

A Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition:  
A Resource for Governing Boards and New Presidents of  
Canadian Public Universities

by

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Royal Roads University will experience a change of leadership when President Allan Cahoon, PhD, steps down in December 2018 after serving almost 12 years in the role and returns to teaching.

The Royal Roads University Board of Governors is responsible for selecting the next university president and overseeing the university's transition to new leadership; however, no current Board member was serving on the Board when the Board last undertook a presidential search in 2006 and nor does the Board have a formal guide to presidential transition. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to develop a smart practice guide to presidential transition in a university setting that can help to guide the work of the Board of Governors in this critical task. Specifically, this research sought to answer the following research question:

- What smart practices support the successful transition to a new university president?

This primary research question was further delineated by a series of supporting questions:

- What are the key features and considerations for the search process that have implications for the successful transition to a new president?
- What institutional supports and activities are required of a governing board post-appointment to support the transition to a new president?
- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president to undertake following appointment to ensure his or her success?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

The outcome of the research is a smart practice guide to presidential transition.

## Methodology and Methods

The methodology for this study is a qualitative inquiry into smart practices in presidential transition. The smart practices were gathered through a literature review, a policy review and semi-structured elite interviews.

Building off the research questions and project objectives, the literature review explored the themes of systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, leadership transition, diversity and organizational culture. The literature review provided the researcher with a grounding in current thinking in theories related to presidential transition. The policy review considered and assessed documents related to presidential transition that are available on the websites of Canadian public universities. The findings of the policy review revealed current and emerging practices related to presidential transition presently in place in Canadian public universities.

Lastly, semi-structured elite interviews were conducted with nine currently serving university presidents who have successfully transitioned to the role of president. For the purposes of this research, the criteria for success in transition is defined as a president who has completed an initial term of appointment and has been re-appointed to a subsequent term of service as president. Semi-structured interviews were used for the richness of data that they offer. Interview transcriptions were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. An inductive approach was used to categorize data into key themes and practices common across transition experiences.

## Key Findings

The key findings of the research are:

- **Transition as a System** - Transition is a system that begins when a board is first made aware that it will need to begin the search for a new president and concludes when the newly-appointed president reports a sense of having the institutional knowledge and resources in place to pursue the strategic priorities of the institution. Activities occurring in the early search process have downstream implications for the successful onboarding of a new president.
- **President-designate and Transition** - The president-designate phase of transition is a key opportunity for an incoming president to begin engagement with the internal university community and external stakeholders.
- **Outgoing President and Transition** - The outgoing president should be considered in transition and can be a valuable resource to the process.
- **Changing role of the University President** - The role of the university president has become more complex, is not well understood by the university community and is a lonely role.
- **Stakeholder Engagement in the System** - Stakeholder and board engagement throughout the transition process is critical to a successful transition.
- **Partners and Shared Understanding** - Boards and new presidents are partners in a successful leadership transition; they must have a shared understanding of their respective roles in the governance of the institution.
- **Board Education and Orientation** - Boards require ongoing education and orientation to the institutions that they govern.
- **Value of Transition Teams** - Transition teams can be an effective means of supporting presidential transition.
- **Diversity in leadership** - Diversity in university leadership continues to be an elusive goal.

## Recommendations

Eight recommendations intended to promote a successful presidential transition at the university are presented to the Royal Roads University Board of Governors for its consideration. The recommendations flow from analysis of practices currently in place at Canadian public universities, including established and emerging practices, and themes emerging from the semi-structured elite interviews that underpin this study. The primary considerations in developing these recommendations were their potential for positive impact on the Royal Roads presidential transition and the ability of the institution to implement them. The first two recommendations provide the foundation for the succeeding recommendations, which are presented in sequential order for implementation and align with the flow of the transition process. These recommendations point to ways in which the Board of Governors can take deliberate steps to support and enhance transition activities to achieve maximum benefit from them. It is recommended that the Board of Governors accept and implement each of the eight recommendations:

### Recommendation 1

- That the Royal Roads Board of Governors accepts the Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition as a guiding document for Royal Roads University's leadership transition.

The practices included in the Smart Practice Guide are a reflection of the transition experience of serving university presidents and practices currently in place in Canadian public universities. Consequently, the Guide offers the Board of Governors insights into practices that, from the perspective of a new president,

may improve the transition process and support successful outcomes. The Guide can be found in Appendix 8, A Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition.

## **Recommendation 2**

- That the Board of Governors approves a budget of \$200,000 for activities related to the presidential transition.

The Board of Governors will need to ensure that resources adequate to support an effective transition are in place. A preliminary budget estimate of \$200,000 to support the transition process has been developed. This figure includes \$150,000 for the search phase of transition and \$50,000 for the post-appointment phase of transition. The budget related to the search phase includes use of an executive search consultant and a community consultation, including administrative support for the consultation process. The budget related to the post-appointment phase includes community engagement activities with the new president, meetings with key stakeholders, formal training for the new president and administrative support for a transition team. This budget is a guideline. Recognizing that transition is an emergent process, it is recommended that the Board of Governors re-assess this budget once the new president has been selected and onboarding and orientation activities appropriate to the new president's experience and needs have been identified. Additionally, it is recommended that the Board of Governors periodically re-assess the transition objectives and activities to determine whether objectives are being achieved and whether adjustments to the budget are required. The details of the preliminary budget are presented in Appendix 9, Preliminary Transition Budget.

## **Recommendation 3**

- That the Royal Roads University Board of Governors recognizes its integral role in leadership transition at Royal Roads University.

A governing board has the potential to be a significant contributor to a leadership transition in addition to its role in the selection of a new president. It is recommended that the Royal Roads Board of Governors formally commit to participation in activities in all phases of the presidential transition. Formal commitment will signal to the university community, external stakeholders and the incoming president the importance that the Board places on the transition process. The Board's commitment can be expressed in the early stages of transition through regular communications with the university community about the search process. Once a new president has been selected, the Board's support of a transition team, including allocating resources to support the team and assigning one or more members of the board to the team, would signal the importance that the Board places on the transition process.

## **Recommendation 4**

- That the Board of Governors holds a workshop on presidential transition.

Should the Board of Governors accept the Smart Practice Guide as a guiding document for the presidential transition, the practices described in the Guide will need to be adapted by Royal Roads University to reflect its unique culture, circumstances and challenges. The Board of Governors will benefit from a workshop on presidential transition, using the Smart Practice Guide as a basis for discussion. The workshop objectives should include developing a deeper understanding of the challenges new presidents face and how a board can support a successful leadership transition. The Board of Governors may wish to schedule the workshop as a topic for its October 2018 Retreat.

### **Recommendation 5**

- That the Board of Governors establishes a transition team to support the transition process.

A transition team comprising members of the Royal Roads University community should be established and the team provided with the Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition. The team should be advisory to the new president but the Board of Governors will need to establish channels for regular communication with the team. The team should be established as soon as practicable once a new president has been selected. Team members should be drawn from across the institution and selected for their knowledge of the institution and their ability to facilitate connections to a variety of constituencies. The team's terms of reference should provide for support to the new president for the first year of appointment, with the option for extension at the request of the new president.

### **Recommendation 6**

- That the incoming president is provided with a copy of the Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition.

The incoming president will benefit from early exposure to the advice on smart practices offered in the Smart Practice Guide. Once the candidate for president is selected, she or he should be provided with a copy of the Guide.

### **Recommendation 7**

- That the Board of Governors supports and facilitates engagement between the transition team and the incoming president during the president-designate phase of transition.

The incoming president will benefit from early engagement with the university community, preferably during the president-designate phase of transition. To facilitate early engagement and capitalize on the president-designate phase of transition, meetings between the transition team and the incoming president should be scheduled as early as possible following the selection of the new president.

### **Recommendation 8**

- That the Board of Governors conducts an assessment of the transition process one year after the start of the new president.

In the interests of continuous improvement, the Board of Governors should consider conducting an assessment of the transition process to understand its successes and opportunities for improvement. This assessment may inform future presidential transitions and may have implications for other executive-level transitions that the university may undertake.

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# 1.0 Introduction

Royal Roads University is a public university located in southern Vancouver Island. Primarily, it offers graduate level programs that are interdisciplinary, applied and professional in nature, and geared for the mid-career professional. Royal Roads was a pioneer in developing the concept of blended learning, which combines online study with short, intense on-campus residencies. Currently, 70% of its students are working professionals, combining online and blended study while pursuing their careers (Royal Roads University, 2017) and the average graduate student is approximately 40 years of age (See Appendix A, Royal Roads By The Numbers, for further information on student demographics, number of programs offered and instructional resources).

The university is facing a change in leadership when the current university president completes his term of office in December 2018. The university's Board of Governors is responsible for hiring a new president and the primary deliverable for this project, a smart practice guide to presidential transition, is designed to assist them in this work.

## 1.1 The challenge

Royal Roads University is facing a change in leadership when the current university president steps down from his position in December 2018 and returns to his role as a faculty member. When the president completes his term of appointment, he will have served almost 12 years as president, or approximately half the life of the institution. Consequently, he has played a significant role in shaping the university and has a deep knowledge of its strengths and opportunities as well as its weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

The Board of Governors of the institution is responsible for the strategic oversight of the university and exercises its authority through its one employee: the president, who is the operational head of the institution. The Board of Governors is responsible for hiring the president and empowers the president to act on its behalf and at its direction and holds the president to account for the institution's performance (Board Resourcing and Development Office, 2005, p. 13). Because of the president's pivotal role in delivering on the Board's strategic objectives for the university, the Board's choice for president is, arguably, the most important decision that the Board will face.

As directed by section 19 of the *University Act* (1996), the governing boards of BC's public universities are populated through several methods. Government appointees comprise the largest proportion of members, while elected students, faculty and staff, the chancellor, and the current serving president make up the balance of the members. Section 21 of the *University Act* limits the term of service on the board to six years, except for the president, who serves as long as she or he holds the position of president (*University Act* [RSBC 1996] s. 20(3)). Government appointees to the board are not typically drawn from academia. Instead, they represent a variety of sectors and hold a variety of skills, for example, risk management, accounting and financial management, law, marketing, communications, and construction management. The government seeks to ensure that, when taken together, the individual members provide a broad and balanced base of skills and experience from which the Board, as a cohesive unit, will lead the university (Board Resourcing and Development Office, 2005, p. 11). Despite this objective, governing boards may have limited experience with executive level recruitment. What experience they do have with executive recruitment will not, generally, be based in the unique traditions and challenges surrounding presidential search, selection and orientation in the context of a university setting (Usher, 2010, p. 4).

The members of the Royal Roads Board of Governors have a broad range of skills but none are leaders in executive recruitment and transition in the context of a university setting (Royal Roads Board of Governors, 2018). Further, no current member was serving on the Board when the Board last undertook a presidential search in 2006 and nor does

the Board of Governors have a formal guide to presidential transition. Thus, the Board has no institutional memory or resources to draw on to guide its approach to the task before it.

A number of observers of the post-secondary sector have highlighted the risks associated with presidential transition and called for boards to develop clear strategies to support the success of new university presidents (Atkinson & Robertson, 2017; Gardner, 2016; Lovett, 2016; Smerek, 2013; Tamburri, 2016). Consequently, as the Royal Roads Board of Governors takes on the challenge of providing for the continued effective leadership of the university, they will benefit from a deeper understanding of current thinking about presidential transition in the Canadian university context.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to identify smart practices in presidential transition in the Canadian university sector and develop a smart practice guide to assist the Board of Governors in managing the transition to a new president. Bardach and Patashnik (2016, p. 126) note that “a practice is a tangible and visible behaviour”. In their discussion of practice theory, Feldman and Orlikowski (2011, p. 1245) note that practices are both “idealized”, and have broad application to a variety of situations, and “performative”, meaning that the practices are adapted to the context of a given situation. They are the arrows in diagrams that connect resources to outcomes (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1249), meaning that practices are sets of activities that mobilize resources to produce results. Smart practices are practices that optimize the potential for the results. They are “internally complex, context sensitive, and capable of being used by different parties to pursue slightly different goals,” (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016, p.133).

In developing a smart practice guide to presidential transition, practices were selected for inclusion based on the outcomes they are intended to produce and are expected to have application across a broad range of organizations. In terms of adoptions and implementation, the Royal Roads Board of Governors is expected to adapt the practices to the specific circumstances of the university and the context in which the Royal Roads presidential transition takes place.

The study approached leadership transition from a systems perspective and considered leadership transition as a process beginning with activities in the early stages of the search for candidates and concluding when a new president is successfully integrated into the role.

## **1.2 The client**

Dr. Allan Cahoon, President and Vice-Chancellor of Royal Roads University, commissioned this study on behalf of the Royal Roads University Board of Governors. President Cahoon is a member of, and reports directly to, the university’ governing board and is responsible for providing the Board with the resources and support it requires to carry out its governance responsibilities.

## **1.3 The project questions and deliverables**

The study was framed by the following primary research question:

- What smart practices support the successful transition to a new university president?

A series of secondary questions further delineated the project:

- What are the key features and considerations for the search process that have implications for the successful transition to a new president?
- What institutional supports and activities are required of a governing board post-appointment to support the transition to a new president?
- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president to undertake following appointment to ensure his or her success?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

To answer the research questions, an analysis of Canadian public university policies that address presidential transition, and an analysis of interviews with sitting presidents of Canadian public universities to understand and learn from their experiences of the transition process took place. The research is supported by a comprehensive literature review exploring key themes related to presidential transitions.

The deliverable for this project is a smart practice guide to presidential transition that is grounded in the Canadian post-secondary sector and can be adapted to the unique characteristics of Royal Roads University. The guide is designed to provide the Royal Roads Board of Governors with a knowledge base from which they can lead the transition to a new university president and create the conditions for the success of a new president.

## **1.4 Organization of report**

This report comprises eight sections. The first section introduces the study and explains the need for the research. It introduces the client, the questions that framed the research and it describes the deliverable for the client. The second section provides background to the issue. It includes an overview of the changing post-secondary landscape in Canada and situates Royal Roads University and its campus within the sector. The third section of the report is a review of the literature related to leadership transition and proposes a conceptual framework for this study. The fourth section presents the methodology and methods for the study, its approach to data analysis and the limitations and delimitations of the research. The fifth section presents the findings from the study while the sixth section provides an analysis of the findings relative to the research questions and conceptual framework. The seventh section provides recommendations based on the findings and analysis. The final section draws some conclusions and identifies areas for further research.

## 2.0 Background

### 2.1 Introduction

The context for a presidential transition will have bearing on how the transition is managed. This section of the report describes the context for a presidential transition at Royal Roads University. First, current trends and complexities in the Canadian university sector are discussed. Next, the unique mission, programming, and governance structure of Royal Roads University that set it apart from other universities and influence its culture are described. Finally, the Royal Roads campus, which is not only a key asset to the university and integral to its identity but also a significant management challenge, is discussed. Against this background Royal Roads University will welcome new leadership and the Board of Governors will need to ensure that its transition planning takes this broad context into account.

### 2.2 The changing university landscape

Historically, universities operated as relatively autonomous entities, with the concept of academic freedom underpinning their academic missions (MacKinnon, 2014, p. 64; Paul, 2015, p. 184; Shore & Taitz, 2012, p. 202). Institutions were largely indistinguishable from one another by the general public and by many within the academy (MacKinnon, 2014, p. 7). However, the conditions in which universities operate – and in which presidential searches and transitions occur – have undergone significant change, especially in the last 20 years (Chan & Richardson, 2012; Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015, p. 334; MacTaggart, 2017; Paul, 2015; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017; Tamburri, 2007).

While academic freedom remains a cornerstone of the university's academic mission, recent global events have led to heightened expectations placed on universities and, by implication, those who lead them. In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the value of a university education has been called into question, as students, their parents, and governments emphasize the importance of educational programming that will turn out 'job-ready' graduates instead of well-rounded citizens, while universities continue to argue for the value of a liberal arts education. The debate plays out in the media as critics and universities each put forward their views and cite statistics in support of their positions (Blackwell, 2016; Crowley, 2013; Council of Ontario Universities, 2017; Melanson, 2014; Prevost, 2015). Governments contribute to this debate by prioritizing investment in employment skills training programs (Government of BC, n.d.; Ontario, 2017).

Universities are under increasing financial pressure as contributions from governments decline and universities must turn to tuition and other sources of funding, such as philanthropy, to make up the shortfall. In his 2016 report on federal spending on post-secondary education, for example, the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Officer noted that in the period 2004/05 to 2103/14, the contributions from all levels of government to post-secondary education as a percentage of institutional total revenues had declined by 5.3% while, in that same period, revenue from tuition increased by 4% (Frechette, 2016, p. 8).

