participation included "consultation with young people at the beginning of

policy developments and service delivery" (p. 95). In contrast, Checkoway (2011) defined youth

participation more broadly by focusing on the impact and quality of engagement. He defined

youth participation as the "process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions

that affect their lives" (p. 341). Checkoway elaborated that participation may "include efforts by

young people to organize around issues of their choice, by adults involving young people in

community agencies, and by youth and adults joining together in intergenerational partnerships"

(p. 341). Furthermore, Checkoway gauged the quality of participation by determining if young

people "have a real effect on the process, influence a particular decision, or produce a favourable outcome" (p. 341). Zeldin and MacNeill (2006) proposed a relationship-based theory of youth engagement in governance. This theory posited that the practice of youth engagement and participation in governance and decision making occurs in the context of relationships, between young people and adults and among youth themselves (Zeldin & MacNeill, 2006). They emphasized that the quality and duration of these relationships are the key factors in the participants' satisfaction with the youth governance experience (Zeldin & MacNeill, 2006).

Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, and Loiselle (2002) defined youth engagement as the sustained, meaningful involvement of a young person who has a focus outside of the self. Rose-Krasnor (2009) elaborated on this definition by proposing a multidimensional theory to engagement that includes the delineation of distinct but interrelated elements that define engagement. These elements are (a) an affective component, which includes the emotional responses to an activity; (b) the cognitive component, which includes learning and knowledge about the activity; and (c) a behavioural component, which includes the actions related to participation (Rose-Krasnor, 2009). A synthesis of each of these terms, definitions, and theories revealed key features that lead to meaningful youth engagement and participation in decision making and governance:

- Youth engagement is a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives.

- The approach of youth engagement is grounded in meaningful and high-quality relationships.

- Diverse methods of engagement and participation are considered.

- The activity of engagement in decision making may be measured based on the quality of relationships.

- Youth engagement may be measured by the real effect that young people have on the systems or structures that they are meant to influence.

For organizations at the onset of the youth engagement in governance process, Checkoway (2011) discussed a first basic assumption "that young people are competent citizens, rather than passive recipients of services" (p. 341). This assumption aligned with Mathie and Cunningham's (2003) discussion of the asset-based theory. Mathie and Cunningham (2003) defined the asset-based and strengths-based theory as the "recognition of strengths and assets" (p. 477) in individuals and communities, rather than "an exclusive focus on needs and problems" (p. 477). Bell, Vromen, and Collin (2008) discussed active agency by encouraging organizations to engage a diverse group of young people at the beginning of the youth engagement in governance development processes. In fact, Bell et al. recommended that young people should be involved "in determining both the processes and the content" (p. 11) of the proposed governance structures or programs that are being established by the organization. These authors also discussed the need for organizational buy-in for youth engagement in decision making from adult decision makers in the organization as well as other adult stakeholders. Libby, Rosen, and Sedonaen (2005) noted the need to embed youth–adult partnerships in decision making through a clear organizational policy before taking the step to engage youth in decision making. Libby et al. (2005) discussed the rationale for this approach by highlighting the credibility that a policy will confer on a process or approach. Finally, they discussed how commitment from leadership

through policies can result in better long-term organizational institutionalization of youth in decision making for other organizational structures and processes (Libby et al., 2005).

The literature on youth engagement in governance and decision making also consistently emphasized the theme of diversity. Diversity cut across a number of different factors such as diversity of the young people themselves, the governance experience, and the proposed approaches. Libby et al. (2005) discussed diversity of youth engagement in governance as the creation of multiple pathways for youth leadership development in organizations so that different types of young people can experience having a say in the organization. Libby et al. elaborated by discussing how a focus on engaging youth in one program or area in an organization may unintentionally exclude young people from other pathways for engagement and voice in the organization. Similarly, Bell et al. (2008) concluded that the definitions of engagement for a diverse group of young people "need to incorporate a range of decision making mechanisms" (p. 11), with an emphasis on incorporating and including informal approaches. Head (2011) concurred with this view and stressed, "A focus on formal organisations and public policy tends to underplay the potential significance of everyday informal participation of young people in community life and in the construction of shared experience" (p. 542). A synthesis of each of these views revealed the need for organizations to take a multipronged approach when trying to meaningfully engage youth in governance and decision making.

Approaches to engaging youth in governance and decision making. The literature I reviewed included discussions on proposed approaches to engaging youth in governance and decision making. Checkoway and Aldana (2013) reviewed approaches to youth participation in decision making by exploring it through the lens of civic engagement. They noted each form of

youth engagement is distinct and its application is determined by the issue that needs to be addressed (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). First, Checkoway and Aldana described grassroots organizing, which they defined as a "form of civic engagement in which people organize action groups to generate power and influence decisions of established institutions (Sen, 2003; Delgado & Staples, 2009)" (p. 1895). Second, Checkoway and Aldana defined citizenship participation, in which citizens take part in established political, governmental, and social institutions. Third, the authors discussed intergroup dialogue, "which features face-to-face structured discussions about various social identities . . . and systems of power" (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013, p. 1896). Finally, Checkoway and Aldana described sociopolitical development, "in which urban youth of color strengthen their social and political development in ways that contribute to . . . collective [community] action" (p. 1897).

Libby, Sedonaen, and Bliss (2006) explored youth leadership in governance and decision making by focussing their discussions on the "outside" (p. 13) and "inside" (p. 13) theory of systems and institutions. Libby et al. (2006) defined inside groups as existing systems and institutions, such as schools, governments, and mandatory governance structures. They defined outside groups as those existing outside of institutionalized systems and structures (Libby et al., 2006). Libby et al. (2006) noted, "Outside strategies are inherently based on contestation and conflict [with outside groups], often calling into question the values and legitimacy of those inside the systems or organizations" (p. 17). Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, and Sinclair (2003) discussed both informal and formal processes as mechanisms for gathering diverse perspectives from young people. Informal processes included creating opportunities for ongoing dialogue, observation, listening to spontaneous communication, and engaging joint activities (Kirby et al.,

2003, p. 62). Kirby et al. defined formal processes as "dedicated mechanisms and activities such as one-off consultations; regular group meetings; suggestion boxes" (p. 27). These activities included youth advisory councils, youth–adult partnership executive councils, and dedicated committees embedded in organizational governance structures.

       Outcomes of engaging youth in governance and decision making. Authors also explored the outcomes of engaging youth in governance and decision-making structures. These outcomes cut across multiple levels, for the youth themselves and for the adults who work with them and the organizations and systems that engaged them. Zeldin and MacNeill (2006) argued that active participation by youth in collective decision making "promotes positive youth development" (p. 7). Zeldin, Camino, and Mook (2005) discussed the importance of setting out a clear purpose for engaging young people in governance. They elaborated that this is often the biggest initial challenge for organizations. Zeldin et al. (2005) also discussed the importance of involving a diverse set of stakeholders in any youth–adult partnership that involves governance. Specifically, they noted that youth should work with individuals who are different from them and should not be left on their own as a group of young people (Zeldin et al., 2005). Ramey (2013) discussed that youth involvement in decision making resulted in improved and more relevant services for populations. The author went on to suggest that youth involvement in governance can improve strategic plans and ensure more entrepreneurial and innovative governance (Ramey, 2013). Interestingly, Ramey also discussed negative outcomes of engaging youth in decision making. These outcomes centred around staff experiencing greater stress, specifically due to increased responsibility and a diversion of resources from other activities.

Summary. Scholars who research youth involvement in governance suggested varied yet complementary approaches. A synthesis of the key terms, theories, and definitions of youth participation and engagement in governance and decision making revealed a set of common features to consider:

- Youth engagement is a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives (Checkoway, 2011, p. 341).

- The approach to youth engagement is grounded in meaningful and high-quality relationships (Zeldin & MacNeill, 2006).

- Diverse methods of engagement and participation are considered (Pancer et al., 2002).

- The activity of engagement in decision making may be measured based on the quality of relationships (Zeldin & MacNeill, 2006).

- Youth engagement may be measured by the real effect that young people have on the systems or structures that they are meant to influence (Checkoway, 2011, p. 341).

This section also explored Checkoway's (2011) discussion of the asset-based approach and theory, namely that young people are active agents not passive recipients of services. Additionally, this section reviewed a number of different approaches to engaging young people in governance and decision making. A synthesis of the discussion on these key approaches revealed that engagement in governance should include the following:

- A focus on both formal and informal activities (Bell et al., 2008);

- the consideration of inside and outside structures and systems (Libby et al., 2006);

- awareness of context in deciding approach (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013);

- young people in deciding the content and structure (Bell et al., 2008); and

- a clear purpose (Zeldin et al., 2005).

Finally, this section included Ramey's (2013) discussion on both positive and negative outcomes that can emerge from the process undertaken to engage youth in decision making and governance. I now shift to an exploration of a key theme that emerged in both sections of this chapter: complexity. In this final section, I focus specifically on exploring complexity theories and frameworks that consider the influence of leadership on governance and decision making in organizations.

Leadership

This study focused on identifying strategies that enhance governance and decision making in the SCC. As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, governance and decision making exist in the formal and informal spaces of an organization. They also exist inside and outside of the organization and can include a diverse set of internal and external stakeholders. It is also clear from the previous sections that the inherent complexity of the environment in which NPOs operate means that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the governance of NPOs. As such, in this section of the chapter I explore this complexity by looking at the relationship between governance and leadership by diverse actors. This discussion will be informed by complexity theory as it relates to governance.

Complexity theory. Leadership and governance practices informed by complexity theory emphasize distributed influence within organizations. Duit and Galaz (2008) stated that a key assumption of complexity theory, as it relates to governance, is that "there are large parts of reality in which changes do not occur in a linear fashion" (p. 312). This assumption aligns with

the NPO context described in Chapter 1, namely that NPOs often need to balance competing

political, social, and economic tensions (Wells, 2012). Furthermore, stakeholder engagement in

organizations involves creating opportunities for diverse actors to lead or influence their context.

Goldstein et al. (2010) shared their views on complexity and governance and emphasized that

leadership is "an influence process that arises through interactions across the organization"

(p. 2). They went on to discuss how leadership happens in the "'space' between" (Goldstein et

al., 2010, p. 9) people as they interact. Pearce and Conger (2003) elaborated on the concept of

spaces between people in their definition of shared leadership: "Leadership . . . is not determined

by positions of authority . . . but rather by individuals' capacity to influence peers and by the

leadership needs of the . . . [organization] in any given moment" (p. 2). Therefore, governance,

through this lens, involves looking at the spaces between people, such as youth, staff, community

members, and board volunteers, examining the areas in which they interact and influence one

another.

This study focused on identifying strategies for the SCC staff to enhance governance and

decision making in the organization. It is interesting to note that SCC staff members are often the

people who spend the most time in the spaces between. They play a primary role in connecting

the organization's various stakeholders: board members, youth, external partners, and funders.

Goldstein et al. (2010) described this from the perspective of leadership and complexity theory

and stated, "Every social network has a structure that reflects the configuration of how people are

connected with one another" (p. 10). In the NPO and SCC context, this configuration with staff

at the centre means that they often have to respond rapidly to environmental, political, social, and

economic changes. According to Hickman (2010), organizations are "better able to meet the

challenges of their complex and rapidly changing environments by developing the capacity of participants to share responsibility for leadership" (p. 164). As a result, primary connectors need to have the capacity to quickly develop structures or systems that fit with their rapidly changing environments. Goldstein et al. (2010) defined this concept as emergence and referred to it as "the arising of novel structures, patterns, or processes" (p. 13) as systems adapt to the complexity of their environments or contexts.

The rapid development of novel structures and patterns made by multiple actors as they respond to political, social, and environmental changes should inform and influence how an organization is governed. This requires a broader view of governance that incorporates and includes the leadership taken by stakeholders and others to adapt to complex environments. As Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) noted in their discussions on complexity theory in organizations: "organizations must increase their complexity to the level of the environment rather than try to simplify and rationalize their structures" (p. 301). They continued on to note that complex governance and/or leadership structures can enhance an organizational "system's capacity to search for solutions to challenges and to innovate" (p. 301) through unlocking the capacity of organizational agents to influence change. Routhieaux (2015) described recent trends in the NPO sector that require novel structures and processes to adapt to the increasing complexity of the nonprofit sector, namely the strain in funding sources, increased emphasis on collaborative efforts for greater impact, impending retirement of significant current executives, demographic shifts, and changes in generational expectations.

Therefore, organizations require a dynamic and inclusive governance and decision-making structure that takes into account the leadership influence of diverse actors in addressing

macro and microlevel challenges. This aligns with EGT's emphasis on the coordination of diverse stakeholders discussed earlier in the chapter. It also aligns with complexity theory. In fact, Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015), in their analysis of leadership by individual agents and its relationship to organizational decision making, defined this influence by looking at interactions that occur at the fine-grain level. Hazy and Uhl-Bien defined fine-grain interactions as "the day-to-day activities of human experience, such as individual meetings, relationships, and the transactions that occur among individuals" (p. 86). These interactions can aggregate and influence the overall direction of a complex organization. The aggregation of these fine-grain interactions that often occur in the spaces between in organizations, described by Goldstein et al. (2010), can positively or negatively influence the direction of the organization. At the very least, these fine-grain interactions need to be considered when building governance and decision-making approaches for NPOs.