It has been argued that these effects have served to erode university autonomy as governments have begun to view higher education as a commodity to be shaped to their purposes (Shore & Taitz, 2012, p. 205). At the civic level, universities are now viewed as integral to the social and economic fabric of the communities within which they are located (MacKinnon, 2014, p. 17), and examples abound of post-secondary institutions partnering with cities to mutually beneficial purposes (Academica's Top Ten, 2017a; Academica's Top Ten, 2017b; Academica's Top Ten, 2017c; Academica's Top Ten, 2018).

Though section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* (Consolidation of Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982) assigns education as a provincial responsibility, the federal government recognizes that a high-quality post-secondary education system creates a range of benefits to Canadian society that align to federal priorities (Frechette, 2016, p.6). McKinnon (2014, p. 16) notes, for example, that the federal government has identified universities as an important contributor to fulfilling the research and innovation agenda required to make Canada a competitive nation. Consequently, the federal government has long played an indirect role in funding for post-secondary education through tax policy, federal transfers and establishing granting agencies to fund research (Frechette, 2016, p. 10). In 1997, for example, the federal government established the Canada Foundation for Innovation to create the Canada Research Chair program. This was the one of several examples of the federal government using its spending power to influence the post-secondary agenda (MacKinnon, 2014, p. 16). More recently, the federal government has targeted spending under the Post-Secondary Institutes Strategic Investment Fund on post-secondary infrastructure projects that align to the government’s innovation agenda, particularly as they relate to the commercialization of research, specialized training that meets the needs of industry or the environmental sustainability of research and innovation infrastructure (Government of Canada, 2018).

Provincial governments have also begun to exert their power over universities in ways not previously seen and require public universities to align their programs and activities to governmental priorities and directives (Ontario, 2015; Pratt, 2013). In British Columbia, for example, university boards are required to sign annual mandate letters issued by the minister of advanced education that direct the universities to align their annual plans to the government’s priorities. Royal Roads University’s 2017/18 mandate letter, for example, required the university to “consider strategic priorities of Government when allocating institutional resources”, which included developing skilled workers for particular sectors of the economy and realizing greater efficiencies in operations (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 2). The 2018/19 mandate letter directs the university to “work closely and in collaboration with the government to support the implementation of priority initiatives”, which includes providing tuition-free Adult Basic Education, providing former youth-in-care with supports such as a tuition waiver program, and expanding programming that aligns to the knowledge-based economy (Mark, 2018, p. 2).

Annual budgeting processes provide additional opportunities for governments to influence university operations and programming. As communicated in the BC government’s 2016/17 budget letter to Royal Roads University, for example, the university was required to allocate a number of student FTEs to programming that directly addressed the government’s priorities under its Skills for Jobs Blueprint plan, or risk a reduction to the university’s annual operating grant. The same budget letter limited annual tuition increases to 2% (Brewster, 2016). In British Columbia, the provincial government’s intrusion into university tuition policy can be traced back to 1996, when Premier Glen Clark froze tuition fees for two years (Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, 1996) and started the long-standing practice of the BC government annually providing direction to universities with respect to allowable tuition increases<sup>1</sup>.

Concurrently, the competitive environment has changed as universities adopt new strategies, business models and technologies in an effort to meet the needs of a changing student population, and to provide educational opportunities with diminishing resources (Matheos, 2011, p. 1; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017, p. 16). The emergence of external ranking systems that differentiate amongst universities and provide a lens for the public to evaluate post-secondary options has also served to heighten competition in the sector (MacKinnon, 2014, p. 134). The annual issue of MacLean’s Magazine that is devoted to ranking Canadian universities (MacLeans, 2017), for example, is highly subscribed by both students and universities. Universities, in turn, have developed self-organized

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see the Royal Roads University website [www.royalroads.ca](http://www.royalroads.ca) About Royal Roads: Governance: Plans & Reports: Government Letter of Expectations for historical annual government letters that stipulate a limit of a 2% increase to tuition rates.

associations of similarly focused institutions to lend strength to their voices about the value and benefits they offer (MacKinnon, 2014, p.8).

When Royal Roads was established in 1995 it was a pioneer in developing the concept of blended learning, which combines classroom-based learning with online distance education. Today, the incorporation of technology to support learning and student access has become the “new normal” (Hissen in Norberg, Dzuiban and Moskal, 2011, p. 207). According to a 2011 report by Canada’s Collaboration for Online Higher Education Research (COHERE), the majority of institutions across Canada have incorporated some form of computer mediated learning into their programming and in the United States 70% of institutions identify computer-mediated learning as a key component of their long-term strategies (Matheos, 2011, p. 1). Consequently, Royal Roads University can no longer rely upon the competitive advantage of the blended model and technology-mediated learning that it used to enjoy.

Another key change in the sector is the drive and competition for international students. As domestic markets decline due to changing demographics, international students are seen as a key market opportunity for most universities in western countries (Shore & Taitz, 2012, p. 205). In 2012, for example, British Columbia set a goal of increasing the number of international students in its post-secondary and K-12 institutions by 50% by 2016. For BC institutions, international students represent not only a valuable revenue stream, but also an opportunity to provide domestic students with a diverse learning community. For the government, international students represent potential pathways for new immigrants (BC Gov News, 2017).

Because of these broad environmental and sectoral changes, the role of the university president has evolved from one of academic leader to something more akin to a corporate CEO (Chan & Williamson, 2012; McTaggart, 2017; Shore & Taitz, 2012, p. 205; Smerek, 2013, p. 397) and the skills required of university presidents have evolved. Observers of this trend have noted the increasing emphasis on budget management, marketing, public relations, government relations, international relations and fundraising skills as integral to a role that used to be focused on academic leadership (MacKinnon, 2014; Mallard, 2015; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017; Tamburri, 2007; Usher, 2010; Venne, 2017). This shift in priorities may not, however, be well understood or recognized by the university community (Usher, 2010).

While the external operating environment has become more complex, university presidents’ terms of service have been shortening (Paul, 2015; Turpin, De Decker & Boyd, 2014; Usher, 2010) and the number of presidents failing to complete their initial appointments to the role of president has been increasing (Chiose & Bula, 2015; Paul, 2015; Tamburri, 2016; Trachenberg, Kauvar & Bogue, 2013; Venne, 2017). Increased turnover in the institution’s most senior leadership role has negative consequences for universities, including losing momentum on strategic initiatives while the new president is focused on learning about her or his new institution (Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017, p. 20).

At the same time that turnover in the presidential office is increasing, the pool of potential candidates to fill the role of senior institutional leader is limited (Paul, 2015, p. 30; Usher, 2010, p. 11). Contributing factors include a decade-long slowdown in faculty hiring in the 1990s, which is now manifesting in a small number of faculty with the administrative experience necessary to take on the role of president, and negative perceptions about the nature of senior administrative positions in universities (Usher 2010, p. 11). Pressure from international competition for top academic talent (MacKinnon, 2014, p. 155) will further exacerbate the challenge Canadian institutions face in finding quality candidates for leadership roles.

These changes to the external environment highlight the fact that universities cannot operate without consideration of the broader environment in which they are situated and must be taken into account during a leadership transition.

The changing requirements of those who might step into the role of president, the diminished pool of qualified candidates, and the upward trend of failed presidencies all point to the challenges and risks associated with a transition period and underscore the importance of an effective transition process (Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017, 21; Watkins-Hayes, 2015, p. 10).

### **2.3 Royal Roads University: A unique institution**

Royal Roads University is a public university that was established in 1995 by an act of the BC government (*Royal Roads University Act, 1996*). In many respects, Royal Roads is unique amongst universities in BC and in Canada. Chief among the differences is its primary mandate. Royal Roads University was created to provide accessible educational programs that are interdisciplinary, applied and professional in nature. It pioneered the concept of blended learning, combining short and intense on-campus residencies with online learning, so that students, both domestic and international, could further their professional and personal development goals without having to give up careers or leave their home communities (Royal Roads University, 2017c). The majority of the university's programs are offered at the graduate level and, today, approximately 70% of Royal Roads students are engaged in full time employment while they pursue their studies (Royal Roads University, 2017). The demographics of the student body reflect Royal Road's unique mandate. The average student is older than a student at a traditional university (Royal Roads University, 2018) and balances active career engagement with academic studies (Royal Roads University, 2017).

Under the Royal Roads learning and teaching model, teaching staff are "scholar-practitioners" who have not only academic credentials in their given field of study, but also a wealth of professional experience. Faculty are relatively few in number and, in addition to teaching, provide a coordinative role for academic programming. Associate faculty, who are also scholar-practitioners, are hired on a term-contract basis to teach specific courses where their expertise and experience fosters a rich learning environment (Royal Roads University, 2012, p. 27).

Royal Roads programs include an action-oriented research component in which students undertake a research project to solve a real-world problem or challenge, which fosters creativity and helps students to synthesize learning (Royal Roads University, 2012, p. 29). Frequently, students choose to undertake projects for their employers and are able to see the immediate application of their education.

Another key difference between Royal Roads and other Canadian universities is found in the university's governance structure. Generally, Canadian universities operate under a bi-cameral system of governance, with a senate or equivalent body overseeing academic matters and boards of governors overseeing business matters (Paul, 2015, p. 184). Royal Roads, however, operates under a unicameral system of governance. The Royal Roads Board of Governors has the powers of a board or senate under the *University Act*, except those powers and duties given to the president under the *Royal Roads University Act* (*Royal Roads University Act, 1996, s.10*). The *Royal Roads University Act* stipulates that the president is responsible for directing the academic work of the institution in consultation with the Academic Council, and gives the president powers over such matters as curriculum content, academic standards and admission criteria (*Royal Roads University Act, 1996, s. 12*), which the president has delegated to the Academic Council. The Academic Council comprises elected members drawn from the professors, employees and students of the university (*Royal Roads University Act, 1996, s. 15*) and is responsible for developing educational policy, setting criteria and priorities for new and existing programs, and reviewing all programs to ensure they are academically rigorous (Royal Roads University, 2018). The *Royal Roads University Act* also requires that there is a Program and Research Council, 2/3 of whose members must not be employees of the university. The Program and Research Council is responsible for advising the Board of Governors on the academic and research priorities of the institution (*Royal Roads University Act, 1996, s. 14*). In practice, the Academic

Council provides recommendations on new and existing programs to the Program and Research Council, who, in turn, advises the Board of Governors, who gives final approval of new programs and initiatives based on the advice it receives.

The composition of the Board of Governors at Royal Roads also differs from that of other BC universities. Most boards have 15 members, eight of whom are volunteers from the community appointed by the government so that the government-appointed members represent a majority on the board<sup>2</sup>. The balance of the membership consists of the chancellor, the sitting president and members elected by the students, faculty and staff (*University Act, 1996, s.19*). Boards are required to choose their own chair from amongst the government-appointed members (*University Act, 1996, s.27*). In the case of Royal Roads, the Board has only 12 members. The membership includes one faculty-elected member, one student-elected member, one staff-elected member and the president. The Royal Roads Board of Governors has the power to appoint two members who must not be employees of the university. In BC, this power is unique to the Royal Roads Board of Governors; no other university board has the power to appoint any of its members. The government appoints the remaining six members of the Royal Roads Board of Governors (*Royal Roads University Act, 1996, s.5*). This means that the government-appointed members do not represent a clear majority of the Board. Another difference to leadership at Royal Roads derives from its unicameral governance structure; while the Board chooses its chair from amongst the government appointed members, as do the other BC universities, the *Royal Roads University Act* states that the board chair is the chancellor of the university (*Royal Roads University Act, 1996, s.11(2)*). So, while at other BC universities, the chancellor is someone other than the board chair and that person also holds a seat on the governing board, at Royal Roads, the responsibilities of board chair and chancellor are vested in the same person.

The university's current enrolment is over 5000 students who are supported by 75 core faculty members and a roster of over 400 associate faculty who teach on a contract basis in both online and face-to-face formats (See Appendix A, Royal Roads By The Numbers for information on student demographics and instructional resources).

## 2.4 The Royal Roads campus

The university campus sits on the traditional lands of the Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) and Lkwungen (Songhees) nations. From the early 1900s until 1940 the lands that now comprise the campus served as a private residence. In 1940, the campus lands were acquired by the Canadian government and, until 1995, were the site of Royal Roads Military College. The campus includes a number of buildings that date from the early 1900s and that were built as part of the private residence, as well as several buildings that were constructed during the campus's use as a military college. The university has repurposed these buildings and today they serve as classrooms and administrative offices. In addition to providing a campus for Royal Roads University, the site is designated a National Historic Site (Hatley Park National Historic Site, n.d.).

The Department of National Defence (DND) continues to own the lands and when the university was established it entered a long-term lease agreement for the lands with DND. Under the lease agreement, the university must comply with the maintenance requirements and development restrictions attendant with buildings and a site that are under a heritage designation (Royal Roads University, 2011). Over 80 years remain on the lease; however, DND has declared the land surplus to its needs and, in early 2017, made public its intent to dispose of the lands (Smart, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> The University of BC Board of Governors has 21 members, 11 of whom are government appoints so that the principle of a government-appointed majority holds.

The Royal Roads lands are now the subject of nation-to-nation discussions involving the federal government and the Songhees Nation (Royal Roads University, 2017a). Royal Roads University is not party to the land claim discussions; however, the Songhees Nation has indicated its commitment that Royal Roads University will continue to operate on its current site (Smart, 2017), and Royal Roads has signaled its interest in acquiring fee simple title to the portion of the lands that are necessary for the continuation of the university (Royal Roads University, 2017b).

## **2.5 Implications for leadership transition at Royal Roads**

The Royal Roads Board of Governors' presidential search will take place against this backdrop of failed presidencies and changing expectations placed on universities and their leaders. As the Board sets about the task of searching for a new university president and supporting the institution's transition to new leadership it must be mindful of the evolving role of the university president and the expectations of stakeholders. It must also be mindful that candidates for the role of president may not fully appreciate the implications of the university's unique mandate, governance model or business model for the practice of leadership at Royal Roads. The Board of Governors will need to ensure that its leadership transition plan addresses the complexity of the environment and supports the enculturation of the next president.

## 3.0 Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

The literature on executive leadership transition suggests that organizations do not pay sufficient attention to supporting new leaders as they transition to their roles, despite transitions being times of increased risk for organizations (Ma, Seidl, & Guérard, 2015; Marcel, Cowan & Ballinger, 2017, p. 1314; Selingo Chheng & Clark, 2017, p. 13). Estimates for failure rates range, for example, from 13% of newly hired executives failing within three years of appointment (Marcel, Cowan & Ballinger, p. 1314) to 40% of newly hired executives failing in the first 18 months of appointment (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008, p. 114).

A number of recent works focusing on the post-secondary sector examine the phenomenon of unsuccessful university presidencies, underscore the risks of presidential transition and highlight the need for boards to pay attention to this critical juncture in their organizations. In their study of Canadian university presidencies, Turpin, Decker and Boyd (2014) found that the length of service of presidents has become shorter in recent years and that the number of presidents who fail to complete their first term of appointment is on the rise. They also found that the percentage of women in the top leadership role has stagnated. After rising to approximately 20% of presidents of Canadian institutions in the 1990's, the rate of participation of women as university presidents had not improved by 2015 (Cafley, 2015). In their study of failed presidencies at American institutions, Trachenberg, Kauvar and Bogue (2013) identified six salient underlying causes for failed presidencies: ethical lapses; poor interpersonal skills; inability to lead constituencies; difficulty adapting to the culture or the role; failure to meet business objectives; and shortcomings on the part of the board.

More recently, Cafley (2015) conducted a study of Canadian presidents with unfinished mandates. Among her findings was the need for new presidents to find wise mentors; that the relationship with the predecessor has implications for the success of the new president; that board governance and, in particular, the new president's relationship with the board chair, is a critical success factor in a new president's success; that the transition process post-appointment is implicated in presidential success; and that a strong male culture exists on university boards and on university leadership teams, which may undermine women leaders. Former Canadian university presidents Ross Paul (Paul, 2015) and Peter MacKinnon (MacKinnon, 2014) have also written on the evolving role of the university president and enumerated the many challenges that presidents face, including the need for expertise in areas previously not contemplated in a university president such as marketing, government relations, community relations, philanthropy, and business skills.

An underlying theme of all these works is the notion that the role of university president has become increasingly complex in an environment of shrinking resources and greater demand for accountability from a wide range of stakeholders (Atkinson & Robertson, 2017; Cafley, 2015; Chan & Williamson, 2012; Gardner, 2016; Lovett, 2016; MacKinnon, 2014; Paul, 2015; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017; Tamburri, 2016; Trachenberg, Kauvar & Bogue, 2013). This highlights the need for university governing boards that are overseeing leadership transition to ensure robust plans that include not only search practices designed to attract a broad range of qualified candidates for the role of president, but also practices that support the successful integration of a new president into the organization, with all activities taking into account the broader environment within which all these activities occur.

These findings suggest a number of key themes to be considered in relation to presidential transition in a university setting and are the basis for this literature review:

- systems thinking,
- stakeholder engagement,
- leadership transition,
- diversity in leadership, and
- the implications of organizational culture on leadership transition.

The University of Victoria's Summon search engine was the primary source for academic peer-reviewed literature relevant to the research themes. This provided a means of comprehensively searching the broad range of databases that include subject matter related to presidential search and transition. Relevant databases that the Summon search engine scans include:

- WorldCat.org
- Emerald Group
- Wiley Online

The Conference Board of Canada, which conducts independent, applied research, was an additional source of information because of the areas of concentration of its research, including, for example, post-secondary education, diversity and inclusion, and leadership.

Search terms for the literature review included: board governance; board diversity; higher education; Canadian universities; executive leadership; executive recruitment; CEO succession; executive succession; executive transition; leader transition; assimilation; adaptation; diversity and bias.

## 3.2 Systems thinking

Von Bertalanffy (2008) first published his ideas about a general systems theory in the 1950s, with the goal of identifying an explanation for system dynamics that would hold across disciplines. It was thought that a general systems theory would provide a means of bridging disciplines and that this general theory would lay the foundation for interdisciplinary communication to address growing societal challenges. While Rousseau (2015, p. 523) argues that a clear general systems theory has yet to be established, he notes that the general premise has led systems researchers to articulate a number of theories about systems behaviour. Systems thinking principles can trace their roots to this early work on a general systems theory (Drack & Schwarz, 2010, p. 606).

Just as a general systems theory remains elusive so, too, does agreement within the systems community about how systems thinking should be defined (Cabrera, Colosi, Lobdell, 2008, p. 300). The basic premise of systems thinking, however, "views systems as wholes rather than compilations of individual components and allows one to see the interconnectedness and interdependencies of agents within systems, to frame problems as patterns, and to get at underlying causality" (Powel Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015, p. 335). Churchman contributed to an understanding of systems thinking when he observed that systems extend beyond the structures of an organization to include the "social and personal constructs of social systems" (Churchman in Powel Davis, Dent & Wharff, p. 343). This perspective aligns to Hurth's (2017, p. 2) assertion that organizations can no longer consider themselves, their purposes and the resources upon which they rely in isolation of the larger system within which they operate. Instead, for an organization to be successful, it must understand not only how its constituent parts interact, affect and are affected by each other, but also how the organization relates to other organizations and actors beyond its boundaries. A systems thinking approach provides a conceptual framework that accounts for multiple perspectives and relationships between the system parts (Cabrera, Colosi, Lobdell, p. 301). It encourages engagement within and

beyond an organization's structural boundaries in processes and activities that lead to increased support for organizational objectives (Powel Dave, Dent & Wharff, p. 344).

In the case of a university presidential transition, multiple stakeholders and systems will be impacted by and act upon the transition process and activities. A systems thinking approach situates the activities related to presidential transition in the context of the university community and the Canadian post-secondary system.

### **3.3 Stakeholder engagement**

The concept of systems thinking has implications for stakeholder engagement. In considering how the boundaries of a system are defined, Cabrera, Colosi and Lobdell (2008, p. 305) observe that, "Perspective has the potential to instantly transform whole systems, rearrange distinctions, and cause relationships to appear and disappear". Freeman in Achterkamp and Vos (2007, p. 4) define a stakeholder, in the broadest sense, as someone who is affected by or can affect an organization. If this definition is applied to a system, then the perspective that one takes on a system and the boundaries that the perspective implies, determine who will be counted as a stakeholder. For Achterkamp and Vos (p. 6) this is an ethical consideration, since the perspective that is adopted will determine how issues are defined, and who has voice in relation to those issues. Inclusive processes that reduce or eliminate the marginalization of stakeholder groups are key to successfully employing systems thinking practices (Powel Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015, p. 344)

Achterkamp and Vos (2007) offer a more nuanced approach to stakeholder identification than Freeman's broad definition suggests. They advocate focusing on stakeholders at a project level instead of the more common approach of identifying stakeholders at the organizational level (Achterkamp & Vos, p. 4). Their proposed approach takes into account a stakeholder's level of interest in the issue at hand, ranging from party involved – actively or passively (two categories) to client, decision-maker, designer and, lastly, passively involved or representative. They also point out that stakeholder engagement will vary with the phases of an initiative, so that any given stakeholder or stakeholder group will be more or less active at different phases of the initiative (Achterkamp & Vos, p.8).

Eden and Ackerman (1998, as cited in Bryson, 2011, p. 408) offer another method of categorizing stakeholders that draws attention to a power differential among stakeholders. They propose a power versus interest grid, with stakeholders falling in one of four categories: high interest/high power; high interest/low power; low interest/high power; low interest/low power. Eden and Ackerman's method provides a useful tool for identifying stakeholder groups who may lack power and benefit from targeted outreach to ensure their voices are included in consultation processes.

Taken together, Achterkamp and Vos's (2007) and Eden and Ackerman's (1998, as cited in Bryson, 2011) work provide valuable perspective and tools for identifying stakeholders. A systems approach to presidential transition will benefit not only from inclusive processes to ensure that a wide range of voices are heard, but also a consideration of stakeholder's roles in relation to presidential transition, the appropriate timing for stakeholder inclusion, and consideration of stakeholders who may require additional supports or targeted outreach to ensure their meaningful contribution to the presidential transition process.

### **3.4 Leadership transition**

Leadership transition is a complex process that will have lasting implications for an organization that is welcoming a new leader (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, cited in Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008, p. 114; Wasserman, 2003, as

cited in Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008, p. 114). Smerek (2013, p. 371), for example, argues that a direct line can be drawn between the success of a transition process and the enduring success of an organization. Conversely, the costs of an unsuccessful transition can be measured not only in the direct costs of recruitment, selection and training associated with bringing new members into an organization, but also in the indirect costs that result from stalled progress towards organizational objectives and uncertainty in the networks of which the leader is a part (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, p. 118-119).

Yet, MacKinnon (2014, p. 136) notes that unlike in the corporate world, succession planning for the most senior administrative role of a university is virtually non-existent so that new presidents are, generally, ill-prepared for the responsibilities and challenges of the office of president. MacKinnon argues that this is further complicated by university governing boards' historical preference for external candidates for the role, the consequence of which is that, during transition, new presidents must learn about not only the requirements of the office but also the institution. His observation is supported by Manderscheid and Ardichvili's (2008, p. 118) findings that external hires have a more difficult time transitioning to their new leadership roles than do internal hires.

Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008, p. 117) draw attention to the important role that learning and information gathering play in the early stages of transition. Smerek (2013) refers to this process as "sensemaking". According to Smerek, the success of the sensemaking process is heavily dependent on the president's social interactions with constituencies within the university community (p. 379) but is frustrated by the relative isolation of a president (p. 385). Sensemaking is further complicated by the tendency for subordinates to be less candid in sharing negative or contradictory views with the president (p. 391). Mentors and a cohesive administrative team may help to ameliorate a president's challenges by providing the necessary perspective on the institution (p. 392), while a strong transition team whose membership includes trusted individuals from outside the institution may help a new president to understand the motivations and actions of members of the institution (p. 398).

Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008, p. 121) support Smerek's (2013) focus on the quality of a new president's social interactions when they note that new leaders must attend to relationship building with both their subordinates and supervisors. In the time of transition, new leaders will be under intense scrutiny (Ciampa & Watkins, 1999, as cited in Manderscheid and Ardichvili, p. 120) and their actions take on greater importance than they would at other times in their tenure (Neff & Citrin, 2005, as cited in Manderscheid and Ardichvili, p. 120). These observations underscore the importance of communication and interpersonal skills to the success of a new president (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, p. 120), including the ability to actively seek and receive feedback from peers and subordinates (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, p. 123). Charan *et al* (2001, as cited in Manderscheid & Ardichvili, p. 124), however, find that it is generally not the practice of leaders to seek feedback on their performance. This reluctance to seek feedback may be overcome through a formal training plan that includes frequent, planned opportunities for interaction with members of the new leader's network and facilitated feedback from the network to the new leader on the leader's performance (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, p. 124).

While external CEO hires may face a greater knowledge deficit of the institution than internal hires, both must navigate the competing interests of stakeholder groups (Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015, p. 468). Gabarro (1987, as cited in Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008, p. 121) highlights the importance of stakeholders when he argues that the success of transition is dependent on the quality of the new president's relationships at the conclusion of the first year in office. In their comprehensive review of existing research into the integration of new CEOs, Ma, Seidl and Guérard (p. 467) also conclude that a new leader's ability to win the respect of his or her organization is instrumental to the success of a transition, and that new presidents must invest significant time and energy to build key relationships. A study of leader-follower relationship building at a hospital with its distinct social groups of clinical staff and administrative employees may be instructive for transitions in a university setting with its

similarly distinct groups of faculty, staff and students. Denis *et al* (2000 as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 469), studied the integration of a new CEO into a hospital and concluded that differentiated engagement strategies tailored to respond to the needs, interests and concerns of each social group was effective in building leader-follower relationships.

The importance of external stakeholders cannot be overlooked in the transition process. Westphal *et al* (2006, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015, p. 471) find that new leaders will take steps to establish relationships with leaders of key organizations in the external environment, sometimes transferring the relationship from the previous leader to the new leader.

In addition to investing in relationship building and learning about the institution, CEOs rely on a variety of practices to gain support for their leadership. Different approaches, however, can be attributed to internal and external hires (Ma, Seidl and Guérard, 2015, p. 468). Shen and Cannella (2002, p. 720) argue that internal hires are frequently selected when the strategic objective of the organization is to 'stay the course' and adhere to the status quo strategy. Internal hires capitalize on their existing networks and knowledge of institutional structures and practices (Cao, Maruping & Takeuchi, 2006, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 468), but may also use their new-found executive power over resource allocation to strengthen ties with organizational divisions whose support is critical to their success (Xuan, 2009, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 466).

In contrast, Shen and Cannella (2002, p. 720) argue that external candidates may be hired with an express mandate to implement a change to strategy and previous studies have found that external hires are more likely to embrace a change strategy than are internal hires who may have been instrumental in setting the existing strategy (Gordon *et al*, 2000; Lant *et al*, 1992; Romanelli & Thushman, 1994; Virany, 1992; as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015, p. 470). Ndofor *et al* (as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 472) find that the greater the degree of difference between the external hire's previous organization and sector experience and the new organization, the greater the degree of change to strategy that the new leader will seek to implement.

Despite being hired with a mandate to change strategy, Shen and Cannella (2002, p. 721) observe that external CEO hires may be limited in their ability to implement change because they lack the support of senior executives who were hired by, and still feel an allegiance to, the previous CEO. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996 as cited in Shen & Cannella, p. 722) argue that external candidates are selected for CEO when a board determines that there are no competent internal candidates to fill the role, which can lead to tensions between the new CEO and members of the senior executive team who may harbor negative feelings after being passed over for the top leadership role to which they aspired. In an effort to create a senior management team on which the new CEO can rely, a new CEO may quickly move to replace senior executives (Helmich & Brown, 1972, and Kelly, 1980, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 462), especially those who are aligned with the former CEO (Hayes *et al*, 2006, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 462). This argument is supported by the observation that external CEO hires are associated with turnover and changes in size to the executive team (Friedman & Saul, 1991 and Helmich & Brown, 1972, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 468), though some of this turnover may be attributed to senior executives who choose to leave the organization of their own volition, either because they disagree with the choice of CEO or because they fear being dismissed (Friedman & Saul, 1991, as cited in Shen & Cannella 2002, p. 721).

Regardless of their status as an internal or external hire, Datta *et al* (as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015, p. 473) find that the age of a new CEO is a moderating factor in how the new CEO will approach the organization's strategy: younger, newly-appointed CEOs are more likely to implement changes to strategy than are new CEOs who are older.

The fit of the organization within its broader operating environment may also have implications for integration practices (Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015, p. 469). In an effort to introduce new skills that will help the organization respond to its competitive environment, new CEOs may choose to replace some members of the executive team (Keck & Tushman, 1993, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 470). Shen and Cannella (2002, p. 728) find, however, that when external hires to the CEO role combine with changes in the senior executive team, organizational performance suffers in the first three years post-appointment. They attribute this to the new CEO being insufficiently grounded in knowledge of the institution with a concurrent loss of institutional expertise in the senior executive team.

Underpinning the foregoing discussion about leadership transition is Manderscheid and Ardichvili's (2008, p. 125) observation that the success of a leader depends on the leader's ability to establish a clear understanding of expectations with subordinates, peers and supervisors. Without a common understanding of expectations, a leader is doomed to failure regardless of the quality of effort to learn about the organization and claim the leadership role.

### 3.5 Diversity

It is generally accepted that diversity in the leadership and workforce of an organization is a worthy goal (Buell Hirsch, 2017; Gupta & Raman, 2014; Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015a; Rhode & Packel, 2014; Phillips, 2014). Proponents of diversity rely on several arguments to support this position. The first is a moral argument: all segments of society should have equal opportunity for participation in society (Rhode & Packel, p. 382). Hunt, Layton and Prince (p. 2) underscore this point when they observe that the concept of diversity refers not only to women and racial and ethnic minorities, but also dimensions such as age, sexual orientation and diversity of experience. In Canada, this philosophy is enshrined in two pieces of federal legislation: the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Employment Equity Act*, which address equal access to and fair treatment in the workplace.

A second argument is that a number of benefits accrue to organizations with diverse leadership teams and workforces (Buell Hirsch, 2017, p. 47; Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015a, p. 1). A 2015 study by McKinsey and Company, for example, finds that organizations with greater levels of diversity achieve better financial performance (Hunt, Layton & Prince). Others argue that diversity provides a greater variety of perspectives and experiences, which leads to more nuanced understandings of the issues at hand (Dunn-Jensen, Jensen, Calhoun & Ryan, 2016; Gupta & Raman, 2014; Kossek, Su & Wu, 2017; Phillips, 2014; Rhode & Packel, 2014). This, in turn, leads to increased innovation and creativity, the results of which are better-quality decisions (Phillips, 2014, p. 43; Rhode & Packel, p. 396).

For the higher education sector, Adserias, Charleston and Jackson (2017, p. 316) offer a third argument for a diversity agenda when they observe that a diverse student population has a positive outcome for the institutional mission. They contend that the engagement of senior university leaders, including boards of directors, in the diversity agenda is critical to the success of changing an organization's culture to embrace diversity (Adserias, Charleston and Jackson, p. 324).

Diversity, however, is not a panacea to all organizational challenges. It has been suggested that increased diversity can lead to difficulties in communications and increased conflict that impede problem resolution (Rhode & Packel, 2014, p. 398). Rhode and Packel (p. 401) also observe that "correlation does not demonstrate causation" and that it is difficult to draw a direct line from implementing diversity practices to improved outcomes. It could be that organizations that have superior performance are able to attract a wider range of candidates for employment, resulting in a more diverse workforce, rather than a diverse workforce leading to superior performance.

Regardless of the benefits of diversity and any associated challenges, if current trends in demographics continue, achieving organizational diversity and creating diversity-supportive practices will become a more pressing issue for organizations as populations and the available labour force become more diverse (Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015a, p. 7). Achieving diversity, however, remains a stretch goal for many organizations. A number of recent studies find that women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions, both outside academia and within (Cafley, 2015; Gupta & Raman, 2014; Kossek, Su & Wu, 2017; Turpin, de Decker & Boyd, 2014), and Leslie, Mayer and Kravitz (2014, as cited in Hekman, Johnson, Foo & Yang, 2017, p. 771) observe that minority groups continue to be over-represented in lower ranking positions and under-represented in leadership roles. Organizations will need to adopt creative strategies tailored to the needs and interests of different demographic groups if they wish to engage with and attract a more diverse workforce (Hunt, Layton & Prince, p. 8). They will also need to address internal processes that affect hiring decisions and career progression (Bendick & Nunes, 2012, p. 239). As Bendick and Nunes (p. 238) note, “Few human resource management processes rival hiring in impact on the distribution of employment opportunities and rewards.”

Researchers have suggested that a diverse leadership team, which can be interpreted as a strong indicator of an organization’s values, will increase the talent pool available to the organization and support diversity efforts (Buell Hirsch, 2017, p. 48; Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015a, p. 9; Rhode & Packel, 2014, p. 401). Gupta and Raman (2014), explore this claim in their study of the effect of women board members on the selection of females for the role of CEO. Contrary to expectations, they find that the presence of women on boards does not increase the likelihood of a woman being selected for the top job. These findings highlight claims that there are a number of barriers to achieving diversity in the workforce.

Dunn-Jensen, Jensen, Calhoun & Ryan (2016, p. 104) draw attention to stereotyping as a practice that tends to lead to an incorrect and limited understanding of people and situations. Implicit bias is the unconscious association of certain traits and characteristics with particular social groups. When implicit bias influences decision-makers in hiring and promotion decisions, disadvantaged groups are adversely impacted (Bendick & Nunes, 2013, p. 240). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that individuals pay attention to information that is congruent with and reinforces stereotypes that they hold and disregard information that debunks them (Koomen & Dikjer, 1998, Hilton & Van Hippel, 1996, Erber & Fisk, 1984, and Nelson, Acker & Manis, 1996 as cited in Bendick & Nunes, p. 240).