Leadership practices for complex organizations. The spaces between, fine-grain interactions, and NPO macrolevel trends require the involvement of diverse actors or leaders who can determine the novel processes and structures that are needed to move an organization forward. Authors put forward several suggested approaches and theories to actively embed leadership opportunities in an NPO's governance structure. Distributive leadership is one particular approach, which Leemans (2017) defined as the disassociation of leadership responsibility from formal organizational roles. Boldon (as cited in Leemans, 2017) also described how the "action and influence of people at all levels is recognized as integral to the overall direction and functioning of the organization" (p. 14). Leemans summarized four distributive leadership approaches that could be used by organizations. First, Leemans listed

spontaneous collaboration, in which "groups of individuals with differing skills, knowledge

and/or capabilities come together to complete a particular task/project and then disband (Gronn)"

(p. 15). Second, he discussed pragmatic distribution, "where leadership roles and responsibilities

are negotiated, and divided between different actors (MacBeath)" (Leemans, 2017, p. 15). Third,

Leemans defined strategic distribution, "where new people, with particular skills, knowledge

and/or access to resources are brought in to meet a particular leadership need (MacBeath)"

(p. 15). Finally, he discussed collaborated distribution, in which "two or more individuals work

together in time and place to execute the same leadership routine (Spillane)" (Leemans, 2017,

p. 15). Leemans emphasized the shift in function of the formal leader from command-in-control

practices "to facilitating the distribution of leadership & dialogue in the organization" (p. 15). It

is important to note that Leemans's discussions centred around the corporate sector. This

distinction is important because the resourcing to implement distributive leadership may not be

possible in the NPO context due to aforementioned funding trends.

A second approach, which may more closely align with the NPO context and adds

elements that may address gaps in resourcing, is connective leadership. Kezar and Wheaton

(2017) discussed connective leadership theory by updating and pulling together key elements

from Lipman-Blumen's (1996) seminal work on connective leadership theory. Kezar and

Wheaton discussed three main areas of connective leadership: relational, directive, and

instrumental. The relational leader "uses collaboration and a contributory style by helping others

to learn and succeed" (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017, p. 24). The directive leader is "driven to excel

and complete work" (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017, p. 24). Finally, the instrumental leader uses "a

personal approach . . . to harness networks and partnerships to get things done and build strong

relationships that can be utilized for support by entrusting and empowering others" (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017, p. 24). Connective leaders use a blend of each of these facets in their leadership style. Kezar and Wheaton (2017) noted, "Connective leaders try to build community among diverse groups in order to create a sense of belonging" (p. 24). Furthermore, Lipman-Blumen (1996) emphasized that connective leaders can be anyone, not just those in positions of authority, and can involve groups, not just individuals.

When working with youth, it is important to also consider leadership approaches that look outside internal organizational structures and systems. As discussed, earlier in this chapter, young people often inhabit grassroots and bottom-up spaces. Wei-Skillern, Ehrlichman, and Sawyer (2015) discussed the impact of network leadership as a key approach to managing the complexity that operates both outside and inside of formal organizational structures and systems. Wei-Skillern et al. described how network leaders "focus on creating authentic relationships and building deep trust from the bottom up" (para. 4). They continued on to discuss how network leaders "ensure that the power of others grows while their own power fades" (para. 4). This is particularly important when supporting young people to thrive. Wei-Skillern et al. emphasized four key operating principles for network leaders:

1. Trust not control. . . . [Diverse] actors invest resources into building long-term relationships.

2. Humility not brand. . . . [Network leaders] are largely anonymous by design. . . . [They cede] their power to the collective.

3. Node not hub. . . . [Network leaders] not only connect to the larger system around

   them . . . , but also deliberately catalyze and lead action-oriented networks that are

   aligned around a defined shared purpose.

4. Mission not organization. . . . [Network leaders are] motivated to achieve maximum

   impact than to advance themselves or their organizations. (Wei-Skillern et al., 2015,

   "The Four Principles," para. 2–5)

This approach creates space for diverse external actors to become integrated into a

complex system. The principles described by the authors also aligned with the youth–adult

partnership approach to decision making discussed earlier in the chapter.

Summary. NPOs exist in environments with complex social, political, and economic

challenges (Wells, 2012). As Goldstein et al. (2010) discussed, managing this complexity

requires leadership from diverse actors who operate in the formal, informal, internal and external

spaces between organizations. Diverse actors also engage in a number of fine-grain interactions,

which influence both the governance and identity of the organization (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

As a result, the leadership of diverse actors needs to be considered when thinking about

strategies that enhance the governance and decision making of an NPO. I found governance

practices, theories, and approaches within the literature reviewed that can be drawn upon when

identifying these strategies. A summary of these approaches reveals key features for NPOs to

consider when looking to embed leadership as a mechanism for enhanced governance and

decision making throughout the organization:

- The disassociation of leadership throughout an organization, structure, or network

   (Leemans, 2017);

- the role of leader as facilitator who actively distributes leadership across multiple actors—the assignment of roles can be determined by skill set of individuals or the content being addressed (Leemans, 2017);

- the emphasis on leadership as a means to connect and bind diverse stakeholders (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017);

- power being shared rather than being hoarded (Wei-Skillern et al., 2015);

- leadership as a mechanism for authentic long-term relationships (Wei-Skillern et al., 2015); and

- Leadership is driven by a cause rather than by a person or organizational interest (Wei-Skillern et al., 2015).

Therefore, leadership is a critical aspect of governance and decision making in complex organizations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored three topics connected to the inquiry questions and subquestions. First, the theory and practice of governance included a review of governance definitions, theories and practices with a specific look at the NPO context. This discussion highlighted stakeholder engagement as a key mechanism for NPO governance. This section concluded with an exploration of the role of the board of directors and other mechanisms in facilitating stakeholder engagement. This chapter then shifted into a discussion on the engagement and participation of the SCC's primary stakeholder—youth—in governance and decision making. This section included a review of key terms, theories, practices, and approaches. This chapter concluded with a discussion on leadership as a mechanism for governance of organizations that operate in

complex environments. This section was informed by complexity theory. This section concluded with a discussion of leadership approaches for complex organizations. The next chapter will discuss the methodology of the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter I describe the methodology used to gather voice from inquiry project participants. I discuss who participated in the study and how the data were collected. This chapter also provides a description of the data analysis process. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical issues that were considered and addressed as part of the inquiry process. I conducted the inquiry to investigate the following question: What strategies can the SCC enact to enhance its governance and decision making? I also explored three subquestions:

1. How can youth be effectively engaged in governance and decision making at the SCC?

2. How can staff support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

3. How can the volunteer Board of Directors support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

Methodology

I conducted this inquiry using an action research (AR) methodology. AR focuses on studying "the resolution of . . . organizational issues together with those who experience these issues directly" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 6). As a result, the recommendations generated from this inquiry came directly from the collective knowledge of the SCC stakeholders who participated in the research project. Inquiry project participants were also invited to review the findings in a make-it-happen session and generate their ideas for the recommendations in Chapter 5. As Stringer (2014) noted, "The primary purpose of action research is to find the means for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation to design an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness" (p. 6). This inquiry used Rowe,

Graf, Agger-Gupta, Piggot-Irvine and Harris's (2013) organizational action research engagement

(ARE) model (see Appendix A) as its methodology. ARE is an adaptation of AR that is designed

to support a participatory research process for organizations. This methodology focuses on

involving and engaging organizational stakeholders in the design and implementation of the

inquiry (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 19). As a result, participants were involved in three key phases of

the AR cycle of inquiry: "Look, Think, Act" (Stringer, 2014, p. 8). First, the participants and I

looked at relevant information and they shared their experiences. Second, I thought about and

interpreted the data and experiences collected. Finally, I proposed actions and recommendations

to address the inquiry question. Through this process, SCC stakeholders supported the

development and emergence of contextually specific recommendations that reflected their own

experiences and the experiences of others in the organization. The SCC is familiar with AR as an

approach for generating and making meaning of knowledge, as the organization uses AR in

partnership with external clients when supporting them to evaluate the effectiveness of their

youth engagement programs. As such, AR and ARE were a good fit for this inquiry.

       In the ARE model, the methods for data collection focus on engaging diverse and key

stakeholders in a variety of activities to generate learning and knowledge to address the inquiry

question (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 19). This aligned well with SCC's context, in which diverse

external and internal stakeholders influence the organization's ability to achieve and deliver on

its mission. In conducting this inquiry I used multiple methods to stimulate generative

discussions and to gather diverse perspectives. This inquiry used two qualitative data-gathering

methods: photovoice followed by focus groups. These methods were group-based so that the

discussions and conversations could lead to group learning. More detail about the methods will

be presented in the "Data Collection Methods" and "Study Conduct" sections below.

This inquiry was also informed by grounded theory (GT). The Grounded Theory Institute

(2014) described GT as "the systematic generation of theory from systematic research" (para. 2;

see also Locke, 2003). Locke (2003) described GT's distinctive features as a "commitment to

research and 'discovery' through direct contact with the social world studied" (p. 34). Maxwell

(1998) discussed that researchers using GT are clear as to the purposes for their inquiry, the

issues they hope to illuminate, and perhaps the practices it might influence. I ensured that

members of the SCC had multiple opportunities to participate in the research and discovery that

occurred as a result of the study. Their involvement occurred from the beginning, as research

participants from the SCC supported the design of the research questions.

Project Participants

I drew participants from three groups: (a) youth engaged with the SCC, (b) SCC staff,

and (c) volunteers from the Board of Directors. The SCC defines youth as those aged 18 years

and under. This is based on the definition from the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of*

the Child (United Nations, 1991), which was ratified by Canada in 1991. The SCC also works

with young adults aged 19–24 years who play a role in supporting youth and adults to achieve

SCC's (n.d.) mission. I invited both groups to participate in the inquiry.

The inclusion criteria emphasized experience with the SCC so that participants could

provide informed views grounded in their familiarity with SCC culture. As a result, participant

inclusion criteria encompassed youth aged 12–18 years and young adults aged 19–24 years who

attended at least three SCC events. Similarly, I included staff members in the study if they were

employed by the organization for at least 3 months. I also invited youth and young adult

participants from the SCC's national network to participate in the inquiry. This network includes

150 active young people. The SCC is a small organization with 10 staff and seven board

volunteers. Therefore, I invited all staff and board volunteers to participate in this inquiry.

The inquiry team included volunteer representatives from each of the stakeholder groups:

two youth engaged with the SCC, a staff person, and the ED of the organization. I selected these

members based on their connections to the participant groups, interest in the inquiry topic,

history with the organization, and willingness to assist in the inquiry process to date. Each team

member was responsible for advising and providing support throughout the inquiry process.

Specifically, inquiry team members supported me in drafting questions, acting as observers,

note-takers, and/or co-facilitators in data gathering, and providing input into data interpretation.

Each member of the team signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix B). Finally, as the

governing body of the SCC, the Board of Directors will have the authority to implement the

recommendations that emerged from the inquiry. The Board of Directors will inform staff of the

intended changes so that they can be executed and implemented. It is also my hope that the

involvement of representatives from each stakeholder group on the inquiry team resulted in

increased buy-in for the implementation of recommendations.

Data Collection Methods

In the first cycle of the inquiry process, youth provided their perspectives in a photovoice

dialogue. Young people are often marginalized from key decision-making structures. Zeldin,

Camino, and Calvert (2003) discussed that the notion that "youth and adults can collaborate on

issues of importance runs counter to prevailing policies, institutional structures, and community

norms" (p. 79). Starting the inquiry process with young people ensured that the inquiry was grounded in their voices. Photovoice is also a youth-friendly data collection method. I found varying definitions of photovoice in the literature. Pritzker, LaChapelle, and Tatum (2012) defined it as "a community-based participatory research method . . . based in photography" (p. 2247). Citing the work of Catalani and Minkler (2010), Pritzker et al. stated, "Photovoice studies typically focus on themes that emerge from the participants' research, rather than on systematic evaluation of how participants themselves are impacted by Photovoice" (p. 2247). As Wang (2006) noted, photovoice provides an opportunity for youth to be engaged in all aspects of the research. Photovoice "does not rely on the written word or artistic skills" (Dixon & Hadjialexiou, 2005, p. 54). It "involves group members taking photographs and then talking about these photographs" (Dixon & Hadjialexiou, 2005, p. 54). One of the advantages of this method is that it promotes positive youth-adult partnerships so that both groups can gain insights from each other (Wang, 2006, p. 157). For this study, I invited youth and young adult participants to answer a question using photos (see Appendix C). Participants were then asked to share their photos. Participants generated and identified key themes as they shared their photos.

I used the themes generated in the first cycle of inquiry to develop focus group questions for the second cycle of inquiry. Morgan (1997) defined focus groups as group interviews that rely on the interaction within the group to generate responses to prepare questions. Additionally, Liamputtong (2011) described focus groups as a "group of people gathered together to discuss a focused issue of concern" (p. 31). The purpose of conducting a focus group "is to better understand how people think about an issue" (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 2). One of the advantages of using focus groups for this inquiry project was that it provided an opportunity for

staff and volunteers to feel bought-in to an organizational change process. It also provided an

opportunity for staff and volunteers to have a direct say in how they wanted to improve the

organization. Marrelli (2008) noted, "Focus groups can generate feelings of involvement and

buy-in and willingness to work for improvement" (p. 39).

Study Conduct

After receiving ethics approval from Royal Roads University, I sent a letter of agreement

to my inquiry team members to confirm their roles during the inquiry process and their

understanding of data confidentiality (see Appendix B). I worked with them to generate the key

question for the photovoice sessions (see Appendix C). Once this process was completed, my

inquiry team members recruited youth and young adults to participate in the first cycle of

inquiry. For youth aged 12–18 years and young adults aged 19–24 years, this involved sharing

hard copies of the letter of information (see Appendix D) and the consent forms (see Appendix

E) at the SCC's youth advisory group meeting so that they could learn about the research

opportunity. Youth aged 12–18 years who were interested in participating in the inquiry were

asked to share the letter of information and consent forms with their parents, as parental consent

was required for those youth to participate in the photovoice dialogue. I collected the consent

forms and then scheduled the photovoice dialogue at the SCC's central office in Toronto. Seven

youth participants from across Canada participated in the photovoice session. The photovoice

dialogue was audio recorded. As previously noted, during the dialogue, participants identified

key themes that they believed answered the key question. These key themes were used to inform

the second cycle of inquiry.

Due to power-over issues, I recruited staff and board volunteers for the second cycle of inquiry through two different approaches. First, on my behalf, inquiry team members sent staff members an invitation to participate in the focus group through email (see Appendix F). The inquiry team members shared consent forms with those interested in participating (see Appendix G). The inquiry team members collected the responses to the consent process for staff and acted as the lead facilitators of the focus group to ensure anonymity. Finally, the inquiry team members scheduled the focus group with the interested participants. Members of my inquiry team conducted the staff focus group at the SCC office, and I was not present in the building when the session occurred. Eight staff members participated in the focus group. The focus group was audio-recorded. At my request, the inquiry team members asked probing questions when necessary and noted participants' nonverbal cues in the transcript. For the final focus group session, I invited board volunteers through email to participate in the board focus group (see Appendix F), and I invited those interested in participating to complete a consent form (see Appendix G). I conducted the board focus groups online using the SCC's Adobe Connect (Adobe Systems, 2012) virtual meeting technology. Three board members participated in the focus group.

I based the questions used for the photovoice sessions on the inquiry project subquestions (see Appendix C). I piloted tested the photovoice questions with the inquiry team prior to conducting the session with the youth participants. The process for the photovoice session involved the participants answering the question: What does decision making look like to you? The question was provided in the letter of information for the photovoice session (see Appendix D). I asked participants to bring their photo to the session. Following the advice of Sutton-Brown

(2014, p. 176), I then asked them to discuss the narrative of their photos with other participants

to identify themes. Participants validated the themes that they had generated. These themes were

shared with the inquiry team to support the development of focus group questions (see Appendix

H). This sequencing was critical because the themes generated by young people in the

photovoice sessions helped focus the areas to be addressed in the focus groups. Additionally, the

inquiry team ensured that the focus group questions aligned with the inquiry subquestions for the

two stakeholder groups. Finally, I pilot tested the draft focus group questions with selected

members who participated in the photovoice sessions as a form of member checking.

I invited the sponsor to review initial themes from each phase of data collection. I also

invited inquiry team members to review initial analysis of data. Each member of the inquiry team

represented and had some responsibility for the different stakeholder groups. They will also have

responsibility for ensuring that the recommendations from the inquiry are implemented. Finally,

I shared the findings generated with inquiry participants to ensure accuracy. Inquiry participants

reviewed the key findings and helped me to generate proposed recommendations for

consideration. This session provided another opportunity for stakeholder buy-in into the

proposed organizational change strategies.

Data Analysis

I manually coded the data. Glesne (2016) described the use of coding as an approach "to

discern themes, patterns, and processes; to make comparisons; and to build theoretical

explanations" (p. 195). I ensured each of the sessions was audio-recorded and supported by a

note taker from the inquiry team. The first sequence of coding occurred during the first cycle of

inquiry. After the photovoice discussion, youth participants described key words and themes that

were mentioned throughout the session. I posted the words for all participants to see on the

video-conferencing software. Participants then voted on the key words that were most important

to them by employing the dotmocracy technique, "an established facilitation option for collecting

and recognizing levels of agreement on written statements among a large number of people"

(BetterEvaluation, 2014, para. 2). I provided youth participants with the opportunity to

anonymously assign 10 dots to the words on the screen. Participants then discussed the key

words with the most dots. After the session, I transcribed the audio recording and completed a

write-up of the theme discussion. Following Saldaña's (2013) advice, I then coded the raw

transcript into words or short phrases that "symbolically assign . . . an evocative attribute for the

specific portion of the language-based and visual data" (p. 3). This first sequence of coding

provided key themes for consideration for the second cycle of inquiry.

For the focus group sessions, a member of my inquiry team transcribed the staff focus

group, while I transcribed the board focus group session. The inquiry team member stripped the

staff focus group of any identifying information prior to sending the transcript to me. The second

sequence of coding focused on generating codes and themes from the focus groups. Specific

manual coding techniques included compare and contrast, word similarity, and searching for

missing information (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once I had completed the first initial round of

coding, I generated a list of codes. I then conducted a subsequent round of coding so that the

codes already identified could be critically examined and organized into key concepts and

categories (Tracy, 2013, p. 194). I then analyzed the codes a third time to look for overarching

themes. I constructed a table with the heading of each column representing an overarching

theme. Wherever possible, I synthesized the themes from the photovoice session with the themes

generated from the focus group sessions. I then organized quotes from the raw transcripts under each column to the corresponding theme. I shared the table with inquiry team members, who provided feedback through inserted comments in the document. I also invited participants to review the table in the follow-up session, as described in the previous section. A review of the table led to the emergence of five key findings at the end of the process.

The validity of AR is grounded in authenticity and trustworthiness. Coghlan (2008) characterized authenticity through four key imperatives: "Be attentive (to the data). Be intelligent (in inquiry). Be reasonable (in making judgments). Be responsible (in making decisions and taking action)" (pp. 359–360). Glesne (2016) described trustworthiness as "alertness to the quality and rigor of a study, about what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the research was carried out" (p. 53). This inquiry took several steps towards ensuring authenticity and trustworthiness. First, the inquiry team members verified the analysis of the data to ensure that the interpretation of the findings was accurate. I practised self-reflexivity throughout the inquiry to address potential researcher biases that emerged as a result of my leadership role at the SCC. This involved actively using the inquiry team at every step in the research process. This included a detailed review of all questions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. I also tracked my progress through personal journaling and holding meetings with my project sponsor. This process also included other practical strategies such as audio recording each data collection opportunity, hiring a transcriptionist to ensure that everything that was said was captured for the staff focus group, and the organizing of my data analysis into time-stamped files to document my process.

Ethical Issues

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2014) *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) defined research as "a step into the unknown. Because it seeks to understand something not yet revealed, research often entails risks to participants and others" (p. 5). From the humanistic perspective, I took specific steps to ensure that photovoice and focus group attendees came to no harm as a result of their participation in the inquiry (Stringer, 2014, p. 89). To do this, I ensured that the inquiry adhered to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement's* ethical guidelines (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014). The following subsections detail how, throughout this inquiry, I adhered to the three core elements of the policy statement: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014).

Respect for persons. According to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. (2014), "respect for persons recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due" (p. 6). This principle is grounded in respect for the autonomy of the individual. In the context of this research process, this meant "giving due deference to a person's judgment and ensuring that the person is free to choose without interference" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014, p. 6). In this inquiry, I provided participants with detailed information about the purposes and expectations of being involved in the inquiry through the letter of information and consent form. I informed participants that they could withdraw at any time and that their data and information would be held confidentially.

Concern for welfare. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. (2014) defined concern for welfare in the research context "that researchers . . . should aim to protect the welfare of participants, and, in some circumstances, to promote that welfare in view of any foreseeable risks associated with the research" (p. 8). The welfare of a person is defined as "the quality of that person's experience of life in all aspects" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014, p. 7). In the case of vulnerable groups like youth aged 12–18 years, parental consent was sought for participation to ensure the welfare of minors. I safeguarded staff members' through inquiry team members conducting the focus group. I ensured findings and themes from the research were anonymized so that individuals could not be singled out or identified.

Justice. Finally, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. (2014) defined justice as "the obligation to treat people fairly and equitably" (p. 8). I addressed this principle in the inquiry project through the involvement of the SCC's diverse stakeholder groups. Youth, staff, and volunteers contributed to the inquiry. The inclusion criteria for each of these groups allowed for most of the stakeholders to be involved in the process. I involved stakeholders in making sense of the data and findings throughout the process and ensured they had a say in validating the final recommendations. This mitigated any perceived or real power imbalances between the SCC stakeholders and me, as the researcher. Finally, there were no real or perceived conflicts of interests that arose as a result of the research process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology of the study. I began the chapter by describing Rowe et al.'s (2013) ARE approach. I then shifted into a discussion of the project participants by highlighting the stakeholder groups that contributed to the study. I then moved into a description

of the data collection methods used in the two cycles of inquiry. The first cycle of inquiry

gathered information and perspectives from youth using photovoice (i.e., a youth engagement

method that uses photos to answer a key question). The second cycle of inquiry gathered views

and perspectives of staff and the volunteer Board of Directors through two focus group sessions,

as focus groups allow for a generative discussion amongst stakeholders. I then described the

step-by-step process I used to implement the study with project participants. The next section

focused on describing the methods used to analyze the data generated from the inquiry. Data

analysis techniques focused on coding the data for key themes and insights and then organizing

quotes under each theme. Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion on the ethical issues

that were considered during the study: respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice. In the

next chapter I explore the findings and conclusions of the study as well as the scope and

limitations of the inquiry.

Chapter Four: Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions

This chapter provides a description of the project findings by highlighting key themes that emerged from the various SCC stakeholders engaged during the photovoice and focus group sessions. Anonymous quotes from inquiry project participants are shared to help illustrate the themes. The findings are then synthesized with evidence from the literature into conclusions. Finally, I conclude the chapter by highlighting the scope and limitations of the inquiry.

The conclusions focus specifically on addressing the inquiry project question and subquestions: What strategies can the SCC enact to enhance its governance and decision making? The conclusions also address the following three subquestions:

1. How can youth be effectively engaged in governance and decision making at the SCC?

2. How can staff support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

3. How can the volunteer Board of Directors support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

Study Findings

Five key findings emerged through the analysis of the data from the photovoice and focus group sessions. The findings reflected inquiry project participants' perceptions of current decision making and governance in the organization. The findings also included inquiry project participants' aspirations for improved decision making and governance in the organization. I summarize the findings under the following five themes:

1. Participants stressed the importance of youth engagement and youth–adult partnerships in decision-making and governance structures.

2. Participants stressed the need for adaptability and flexibility in organizational

     decision making.

3. Participants value open communication in decision making.

4. Participants highlighted the need for clarity in decision-making processes and roles.

5. Participants wish to improve systems and structures that support decision making.

To substantiate the findings I cite excerpts from the photovoice and focus group sessions.

In order to protect participant anonymity, I have used the following codes when citing participant

sources: Youth #1 through to Youth #7 for photovoice participants, Staff Member #1 through to

Staff Member #8 for the staff focus group attendees, and Board Member #1 through to Board

Member #3 for the board focus group attendees.

Finding 1: Participants stressed the importance of youth engagement and youth–

adult partnerships in decision-making and governance structures. All inquiry project

participants agreed that young people should be engaged in organizational decision making and

governance. I found widespread agreement in all groups that youth engagement in decision

making needed to be meaningful, intentional, and consistent across the organization. Youth #1

shared a photo of a recent staff–board–volunteer retreat to illustrate meaningful youth

engagement in decision making in the organization and noted,

> All levels of the organization coming together to make decisions about how the . . .
>
> [SCC] should move forward. We all came together. Equal value in the decision making,
>
> even though you were "lower" compared to the board and the directors.

The other youth participants identified youth–adult partnerships as key aspects for how the SCC

should make decisions, with each participant highlighting a specific youth–adult partnership

experience when describing their photographs.