Similarly, unconscious bias can limit diversity by perpetuating the status quo. Unconscious bias can be thought of not as discrimination against an individual or group of individuals but as favouritism for what is familiar. It is argued that we recognize and reward those who are like us (Bendick & Nunes, 2013, p. 241; Buell Hirsch, 2017, p. 48; Rhode & Packel, 2014, p. 404). Similarly, in-group favouritism tends to attribute the success of those who are like us to intrinsic characteristics, such as intelligence (Bendick & Nunes, p. 240; Rhode & Packel, p. 405). Conversely, out-group members are viewed as less competent (Bendick & Nunes, p. 242; Rhode & Packel, p. 408) and their success is attributed to luck or special treatment (Bendick & Nunes, p. 240; Rhode & Packel, p. 405).

Role theory posits that when persons occupy positions or act in ways contrary to a stereotype they are judged negatively (Bendick & Nunes, 2013, p. 240). Kossek, Su and Wu (2017, p. 234), for example, argue that society is socialized to view women as less suitable for leadership roles and, therefore, women face unequal treatment in their pursuit of leadership positions.

Tokenism, or the assumption that one individual from a particular segment of society will be able to represent the views of all members of that segment of society, also plays a part in limiting diversity. Tokenism inhibits diversity in the assumption that once one individual from a group is appointed or hired to an organization, addition group

members are superfluous to achieving organizational objectives (Bendick & Nunes, 2013, p. 251; Rhode & Packel, 2014, p. 409).

Biased organizational processes and systems may also inhibit organizations from achieving diversity objectives. Kossek, Su & Wu (2017, p. 234) find, for example, that women who seek leadership positions are adversely impacted by organizational practices and policies that fail to account for the disproportionate share of family responsibilities that fall to women in comparison to their male counterparts. Additionally, the contributions and achievements of out-group members are under-recognized and under-rated compared to those of in-group members (Bendick & Nunes, 2013, p. 240; Kossek, Su & Wu, p. 230; Rhode & Packel, 2014, p. 405). Other researchers find that interviewer behaviour within the interview process itself can create conditions that disadvantage out-group candidates, for example, failing to make eye contact with candidates and sitting further away from them during the interview (Word, Zamma & Cooper, 1974, and Shelton, Richeson & Salvatore, 2005, as cited in Bendick & Nunes, p. 241).

Gupta and Raman (2014, p. 498) find that organizations have a strong tendency to appoint internal candidates to the top leadership position but Rhode and Packel (2014, p. 402) observe that members of diverse groups are under-represented in the pipeline to leadership positions. If this is the case, then organizations who seek to diversify their leadership teams will be hampered in their efforts by inadequate pipelines.

It has been suggested that barriers to diversity, such as those described above, can be overcome through education, the first step of which is awareness, and through changing organizational practices that tend to perpetuate biases (Buell Hirsch, 2017, p. 49; Dunn-Jensen, Jensen, Calhoun & Ryan, 2016, p. 104). Organizations could achieve greater diversity at the leadership level by enriching the diversity of their pipelines to create larger candidate pools (Buell Hirsch, p. 48; Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015b, p. 3). This could be achieved through initiating mentoring and coaching programs to decrease the impact of implicit and unconscious bias in the hiring process, hiring diversity advisors and revising policies that may unintentionally favour some groups over others (Rhode & Packel, 2014, p. 411). Rather than teams being acknowledged for achievements, contributions of individuals should be explicitly recognized in performance review processes (Buell Hirsch, p. 50).

While this discussion enumerates the many challenges for organizations seeking to increase the diversity of their workforces and leadership teams it also highlights the benefits of pursuing a diversity agenda and points to concrete actions that organizations can take to support their diversity goals.

### **3.6 Organizational culture**

Culture provides the structure for how a society or organization functions. It comprises the rules, norms, mores and symbols that regulate the interaction between the individual and the larger group within which the individual is situated (Giberson, T. R. et al, 2009, p. 124; Hartnell, C. A., Kinicki, A. J., Lambert, L. S., Fugate, M. & Doyle Corner, P., 2016, p. 848). Tierney (2008, p. 14) argues that the culture of an organization is a social construction, the product of the perceptions and beliefs of the members of the organization, and that organizational culture can be understood only if one has a deep understanding of the variety of perspectives that contribute to the culture.

The relevance of a university's culture to a presidential transition cannot be underestimated. According to Paul (2015, p. 69), one of the greatest challenges facing a new university president is learning the institution's unique culture, or the rules that govern how decisions are made, how it operates, and how communication occurs. Giberson, et al (2009, p. 135) draw a direct line between organizational leaders and culture when they argue that senior leaders are key determinants of organizational culture through their actions and behaviours. They contend that

organizational culture is derived from the leader's preferences and characteristics as reflected in the goals and operational decisions set by the leader.

Tierney (2008, p. 24) underscores the connection between leader and culture when he observes that the same leadership style can lead to different organizational outcomes depending on the culture of the organization. Without developing a keen understanding of the organization, an incumbent who was successful in a previous organization may fail in her or his new role. This observation lends power to the idea that boards give serious consideration to internal candidates, such as deans or vice-presidents, for the role of president, since internal candidates will already be well-versed with institutional culture (Paul, 2015, p. 226).

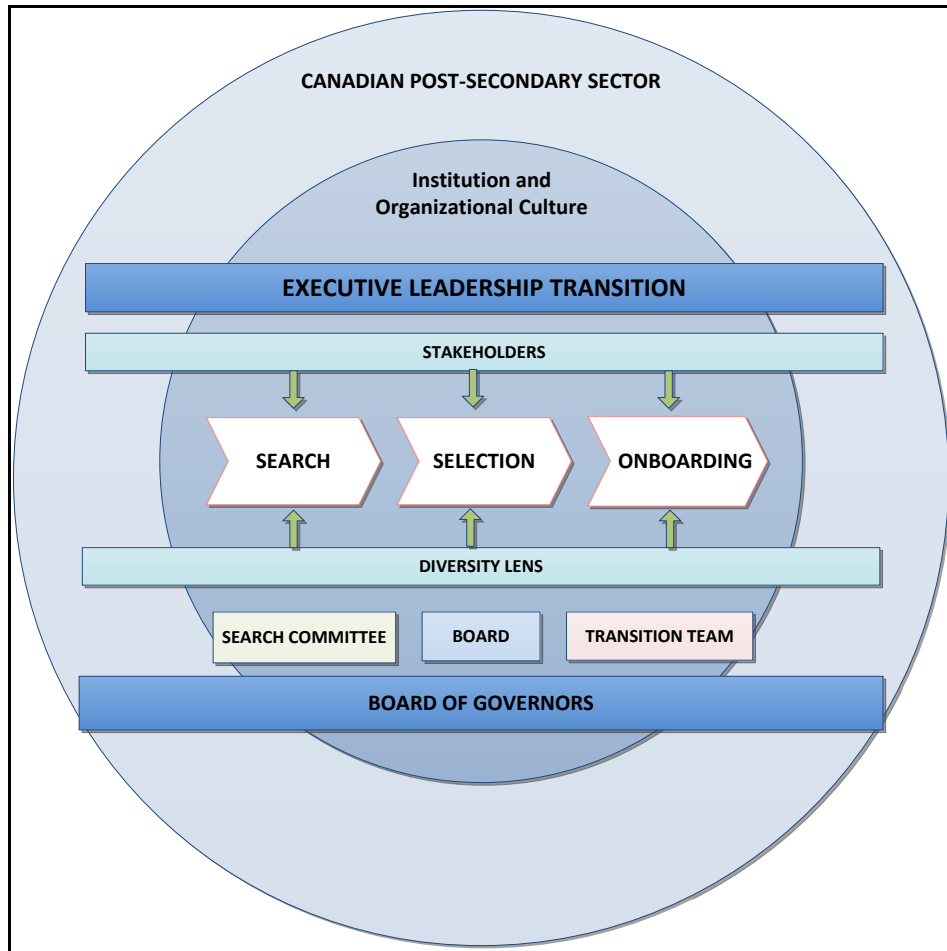
In a related theme, Hartnell et al (2016) find that organizational performance is enhanced when the organization's culture and a leader's values are dissimilar. Their study examined firm performance under conditions of leader and culture congruence on dimensions of task-orientation and relational-orientation and found that firm performance was greatest when culture and leader values were dissimilar (p. 857). They posit that organizational culture can be a substitute for leadership (p. 856), freeing leaders to fill gaps in organizational culture. They caution, however, that culture can stand in for leadership only in conditions where the existing culture is strong enough to provide unambiguous cues to the organization members as to appropriate behaviour and priorities. They also observe that organizational needs change and that what constituted effective leadership in the past may not be relevant in the future (p. 858).

Tierney (2008, p. 27) argues that leaders who adopt a cultural lens will have a better understanding of the implications of decisions across the organizational landscape, appreciate the sources of tensions in the organization and recognize the "symbolic dimensions" of decisions. He finds that certain conditions are associated with effectively implementing decisions in a post-secondary institute: developing a clear understanding of the institution's identity (p. 18); identifying the contradictions between the organization's stated culture and internal processes as these will be sources of potential resistance (p. 17); and communicating decisions through a broad range of channels and means, both formal and informal (p. 19).

In essence, culture is the unique terrain of an organization and an understanding of the organizational culture provides a new CEO with a roadmap to navigate the terrain. Safe routes forward can be identified, while obstacles and hazards can be avoided.

### **3.7 Conceptual framework**

The purpose of this study was to identify practices that effectively support executive leadership transition in a Canadian university. Drawing on the themes explored in the literature review, a conceptual framework for leadership transition is presented in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for Leadership Transition in a University. The conceptual framework links each of the themes explored in the literature review to the transition process and illustrates how each contributes to or impacts leadership transition and the practices that support a successful transition.



**FIGURE 1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IN A UNIVERSITY**

Systems theory provides the foundational underpinning for the conceptual framework and situates the leadership transition of an individual institution within the broader context of the Canadian post-secondary system. In keeping with systems theories that argue that the various elements of a system are impacted by and act upon each other (Cabrera, Colosi, Lobdell, 2008; Churchman, 1970 as cited in Powel Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015; Powel Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015), the framework connects the various activities and stages associated with leadership transition to each other. It implies the dynamic nature of a leadership transition and reminds practitioners and those charged with facilitating a transition that actions taken at earlier stages of transition have implications for the success of later transition activities and the integration of a new leader into an organization.

Theories about stakeholders and the need for stakeholder involvement throughout the life of an initiative (Achterkamp & Vos, 2007) are reflected as a continuous element of transition, starting with the search phase and continuing into the onboarding phase of transition. The connection between stakeholders and all phases of the transition process also highlights the critical nature of a new president's relationship with stakeholders to the success of transition (Gabarro, 1987 as cited in Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008; Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015).

Concepts related to leadership transition are represented in two ways: firstly, in the bar representing the board of governors that depicts their responsibility extending throughout the transition period (Smerek, 2013) and, secondly, in the bar representing the onboarding process. This second representation draws attention to the importance of

investing in the onboarding process well into a new president's first term of appointment (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008; Smerek, 2013). The successful onboarding and early integration into an organization and new role are critical to the long-term success of the new leader.

Ideas about organizational culture and its importance to not only the search for a president who will complement the organization's culture (Hartnell, 2016) but also a new president's enculturation (Giberson, T. R. et al, 2009; Hartnell, C. A., Kinicki, A. J., Lambert, L. S., Fugate, M. & Doyle Corner, P., 2016) is presented as a backdrop to the transition process. The placement of culture in the framework highlights the inescapable impact of culture on all organizational processes, especially the transition to new leadership (Giberson, T. R. et al, 2009; Tierney, 2008). Transition activities must take into account the prevailing and unique institutional culture.

Lastly, the diversity lens in the framework embeds considerations of diversity (Buell Hirsch, 2017; Gupta & Raman, 2014; Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015a; Rhode & Packel, 2014; Phillips, 2014) in the transition process. It draws attention to the need to ameliorate bias, both implicit (Bendick & Nunes, 2013; Dunn-Jensen, Jensen Calhoun & Ryan, 2016) and unconscious (Bendick & Nunes; Kossek, Su & Wu, 2017; Rhode & Packel, 2014), as a thread that runs through all transition-related activities, from selection of members for the search committee, to defining selection criteria, evaluating candidates, designing onboarding activities and evaluating the performance of the new leader.

## **4.0 Methodology and Methods**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Methodology and methods are distinct concepts in research. The methodology is the overarching design of a research project, while the methods are the specific actions or techniques used to gather and analyze the research data in support of the research question(s) (Crotty, 2003, in Cho & Lee, 2014, p. 2). This section describes the methodology for this study and the methods selected to support the collection and analysis of data regarding presidential transition. It then outlines the approach to data analysis and limitations and delimitations of the research.

### **4.2 Methodology**

This study is a qualitative inquiry into smart practices related to presidential transition in Canadian universities. It draws on a constructivist perspective which posits that there is no single reality; instead, individuals create their own, unique understanding of their lived experiences within any given context. The role of the researcher is to seek to understand that reality with the objective of arriving at a deeper understanding of the issues under analysis (Miller & Yang, 2007, p. 144). Guba and Lincoln (as cited by Costantino, 2008) offer perspective on how to assess the credibility of knowledge gleaned through qualitative inquiry when they argue that knowledge is credible when there is agreement on a phenomenon amongst individuals with knowledge and experience in the domain being explored. For Guba and Lincoln, it is the responsibility of the reader to transfer the knowledge to other situations and contexts.

The concept of a smart practice is congruent with the foundational elements of qualitative inquiry. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) describe practices as a set of actions designed to mobilize resources to produce desired outcomes. Practices may be “idealized” with broad application to a variety of situations and also modified and adapted to suit the needs of particular situations and contexts. As Bardach and Patashnik (2016) explain, smart practices are practices that have been used successfully in other jurisdictions or in comparable situations to address the same or similar challenges or problems. In the context of this study, each research participant will have had a different leadership transition experience based on his or her individual circumstances and knowledge, and the norms and mores of the institution into which they were assimilating. These experiences, when examined together, offer a valuable opportunity to consider a range of practices associated with presidential transition, search for commonalities and seek to unearth those practices that will have application for the post-secondary sector more broadly.

### **4.3 Methods**

The study drew on three methods: a literature review, a review of university policies addressing presidential transition, and primary research consisting of semi-structured elite interviews with serving Canadian university presidents who had successfully transitioned to the role of president. The following subsections discuss each of the methods in more detail.

#### **Literature review**

A literature review was conducted to explore current thinking on theories related to leadership transition in a university setting:

- Systems thinking

- Stakeholder engagement
- Leadership transition
- Diversity
- Organizational culture

The literature review provided the researcher with a strong theoretical background to the challenges posed by executive level leadership transitions, particularly as they apply to the Canadian university sector.

## **Policy review**

A review was conducted of policies and related documents presently in use by Canadian public universities to guide presidential search and transition activities. Documents examined included board policies, procedures, guidelines, and collective agreements. Presidential search webpages that emerged in the search for policy documents were also reviewed for information on current practice.

The websites of Universities Canada member institutions (Universities Canada, n.d.) that are primarily English-language institutions were searched using combinations of the terms “president”, “presidential”, “rector”, “principal”, “search”, “transition”, “committee”, “policy” “bylaw” and “terms of reference”. Policy documents and websites were logged and reviewed, and common themes and gaps were identified. Appendix 2, List of Universities and Policy Instruments, is a list of the universities on whose websites relevant references were located, the title of the relevant document or source and a website link.

## **Semi-structured elite interviews**

Semi-structured elite interviews were used for the richness of data that they offer. In a semi-structured interview, an interview guide that contains a series of pre-determined open-ended questions or interview topics is used by the interviewer as the basis of discussion with an interview subject. The semi-structured nature of the process allows the researcher and respondent to explore other topics relevant to the research that may arise in the course of the interview (Ayres, 2008). The semi-structured interviews were used to determine, from the perspective of successful, sitting presidents, those practices that were helpful to them in the search process and transition to their roles as university presidents, their perspectives on gaps in practice during the search and transition phase that created unnecessary challenges to their transition and, in hindsight, actions that they would recommend to either incoming presidents or boards undertaking a presidential search and overseeing the onboarding of a new president.

Because the research design involved contact with human subjects, research ethics approval was sought from and granted by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. As a condition of their approval, the Human Research Ethics Board required that the research ethics boards of participating presidents’ institutions be contacted to determine whether their research ethics approval are also required.

Candidates for participation in the study were drawn from Universities Canada member institutions. Three criteria were used to narrow the list of institutions whose presidents would be invited to participate in the study:

1. Language: the list of Universities Canada member institutions (Universities Canada, n.d.) was narrowed to those institutions that operate primarily in English.
2. Geography: the presidents of BC institutions who meet the criteria for “successful transition” were included. Since they operate within the same legislative framework and political arena, it was deemed

that their transition experiences would provide a valuable perspective on presidential transition at Royal Roads University.