Staff and board members discussed potential areas of improvement for engaging young

people in decision making. Staff Member #1 shared, "We are not walking the talk as well as we

could be around youth in governance." Discussions that occurred in the board member focus

group supported this perspective. Board Member #1 noted, "The board is more removed from

youth voice than they used to be."

Staff Member #2 stressed the need for organizational members to ensure they were

intentional in their approach to engaging young people in governance:

> I think it becomes tokenistic if you're like, "Oh, we need two youth on the board." Well,
>
> you can do that, but they should be youth that use our services that come to our events, so
>
> it's not just about integrating them in decision making. It's about thinking about how they
>
> are integrated in other elements of the work.

Participants in the board focus group agreed with this statement. Board Member #2

advised, "Genuinely ensuring that the voice of young people is not there for show. Ensuring that

it's from an authentic and genuine place." Staff Member #3 added to this by emphasizing youth–

adult partnerships in the engagement process: "It can't be just like only like, 'Oh, involve them in

a meeting and that's cool.' There has to be some mentoring when involving young people in a

decision-making process."

Staff and board members put forward several specific ideas to improve youth engagement

and youth–adult partnerships in decision making. Board Member #3 suggested improvement

could occur by involving young people in the board: "At a board level, one way we could potentially improve decision making is to actually have more youth voice at the table. I know we've talked about that, but actually making it happen." Board Member #1 agreed with this and suggested an idea for improvement from a previous governance experience:

> I did something for another organization. It was about having youth involved in the board. One of the things that youth recommended: 1) there has to be at least two of them and 2) they need to be speaking for a group of youth not just themselves. They felt that they would then have the responsibility to report back to youth.

> Staff members also discussed engaging young people in the organization's governance

structures. Staff Member #4 suggested, "Youth engagement could be structured into committees, calls, processes, and procedures. Like a youth advisory committee to the Board of Directors, youth on the board; maybe they can't vote because of age restrictions, but youth board members or advisers." Another staff member suggested a broader external and internal approach:

> We could have satellite groups of young people across the country that feed back to our internal decision making but also external partners who want youth voices of a particular issue which will happen because they want their own advisory committee. (Staff Member #3)

Staff members also discussed other potential avenues for engaging young people in decision making. Staff Member #5 suggested, "Prioritizing more youth positions within the organization." Staff Member #4 noted the need for diverse methods to engage youth: "You probably need different structures, or multiple structures that complement each other when engaging youth in decision making. There needs to be informal stuff."

Finding 2: Participants stressed the need for adaptability and flexibility in organizational decision making. Participants in each data-collection session were consistent in describing the organization as both adaptable and flexible in its decision-making processes. Altogether, most participants highlighted this lack of rigidity as a strength, while also discussing potential areas of improvement. Staff Member #3 discussed the need for better supports in preparing to adapt to shifts or changes:

> I think it's a strength that we are able to adapt when we need to. Maybe just in terms of the preparation to adapt, that just figuring out what a smoother transition would be like. Having to adapt to something else or multiple things . . . so that it's not feeling overwhelming.

I found it interesting to note that the areas of improvement varied depending on the stakeholder group engaged. Youth participants, in particular, expressed interest in maintaining adaptability and flexibility in organizational decision making. In fact, this theme was mentioned each time participants described their selected photos, even when the photos themselves were very different. For example, one photo depicted a group of people, while another photo portrayed a geological structure. In both cases, the youth participants described the photo by highlighting the theme of adaptability and flexibility (Youth #1; Youth #4). The discussion of these photos centred on the subject of ensuring flexible spaces for different types of young people. This diversity was defined by the group throughout the photovoice session and included key characteristics like a young person's age, life experience, gender identity, religion, culture, and sexual orientation.

Staff members focused their suggestions for improvement on looking for ways to increase staff engagement in decision making. Staff Member #6 shared, "There is no 'how' with decision making. It's not standardized. It's very different in different contexts, and that's good in a lot of ways because there is flexibility and it accommodates for different people's comfort levels." Staff Member #6 then discussed challenges with decision making. Specifically, this participant expressed the desire to be involved in decisions that may influence or may relate to his or her specific area of expertise in the organization: "But on the other hand, sometimes it's frustrating because you might want to be more involved in decisions that have just been made" (Staff Member #6). Staff Member #7 agreed with this sentiment:

Well, I always appreciate when I'm in a decision-making process, but I also appreciate being invited in when I know I have the knowledge to actually make an informed decision, and inform with the knowledge that will help, so I get very tentative in being involved in the decision-making process when I don't consider myself to be the knowledgeable person that will actually help the decision-making process.

Board members suggested areas of improvement focused on increasing opportunities for reflection in organizational decision making. Board Member #3 asserted, "We need to embed in our flexible structures that we do review things, that we create spaces to questions, that we look at things or why are we doing it this way." This same participant continued by stating,

Part of the flexibility is having touch points along the way to sometimes, because whenever we're making decisions . . . sometimes we go heads down to plough through. It's the reminder to lift the head to see how everyone's feeling, reminder to check in with people. (Board Member #3)

Finding 3: Participants value open communication in decision making. Participants highlighted both strengths and areas of improvement for the organization in how decisions are openly communicated. Staff members seemed to have conflicting views about open communication decision making in the organization. Staff Member #8 shared, "I always find there is the opportunity to give your opinion, because we have an open environment here, so if I'm sitting at my desk, I am probably hearing decisions being made around me constantly." Staff Member #7 noted, "I think the open concept that we have and have had is good, because it actually invites people in or not, but regardless you are aware of the decision-making process in most cases." In contrast, some staff members identified feeling closed off from decision making in the organization. Staff Member #5 shared a desired more opportunities to be invited into the decision-making process:

> I think, sometimes, I feel as though it would be nice to even just be asked my opinion on something. There have been times where I thought it would have been nice to have been asked about my thoughts because of how closely I am connected, or whatever the case may be. So not necessarily a final say in the decision, but being engaged in the process is nice.

Similarly, Staff Member #4 described an experience of being surprised by decisions that were made: "There are also some decisions that you just find out about, like 'Oh, this big thing has changed,' or there are new staff, and you didn't even know there was a position."

Board and staff members emphasized the need to maintain and potentially improve transparency in decision making. Staff Member #3 shared, "We need to be clear about when a decision is rushed, sorry, no time, come to this meeting or send in an email by the end of the day

because that's when the decision has to be made." Board members discussed transparency

through the lens of their fiduciary responsibilities. Board Member #2 said,

> I'm wondering if, to better inform the decision points that we make, I'm wondering if
>
> there's something that's one step back from the summary that is provided by leadership
>
> in board meetings? [So that] we can see the thinking, more transparency around certain
>
> decisions.

Staff and board members also discussed the best venues for open communication to

occur. Staff Member #4 noted, "It can be difficult to contradict someone in large meetings,

because sometimes that's taken as you're being mean to someone in front of a group of people."

Staff Member #5 suggested a way to mitigate this challenge by highlighting potential solutions:

> Sometimes meetings are just surface, and being okay with that and knowing that we have
>
> the general ideas on the table, and then if people have other deeper things, it can either be
>
> written in an email or talk to someone outside or something.

Board Member #3 suggested that staff needed to be aware that their voices were being

heard and to create opportunities for this to be shared:

> Staff may not be confident whoever is making the decisions actually has their voices in
>
> mind. Maybe it's around that communication; your voice is in leadership's head when
>
> they are trying to make those decisions. Not everyone can, or wants to be involved in the
>
> decision. Maybe there's a new step that should be taken to demonstrate that their voice
>
> has been taken into account.

Finding 4: Participants highlighted the need for clarity in decision-making processes

and roles. Board and youth participants expressed the need for clarity about the organization's

decision-making processes and roles in the organization. Board members discussed their oversight of the Leadership Circle while youth dialogued about their partnerships with SCC team members and staff. In contrast, however, staff members shared that they often experienced a lack of clarity of how to make a decision and who to go to. Staff Member #2 shared, "There are times where you are not always clear who is the decision maker in a situation. Sometimes it can be confusing to figure out like, can I make this decision?" Staff Member #3 agreed, "There are times when . . . I don't know who is supposed to make this decision, and I don't know who to bring to the table, so I still need a deeper understanding of like the whole picture." Some staff members expressed uncertainty with when to involve themselves in decision making. Staff Member #4 shared, "There are times when I don't know when to voice things, like if it's too soon, or if I'm jumping, maybe there are other ways of voicing opinions, because not everyone feels comfortable to say it out loud." Staff Member #5 stated, "I need to understand how all the pieces fit together in order to be smart and strategic about decision making." Board Member #3 identified, "We could improve by describing and defining the different decisions that the organization has to make without creating a governance model that's so rigid and onerous."

Finding 5: Participants wish to improve systems and structures that support decision making. Board and staff members discussed improved systems and structures that could potentially improve governance and decision making. It is important to note, however, that this theme was not mentioned during the photovoice session with youth. Many participants highlighted the funding structure of the organization as a key consideration in building any improvements for the organization's decision-making systems. Staff Member #8 noted,

I think what makes it hard in this organization is that we are project based. You might be

hired for a certain project and then the funding ends. . . . What is nice is that you don't

necessarily get booted out of the organization, which makes sense for our funding model.

Staff Member #1 discussed aspects of organizational culture that influenced decision-

making systems and structures: "We are an accommodating organization for our clients, but . . .

we need some sort of structure that accommodation doesn't go outside of the frameworks of

things we actually won't be able to do." Staff Member #2 noted, "Everyone does a lot of

overlapping jobs, so people are stretched thin. You often run into situations where the people

who you need to get a decision from aren't present."

Both staff and board members were consistent in noting that improved intentionality in

decision making could potentially mitigate some of the structural and cultural challenges of the

organization. Staff Member #1 stated, "More intentionality, that word came up a lot. There is a

space for informal decision making, but also being intentional about creating spaces where like,

this is something we do regularly, or it is built into our decision-making process." Staff Member

#8 added,

And I think we also, we focused a little bit like on planning. So not so much structure per

se, but planning in like order to know who should be involved in a decision or what

length of time we have to make that decision, which will impact how much input we can

get.

Staff Member #5 expressed frustration at not being able to determine who to approach for

a decision to be made:

Some process to be able to know the importance level of the thing you're bringing to the person, because I think there is always an assumption that I'm like standing there about to ask a dumb, easy-to-answer question.

Board members discussed potential solutions to improve decision-making structures and systems by discussing ways to streamline or simplify decision making. Board Member #2 suggested,

There can be a formula applied to situations to make decisions; you can have a decision-making framework and those sorts of things. Frameworks or guidelines or how to go about making decisions, how to assess the situations, how to analyze it. Maybe there's something that can be written to assist staff and the board.

Staff members discussed challenges with existing decision-making venues and suggested potential areas of improvement. Staff Member #4 noted, "[In] large-group meeting processes, sometimes the process isn't getting all the voice that you want." Another staff member stated, "I feel like some of the time we have way too many meetings, when I speak, I want to really have something substantive to say, I don't just want to speak" (Staff Member #3). Staff Member #5 suggested adapting the model from a particular meeting to improve other meetings: "Compared to other team meetings, our youth engagement team meetings are usually much smaller and very productive. They are focused on coming out with a task." Staff Member #6 highlighted how meetings could be more effectively used to make decisions by noting, "When you have a meeting where decisions need to be made, outlining very clearly what decisions need to be made and why. I like meetings when I feel something has to be heavily discussed." Staff were particularly concerned that current meeting processes might not encourage all voices to be heard.

Staff Member #7 shared, "In a group conversation, there are many times when you'll censor yourself, there are different ways people perform in a space like that." Another staff member shared, "I have deeper conversations one-on-one than in groups."

Technology was discussed as a potential solution to improve and enhance decision making. Staff Member #5 shared, "Having shared docs online can be helpful and giving people other options like you can email me your opinion or something on this thing. I need some sort of thing where I can think what impacts what." All staff member participants unanimously agreed that each employee should have a work plan. Staff Member #6 highlighted this point by stating, "Work plans—everybody in the organization should have a work plan."

Summary. This section included a description of the five key findings that emerged from an analysis of the data collected from participants. The analysis revealed key themes of decision making and governance for the SCC, namely that decision-making and governance structures be adaptable flexible and grounded in open communication. Participants also emphasized an enhanced role for young people in decision making and governance through youth–adult partnerships. Finally, participants discussed the need for more supports and structures that support decision making in the organization. I now shift the discussion into a review of the key conclusions of the study.

Study Conclusions

I derived four conclusions from the data in answer to the inquiry question and subquestions. Informed by the study findings and the review of the literature from Chapter 2, the four conclusions are as follows:

1. Based on findings supported by specific leadership and governance theories, The SCC is complex. Therefore, the leadership, governance, and decision-making structures need to take into account the complexity of the organization and the environment in which they are situated.

2. Youth should be more meaningfully engaged in the SCC's organizational governance and decision making.

3. Staff members are the network leaders of the SCC.

4. The Board of Directors can be more meaningfully engaged in organizational governance and decision making.

Conclusion 1: Based on findings supported by specific leadership and governance theories, the SCC is complex. Therefore the leadership, governance, and decision-making structures need to take into account the complexity of the organization and the environment in which they are situated. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) build on Ashby's law of requisite variety, and subsequent development of the "law of requisite complexity" by McKelvey and Boisot (p. 301) to note that organizations must increase their complexity to the level of the environment rather than try to simplify and rationalize their structures. Participants are looking for the SCC to consider this increased complexity in the leadership, decision-making, and governance frameworks of the organization. The bottlenecking and confusion of roles that participants discussed highlights a centralized decision-making process that may be overly simplistic for the organization. Additionally, participants want to more intentionally involve different kinds of actors in the decision making and governance of the organization. Beunen et al. (2015) defined governance from the perspective of EGT as a form of coordination in the

taking of collectively binding decisions within a certain community. For the SCC, the word

coordination in this definition implies that governance involves the facilitation and inclusion of

diverse viewpoints.

For study participants, inclusion centred on a more meaningful role for youth. In fact,

participants unanimously agreed that youth needed to be more meaningfully engaged in the

leadership, governance, and decision-making structures of the organization. The data also

pointed to the need to acknowledge the decision making that occurs between and amongst staff.

Engaging these groups in the governance and decision making of the SCC falls out of the

traditional approach to governance of NPOs described in the NPO governance literature. In fact,

only recently have NPO governance scholars begun to identify the need for a broader view of

governance. Cornforth (2012) discussed the outsized influence given to boards when reviewing

NPO governance literature. Cornforth recommended that researchers broaden their scope by

looking at the formal and informal decision-making roles of internal and external actors. This

lack of evidence may provide a systemic explanation for why participants perceive a lack of

clarity for how decisions are made at the SCC.

The SCC needs a 21st century governance model that goes beyond the enactment and

enforcement of rules. Using EGT and leadership theories that draw on complexity theory for

NPO governance will improve the effectiveness and agility of the SCC's stakeholders in the

governance and decision making of the organization. This approach may also address the gap

that currently exists in the literature. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) discussed how complex leadership

structures can enhance an organizational system's capacity to search for solutions to challenges

and to innovate through unlocking the capacity of organizational agents to influence change,

which the SCC must do to influence change. Therefore, the organization's governance and

decision-making structures need to take into account the role of diverse stakeholder groups in

influencing the organization. This means acknowledging and creating spaces for youth, staff, and

potentially other stakeholders to be more intentionally involved. More recent work by Hazy and

Uhl-Bien (2015) highlighted the influence that occurs in organizations as a result of fine-grain

interactions between diverse stakeholders. They emphasized how these interactions can

accumulate to influence the direction and decision making of complex organizations (Hazy &

Uhl-Bien, 2015). The SCC needs to consider the influence of these interactions when building

enhanced strategies for governance and decision making.

Figure 2. A 21st century governance model for the SCC that synthesizes EGT, leadership and complexity theories. The model takes into account the complexity of the organization and the role of diverse stakeholders in influencing the organization.

Participants discussed the need for better frameworks and clarity of roles. However, they also qualified these discussions by mentioning key themes such as diversity, adaptability, flexibility, and openness. In fact, many participants described the organization's existing flexibility as an asset. Participants wish to maintain flexibility in governance and decision making so that they can adapt as needed. Goldstein et al. (2010) described this concept as emergence and defined it as the arising of novel structures, patterns, or processes as systems adapt to the complexity of their environments and contexts. Participants are looking to embed emergence in the leadership, governance, and decision-making structures of the organization. They seek to avoid overly rigid or onerous frameworks.

Conclusion 2: Youth should be more meaningfully engaged in the SCC's organizational governance and decision making. Checkoway (2011) defined youth participation as the process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives. Similarly, Pancer et al. (2002) defined youth engagement as the sustained, meaningful involvement of a young person who has a focus outside of the self. As discussed in the previous section, participants unanimously agreed that youth should be more meaningfully engaged in the SCC's governance and decision-making structures. Adult participants emphasized a youth–adult partnership approach to governance and decision making in the organization. Board members in particular discussed the need to form stronger relationships with youth in order to enhance their awareness and oversight of the organization. Zeldin and MacNeill (2006) discussed engagement and participation in governance and decision making as occurring in the context of relationships between young people and adults and among youth themselves. Building off EGT, the SCC may

see increased influence by youth over how decisions are made if the organization enhances its coordination of youth–adult partnerships.

Youth participants emphasized the theme of adaptability and flexibility in decision making. This discussion centred on the topic of ensuring the inclusion and involvement of diverse youth in the governance and decision making of the SCC. Libby et al. (2005) discussed diversity in youth engagement in governance as the creation of multiple pathways for youth leadership development in organizations so that different types of young people can experience having a say in the organization. The emphasis on the involvement of diverse groups of youth through multiple potential pathways aligns with complexity theory. In fact, Goldstein et al. (2010) discussed leadership as an influence process that arises through interactions across the organization. They highlighted the "'space' between" (Goldstein et al., 2010, p. 9) as a venue in which decisions and influence occurs. A more traditional view of governance may exclude some of the youth who engage with the SCC. Therefore, a flexible and adaptable youth engagement governance approach needs to consider both the formal spaces and the spaces between. Kirby et al. (2003) discussed informal and formal processes as mechanisms for gathering diverse perspectives from young people. They defined informal processes as creating opportunities for ongoing dialogue, observation, listening to spontaneous communication, and engaging in joint activities (Kirby et al., 2003, p. 62).

Involving diverse groups of youth and adults in decision making requires intentionality, which surfaced as a subtheme throughout the study. Participants discussed the need for intentional processes that proactively involve youth (and other stakeholders) in the decisions that affect them. Participants drew on their varied experiences by suggesting a number of different

ways for youth to be engaged (e.g., through the board, in projects, and in informal ways). In fact,

Bell et al. (2008) recommended that young people be involved in determining both the processes

and the content of the proposed governance structures of the organization. For the SCC, youth

can partner with experienced adults to intentionally develop strategies that enhance governance

and decision making.

Participants discussed youth engagement and participation in governance by emphasizing

the need for the organization to walk its talk. Participants shared that SCC often provides advice

to other organizations on how to meaningfully engage youth in decision making. Ramey (2013)

discussed that youth involvement in decision making resulted in improved and more relevant

services for populations. The author also suggested that youth involvement in governance can

improve strategic plans and ensure more entrepreneurial and innovative governance.

Conclusion 3: Staff members are the network leaders of the SCC. Goldstein et al.

(2010) noted every social network has a structure that reflects the configuration of how people

are connected with one another. Board and youth participants discussed staff members as their

primary touch points within the organization. Board participants in particular emphasized the

role of staff in executing and carrying out the organization's mission. Wei-Skillern et al. (2015)

defined this as network leadership. Network leaders "focus on creating authentic relationships

and building deep trust from the bottom up" (Wei-Skillern et al., 2015, para. 4). Network leaders

act as the bridges between diverse stakeholder groups and are not constrained by hierarchy.

Interestingly, staff did not explicitly see themselves in this role. In fact, the need for more clarity

around roles, structures, and systems consistently surfaced as a theme in the staff focus group

session. Goldstein et al. (2010) discussed how adaptability in complex systems can emerge only

if there are constraints or boundaries that routinely operate on the choices and actions of the

individuals in the system. The disconnect in perception between staff and external stakeholders

highlighted an organizational context in which certain boundaries are implicitly assumed but not

explicitly or intentionally supported. Therefore, the SCC may want to uncover and intentionally

support what is already occurring in the staff team—leadership. This uncovering and naming of

boundaries may result in increased supports for staff to fulfill their role as network leaders.

  Staff who participated in the study identified challenges that they perceived as preventing

them from fulfilling their role as network leaders. These challenges aligned with Hazy and Uhl-

Bien's (2015) discussions on the influence of fine-grain interactions on an organization and its

identity. For example, staff members expressed a desire for better supports in decision making,

specifically requesting clarity on when to involve others in the process and the implications that

one individual decision may have on other members or systems of the organization. Staff

members' lack of confidence in making a decision was connected to their perceived lack of

supports and/or information to make the decision. Staff members also placed value on the

interactions that occur in what Goldstein et al. (2010) defined as the "'space' between" (p. 9),

namely that one-on-one interactions with other staff and stakeholders with specific skill sets can

lead to effective decision making. I found it interesting to note that staff did not find as much

value in the organization's large-group meetings as a forum for problem solving and decision

making. Again, this finding highlighted the value that staff placed on the "fine-grain

interactions" (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015, p. 80) that occur in the "space' between" (Goldstein et

al., 2010, p. 9) within the organization.

Staff and board participants also identified supports to enhance decision making and governance that were not directly or explicitly mentioned in the literature but did align with EGT's definition of governance and a shared leadership approach (Beunen et al., 2015). For example, a more detailed breakdown of the decision-making process would enable stakeholders to understand the thought process behind a decision. Similarly, participants discussed the need for shared systems such as work plans and decision making charts so that they could more effectively make individual decisions about their priorities.

Conclusion 4: The Board of Directors can be more meaningfully engaged in organizational governance and decision making. Both staff and youth participants expressed a desire to be more meaningfully connected to the Board of Directors. Similarly, board participants expressed a desire to be better connected to youth and staff. Participants notably did not mention the role of the Board of Directors in being better connected with the community at large. This finding is not surprising as the study was focused on the internal machinations of the organization. This is notable, however, because the literature on NPO governance consistently referenced the role of the Board of Directors as a primary mechanism for connecting the organization to the external community and to the organization's stakeholders (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012). In fact, Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) discussed how an NPO volunteer board of directors often acts as the formal bridge between the organization and various community stakeholders. The absence in participant discussions of the role of the Board of Directors in initiating and sustaining external stakeholder engagement may be a result of the role that the staff already play and the desire of board members not to interfere in the day-to-day operations of the organization. Board members were emphatic in insisting that they were not a management board.

Specifically, they did not interfere in the operational decisions made by staff members but were focused on big-picture strategy of the organization. Bradshaw (2009) defined this board model as policy governance.

This study did highlight the need, however for the Board of Directors to be more meaningfully engaged in the governance and decision making of the organization. More meaningful engagement of the Board of Directors at the SCC does not necessarily mean shifting to a traditional NPO governance approach as described in the literature (e.g., Renz, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In fact, building off of EGT and complexity theory, the board should be seen as one of many governance activities in the organization (e.g., Beunen et al., 2015; Goldstein et al., 2010). The SCC's volunteer Board of Directors may want to consider adding nontraditional activities as part of its mandate. For example, the board may want to consider moving away from its current policy governance model. Bradshaw (2009) defined constituency or representative governance as formalized and decentralized in its decision making with power being held by committees and staff that support specific functions of the organization. There could also be an enhanced role for youth on these committees. From an EGT perspective, the board may also want to consider adding the coordination of the engagement of diverse internal and external stakeholders to its activities (Beunen et al., 2015). Building off of complexity theory, this coordination may also include supporting a network of organizations to work together to address a common challenge (Renz, 2013).

Deciding on which approach to take should be left to the organization's network leaders. This approach to deciding the best model for the Board of Directors is nontraditional and is not overtly seen in the conventional NPO governance literature (e.g., Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012).

It does, however, reflect the complexity of the organization and its environment. This approach also acknowledges and builds off of the social configurations that already exist in the SCC (Goldstein et al., 2010), namely that staff are the primary network leaders in the organization, as they are the most connected to youth, external stakeholders, and the board volunteers.

Summary. This section proposed a 21st century governance model that reflects the complexity of the internal and external environment of the SCC. With this complexity in mind, governance and decision-making at the SCC goes beyond traditional rule-making. Based on EGT, the findings from the study and leadership complexity theory, this model of governance focuses on the coordination and inclusion of diverse internal and external stakeholders with a particular focus on the engagement of youth in decision-making. In fact, Conclusion 2 spoke to the fact that young people should play a role in supporting enhanced governance and decision making in the organization. Second, Conclusion 3 recognized staff as the network leaders of the organization and noted that they require supports to make more effective decisions. Finally, Conclusion 4 highlighted that the Board of Directors can be more meaningfully engaged in organizational governance and decision making. I now conclude the chapter with a discussion on the scope and limitations relating to this research.

Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry

This inquiry focused on engaging internal stakeholders who are directly and consistently involved with the SCC on a day-to-day basis: staff, board volunteers, and youth. Each stakeholder group contributed perspectives on strategies to enhance governance and decision making in the organization. Each inquiry project participant contributed through his or her own internal experience within the organization. Therefore, the inquiry included all of the primary

stakeholders who influence governance and decision making on a day-to-day basis. This inquiry did not, however, engage external stakeholders such as funders, clients, governing authorities, and organizational partners. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, NPOs like the SCC are heavily influenced by sector-wide trends (Wells, 2012). NPOs also exist in multiple and often intersecting systems that in many ways determine how they are governed as well as how decisions are made. In some cases, systems and trends can predetermine a governance function or a decision that has to be made in the organization. As a result, the conclusions generated in this inquiry did not include the full systems level perspective on governance and decision making. Additionally, the application of the findings and conclusions of this inquiry outside of the SCC and for other NPOs may be limited due to the internal focus of the inquiry.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a description of the project findings by discussing key themes that emerged from the study. The themes were organized into five findings. I shared anonymous quotes from inquiry project participants to illustrate the themes. I then synthesized the findings with evidence from the literature to derive four conclusions. I concluded the chapter by highlighting the scope and limitations of the inquiry. I now shift into a discussion about the implications of the inquiry and present the recommendations.

Chapter Five: Inquiry Implications

This chapter is the culmination of the work done throughout the study. This chapter brings together the organizational context, the literature, the findings, and conclusions into recommendations that address the inquiry questions: What strategies can the SCC enact to enhance its governance and decision making? The recommendations also address the following subquestions:

1. How can youth be effectively engaged in governance and decision making at the SCC?

2. How can staff support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

3. How can the volunteer Board of Directors support enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC?

I also discuss the leadership implications for the organization and implications for future inquiry within this chapter. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the overall thesis.

Study Recommendations

The recommendations described in this section take into account the complexity of the SCC and its environment as described in Chapter 4. Snowden and Boone (2007) discussed, "In a complex context, correct answers can't be ferreted out" (Complex Contexts section, para. 1). Therefore, these recommendations will not attempt to impose a course of action (Snowden & Boone, 2007); rather, they are designed to kick-start a process that will lead to the emergence of novel solutions and strategies. This emergence will occur as the SCC's stakeholders probe, sense, and respond to the process outlined in this section. This emergent and fluid process will

hopefully result in enhanced governance and decision making at the SCC. I put forward the

following four recommendations for the SCC to review and consider:

1. Immediately engage a diverse group of Canadian youth in the development of an

    inclusive governance process for the SCC.

2. Intentionally uncover the leadership that already exists in the organization, and

    identify the structures needed to support staff in their role as network leaders.

3. Involve members of the Board of Directors in the working group processes.

4. Engage with other organizations in the youth sector to develop a collective

    governance approach that addresses youth issues in Canada.

Recommendation 1: Immediately engage a diverse group of Canadian youth in the

development of an inclusive governance process for the SCC. The inquiry participants

unanimously agreed that the SCC needs to be more intentional about engaging young people in

governance activities. Building on complexity-informed leadership theories, young people can

play a role in identifying innovative solutions to both organizations and society's complex

challenges. Kirby et al. (2003) illustrated a number of different models and approaches for

engaging young people in informal and formal governance activities. Bell et al. (2008)

recommended that young people have a say in the governance approach that they would like

implemented in their organization. This recommendation aligns with the organizational context

of the SCC, namely the SCC's (n.d.) mission, which emphasizes partnering with young people to

put their ideas for improving themselves and their communities into action. With this context in

mind, I advise the SCC immediately initiate a working group of young people partnered with

adults to begin the process of enhancing youth engagement and participation in governance and

ENHANCING GOVERNANCE AND DECISION MAKING AT THE SCC   84

decision making in the organization. The group does not necessarily need to include young

people who have been highly engaged with the organization. I recommend the group, however,

include diverse viewpoints and experiences of youth across Canada. Zeldin and MacNeill (2006)

highlighted the benefits of youth–adult partnerships in building and sustaining youth engagement

in governance. Given this information, I advise adult partners who represent each of the SCC's

various stakeholder groups be embedded in the process, namely staff, board volunteers, and

whenever possible external stakeholders.

I suggest the working group engaged in the process begin by reviewing the findings and

literature from this study as they build their proposed approach. I recommend they ensure that

the approach considers both formal and informal structures. I advise the group also keep in mind

"inside . . . [and] outside" (Libby et al., 2006, p. 13) structures as well as the "'space' between"

(Goldstein et al., 2010, p. 9) in which diverse interactions that influence decisions in the

organization occur. Furthermore, I recommend the group pay particular attention to ensuring that

the complexity of the organization is taken into consideration, as participants consistently

discussed this complexity throughout the study. In fact, participants frequently highlighted the

theme of flexibility and adaptability in decision making.

I suggest the working group of youth and adults spend the next 6 to 8 months meeting to

design and build their proposed approach. I advise members of the working group to also ensure

that they are checking in with other representatives of their stakeholder group as they build their

approach. This constituency-based approach aligns with the organizational context and findings

from the study and the literature, namely respecting and listening to a diverse group of people

when building new strategies and approaches. I recommend the final step in the process include

the preparation of a presentation of the proposed approach for ratification by youth and adult

delegates at the next SCC national conference in March 2018.

Recommendation 2: Intentionally uncover the leadership that already exists in the organization, and identify the structures needed to support staff in their role as network leaders. Intentionality surfaced as a key subtheme of the study. I, therefore, advise members of

the Leadership Circle to intentionally uncover the leadership exhibited by staff that already exists

in the organization. Building on EGT and complexity theory, I recommend this uncovering occur

through one-on-one "fine-grain interactions" (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015, p. 80). In these

conversations, I encourage members of the Leadership Circle to share the conclusions from the

study with staff members. I suggest staff members be made aware of the influence of "fine-grain

interactions" (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015, p. 80) that occur in the "'space' between" (Goldstein et

al., 2010, p. 9) in organizations. Staff members may also be asked to intentionally observe or be

involved in the youth engagement in governance working group. One potential method to

consider to support the uncovering of leadership is social network analysis. Cross, Borgatti, and

Parker (2002) described social network analysis as a tool that reveals the informal networks that

influence an organization. I propose staff members document the novel solutions developed

through informal networks that may emerge as part of this process. Staff members will also be

invited to document their reflections on the conclusions shared in the study and to observe the

decision making that occurs in the spaces between in the organization. I recommend Leadership

Circle members also document and observe the SCC system for any shifts, improvements, or

changes. If these reflections from both staff and Leadership Circle members could be collected

monthly, they could be integrated into the regular large-group team meeting. I suggest this process occur in tandem with the youth engagement in governance working group.

After the March 2018 national conference, I advise a working group of intergenerational staff, including both full- and part-time representatives, be struck to identify the structures and supports needed to support staff in their roles as network leaders. I recommend the working group begin by looking at the proposed solutions that emerged from the study, namely the discussion on systems and structures that focused on improving meetings, fostering fine-grain interactions between staff, and developing tools such as workplans. I urge the working group to also take into consideration the observations and reflections of Leadership Circle members, staff, and youth from the previous year, namely the youth engagement in governance working group and the intentional uncovering of leadership.

I propose the working group ensure that the enhanced structures and supports take into consideration the complexity of the organization. In fact, they should not be onerous and overly rigid. They may in fact need to be tailored to individuals. I recommend the working group meet monthly to discuss adaptations to systems and structures that may need to be made due to changing social, economic, and political whims. The working group could provide decision-making opportunities at all-staff meetings and/or retreats so that a broader group of staff and stakeholders can contribute their perspectives. Finally, I suggest the working group become a permanent structure of the organization so that staff members can have a forum to intentionally reflect, respond, and adapt to emerging opportunities, challenges, and issues.

Recommendation 3: Involve members of the Board of Directors in the working group processes. The preceding recommendations focused on striking working groups to

identify strategies to enhance governance and decision making in the SCC. The working groups

provide a concrete opportunity for board members to be more meaningfully connected to youth

and staff. I, therefore, recommend that the Board of Directors identify one to two members to

join the working groups. Board members can observe and contribute their perspectives as the

groups work through their process. Including the Board of Directors in each of these groups

serves three purposes. First, it provides opportunities for staff and young people to be more

closely connected to the board, as both staff and young people mentioned during the study a

desire to be better connected to the board. Second, it includes a key stakeholder group of the

organization in identifying strategies; the diversity of perspectives can enrich the discussions of

the working groups. Finally, it creates opportunities for emergence. As Goldstein et al. (2010)

discussed, "novel structures, patterns, or processes" (p. 13) will emerge that may result in

specific strategies and solutions to enhance the long-term role of the Board of Directors.

I recommend board members observe and participate in the working groups for at least

1 year. I suggest board meetings also include regular updates from the representatives of the

working groups. These representatives do not necessarily have to be board members. This will

develop the board's comfort level with having outside stakeholder groups present at its meetings.

I advise the lessons learned from the two working groups be documented and captured in annual

reports presented to the board at annual general meetings. The report could include

recommendations from the working groups on a proposed model for how the Board can continue

to be engaged with specific stakeholder groups on specific issues. I recommend the report also

include contributions from staff, youth, board members, and wherever possible external

stakeholders. I advise complexity theory and EGT be taken into account when writing the

Lessons Learned report. namely the facilitation and coordination of smaller working groups that occur in the "'space' between" (Goldstein et al., 2010, p. 9) organizations.

The literature on NPO board of directors also emphasized diversity of competency, experience, and background as keys to organizational effectiveness and identity. Chait et al. (1996) mentioned six key competencies to consider. Similarly, Bradshaw (2009) discussed board configurations that could be adapted based on the needs of the organization. The current Board of Directors is composed of five members from across Ontario. I, therefore, recommend that the Board of Directors, with the support of the other stakeholders of the organization, develop and implement a recruitment process for new board members. I suggest the recruitment process consider identifying board members with specific competencies and experiences. The recruitment of the new Board members could occur over a 3-year period to ensure that they are meaningfully oriented to their role. I propose the 3-year process begin after the two working groups have been struck.

Recommendation 4: Engage with other organizations in the youth sector to develop a collective governance approach that addresses youth issues in Canada. The previous three recommendations are internally focused to the organizational context of the SCC. It is clear, however, from the literature and the systems analysis of the inquiry that NPOs like the SCC also need to consider a broad view of governance that looks beyond individual organization. In fact, as Blanchet-Cohen (2015) discussed, NPOs can play a unique role in building community capacity to address society's complex problems and challenges. Renz (2010) discussed broader forms of governance that take into account a network of organizations. Beunen et al. (2015) also discussed governance as a form of coordination of diverse stakeholders. The SCC can play a

bridging role between various organizations by facilitating a common governance approach that supports diverse organizations to more effectively address youth issues in Canada. The SCC first, however, needs to ensure that its internal systems match its expectations and aspirations for collective governance of the broader youth sector.

As participants in the study identified, it is important that the SCC be able to walk its talk. Therefore, I recommend that the SCC spend the next 3 years probing, sensing, and acting as Recommendations 1 to 3 are implemented. This will intentionally embed reflection in the culture of the organization. The lessons learned from the implementation of the internal recommendations should inform the SCC's approach to collective governance of the youth sector. The successful implementation of the recommendations will also serve to bolster the SCC's relevance and reputation so that the organization can play a key role in developing a governance model for the sector. In the meantime, I recommend the SCC engage its internal stakeholders in conceptualizing a potential approach for collective governance of the sector. As noted throughout the study, the SCC's internal stakeholders have engaged in the development of governance strategies and approaches for other organizations. I advise these experiences and connections be leveraged to develop a proposed potential approach that can be presented to external stakeholders and partners in 3 years. I suggest the internal working groups and Board of Directors also include discussions about external collective governance so that the working group conversations are not overly focused on internal machinations.

Summary. The recommendations generated from this study outlined short-, medium-, and long-term strategies designed to enhance governance and decision making at the SCC. Recommendations 1 to 3 focus on the role of the SCC's internal stakeholders in enhancing

governance and decision making in the organization. A working group will be struck to bring together a group of young people partnered with adults to identify an approach to the engagement and participation of youth in governance and decision making. This approach will be ratified at the SCC's annual national youth conference in March 2018. Concurrently, members of the Leadership Circle will work to intentionally uncover and name the leadership that already exists in the organization. Both processes will take emergence into account. Novel solutions and structures may emerge through the processes and staff, Leadership Circle, board members, and youth will be invited to reflect and document these experiences as they arise. These reflections will be collected and shared monthly at all staff meetings.

After the national youth conference, a second working group will be struck to bring together an intergenerational group of staff members to identify adaptable and flexible systems that promote more intentional decision making in the organization. Each of the working groups will include representation from the Board of Directors. This representation will serve to better connect youth and staff with board members. The lessons learned from the process will support the board in developing a 3-year recruitment strategy focused on ensuring diverse experience and representation.

The final recommendation outlines a proposed collective approach for governance and decision making for the next 10 years. This approach would leverage SCC organizational experience and expertise to develop a collective governance model for the youth sector. The model will be informed by the lessons learned from the implementation of the first three recommendations and through the engagement of a diverse set of external stakeholders. The

collective governance approach will position the SCC to remain the leading organization for meaningful youth engagement and participation in Canada.