3. Institution size: since Royal Roads enrolls under 5000 students it was determined that the transition experiences of presidents at a smaller institutions would be more relevant to the Royal Roads experience than the transition experience of presidents of large institutions. A student enrolment limit of 15,000 was used to further narrow the list of institutions from which research participants would be drawn.

These criteria were applied to the Universities Canada list of member institutions to produce a list of potential study participants. Prior research into failed presidencies was instrumental in determining which presidents should be invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews. In their research into unfinished presidential mandates, Cafley (2015) and Trachenberg, Kauvar and Bogue (2013) point out that new presidents may serve for several years of their term of appointment before either the president or the institution's governing board takes action to end the appointment, and so indicating that the presidency was not a success. Since the focus of the primary research of this study was to gain the views of sitting university presidents who had successfully transitioned to the role of president it was necessary to develop criteria to assess whether a transition was successful. A decision by an institution's governing board to continue the presidency of a serving president beyond a first term of appointment may be understood as an indicator that an individual has been deemed "successful" in the role. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, a successful university president is defined as a president who a) has completed a first term of appointment and is serving in a subsequent term, or b) is serving a first term of appointment and whose re-appointed to a subsequent term has been announced publicly.

University websites were searched for news releases and announcements related to presidential appointments and re-appointments. Based on this publicly available information, presidents were identified 1) who preside over institutions that operate primarily in English and 2) either enroll under 15,000 students or are BC-based, and 3) who had completed at least one term of appointment and were serving in a subsequent term or whose re-appointment had been publicly announced. These presidents were invited to participate in the research. Invitations were issued by email. The text of the invitation is appendix 3. Attached to the email invitation were the following documents:

- Project abstract (appendix 4)
- Interview questions (appendix 5)
- Ethics consent form (appendix 6)

Nineteen presidents met the criteria for inclusion in the study and were invited to participate. Ten responded favourably. One president was unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. Interviews were scheduled with the remaining nine presidents.

As per the requirement of the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board, the research ethics boards of the nine participating presidents' institutions were contacted to determine if their research ethics approval was required. One institution confirmed that this study required its approval before an interview could proceed. Research ethics approval was applied for and granted.

Once the question of research ethics approval was addressed, eight interviews were conducted using web-based videoconferencing technology (Bluejeans, 2018), recorded with the permission of the research participants and later transcribed by the researcher. One interview was conducted by telephone with the researcher taking notes of the conversation.

To encourage an open sharing of experiences, research participants were advised that the following steps would be taken to preserve their anonymity to the fullest extent possible: in reporting the research results, pseudonyms would be used to refer to presidents and efforts would be made to avoid reference to descriptions of situations, incidents or institutional features that might reveal the participating presidents' home institutions.

The presidents participated from their offices in their institutions. The interviews were each approximately one hour long and were conducted over a six-week period. At the start of each interview, the researcher provided each president with a verbal overview of the purpose of the study and clarified that the questions that were distributed with the invitation were intended as a framework for the interview. Presidents were asked to respond to the questions which they felt resonated most strongly with them and would provide the greatest contribution to the research. They were also invited to comment on other aspects of transition that were not directly addressed by the pre-set questions. Eight presidents confirmed that they had reviewed the questions in advance of the interview and several had made notes on points they wished to raise. One president noted that he had been unable to review the questions in advance and would be commenting "in the moment". The resulting interviews were rich, free-flowing discussions, with the participating presidents candidly sharing their experiences of transitioning to the role of president.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is a means of analyzing data to identify key concepts, along with themes to tie the concepts together. It is a flexible approach, allowing data to be analyzed either inductively or deductively, depending on the purpose of the research and prior knowledge of the subject matter (Cho, J. Y. & Lee, E. 2014, p. 4).

When conducting qualitative content analysis, the researcher categorizes data into clusters so that meaning can be derived from the content under analysis. When applied to text-based content, such as interview notes or policy documents, qualitative content analysis is an iterative process that demands rigorous reading and re-reading of the text to identify coherent themes and resolve incongruencies in earlier attempts at the categorization of data. Just as important as what is represented in the text is what is not included, and the researcher should be looking not only for categories to extract from the data but also gaps in data. Because of the interpretive nature of qualitative content analysis, the researcher must also be alive to her own potential for bias in analyzing the data (Julien, 2008).

For this study, the data under analysis was drawn from the policy review and the elite interviews with sitting presidents. An inductive approach was used, where categories emerged from analysis of the data. To avoid bias and ensure a rigorous analysis, the researcher sought to confirm her categorization of the data through triangulation methods, for example, by comparing themes emerging from the data with themes identified in the literature review and by seeking out examples in the data that both confirmed and ran counter to the categorizations and the conclusions drawn through the content analysis.

The verbatim transcriptions of the eight recorded interviews and the notes from the one telephone interview were analyzed to draw out dominant themes and insightful observations that were consistent across the interviews or were contrary to the views of the majority of research participants. Following the analysis, a narrative summary was prepared for each interview distilling the dominant themes raised in the interview. The narratives were structured to tell the story of each research participant's experience of leadership transition and attempted to capture the voice of each participant. Similarly, the policies were reviewed for consistency in themes and practices, and for examples that stood apart from the majority. The themes identified through the analysis of both the interviews and the policies are the basis of the smart practices that emerged from this study.

## **4.5 Project limitations and delimitations**

### **Limitations**

This study was limited by a number of factors. The policy review component of the study relied on documents that are publicly available on university website. These documents may not, however, fully represent the range of formal plans or frameworks used by universities to guide presidential transition. It is possible that governing boards have developed presidential transition plans for incoming presidents but have not made the plans available to the public.

With respect to the semi-structured interviews, the population of presidents of public universities in Canada is a limiting factor. Universities Canada membership comprises just 96 public universities. When this list of institutions was limited to those that are primarily English language institutions enrolling under 15,000 students, and the criteria for inclusion in the study was subsequently applied to the presidents of this narrower list of institutions, the sample for the study was narrowed to just 19 presidents. Another limitation to the study was whether the 19 presidents comprising the sample were willing and available to participate. Ultimately, nine presidents participated in the study.

The quality and accuracy of participants' memories was another limitation. Because the criteria for inclusion in the study included the requirement that presidents had been appointed to a second term of office, all of the presidents who were eligible to participate in the study were in at least their fifth year serving in the role of president. Consequently, their memories of the transition experience may not capture the full range of practices that supported or impeded their transition. Additionally, with the passage of time, presidents' impressions of their transition experiences may have altered so that their assessment of the degree to which any particular practice may have helped or hinder their transition might not reflect how those practices were experienced at the time of transition.

Lastly, the study relied on presidents being willing to share their memories. It is possible that for a range of reasons presidents participating in the study might have chosen to withhold some aspects of their transition experience.

### **Delimitations**

This study is intended to support the transition to new leadership at Royal Roads University, one of the smaller public universities in Canada. Consequently, with the exception of BC institutions, the sample for this study excluded presidents of institutions with enrolments of over 15,000 students on the assumption that their transition experiences in larger settings could be quite different than those of presidents of relatively small institutions. Additionally, because of the researcher's limited fluency in the French language, the study was limited to the presidents of institutions that operate primarily in English, which resulted in a number of presidents being excluded from the sample group who might otherwise have been included.

Perhaps most significantly, this study is based only on the views of serving presidents. It does not include the views of the governing boards to whom the presidents report, the direct reports of the presidents or key institutional stakeholders, such as students, faculty, staff, governments or community partners. It is not known whether boards, direct reports and stakeholders share the self-reported perspectives of the study participants of their transition experiences and the degree to which they view the transition as successful.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

The section described the methodology and methods for this study into smart practices in presidential transition. It outlined the key themes of the literature review and the search terms used in searches of Canadian public universities for policy documents related to presidential transition. The means of identifying research participants for elite interviews was described, as was the approach for data analysis. Finally, this section described the limitations and delimitations of the study. This information provides the context for the findings, which are presented in the next section of the report.

## 5.0 Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

This section of the report presents the findings of the research. It begins by presenting the findings from the policy analysis, noting dominant themes and emerging patterns in the policy approach to presidential transition. This discussion is followed by a presentation of the findings from the semi-structured interviews with university presidents who have successfully transitioned to the role of president.

The literature review was intended to provide the researcher with a strong theoretical foundation in topics relevant to executive leadership transition and serve as a means of triangulating the findings from the policy analysis and the interviews. Consequently, the literature review is not discussed as a separate findings topic. Instead, the findings of the literature review are referenced throughout the discussion and analysis section of the report to draw attention to points of congruence and points where the research findings differ from the literature.

### 5.2 Policy analysis

The policy analysis was based on information publicly available on the websites of Universities Canada member institutions that operate primarily in English. The websites of 77 institutions were searched using combinations of the search terms “president”, “presidential”, “rector”, “principal”, “search”, “transition”, “committee”, “policy” “bylaw” and “terms of reference”. Policy instruments or documents related to presidential search or transition were found on the websites of 52 institutions. The references included board and institutional by-laws, board policies, procedure documents, guideline statements, memos, news releases and webpages devoted to presidential search and transition. No meaningful references to presidential search or transition were found on the websites of 25 institutions. In instances where no references were found, it is possible that those institutions have policies in place that direct their presidential search and transition practices but do not consider them public documents and have chosen not to make them available on their websites.

The policy review revealed that, of the 52 institutions whose websites included meaningful references to presidential transition, no institution has a policy that specifically addresses presidential transition as defined in the context of this study; that is, transition as a process beginning when the governing board is made aware of the need to begin searching for a president and concluding after a new president is selected and settled into the role.

The website search revealed that policy instruments addressing presidential search are the most commonly available instruments on the public websites of universities. Of the 52 institutions on whose websites were found references to search and transition, 48 included evidence that the use of a presidential search committee is an established practice at the institution. The websites included one or more of the following:

- policies established by governing boards requiring the governing board to establish a presidential search committee to advise the board,
- search committee terms of reference, or
- an active or archived presidential search webpage.

Additionally, 40 of those universities have made public the mandates and composition of their search committees. The largest search committee requires 21 members and the smallest requires 7 members, with the average search committee comprising 14 members representative of the university community. Of the 40 publicly available search

committee mandates, all committees require the appointment of faculty members to the committee, 90% require students, 80% require staff, 60% require alumni and 55% require members of the senior administration, for example vice-presidents, vice-chairs of senate, deans or associate vice-presidents. In 27.5% of cases the institution's governing board represents a clear majority of search committee membership. In 20% of cases, the governing board represents 50% of search committee membership, while in 52.5% of cases, the board representation comprises a minority of the committee members. In 77.5% of cases, there is evidence that the search committees are either required to consult with the university community or have discretion to consult about the attributes desired in a new president. Appendix 7, Analysis of Website References to Presidential Search or Transition from Universities Canada Member Institutions, lists the institutions on whose websites references were found to presidential search and transition and summarizes their requirements for community consultation, whether use of a search committee is the institution's practice and, if so, the size and composition of the committee where available.

Some institutions' policies address both re-appointment and appointment within the same policy, with annual goal setting and performance appraisals elements of these policies. Appendix 2, List of Universities and Policy Instruments Related to Presidential Search and Transition, includes policies that address reappointment and performance appraisal. A review of these policies showed that they do not address matters of support to a new president during a leadership transition to enhance performance.

During the website searches, two examples were found of universities addressing presidential transition in an intentional and robust fashion. The first example is the University of Saskatchewan, which established a presidential transition committee to support President Peter Stoichoff when he became president of that university in 2015. A webpage provides information on the committee, its membership, general purpose and scope of activity, and stipulates that the committee commenced its work on the date that the new president's appointment was announced and concluded its work one year from the new president's start date. Stoichoff's appointment was announced in July 2015 and his appointment started in October 2015. The terms of reference provided flexibility for the committee to adjust its membership as it determined appropriate to meet the goals of the committee and to establish sub-committees as needed (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.). The University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) offers a second, more recent example of an institution that established a transition committee to support its 2018 presidential transition process and made the terms of reference for the committee available on its website. UOIT's transition team was effective February 01, 2018, and President Steven Murphy started as president on March 01, 2018. Similar to the University of Saskatchewan's committee terms of reference, the UOIT terms of reference outline the membership, purpose and goals of the committee, and provide flexibility in establishing subcommittees and adjusting the membership to ensure a diverse and inclusive membership (University of Ontario Institute of Technology, 2018).

Mount Royal University also references transition in its procedures for the search, selection and appointment of a new president. The procedures require the board to develop a transition plan and establish a transition team to support a new president but do not direct the membership of the team or provide details on the goals or scope of activity of the transition team, or its lifespan (Mount Royal University, 2018).

Other evidence of transition plans was found in the form memos and news releases. In a 2013 memo from the Chair of the University of Toronto's Governing Council, for example, the university community was informed that the president designate, who was an internal candidate, would step down from his current role and be on leave for a period of three months, which would be followed by a two month period of on-campus presence to attend planning sessions and events with the outgoing president, before formally moving into the presidency (University of Toronto, 2013). In a similarly worded February 2017 news release available on the Wilfred Laurier University website, Laurier announced that it had implemented a transition plan for its then in-coming president. According to the news

release, the president designate, who was also an internal candidate, would be stepping down from her current role to begin the process of transitioning to the role of president, before formally moving into the role in four months' time. The memo explained that the current serving president would continue to serve and would engage with the president designate on "initiatives that have long-lasting implications for Laurier" (Wilfred Laurier University, 2017).

### **5.3 Semi-structured interviews**

Nine interviews were conducted over a six-week period between March and May, 2018. Of the nine presidents interviewed, six were men and three were women. All of the presidents had senior leadership and administrative experience prior to taking on the role of president, six primarily from within academia and three with experience either from outside of academia or a combination of experience from within and outside academia. Five of the research participants followed predecessors whose presidencies had been cut short, with the predecessors failing to complete their first terms of appointment as president. In three instances, the presidents were hired by their institutions either in a search launched after a first unsuccessful search or were made aware that the first choice candidate had declined the offer of employment and that they were an alternate candidate.

The institutions they represented included: research-intensive institutions; teaching-intensive institutions; large, mid-sized and small institutions; institutions in large metropolitan areas and institutions in smaller centres; and institutions on the east coast, the west coast and points in between.

#### **Terry's transition experience**

Prior to becoming president of a small university, Terry had extensive leadership and management experience outside academia. When Terry learned of the opportunity at the institution, Terry contacted individuals within the institution known personally to Terry to learn more about the opportunity and the university before applying. Terry had personal ties to the institution and had a strong interest in giving back to the community through meaningful work.

While the board was supportive of Terry's presidency and had a strong desire to see the institution succeed, it provided little in the way of formal orientation or transition support. The board chair, however, was helpful in supporting Terry in the early days of presidency. The chair, an experienced, senior public sector leader, effectively bridged gaps in differences in understanding between Terry and members of the board of governors as Terry worked to become more familiar with the institution and role of president. The board chair was also available on an ad hoc basis to talk through challenges as they arose. The university offered a half-day orientation for all new senior administrators and Terry participated in this orientation with a number of other individuals.

Terry noted that formal training, such as that provided by Universities Canada or Harvard University's Seminar for New Presidents, is invaluable not only for the practical skill-building that it entails but also for the informal network of support that can emerge from it. Equally valuable are regional networks of universities or networks among similarly mandated institutions. Terry has formed valuable connections through these networks and has developed relationships with colleagues who are able to provide mentorship and advice. Positive relations with past institutional leaders was also helpful as these individuals made themselves available to Terry as needed.

Terry was fortunate to have a confidential executive assistant who knew the institution and, consequently, was able to provide informed perspective on the dynamics within the institution that might otherwise have been opaque. The key role played by a skilled executive assistant should not be underestimated, particularly in the transition period,

and Terry takes great comfort from the word “confidential” in the EA’s title. The executive assistant’s advice was invaluable in helping Terry to avoid mis-steps during transition.

For Terry, the most challenging aspect of the transition was learning about university governance. Terry underestimated the complexity of it and how much time must be devoted to governance. In this regard, colleagues and mentors have been a great resource to Terry and have provided valuable advice.

Terry was also surprised by the scope of activity that occurs in the president’s office, particularly with respect to fundraising and donor relations, and needed to learn about the university’s Foundation and how the Foundation relates to the university. However, Terry’s business skills of client relations, marketing, research and writing were transferrable to donor relations work and, more generally, to the role of president, and set Terry in good stead to meet those responsibilities.