Organizational Implications

As part of this inquiry process, I invited SCC stakeholders to attend a 4-hour session to review the findings that emerged from the study. I offered participants the opportunity to review the findings as described in this thesis. They were also invited to review the themes, codes, and quotes that emerged from the data analysis. In the first 90 minutes, participants broke off into small groups and spent time exploring the organized and analyzed data. They came back as a large group to share their high-level observations with one another. Session participants unanimously agreed that the data and findings aligned with their individual and organizational experiences. Participants then split up again and spent time generating proposed recommendations based on the data. In the large group, participants shared their proposed recommendations. At participants' request, I extended the session for further discussion. The input generated during this session informed the development of the recommendations described in the previous section.

The year-long inquiry process facilitated an enhanced culture of reflection in the organization. The process required organizational leaders and the SCC's internal stakeholders to pause and take stock of the organization at different points throughout the year. The process led to the identification of organizational strengths and areas of improvement connected to the study. In fact, evidence is emerging that leadership and staff are beginning to move forward on some of the findings that were generated during the study, namely more intentional involvement of youth in microdecisions and an increase in conversations about improved systems and supports.

Interestingly, the process has also led to the identification of organizational strengths and areas of improvement that have gone beyond the research questions. Simply creating a space to reflect has resulted in "fine-grain interactions" (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015, p. 80) that have led to micro and macrolevel changes—some connected to the study, while others not. Trullen and Torbert (2016) discussed how organizations engaged in third-person research "are open to practicing inquiry, learning from mistakes, questioning their assumptions, and reducing defensiveness" (Third-Person Research section, para. 1). In many ways, the inquiry process itself has served as the template for ongoing third-person inquiry in the organization. In fact, organizational stakeholders have started to gravitate towards Stringer's (2014) AR and Rowe et al.'s (2013) ARE as methodologies for building other aspects of the organization's emerging 10-year strategic plan.

While one part of this reflective process has ended, another part has begun. Stakeholders will need to view the thesis and the recommendations not as an endpoint but rather as a starting point for the changes they are seeking. They will need to carve out time and space from their already busy schedules to create the organizational conditions that will lead to the implementation of these recommendations. Furthermore, they will need to ensure that the time and space they create is immune to the shifting political, economic, and social whims that influence NPOs. This is not a small undertaking and will require intentional support from the Leadership Circle to make it happen. Stakeholders involved in the working groups will also need to consider the individual, social, and systemic complexities and implications of any proposed approach or design that emerges from their discussions. Furthermore, they will need to ensure

that adaptability, flexibility, and emergence remain a cornerstone of whatever process and approach they choose to implement.

If this thesis sits on a shelf than the SCC will miss a critical opportunity to enhance its sector-wide relevance and reputation. The SCC will have also lost an opportunity to adapt the governance and decision-making structures to its ever-shifting environment. Staff will continue to act as network leaders without intentional supports and structures to support them in their roles. The board will continue to be disconnected from its key stakeholders and will remain static in its diversity of experience and expertise. Most importantly, the SCC will fail to involve its most important primary stakeholders—the youth—in its decision making and governance.

This thesis builds on the research and discussions in the literature on the governance of complex NPOs. This thesis will add another NPO governance perspective. This specific focus of this thesis on the coordination and involvement of diverse stakeholders as a mechanism for enhanced governance will also add to the evidence. This thesis expands upon the growing evidence that governance is broader than rule-making. The additional emphasis on the engagement of youth in governance also adds to the scholarly work by providing a proposed approach for diverse organizations to meaningfully engage this important stakeholder group.

The project sponsor was an active participant throughout the process. He checked in regularly and provided support as needed. His experience completing the Master of Arts in Leadership program in 2014 proved to be invaluable to me during very stressful times. He has accepted these recommendations and will present them to the June 2017 annual general meeting for approval by the full Board of Directors. Once the recommendations are approved, the SCC's Leadership Circle will be instructed by the Board of Directors to begin implementing them. Each

member of the SCC's three-person Leadership Circle will be directly responsible for

implementing one of the first three recommendations. The Leadership Circle as a whole, will

support the implementation of Recommendation 4. As a member of the Leadership Circle, I will

be accountable to the Board of Directors for the successful implementation of the

recommendations. I am particularly interested in leading and supporting the youth engagement in

governance working group.

Implications for Future Inquiry

This study focused on exploring governance and decision making of a relatively small yet

complex NPO. It would be interesting to see if the findings and recommendations are

transferable to larger nongovernmental organizations, the public sector, the corporate sector, and

other social institutions. This study also grounded the discussions and analysis by focusing on a

broad view of governance: diverse stakeholder engagement. All organizations increasingly

operate in complex systems that require the individuals who make up the organizations to

constantly adapt their approaches. Further research grounded in EGT and complexity theory is

needed so that organizations can make evidence-based decisions on how to adapt to their

constantly changing environments.

This study paid particularly close attention to the role of young people in governance and

decision making. This is an area that requires further research and discussion so that a diversity

of viewpoints can be added to the literature. Young people experience stubbornly high youth

unemployment rates (Trading Economics, 2017). They are also more likely to experience low

levels of civic engagement (Turcotte, 2015). NPOs and other social sector institutions can fill

this gap by providing opportunities for young people to be meaningfully engaged in the decisions that affect them.

It would be particularly interesting to document the outcomes of other youth engagement in governance approaches in different organizations. It would also be interesting to track the successes, challenges, and outcomes of the Canadian Prime Minister's Youth Council. Specifically, the influence that this council has on policy, governance, and decision making in the government context. Furthermore, a pan-Canadian longitudinal study that compares and contrasts diverse youth engagement in governance approaches spanning various organizations would be of interest. This study could be shared across organizations to build Canadian evidence about meaningful youth engagement in governance.

Future inquiries could also look at documenting evolving forms of governance. It would be particularly interesting to look at identifying best practices that support the effective governance of networks. This could include an exploration of how networks address complex and complicated challenges. Finally, the SCC could engage its academic partners to conduct a study on the role and influence of the SCC in facilitating youth voice opportunities in Canada. This study could support the organization to identify best practices in preparation for the implementation of Recommendation 4.

Thesis Summary

This thesis is the culmination of a year-long ARE project at the SCC. This process focused on involving the SCC's internal stakeholders in identifying strategies to enhance governance and decision making in the organization. The first chapter focused and framed the

study by providing organizational context on the SCC. This chapter also included a discussion on the significance of the issue.

The second chapter provided a comprehensive literature review that focused on three topics relevant to the study. These topics included the theory and practice of governance, youth participation and engagement in governance, and leadership.

The third chapter outlined the methodology of the study by describing Rowe et al.'s (2013) ARE methodology and the methods used to collect data from the SCC's internal stakeholders. I completed two cycles of inquiry. In the first cycle, youth participated in a photovoice session and shared their views on decision making through photography. The themes generated from the first cycle of inquiry informed the development of focus group questions for the second cycle of inquiry. In this cycle, staff and board members participated in two separate focus group sessions. I analyzed the data collected during both cycles of inquiry using qualitative coding techniques. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the ethical concerns of the inquiry.

The codes and themes generated from the qualitative coding process were organized into key findings and presented in Chapter 4. In total five key findings emerged as a result of the study. The five findings are as follows:

1. Participants stressed the importance of youth engagement and youth–adult partnerships in decision-making and governance structures.

2. Participants stressed the need for adaptability and flexibility in organizational decision making.

3. Participants value open communication in decision making.

4. Participants highlighted the need for clarity in decision-making processes and roles.

5. Participants wish to improve systems and structures that support decision making.

I then synthesized the findings with the literature from Chapter 2 into study conclusions.

Four key conclusions emerged from this synthesis:

1. The SCC's leadership, governance, and decision-making structures need to take into

    account the complexity of the organization and the environment in which they are

    situated.

2. Youth should be more meaningfully engaged in the SCC's organizational governance

    and decision making.

3. Staff members are the network leaders of the SCC.

4. The Board of Directors can be more meaningfully engaged in organizational

    governance and decision making.

The final chapter of the thesis focused on outlining a process that will result in enhanced

governance and decision making at the SCC. This process was grounded in complexity theory

and acknowledged the reality of the organizational context of the SCC. The process outlined four

specific recommendations. The first three recommendations focused on enhancing governance

and decision making for the SCC's internal stakeholders. The final recommendation focused on

the development of a governance approach for the broader youth sector. The four inquiry

recommendations are as follows:

1. Immediately engage a diverse group of Canadian youth in the development of an

    inclusive governance process for the SCC.

2. Intentionally uncover the leadership that already exists in the organization, and identify the structures and supports needed to support staff in their role as network leaders.

3. Involve members of the Board of Directors in the working group processes.

4. Engage with other organizations in the youth sector to develop a collective governance approach that addresses youth issues in Canada.

This final chapter also outlined the implications of the study by discussing the effects of the study on the organizational context. This discussion also focused on identifying the implications of not putting into place the recommendations. The chapter concluded with a discussion on implications for future inquiry.

It is my hope that the process of organizational reflection that occurred as a result of this study will continue at the SCC. As discussed earlier, this thesis is not an endpoint but the beginning of a journey that if seen through will result in enhanced governance and decision making at the organization. It is also my hope that this process provides the spark for change that will support the organization in achieving long-term sustainability. The SCC plays a critical role in ensuring that young people's voices are heard in this country. A stronger, sustainable SCC will ensure that the voices of young people are heard in this country for years to come.

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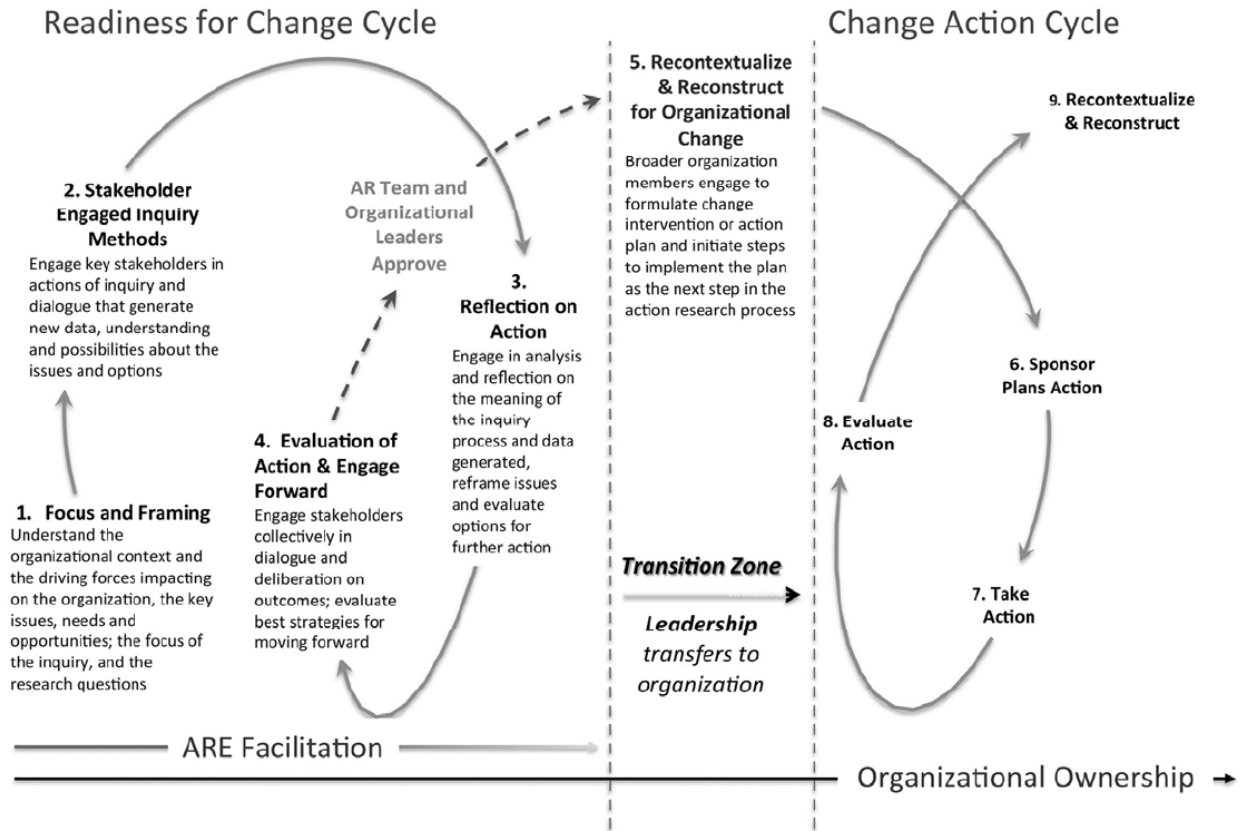Students Commission of Canada. (2016b). *Strategic planning process.* Toronto, Canada: Author.