In the interview process, the search committee obliquely referenced some of the challenges facing the institution, particularly around the institution’s culture, but did not directly state the nature of those challenges. Being an external candidate, however, allowed Terry to bring a fresh perspective, unencumbered by existing conflicts and stresses within the institution, which Terry views as a strength. By demonstrating a commitment to rejuvenating the institution, Terry was able to generate support for the presidency from the faculty. Terry’s approach has been to enable the administrators in the institution to do their jobs and try not to get in the way too much. Terry views this approach as a key strength: trusting in the team members to do their jobs well. This approach does, though, create opportunities for issues or problems to develop which might have been avoided or minimized had Terry been involved at an earlier stage. Terry recognizes both the benefits and risks of this approach.

Terry expressed his appreciation for his predecessor who convinced the board of governors to defer approving a strategic plan until Terry had joined the institution and had an opportunity to shape to the plan to Terry’s own vision. Terry cautioned that presidents must be mindful that strategic plans are achievable within a balanced budget, otherwise both the president and board will be set up for failure.

When asked what advice Terry might offer to a new president, Terry noted the importance of new presidents trusting themselves and relying on the strengths they bring to the job. Terry observed, “what are the key principles and priorities in your life? That should guide your work. If you haven’t set out your priorities in your own personal life, in relationships with your partner, your kids, your job, you’ll have trouble accomplishing important tasks” (Personal interview).

Terry noted that the president must consult with the university community but be prepared to take hard decisions and stand behind them. A key difference between academia and the business world is that in academia members of the university community are continually coming forward with new ideas. To be effective, the president cannot assume responsibility for all ideas; instead, the president must take a longer term view of the institution and empower those around her or him to find solutions and bring forward fully formed plans for consideration.

Terry observed that concrete actions that a board could take to improve on transition include:

- making available to presidents all legal documents that pertain to the university,
- compiling a transition binder of all relevant documents and reference materials,
- setting up early meetings with the finance team to build an understanding of the university finances and the institution’s financial health, and

- providing a team or individual who can assist with orienting a new president to the external community, for example, identifying key stakeholders and facilitating introductions.

Lastly, Terry reported that an important lesson learned early in the job was to attend to personal health. A university president must spend considerable time and effort engaging with the external community through community relations, government relations and donor relations activities, much of which involves commitments outside of regular business hours and involves socializing over meals. To maintain a healthy balance in life, Terry strictly limits the number of afterhours commitments in Terry's weekly calendar and prioritizes regular physical activity. Part of leadership is setting a good example and attending to health and work/life balance is one way the president can support the university community.

### **Jordan's transition experience**

Jordan, president of a mid-sized teaching institution, had served in senior leadership roles in academia prior to the current appointment. Jordan was attracted to the opportunity for several reasons: the university's mission was attractive; Jordan had worked in the region previously and had good interactions with the institution during that time; and Jordan had family in the area.

Context matters when planning presidential transitions. Jordan noted that different leaders will have different needs, depending on the context of the institution. A leadership transition in an institution in crisis will look quite different, for example, than a leadership transition in an institution with a healthy culture. In the case of Jordan's institution, the previous leadership had been uncertain and the institutional culture was characterized by distrust and suspicion.

Jordan noted that full disclosure of issues is critical to the success of a president. Providing less than full disclosure has the potential to undermine a president's effectiveness. Jordan stressed that candidates interested in the role of president must educate themselves about the institution and what the board is looking for in the next leader. "Candidates need to ask difficult questions," Jordan observed. "What do you really mean here? When you say you want someone to steady the ship but you also want someone to be a change agent, what exactly do you mean?" (personal interview).

Jordan observed that the role of president is a lonely role and that new presidents will face many stakeholders, each with an agenda to advance. The challenge for the president is in determining which narrative to trust in the absence of colleagues who can provide wise counsel. In this regard, the presidential staff are key. A high-functioning executive assistant who understands the institution and its internal dynamics, and is able to think strategically and appropriately prioritize stakeholder meetings, can be an invaluable asset to a new president.

Jordan was able to spend considerable time becoming familiar with the institution after appointment but before starting in the role of president and was compensated for this commitment. Jordan was able to arrive on campus with a deeper understanding of the institution and its culture, and the challenges it faced. Jordan noted the value of the investment to the board and the institution because, by the time Jordan arrived on campus, Jordan had developed a plan for the first year of presidency, including a plan to launch a comprehensive strategic planning process.

When asked what advice Jordan had for a new president or a governing board, Jordan offered three pieces of advice, the first of which applies to presidents: be as transparent as possible in all transactions. With little effort or risk, Jordan was able to begin repairing the relationship between the administration and the faculty by being transparent in decisions, making information available to the university community and consulting in an open and sincere

fashion. Blogging to share information and technology-mediated consultation on key issues opened channels of communication and started to shift the institutional culture to a healthier place.

Jordan's advice to boards is to carefully plan a president's first 100 days in office. "People always talk about drinking from the fire hose. It's a lot to learn but somebody needs to sit down and carefully plan, what does the president need to know in the first 100 days and what sequence do they need to know it in" (personal interview). Jordan underscored the importance of prioritizing key meetings and balancing those meetings with "get to know you" and networking events. Jordan did not downplay the importance of having a public profile early on in a presidency but emphasized that strategic thinking must drive a strong agenda of meetings that will inform a new president of key issues, including the financial health of the institution.

Jordan's last piece of advice applies equally to presidents and boards and that was to practice patience. Reflecting on high-profile presidencies that had been cut short, Jordan said, "just to get rid of a president after two years or three years, unless there is something really outrageous going on, isn't fair to the institution or the incumbent" (personal interview). Jordan noted that transition is a long process; a five year term passes very quickly and change takes time to achieve. In the case of Jordan's own presidency, Jordan observed, "about the fourth year of my term, that was when I thought, okay, now I have an executive team who really knows what they are doing, that I trust and we are all on the same page" (personal interview). In closing, Jordan circled back to an earlier observation that context matters. In the case of Jordan's institution, the second five years of presidency provides an opportunity to drive towards achieving a new strategic vision now that relationships have been repaired, the institutional culture has improved and the groundwork has been laid for deeper change. Jordan observed that in other institutions positive results may be apparent in a shorter timeframe.

### **Shawn's transition experience**

Shawn is the president of a small institution and had significant academic leadership experience prior to taking on the role. A colleague brought the opportunity to Shawn's attention and suggested a fit to Shawn's background and interests. Shawn reached out to other colleagues with experience with the institution for their impressions of the institution and whether Shawn would be a fit for the role of president. For Shawn, the university's strategic plan was the most compelling factor in deciding to pursue the opportunity.

Shawn was hired following a failed presidency. Institutional morale was low and a culture of distrust existed. There was no transition plan in place to help shape the early part of Shawn's presidency and while a few members of the board of governors were strong supports to Shawn, the board was focused on resolving challenges internal to the board. Overall, governance was a challenge in the early days of Shawn's presidency as the governing board tried to direct decisions that appropriately fall within the authority of the president, such as appointments to key senior leadership positions within the institution. Support from other university presidents and former colleagues was instrumental in helping Shawn work through some challenges and develop strategies to respond to issues.

When asked about challenges in transitioning to the role, Shawn reported that many significant challenges facing the institution were not disclosed to Shawn prior to Shawn accepting the role. Nor was Shawn made aware of the challenges in advance of arriving on campus. Additionally, key decisions were taken by the board of governors in the weeks immediately prior to Shawn arriving on campus that had negative repercussions for Shawn's transition and the perceptions of Shawn's presidency by the university community. The board approved, for example, the closure of a program and dismissal of employees but left implementation of the decision for Shawn's arrival. Consequently, the first significant act that Shawn undertook as president occurred in the first week of presidency and was the closure of a program and the dismissal of employees.

Shawn mused that though these early actions created challenges for Shawn's presidency, they forced Shawn to reach out to key influencers in the university community to understand their views and perspectives. In the process of reaching out, Shawn was able to demonstrate a commitment to the university's mission and to establishing positive working relationships with the university community. Learning who is trustworthy and who may present a skewed view of the institution is, however, difficult for a new president, who will be challenged to discern among the many voices on campus.

On a personal level, Shawn noted that the role of president is a lonely role and that this was unexpected.

Because of prior commitments, Shawn was unable to devote significant time or energy following appointment but before arriving on campus to developing a deeper understanding of the institution. In hindsight, Shawn observed that it would have been helpful to have more time on campus during this period because once a new president starts in the role, every action taken by the president is under scrutiny. "If you sneeze, they say 'we've got a sneezer'" (personal interview). Shawn also noted that once a president starts in the role, interactions with constituencies are usually coloured by requests for resources rather than viewed as opportunities for constituencies to share information about themselves. Shawn mused that, similar to the concept of a "mystery shopper", it would be helpful to be a "mystery student" or a "mystery researcher" as these kinds of experiences would provide a deeper understanding of the institution than can be provided in briefing materials. Shawn said that, on reflection, there should be some overlap between incoming and outgoing presidents, with the incoming president keeping a low profile but free to wander the campus and meet people on an informal basis.

Shawn observed that, generally, the role of president is not well-understood by the university community. Faculty perceive that the primary purpose of the role is to decide on the allocation of resources within the institution. They do not appreciate the level of commitment required to external relations and the value that those activities bring to the institution. Frequently, however, a crisis issue occurs early in a presidency and how a president chooses to respond to the issue will define how the president is viewed for the balance of the presidency.

When asked what advice could be offered to a governing board embarking on a presidential search, Shawn stressed the need for boards to think more broadly about the profile of an ideal candidate. Shawn noted the under-representation of certain demographics in university leadership and drew particular attention to the lack of women leaders. Shawn challenged search committees and boards to be open to candidates with a diversity of experience and to hold search firms accountable for providing a diversity of candidates. Shawn also challenged search firms to approach the cultivation of candidates more creatively, instead of falling to old models that perpetuate the current participation rates of diverse groups in university leadership, and to challenge themselves to find better ways of assessing the performance potential of candidates than the standard executive interview.

### **Kelly's transition experience**

Kelly is the president at a large institution and has prior experience in leadership positions, both within and outside academia.

As an external candidate for the role of president and unfamiliar with many aspects of the institution, Kelly was deeply invested during the presidential search in learning as much about the institution as possible. A top concern of Kelly's was understanding the university's culture and whether Kelly would be a fit. The university website was the most useful resource for Kelly. Information available online included videos of presentations by the vice-president academic and the vice-president of research about the academic and research priorities of the university, which provided a more nuanced understanding of the university than written briefings could provide. The most valuable

information available, however, was video of a consultation with the university community that was led by the board chair regarding the characteristics that should be sought in the university's next president. This last video was particularly helpful in opening Kelly's eyes to the type of leadership that would be required and in expanding Kelly's understanding of the university's culture, as well as providing some insights into the character of the board chair.

Kelly noted that the information provided by the search firm to candidates about the opportunity was extremely limited. Though all the resources that Kelly accessed would have been available to all candidates, Kelly observed that it would be beneficial for the institution and candidates if a standardized information package, including a selection of short videos, was made available to all candidates. Kelly observed that by doing so, search committees would benefit from candidates having a more equivalent knowledge base of the institution.

Kelly spoke at great length about the value of the period between being appointed to the role of president and the time Kelly arrived on campus and assumed responsibilities as president. Kelly noted that most presidents are confirmed with significant lead time before they take up the responsibilities of the role. This period offers a chance for an incoming president not only to become more familiar with the institution but also to fill gaps in key knowledge areas. For Kelly, the intervening period was an opportunity to learn more about the university, the responsibilities of a university president, university governance, university finances and strategic planning. Drawing on contacts and prior standing relationships, Kelly was able to spend time with well-regarded, serving presidents of other institutions and individuals who had previously served as president at similar kinds of institutions. Kelly found these interactions offered useful insights into what is entailed in being a university president. Kelly also met several times with the outgoing president and members of the university's executive team, attended convocation and Board and Senate meetings as an observer, and participated in formal training by attending the Harvard Seminar for New Presidents.

During the intervening period Kelly also became involved in some key governance decisions, to the extent that Kelly was able to make the case that decisions that would have long-term implications for Kelly should be delayed until Kelly was in the role of president and could meaningfully participate in the decisions.

The intervening period was also an opportunity for Kelly to make connections within the broader community of university stakeholders and supporters. Of particular value were meetings in the community where the outgoing president facilitated introductions between Kelly and key supporters of the university, such as leading alumni, business leaders and NGOs.

Kelly noted that the president's role has a significant external focus to it but one element of the role that surprised Kelly was the amount of socializing required. Kelly and Kelly's partner invested significant amounts of time in Kelly's first year of presidency, for example, in hosting and attending dinners and other social gatherings. Kelly observed, "there was a huge number of people who felt an attachment to the university and had an expectation that that sense of attachment would be validated through some kind of social engagement" (personal interview). This required Kelly and Kelly's partner to get to know a broad range of people in a very short period of time and in a way that made these people feel valued and appreciated. Returning to the importance of cultural fit, Kelly stressed, "again, this is why it's important to understand the culture of the institution, and why someone who may understand the culture of the institution at X and be comfortable in it may be exceedingly uncomfortable in the institutional culture at Y" (personal interview).

When asked about board's role in onboarding the president, Kelly stressed that while the president's relationship with the board is important, it is a small part of an effective onboarding process. For the president's long-term

success, relationships with the executive team, students, the senate, the faculty association, funders and alumni, amongst others, are equally important. The board may have a role in ensuring that resources are prioritized and mobilized to support activities to build those relationships, but the board is not in the position to effectively plan or execute those activities. It will be idiosyncratic to each institution who will be best positioned to develop the optimal engagement strategy but may include individuals such as the VP Academic, the director of the president's office and the university secretary.

Kelly recommended that new presidents carefully plan the first several months of office well in advance of taking on the role. In this way, a new president can ensure that key meetings are scheduled and appropriately sequenced. Kelly, for example, made a point of meeting with each academic unit over the fall term and worked with the staff of the outgoing president's office in the months leading up to the fall term to schedule the meetings. This entailed coordinating in excess of 30 meetings to take place over a three month period, but it was important as a demonstration of Kelly's interest in and support for the academic mission of the institution. Kelly also offered that new presidents should have a clear game plan for the first year of office. "How are you going to interact, what is your value add to the university going to be in the first year and how are you going to demonstrate that value add to the community? And it has to be done in a way that is consistent with that culture" (personal interview). Kelly noted that incredible value can be gained from the simple act of being seen on campus, for example, walking the campus, having coffee in a public location or attending a student or faculty presentation.

Kelly observed, however, that the role of president is not well-understood and each president's conception of the role of president will influence how that individual fulfills the responsibilities of the office. There will always be people within the institution who feel that the president is not paying enough attention to the university, despite the benefits that accrue to the university through the president's activities. Kelly noted that "one of the greatest qualities a president brings and the value that a president adds is be able to help the university develop a strategic approach but you have to understand the levers, the instruments and the opportunities to know what field you're operating on to be strategic" (personal interview).

Lastly, Kelly offered the following advice to new presidents: "Do not measure your effectiveness by the extent to which your contribution is at variance with your predecessor. Or, to put it more positively, build on strength. So, look to the institution, respect its history, understand where there is strength, appreciate the value that others have contributed, and build on it. Add your own, maybe take it off in a slightly different direction or add something that is different, but don't assume that the way you elevate yourself is to deprecate or negate what others have done before you. Because unless you're coming in basically to revive or resuscitate an institution that is on its last legs, and hopefully you're not, you're coming into an institution that people have put their heart and soul into, their energy into, people have invested a lot in it, they have pride in it, and even though you think you can add a lot and do more, an important part of your function is to mine the benefit that is already there, the value that is already there. It's good because if you can build on top of a solid foundation that is already there, it's also important because it means you're crediting people who have contributed and are probably still around, many of them still within the university or supporting the university, and it's a way of connecting with them and bonding with them, showing them that you respect their contribution and what you're going to do now is try to add to that contribution rather than detract from it" (personal interview).

## **Dale's transition experience**

Dale is the president of a mid-sized university and brought considerable academic leadership experience to the role. Dale came to the university following a failed presidency by Dale's predecessor but stated that the mission of the university was what made the opportunity attractive.

Dale spoke at great length about the period of time following appointment to the role of president but before the appointment started. Three months prior to assuming office, Dale joined the campus as “president-designate” and was provided a salary, an office and access to support staff. This allowed Dale time to get to know the campus community and the local community. Frequently, new university presidents must re-locate to take on the role and Dale noted that they need time to become familiar with their new communities. Dale report that this time as president-designate was invaluable in terms of becoming immersed in the culture of the institution and the broader community. While Dale observed that presidents have to careful about being too closely identified with their predecessors, those relationships can also be very valuable and Dale was able to form a positive relationship with the interim president, a relationship that persists today.

During the time that Dale was president-designate Dale attended board and senate meetings as an observer. Dale also met with the union executive and found this meeting valuable since it was an opportunity to establish a relationship when Dale was not yet in a position to be able to respond to any requests from the union. As well Dale met with leaders of community organizations and local politicians. Once in office, a president has little time for attending to personal matters so Dale also took advantage of the opportunity to attend to such practical matters as finding doctors and dentists and, more generally, becoming oriented to the community.