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Appendix A: Organizational Action Research Engagement Model

Readiness for Change Cycle

Change Action Cycle

2. Stakeholder Engaged Inquiry Methods
Engage key stakeholders in actions of inquiry and dialogue that generate new data, understanding and possibilities about the issues and options

AR Team and Organizational Leaders Approve

3. Reflection on Action
Engage in analysis and reflection on the meaning of the inquiry process and data generated, reframe issues and evaluate options for further action

5. Recontextualize & Reconstruct for Organizational Change
Broader organization members engage to formulate change intervention or action plan and initiate steps to implement the plan as the next step in the action research process

9. Recontextualize & Reconstruct

4. Evaluation of Action & Engage Forward
Engage stakeholders collectively in dialogue and deliberation on outcomes; evaluate best strategies for moving forward

1. Focus and Framing
Understand the organizational context and the driving forces impacting on the organization, the key issues, needs and opportunities; the focus of the inquiry, and the research questions

Transition Zone

Leadership transfers to organization

8. Evaluate Action

6. Sponsor Plans Action

7. Take Action

ARE Facilitation

Organizational Ownership →

Note. AR = Action Research; ARE = Action Research Engagement.

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Appendix B: Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Sharif Mahdy will be conducting an inquiry research study at The Students Commission of Canada. The inquiry will focus on identifying strategies to enhance the governance and decision-making structures of the organization. The student's credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address].

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, or reviewing analysis of data, to assist the Student and the Students Commission of Canada's organizational change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information, personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

Bridging Student's Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict

In situations where potential participants in a work setting report directly to the Student, you, as a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this potential or actual conflict of interest in this study. Such requests may include asking the Inquiry Team Advisor to: send out the letter of invitation to potential participants, receive letters/emails of interest in participation from potential participants, independently make a selection of received participant requests based on criteria you and the Student will have worked out previously, formalize the logistics for the data-gathering method, including contacting the participants about the time and location of the interview or focus group, conduct the interviews (usually 3-5 maximum) or focus group (usually no more than one) with the selected participants (without the Student's presence or knowledge of which participants were chosen) using the protocol and questions worked out previously with the student, and producing written transcripts of the interviews or focus groups with all personal identifiers removed before the transcripts are brought back to the Student for the data analysis phase of the study.

This strategy means that potential participants with a direct reporting relationship will be assured they can confidentially turn down the participation request from their supervisor (the Student), as this process conceals from the Student which potential participants chose not to participate or simply were not selected by you, the third party, because they were out of the selection criteria range (they might have been a participant request coming after the number of participants sought. For example, interview request number 6 when only 5 participants are sought, or focus group request number 10 when up to 9 participants would be selected for a focus group). Inquiry Team members asked to take on such 3rd party duties in this study will be under the direction of the Student and will be fully briefed by the Student as to how this process will work, including specific expectations, and the methods to be employed in conducting the elements of the inquiry with the Student's direct reports, and will be given every support possible by the Student, except where such support would reveal the identities of the actual participants.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with Sharif Mahdy, the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.

_____   _____   _____

Name (Please Print)   Signature   Date

Appendix C: Questions for Photovoice

This photovoice session will support enhanced governance and decision-making at the SCC. I will also be doing focus groups with other SCC stakeholders: staff and board volunteers.

Before we begin, I would like to go over some of the procedural details and guidelines for this session.

1. This photovoice session should last 60 minutes depending on how much you have to say.

2. I will be audio taping the photovoice session. I will not put any names in the transcript of the session. Maddy Ross will also be taking notes during the session.

3. Everything you say will be confidential.

4. Whatever is said in this room stays in the room.

5. When more than one person speaks at a time, it is difficult to capture what everybody says, therefore it is important that you talk one at a time.

6. Everybody is entitled to their views and opinions – we need to respect them.

7. A reminder that you can withdraw from the session at any time.

Do you have any questions or comments before we begin?

A reminder of the question for this session:

Youth Session

1. What does decision-making at the SCC mean to you?

Please share the photo that you brought and share with the group why it best represents your answer to the question.

I will write down key words that you say on the flipchart and then ask you to make sure that I've captured all of your thoughts.

Afterward, we will pick top themes from the key words on the flipchart. The themes that you pick will be used to inform the development of focus group questions for other SCC stakeholders. Your discussion today will also be used to inform recommendations that address the purpose of this inquiry. I will be coming back to you with some of my initial findings before I generate final recommendations.

Appendix D: Letter of Invitation for Photovoice

PHOTOVOICE INFORMATION LETTER

Enhanced Governance and Decision-Making at the Students Commission of Canada

My name is Sharif Mahdy and this inquiry project is part of the requirement for my Masters of Arts in Leadership degree at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [telephone number].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of this inquiry project is to gather the perspectives of SCC stakeholders on governance and decision-making. The SCC is a national charitable organization with a mission to support young people in putting their ideas for improving themselves and their communities into action. This inquiry project will provide the SCC and its stakeholders with recommendations to enhance the governance and decision-making structures in the organization. Youth, staff, volunteers and alumni will be included in the research to provide a diverse set of perspectives on the issue.

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of photovoice sessions with youth and alumni. Themes from the photovoice sessions will then be used to inform the development of focus group questions. Focus groups will be conducted with staff and volunteer after the photovoice sessions. The photovoice session is anticipated to last about 60 minutes. The anticipated questions include: Youth Session: What does decision-making at the SCC mean to you? Please bring a photo that represents your answer to this question. Please do not bring a photo of a person or people.

Benefits and risks to participation

The research conducted for this inquiry process will provide SCC stakeholders with the opportunity to have a say in the future governance and decision-making structures of the organization. This will result in an improved organizational culture for SCC stakeholders and improved services for youth that participate in SCC programs. Enhanced governance and decision-making will also enhance the long-term sustainability of the organization. This will benefit society broadly because the SCC will continue to be one of the key organizations in Canada that supports youth voice.

Being involved in this research study could make you aware of organizational realities that are not in line with your expectations. This can sometimes lead to feelings of resentment or sadness as you realize that the organization you are supporting is not necessarily in line with your hopes and expectations. There will be an on-site counsellor available if there are any issues that emerge as a result of feelings of resentment or sadness.

Inquiry team

There is an inquiry team that supports the researcher in ensuring authenticity and trustworthiness of the research. This inquiry team includes representatives from each of the stakeholder groups that will be involved in the inquiry: youth, alumni, staff and volunteers.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

There are no real or perceived conflict of interests.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on an encrypted drive on my personal laptop. Information will be audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Once the report is submitted, all audio recordings and transcripts will be deleted and destroyed after 5 years. The data/information will not be retained for those individuals who withdraw from the study. Please note that focus groups are group methods and it is therefore not possible to keep the identities of all participants anonymous within the group. Participants will therefore be asked to respect the confidential nature of the focus group and not to share names and/or any identifying comments.

Sharing results

The final thesis will be submitted to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership degree. The thesis will be published through the Thesis Canada Portal and will appear on the ProQuest site and on the RRU D-Space library website. It may also be published in interested journals and shared at conference presentations. Finally, the thesis will also be shared with the Students Commission of Canada and research participants.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study

Participants can withdraw from the study right up until the photovoice session is scheduled to begin. Participants can also withdraw from the photovoice session at any time. Please note that the session will be audio recorded and that individual names will not be ascribed to the responses in the transcription process. It may therefore be difficult to remove responses from the transcript after the session has occurred.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By signing the in-person consent form you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project. Please note that if you are a youth aged 18 and under, parental consent will be required to participate in the research process.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Appendix E: Informed Consent Photovoice

PHOTOVOICE CONSENT FORM

Young Adults

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

☐ I consent to the audio recording of the photovoice session

☐ I commit to respect the confidential nature of the focus group by not sharing identifying information about the other participants

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

PHOTOVOICE CONSENT FORM

Youth (aged 12-18)

By signing this form, you agree to consent to the participation of your child in this study and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent for your child to participate in this project.

For Parents

Name of Youth Participant: (Please Print): _____

Name of Parent: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

☐   I consent to the audio recording of the photovoice session

For Youth Signature

☐   I commit to respect the confidential nature of the photovoice session by not sharing identifying information about the other participants

Signed (Youth Participant): _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Letter of Invitation for Focus Groups

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION LETTER

Enhanced Governance and Decision-Making at the Students Commission of Canada

My name is Sharif Mahdy and this research project is part of the requirement for my Masters of Arts in Leadership degree at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [telephone number].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to gather the perspectives of SCC stakeholders on governance and decision-making. The SCC is a national charitable organization with a mission to support young people in putting their ideas for improving themselves and their communities into action. This research project will provide the SCC and its stakeholders with recommendations to enhance the governance and decision-making structures of the organization. Youth, staff and volunteers will be included in the research to provide a diverse set of perspectives on the issue.

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of photovoice sessions with youth. Themes from the photovoice sessions will then be used to inform the development of focus group questions. Focus groups will be conducted with staff and volunteers. The focus groups are anticipated to last about 90 minutes. The anticipated questions include:

- How are decisions currently made in the SCC?

- How can we ensure that all members of the organization (staff, youth, alumni, board members, partners) feel heard in organizational decision-making processes and structures? (Equality)

- Can you think of an example of a time when you felt heard in a decision-making process?

- How can youth be effectively engaged/integrated into decision-making at the SCC? How have they been in the past?

- How can decision-making processes and structures foster trust and accountability? (Trust and Accountability)

- How can the organization's decision-making processes and structures be adaptable? (Adaptability)

Benefits and risks to participation

The research conducted for this inquiry process will provide SCC stakeholders with the opportunity to have a say in the future governance and decision-making structure of the organization. This will result in an improved organizational culture for SCC stakeholders and the youth that the SCC works with. Enhanced governance and decision-making will also enhance the long-term sustainability of the organization. This will benefit society broadly because the SCC will continue to be one of the key organizations in Canada that supports youth voice.

Being involved in this research study could make you aware of organizational realities that are not in line with your expectations. This can sometimes lead to feelings of resentment or sadness as you realize that the organization you're supporting is not necessarily in line with your hopes and expectations. There is also a risk that opinions and ideas shared through the research may not be included in the final recommendations.

Staff members may feel uncomfortable participating in the research study due to the researcher's leadership role in the organization. The staff focus group will therefore be conducted by a member of the inquiry team in order to address this power-over issue. The inquiry team member will ensure anonymity of responses and the removal of any identifying information in the focus group transcript. This will address any perceived risks that staff may feel in participating in the research study.

Inquiry team

There is an inquiry team that supports the researcher in ensuring the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research. This inquiry team includes representatives from each of the stakeholder groups that will be involved in the inquiry: youth, alumni, staff and volunteers.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

There is no real or perceived conflict of interest.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on an encrypted computer on my home computer. Information will be audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Once the report is submitted, all audio recordings and transcripts will be deleted and destroyed. The data/information will not be retained for those individuals who withdraw from the study. Please note that focus groups are group methods. It is therefore not possible to keep the identities of all participants anonymous within the group. Participants will therefore be asked to respect the confidential nature of the focus group. Specifically, not to share names and/or any identifying comments.

Sharing results

The final thesis will be submitted to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership degree. The thesis will be published through the Thesis Canada Portal and will appear on the ProQuest site and on the RRU D-Space library website. It may also be published in interested journals and shared at conference presentations. Finally, the thesis will also be shared with the Students Commission of Canada and research participants.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study

Participants can withdraw from the study right up until the focus group is scheduled to begin. Participants can also withdraw from the focus group at any time and do not need to answer every question asked in the session. Please note that the focus group will be audio recorded and that individual names will not be ascribed to the responses in the transcription process. It may therefore be difficult to remove responses from the transcript after the focus group has occurred.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By signing the in-person consent form you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Appendix G: Informed Consent for SCC Focus Groups

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

☐   I consent to the audio recording of the focus group

☐   I commit to respect the confidential nature of the focus group by not sharing identifying information about the other participants

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Questions for Focus Groups

This focus group will support enhanced governance and decision-making at the SCC. The questions for this focus group are based on themes identified by youth and SCC alumni who shared their perspectives on governance and decision-making in photovoice sessions.

Before we begin, I would like to go over some of the procedural details and guidelines for this session.

1. This focus group should last 1.0-1.5 hours depending on how much you have to say.

2. I will be audio taping the focus group. I will write down what is in on the tape, but will not put any names in the transcript of the session. <<insert name>> will also be taking notes during the session.

3. Everything you say will be confidential.

4. Whatever is said in this room stays in the room.

5. When more than one person speaks at a time, it is difficult to capture what everybody says, therefore it is important that you talk one at a time.

6. Everybody is entitled to their views and opinions – we need to respect them.

7. A reminder that you can withdraw from the session at any time.

Focus Group Session Questions

- How are decisions currently made in the SCC?

- How can we ensure that all members of the organization (staff, youth, alumni, board members, partners) feel heard in organizational decision-making processes and structures? (Equality)

- Can you think of an example of a time when you felt heard in a decision-making process?

- How can youth be effectively engaged/integrated into decision-making at the SCC? How have they been in the past?

- How can decision-making processes and structures foster trust and accountability? (Trust and Accountability)

- How can the organization's decision-making processes and structures be adaptable? (Adaptability)