Dale noted that the value of a good executive assistant is not fully understood or appreciated. A knowledgeable and highly skilled executive assistant is a tremendous asset in the transition process as this individual is able to offer insights on members of the institution and provide valuable context, all of which helps a new president with the sense-making process. Dale also noted the value of attending professional training, such as the workshop for new presidents put on by Universities Canada. This forum provides an opportunity not only to learn about the role of the president and strategies for success but also to form a network of colleagues.

When asked about challenges experienced, Dale noted that full disclosure of issues is critical. When Dale started as president-designate a pressing and critical issue came to light that would have serious consequences for the institution’s reputation if not resolved. The board was well aware of the issue in advance of Dale being selected for the role of president but had not disclosed the matter during the interviews. The time as president-designate was useful in that it enabled Dale to develop an action plan to implement at the time Dale became president and, through this plan, Dale was able to resolve the issue to a successful outcome.

Dale also noted that one of the challenges of being president, especially as an external candidate, is knowing who to trust. Dale reiterated that a good executive assistant can be an invaluable resource on these matters but acknowledged that building trust is a matter of time and getting to know people, including members of the executive team.

On the matter of trust, Dale observed that building trust with the board is key to a president’s success. Prior to Dale’s arrival the board did not conduct an annual performance review of the president. At Dale’s initiation, the governing board now includes a review of the president’s performance in its annual governance cycle. Additionally, as recommended by the Universities Canada new presidents program, Dale established the practice of meeting monthly with the board chair to open lines of communication. Dale also implemented a 15 minute private discussion for board members without the president at the close of every board meeting. Following the private discussion, Dale returns to the meeting and the board chair raises issues or questions with the president on behalf of the board and in the presence of the full board. Dale observed, “Those are the things I introduced here in order to not get surprised and not to surprise my board” (personal interview).

Continuing on the theme of trust, Dale stressed that openness with the board is essential. Dale is clear with his executive team that nothing should be hidden from the board and insists that materials for board meetings are provided to board members a minimum of seven days in advance of board meetings. Dale observed, however, that a challenge to maintaining trust with the board is the degree of turnover on the board. For Dale, the rate of turnover in board membership was unexpected and means that a key responsibility of the president is a continual process of board education. Presidents, however, must look after their boards if they wish to have the full and ongoing support of the board through challenging times. As Dale put it, “The care and keeping of the board is essential. So they have to support the president, but the president has to be worthy of support” (personal interview).

With respect to the conception of the role of president, Dale observed that the president is different things to different people, and the adept president learns how to adopt different personas. The president is the external face of the institution and a considerable element of the role is external relations. Even the most introverted individual must adapt to meet the demands of frequent interactions with key stakeholders. Dale also observed that students benefit from one kind of interaction, faculty another and government officials yet another. Dale cited an example of an experience early in Dale’s first term of appointment when Dale attended a social event organized by faculty and staff. It was not the type of event that Dale would normally seek out but felt that it would be appropriate to attend for a short period of time. A few weeks following the event, at an open meeting of some members of the university community, a member of the university community rose and publicly acknowledged Dale’s attendance at the event and remarked on how meaningful it was to the community. For Dale, this was an instructive moment on what was expected from the office of president.

As Dale’s term as president is drawing to a close, the board of the institution has established a transition committee to oversee the transition process. Dale noted that the executive assistant to the president is an active member of the committee, not a support to the committee, because of the valuable contribution of the role and the deep institutional memory typically held by the individual in that role. Dale will contribute to the transition as a resource to the new president at the request of the new president.

### **Robin’s transition experience**

Prior to becoming president of a small university, Robin had gained senior leadership experience outside of academia. Robin was drawn to the institution’s mission and a desire for meaningful work. Robin’s qualifications were atypical of most candidates for president but they were a factor that the search committee found compelling in Robin’s candidacy. While not typical they included skills that transfer well to the current demands placed on a university president, including organizational leadership, team building, budget management and building organizational culture.

Robin stated that the role of president was exactly what was expected, however, Robin shared the view that generally the role of president is not well understood and this creates challenges, particularly for a new president who is trying to establish her or his leadership. Because the role is not understood, the expectations of constituencies may be incongruent with how the president fulfills the role.

Robin noted that institutions may have unique cultures but, at the heart, the role of president is not that different from one institution to the next. The same skill set is required to deal with the same types of issues and the skills that Robin brought to the role served the institution well. In Robin’s view, universities are characterized by people who are highly knowledgeable in their fields and feel empowered to advise the administration on how best to do their jobs despite not understanding what those jobs entail. Robin noted that the board did not do a consultation with the university community prior to launching the presidential search and this was likely a significant oversight. Had the

board or search committee consulted with the university community and used the opportunity not only to gain the views of constituents but also to educate them about the responsibilities of a president then there might have been a greater appreciation on the part of the community about the scope and focus of the president's role.

This lack of understanding of the role touches on another challenge for a new president that Robin identified. While a new president must find ways to engage with the university community and build a healthy culture, the role of president has an external focus that frequently takes the president away from campus. The president is not a manager but a strategic leader and promoter of the institution but, because the role is so poorly understood, the president may be perceived as being disengaged from the university if not visible on campus at all times. Consequently, the president should develop strategies to increase visibility on campus. This may be as simple as walking the campus and greeting people, or inviting members of the university community to sit on various committees with the president.

When asked about work/life balance, Robin responded that a president is always on the job; boundaries do not exist. The pace is demanding but enjoyable. A president's attendance at a university event is meaningful for the university community and Robin is intentional about attending events across the institution and its programs. Robin observed, "you know, there's an inverse proportionality here. You go to convocation, well... I'm expected to go to convocation. What I'm not expected to do is go downtown to a gallery and tour five bachelor of fine arts students' final papers in their senior year and listen to them explain why they created this particular piece of art. I will get tremendous feedback because not only does that professor say, wow, thanks for taking the time, but they also say the same thing to three other professors" (personal interview).

In terms of surprises in the role, Robin noted that the most shocking discovery was how slowly universities move and how change-averse the institution was. In Robin's view, expectations of the academy and the president have changed but many people within the academy have not, nor have they altered their perceptions of the academy. Consequently, today's university leader must be willing to make hard decisions and stand behind them.

Robin acknowledged that the president's job is a lonely one. One of the greatest challenges is discerning from amongst the many voices in the institution, each of whom has its own narrative of the university. Patience was required to discover a balanced view of the institution and, consequently, discern which issues to take on and which to leave alone. Robin also observed that it takes time to build a good team that will support the vision for the institution. In Robin's case, it took nearly the full first term to build a leadership team united in vision. In the early days of the presidency, Robin found support from friends and contacts outside the institution. Particularly helpful were contacts from outside of academia who could provide a completely fresh perspective on the issues that Robin faced.

While university governance presented a learning curve, Robin had significant experience working with boards. Consequently, Robin understood the importance of the president's relationship with the Board and the Board Chair, as well as the limitations of what a board could offer in terms of support to a new president. While boards and presidents need to understand the division of responsibility between the two and respect those boundaries, Robin ventured that boards, generally, are the least informed members of the university community about what is actually going on in the university. They are on campus infrequently and, typically, they are leaders in business and industry who do not understand many of the fundamental operating principles of academia. They find the constraints and processes baffling and new presidents must be alive to the need to take a leadership role in continually educating board members about their institution. Board membership changes frequently and this in itself presents a challenge for a president. Robin noted that since being appointed five years ago three different people have chaired the board and a fourth would soon take the lead.

In closing, Robin offered two pieces of advice to new presidents. Firstly, hone your listening skills. To listen is to demonstrate respect and communicates value about a relationship. “If you’re a listener, great. If you’re not a listener, learn to be one” (personal interview). Secondly, be humble and acknowledge the contributions of others. “Be really, really humble. Everyone is looking for credit at the institution. Everyone. When you get your chance to tell your story in front of the board you should, if you have five minutes, you should be acknowledging five people” (personal interview).

## **Jamie’s transition experience**

Jamie is the president of a small institution who had some leadership experience within the institution prior to moving into the role of president. Jamie was a non-traditional choice for the role because, although Jamie holds a PhD, Jamie did not have what the institution’s faculty considered a sufficiently long record of academic achievement, either as a teacher or a researcher. Furthermore, Jamie was selected for the role after a first, fruitless search in which Jamie was overlooked despite expressing an interest in the opportunity.

In Jamie’s view, faculty do not understand the role of president or appreciate that administration requires talent and skill in the same way that being a subject matter expert in an academic discipline does. “They don’t see that overview, oversight, mobilizing, influencing, they don’t see that happening behind the scenes” (personal interview). That perception, coupled with Jamie’s relative lack of an academic track record, meant that when Jamie took on the role of president, Jamie faced a difficult challenge in earning the respect of the faculty in the institution. Jamie, however, felt well-equipped for the role of president. Jamie had completed a graduate diploma in public administration in addition to doctoral studies, and cited the skills acquired through the graduate diploma as being good preparation for the role of president. The courses addressed good governance practice and provided practical administrative skills.

Governance was also an issue from the outset of Jamie’s presidency. Not only was the board populated with individuals who did not possess the breadth of skills required for governance leadership but also some board members did not wholeheartedly support Jamie’s presidency. Nor did they understand their role as governors and Jamie’s role as president. Jamie cited an example of attempts to deal with urgently needed restructuring only to have the board withdraw their support for Jamie’s strategy in favour of faculty members who had by-passed Jamie and reached out directly to board members to state their case. This resulted in a much-needed change being deferred and Jamie’s authority as president being seriously undermined. Jamie also cited conflict of interest and the appearance of conflict of interest as being an issue with some members of the board.

When asked how Jamie coped during these challenging early days of presidency, Jamie joked, “therapy”. In a more serious tone, Jamie added, “and an understanding spouse” (personal interview). Jamie observed that the support of the board would have been beneficial but, in its absence, Jamie focused on building credibility in the eyes of faculty with a strategy that included a commitment to transparency. This entailed sharing information such as budget details and statistical reporting, which was not the institution’s cultural norm. By sharing information, Jamie was able to dispel long-held but inaccurate perceptions of inequities in compensation and resourcing of programs, and begin to shift the institutional culture. As well, Jamie invited discussion about the concerns of faculty and their vision for the future and did not interfere in areas of the institution that were functioning well. Jamie cited listening as a key skill to practice in building trust with faculty.

Jamie noted that presidents must consult but have confidence in their own judgment and be prepared to make difficult decisions. In Jamie’s case, when difficult decisions were made that affected people within the institution, Jamie’s competence was called into question but these hard decisions were needed for the survival of the institution.

Jamie acknowledged that the role of president can be a lonely one. During challenging times Jamie noted a lack of colleagues and supports. Formal training, such as that offered through Universities Canada for new presidents, is helpful to a point and offers an opportunity to hear the perspectives of others. Similarly, connecting with colleagues in other institutions offers a sounding board with people living a similar experience. More beneficial to Jamie, though, was influencing the appointment of new members to the board so that skilled board members, experienced in good governance practice, replaced existing members when they retired. In this way, Jamie was able to nurture a more strategic and supportive board that understands governance.

Jamie returned to the theme of the nature of the role of university president and how poorly understood it is. Because presidents are required to spend so much time on activities external to the institution, faculty feel that the president is disengaged. “I think there are a lot of professors who feel that here is nobody at the helm who knows what it means to be a university” (personal interview). In Jamie’s view, the more externally-focused the role becomes, the more anxious faculty will become about their institutions and the more they will agitate for co-management of the institution.

When asked unexpected elements of the role, Jamie responded that the level of anxiety that change can trigger in people was surprising. “And I was definitely surprised by, I’d say, the violence that people can express when they feel that they can’t cope with change” (personal interview).

When asked what advice Jamie would offer to the board of an institution transitioning to new a new president, Jamie ventured that boards need help in understanding how to effectively assess what they require in the next president and how to effectively assess candidates. “Board members say they want to hire X and yet they hire Y. I’ve seen it done many, many times. I’ve seen examples around me. So I’m puzzled. Because I think most of the boards will tend to hire somebody who was authoritative and not necessarily in a good way” (personal interview).

Jamie also noted that change takes time, be it correcting a budget situation or turning around institutional culture. “You need to have strategic patience and a lot of board members don’t have it. And this is when things go awry because they fire the president because they think the president doesn’t know what they’re doing and then it creates more havoc, so patience is required” (personal interview).

With respect to new presidents, Jamie observed that they must build relationships of trust with their boards. “The trust that you try to build with the board is paramount, because sometimes you need to be recommending very bold decisions and people need to be able to trust you, otherwise things go awry” (personal interview). Trust can be achieved by being transparent with the board and ensuring they have full information on the decisions they are asked to make. “So I find that I would rather put more out there than less because I want them to trust the process and to trust me and my team. And it goes both ways. I also need to trust them” (personal interview).

## **Morgan’s transition experience**

Morgan is the president of a small university and joined the institution following a failed presidency. At the time of Morgan’s appointment, an interim president who was not a candidate for president was leading the institution. Prior to taking on this position, Morgan had received numerous calls from executive search firms about leadership opportunities at other institutions but had turned them down because of commitments to family. Morgan’s current position was attractive, however, because it is with Morgan’s alma mater and Morgan had a strong interest to give back to an institution that was personally meaningful.

Morgan brought significant leadership experience in academia to the role and, in Morgan's view, senior-level academic administrative experience is a prerequisite for the role of president. Decanal positions at large institutions, for example, are typically responsible for budgeting, hiring, capital campaign fundraising, government relations and external relations, all of which provide skills and experience that are directly transferable to the role of president. Senior positions also provide a lens into the broader operations of a university and the stressors it faces through leading or participating in committees. Morgan observed that participating in committees or chairing them offered a view of the university as a whole, and its issues and challenges, and provided the necessary grounding for advancement to the president's office.

When asked about the role that the board played during Morgan's the transition, Morgan noted that, generally, boards are challenged to understand the institutions they govern. "If you haven't had a lived experience of being in a university, it takes a while to appreciate it" (personal interview). Morgan cited the collegial governance of universities as a significant challenge for many board members who come from the corporate world. "From the outside corporate perspective they can't understand the internal academic governance" (personal interview). Additionally, Morgan noted that departments and faculties will view resources allocation decisions as contests between departments. Boards tend not to understand this and need to be better educated about the internal dynamics of universities.

Morgan reflected that university governance is complicated by the fact that board membership changes frequently. This can be a challenge for a president, especially for new presidents still finding their feet. Presidents must recognize that board renewal means that board education is an ongoing activity, and that the president plays a key role in educating the board. Recalling Morgan's own transition experience and the challenges that arose, Morgan observed that boards require education in board governance and cited several examples of lapses in governance that became apparent early in Morgan's tenure as president. In one instance, the board acted outside of the scope of its authority and took actions that resulted in the loss a key member of the executive team before Morgan arrived on campus. This individual had a deep knowledge of the institution and would have been a valuable resource to Morgan during the transition and beyond. Instead, Morgan arrived on campus only to discover that a priority action would be to recruit a new team member. Reflecting on another example, Morgan observed that boards must be cognizant of good governance practice, and aware of conflict of interest and the detrimental effect an undeclared conflict can have on the governance of an institution. Search committee members, for example, must not have prior relationships with candidates for the role of president. An external expert can be a valuable resource and lend credibility to board discussions about good governance practice; for example, a respected former university president with a track record of success can be a positive contributor to a discussion of the roles and spheres of responsibility between the board and the president.

Full disclosure of all issues is critical for a new president. Morgan noted that the position brief used during a search provides only a limited perspective on the opportunity. Personal conversations with the search consultant, board members who are part of the search committee, and members of the university community with whom candidates are able to meet during the interview process can all help candidates to develop a realistic picture of the institution's strengths, opportunities and challenges. In Morgan's case, the interim president was particularly helpful in providing perspective on the challenges that the next president would need to address.

Prior to joining the university, Morgan spent a week on campus. With the advice of the interim president, Morgan developed an agenda of priority meetings, which included the vice-presidents and the union executive. This time enabled Morgan to begin establishing relationships, as well as identify and begin planning for the priority initiatives that would drive Morgan's agenda once Morgan officially started in the role of president. One of the priority challenges to overcome was a climate of distrust between the faculty and the administration. In particular, women

faculty members were deeply suspicious of the administration because, in the history of the university, a woman had never occupied a senior leadership position. Additionally, a strategic plan needed to be developed, the administrative structure required modernizing, and steps needed to be taken to improve communications across the institution.

The role of president can be a lonely role and Morgan noted that presidents must find ways to build support networks outside of their institutions. Morgan, for example, attended the program for new presidents by Universities Canada, participates in provincial and regional networks of university presidents, and frequently speaks on the phone with colleagues. Morgan recommended that new presidents take the time to attend national and regional meetings with other presidents as these networks can offer valuable support. “I noticed that some new presidents don’t do that and I think it’s a mistake for them not to, because it’s like a support group of a kind” (personal interview).

Morgan noted the importance of being visible on campus and has adopted the practice of meeting with academic units every second year to hear their concerns and issues and also to share with them the broader institutional concerns and issues. Morgan observed that this is easier in a smaller institution but ways can be found to scale such meetings to a larger institution; for example, by organizing meetings at the faculty level instead of by department. Morgan also makes a point of attending many student and faculty events, such as sporting events, lectures and faculty book launches. Despite these efforts, Morgan received feedback in an interim review that Morgan needs to be more visible on campus. Morgan suggested that perhaps faculty are not attending events outside of their own fields and, consequently, do not see Morgan but also noted that the job of a president is very busy and does not allow much time for activities such as walking the campus and having coffee in a public location.

Morgan mused that faculty and the university community probably do not fully appreciate the scope of the role of president and how busy the job is. They do not, for example, appreciate the importance of the external relations work in attracting scholarships, grants and partnerships to the institution. While this is a difficult gap to bridge, it can be narrowed by activities such as campus-wide strategic planning processes and by inviting faculty to participate in committees, such as president’s advisory committees established to address particular issues.

With respect to work/life balance, Morgan observed that new presidents should be aware that the first year in an appointment is particularly demanding so it is important to be disciplined and schedule vacation time. Morgan noted that restorative time is critical to being effective on the job.

When asked what advice Morgan would offer to a new president, Morgan emphasized the importance of paying attention to governance and the board. Morgan stressed the need to establish a strong relationship and good channels of communication with the board chair. The president and board chair should be readily accessible to each other with a relationship based on open and informed communication. Morgan advised that presidents should take board meetings and their report to the board very seriously. The report to the board should be structured such that it keeps the board informed of progress on both the institution’s strategic objectives and the president’s personal strategic objectives, “so that you’re not leaving it to the end of the year. There should be constant feedback and interaction” (personal interview). Lastly, Morgan observed that the functioning of the secretariat is critical to the president’s relationship with the board and the board chair.

## Alex's transition experience

Alex was an internal candidate for the role of president in a small institution.

Despite a deep love of academic work, Alex had always had an interest in administration and sought opportunities to practice those skills. When the institution began its presidential search, Alex was encouraged to stand as a candidate. Despite this encouragement, the search was a serious and credible search, open to external candidates, and Alex felt that the validation of a rigorous search was important to building Alex's credibility as a leader in the eyes of the university community.

Alex's background is in the fine arts and it was apparent during the search that the search committee was seeking candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Alex observed, however, that "the board made it pretty clear to me early on to me that we want you to sound like a president. We don't want you to sound like an academic or an artist, right? You can have a little bit of artistic language on the side but can you make sure that firstly you sound like a president? (personal interview). Considering this expectation from the board, Alex questioned whether boards are really willing to reconsider what they look for in a president, despite their stated intention to embrace diversity. Donors and other stakeholders also found Alex's atypical background disconcerting, with some initially questioning Alex's abilities with respect to budgeting and working with policy.

Because of Alex's status as an internal candidate, Alex knew the institution's culture and most of the issues and challenges that the institution faced. Alex's personal challenge was in defining the role. "What I didn't always have clarity of is, what's my job and what's your job, even in terms of what I should be taking forward and initiating and what the VPs should be doing... ..I wish I would have asked that question a little more directly" (personal interview).

On further reflection, Alex observed that trust is required between the president and vice-presidents if they are to talk openly about roles and responsibilities and where the lines fall between the president and the executive team. Alex suggested that it would be beneficial for presidents to intentionally reflect on those relationships and seek feedback from the executive team and other senior leaders in the institution about those issues that the president should either give more attention or delegate to others. In this way, crisis could be avoided because everyone involved understands the roles and scope of responsibility. Alex noted that the board could have played a role in supporting Alex by having an awareness of the value of regular feedback through a 360 degree review process.

Alex noted that the president's role can be isolating to the extent that it is difficult to find individuals with whom the president can work to explore ideas and brainstorm. Too often, when Alex has tried to talk through an idea with the objective of gaining greater clarity on the idea, the discussion has been perceived by the other participant as an assignment of work. Consequently, Alex has become acutely aware that the office of president carries a certain weight and those occupying the office need to be mindful of how others will perceive the president. To overcome the challenge of finding opportunities within the university for talking through ideas, Alex has turned to individuals who occupy leadership positions outside the institution.

With respect to university governance, Alex noted that the president must take an active role in educating the board about the institution. "The fact that the board is who hires the president and who does the monitoring of the president is very, very strange to me because unless I'm educating the board, they're really out of touch with what's going on... ..they are trying to read the dynamics and language of collaboration amongst us. If they see that as healthy, they trust us... ..It's almost as if they are monitoring the dynamics and whatever measure they have of the

institution than that they really can evaluate well the quality with which the president is working ” (personal interview).

The board insisted that Alex take a four month sabbatical before starting in the role of president. This allowed Alex to come into the new role with some separation from Alex’s previous identity within the institution. During this time, Alex attended the new president’s program through Universities Canada, met with other university presidents and became more familiar with elements of the institution that were outside of the scope of Alex’s previous position, for example, the legal and regulatory framework for the university. While Alex benefited from and appreciated the sabbatical, Alex noted that the board did not provide guidance on the types of activities that Alex should undertake during the sabbatical.

Alex observed that a challenging aspect of the role was learning how to write a report to the board the provided enough information for informed decision making without inviting the board to become involved in operational details. “I guess what I’m saying is risk management. Don’t give them too much information that would make them default to a managing position” (personal interview). Alex suggested that Universities Canada’s new president’s program would be improved by incorporating some information on how to write a report for a governing board.

Noting a certain fluidity in the role of president, Alex expressed an occasional desire for externally imposed structure. “Sometimes you wish for some sort of regularity besides the seasons of the year that could help you tick the boxes of things that really need to be done” (personal interview). Alex had expect to be much more deliberate in the allocation of time to certain activities. The nature of the job, however, has meant that Alex is more responsive to the moment at the expense of being able to plan a more structured schedule.

On the matter of morale and visibility on campus, Alex observed that it has been far easier than expected to earn the trust of the university community. “I think it surprised me how little it takes to earn and sustain trust. It’s basically take an interest in what people’s own individual work is and how they take pride in what they do for themselves. Take the time for small talk with staff and faculty. I have found that those little gestures earn an awful lot of trust” (personal interview). Alex is very intentional in selecting activities to attend on campus. While Alex has a natural inclination to favour some events over others, Alex ensure that events are scheduled from across the university’s programs.

When asked for final advice to a new president, Alex offered, “To be able to read yearnings into what people are saying they want to see. In other words, to be able to call something out, to be able to point to what they are saying without necessarily doing the things directly that they are asking for. And that capacity to hear the yearning as it emerges from the grass roots and to... and then to take it somewhere. And paint something beyond what they are already imagining. That is what I have found to be the most helpful as a way of both honouring, working with the real material of what people care about and taking it somewhere beyond what the institution is already doing. So living on that tightrope. But you have to really love being at that place. That would be my advice” (personal interview).

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This section of the report enumerated the findings from the policy analysis and reported the outcomes of the semi-structured interviews with nine university presidents who have successfully transitioned to the role of president. The next section will consider these findings in relation to the conceptual framework underpinning the research and the research questions.

## 6.0 Discussion and Analysis

### 6.1 Introduction

Royal Roads University anticipates transitioning to a new president in January 2019 and identified a need for a deeper understanding of smart practices in presidential transition to help guide the institution in this critical process. This study sought to answer the following research question:

What smart practices support the successful transition to a new university president?

This primary research question was further delineated by a series of supporting questions:

- What are the key features and considerations for the search process that have implications for the successful transition to a new president?
- What institutional supports and activities are required of a governing board post-appointment to support the transition to a new president?
- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president to undertake following appointment to ensure his or her success?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

The research questions were situated within a conceptual framework that considered transition as a process beginning with the first indication to a governing board that it needs to begin planning for a presidential transition and concluding when a new president is installed in the role of president and performing comfortably. In the conceptual framework, this process is embedded in the larger landscape of the Canadian post-secondary system, which underscores the need to consider broader contextual factors in leadership transition. The conceptual framework posits that the transition process requires deep engagement by the governing board and ongoing engagement with stakeholders. The framework incorporates concepts of systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, leadership transition, diversity and organizational culture as influences on the transition process.

The research draws on a review of university policy instruments relevant to presidential transition and elite interviews with serving university presidents. Six themes relevant to presidential transition emerged from the research and address the research questions:

- The relationship between the president and the board of governors
- The relationship between the president and the university community
- Transition: improving the search phase
- Transition: navigating the onboarding phase
- Personal effectiveness
- Leadership and diversity

A discussion and analysis of the key themes follows, and where appropriate links the themes to the literature review, the conceptual framework and the research questions. This section concludes with a revised conceptual framework.

## 6.2 Themes

### **The relationship between the president and the board of governors**

The relationship between the president and the board of governors was a dominant and recurring theme throughout the research and addresses the following research questions:

- What are the key features and considerations for the search process that have implications for the successful transition to a new president?
- What institutional supports and activities are required of a governing board post-appointment to support the transition to a new president?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

This theme relates most strongly to the onboarding phase of transition in the conceptual framework but also has implications for board activity prior to the appointment of a new president and into the long-term relationship between the president and board. The literature on leadership transition and stakeholder engagement underpins this theme and, from the findings, a series of practices emerged that should be included in a smart practice guide for presidential transition.

Congruent with Eden and Ackerman's (1998, as cited in Bryson, 2011) findings that powerful stakeholders with a high level of interest in an organization or issue will receive the greatest level of attention, the relationship between the president and board is a key priority for a new president. Similarly, Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008) find that new leaders must invest in relationship building not only with subordinates but also with superiors. For a president, the relationships with the board and board chair are the relationships with the greatest potential to impact the future trajectory of a presidency and, consequently, garner significant attention from a new president during the onboarding process and stretching into the balance of a presidency.

In their observations about their relationships with their boards and board chairs, research participants cited good governance practice as a critical success factor for transition. The research participants who identified significant challenges during transition linked those challenges to a lack of understanding on the part of the governing board about their role and responsibilities in relation to those of the president, which led to lapses in good governance practice. Examples of lapses included governing boards directing key personnel decisions, liaising directly with employees over management issues and decisions, and taking decisions immediately before the start of the new president's term that constrained the ability of the new president to lead, all of which served to undermine the authority of the president. Research participants also identified challenges with board members being in an undeclared position of conflict during the search process due to a pre-existing close relationship with another candidate for the position of president, and noted that this undermined the trust between the president and the board member following the president's appointment. At all times, presidents need the full support of their boards. If the board is seen not to support the president on key issues then the authority and leadership of the president are compromised.

Additionally, the research participants shared the view that governing boards are not well-versed in the institutions over which they exercise strategic and fiduciary oversight. Frequently, boards do not truly understand their institutions and, through the nature of their interactions with the university, are not positioned to develop a deep understanding. Further, the dynamics that govern institutional life are opaque to board members who frequently do

not appreciate the norms and mores of academia. The research participants reported that boards are challenged to grasp university governance and the role of the professoriate in relation to the governance of the institution. More than one president observed that boards are ill-equipped to make the significant decisions about leadership that they are called upon to make. As one president noted, “probably the people who least understand what is going on in an institution is the board members” (personal interview). This observation aligns with Paul’s (2015) argument that an understanding of institutional culture, including its norms around communication and how decisions are taken, is critical to effective leadership. Paul was referring to university presidents but the same argument could be applied to governing boards. This lack of understanding is further complicated by the observation of several presidents that boards do not appreciate that they do not know their institutions.

Turnover in board membership was also identified as a governance challenge. Though reducing the rate of turnover is largely outside the control of presidents, the research participants identified turnover as an unexpected challenge that contributes to the lack of a deep understanding on the part of board members of the institutions they serve. It also requires that presidents continually invest in relationship building and the ongoing education and orientation of board members.

The relationship between the president and the board chair was widely recognized as a relationship of prime importance, especially for a new president trying to make sense of a new institution, or make sense of a new role within a known institution; however, similar to the observations about turnover amongst board members, the research participants reported high rates of turnover in the position of chair. One president, for example, had reported to three different chairs in a six year span and was preparing to welcome a fourth chair. Frequent turnover in the chair has the potential to add a level of complication to this important relationship.

Just as boards and board chairs need to be well-grounded in university governance practice, so, too, do new presidents. One president observed that there are few opportunities to learn about university governance outside of the role of the president and that, depending on the prior roles held by the incumbent, a new president may have had very limited exposure to a university’s governing board. This observation highlights the importance of boards and board chairs having a good understanding of their roles so that they can be a resource to a new president. If a board is unclear in its role and responsibilities and hires a new president with limited prior exposure to a governing board, then it would be reasonable to expect an increase in the incidence of challenges experienced in the transition process related to governance.

The research participants also counselled patience to both boards and new presidents. Several participants spoke of the transition period as extending several years into their first terms of appointment. Chief among the factors they cited was the time required for the management team to coalesce around a shared strategic vision for the institution. Consequently, both presidents and boards must have realistic expectations of what can be achieved and take a long term perspective on goal achievement. One president observed that a board usually engages in a rigorous re-appointment process when considering whether to re-appoint a president for a subsequent term. At that time, the board has an opportunity to re-assess the fit and adequacy of the incumbent and has the option to forego re-appoint in favour of searching for a new president.

Transparency emerged from the research as a final sub-theme related to the relationship between the president and the board. Research participants spoke of the need for presidents to fully disclosure information to their boards so that boards have adequate information and context for decision making. One research participant noted that, for example, the president’s report to the board should be closely tied to and report on the strategic priorities of the institution and invite opportunities for the board to engage with issues at the appropriate, strategic level and at the right moment. Several participants spoke of the need to keep the board apprised of emerging issues and that the

board chair should be informed of all possibilities of negative public exposure before they occur. There should be no surprises.

Similarly, research participants noted that boards must be equally transparent with presidents. Presidents should receive regular and candid feedback on both institutional and personal performance through, for example, formally structured performance review systems that provide rigorous, timely and relevant feedback, and informally through regular meetings between the president and the chair. This recommendation is supported by Charan *et al* (2001, as cited in Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008), who find that boards can overcome a president's reluctance to seek feedback by implementing structured feedback mechanisms. Overall, research participants agreed that the success of a president is contingent on the president paying close attention to the needs of the governing board and that the effort to meeting this need should not be underestimated. This relationship should be supported by a commitment to transparency on the parts of both the president and the governing board.

### **The relationship between the president and the university community**

A second key theme emerging from the research relates to the president's relationship with the university community and addresses the following research questions:

- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president to undertake following appointment to ensure his or her success?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

This theme relates most directly to the onboarding phase of transition but also has implication for a president's long-term performance in the role. A series of practices for inclusion in a smart practice guide emerged from the findings related to this theme and are supported by the literature on organizational culture, leadership transition and stakeholder engagement.

Culture provides a roadmap to norms that govern the interactions of individuals within an institution (Giberson, T. R. et al, 2009; Hartnell, C. A., Kinicki, A. J, Lambert, L. S., Fugate, M. & Doyle Corner, P., 2016); however, one of the greatest challenges for a new president is learning the institution's culture (Paul, 2015). To address this challenge, Smerek (2013) argues that leaders engage in a process of sensemaking during onboarding and notes that the success of the process depends on the quality of the president's relationships with constituencies within the university. The literature on stakeholder engagement suggests that a president should take into account the level of interest of the various constituencies when planning engagement strategies for the university community (Achterkamp & Vos, 2007; Eden & Ackerman, 1998, as cited in Bryson, 2011). Together, these ideas are strongly reflected in the research participants' comments on their strategies for engaging with and learning about the university community.

Congruent with the literature on stakeholder engagement that argues that different stakeholders require different engagement strategies (Achterkamp & Vos, 2007), the research participants cited a variety of strategies intended to support relationship building with the university community and demonstrate engagement with the institution. These strategies also create opportunities for the university community to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the president. These strategies included targeted and purposeful attendance at university events, engagement through informal channels such as having coffee in the student commons and walking the campus, providing opportunities for members of the university community to sit on various advisory committees, and creating channels for information exchange through regularly scheduled president's breakfasts/coffee sessions, lecture series, townhalls,

blogs and webpages. Several research participants reported successful outcomes from establishing a schedule of regular meetings with faculties or departments to hear their concerns, answer questions and share information on challenges the institution may be facing. Consistent with the need for transparency with boards, research participants reported that being as transparent as possible with the university community and making information easily available was an effective strategy for dispelling myths and building trust.

While the research participants spoke of the importance of building strong connections to the university community they also shared the view that the role of the contemporary university president is not well understood. They noted that the various constituencies within the university do not appreciate either the scope of the role or the degree to which it is externally focused. In particular, the research participants reported that they are perceived as being away from campus too much and, consequently, may be judged as “out of touch” with the university. For a new president, this lack of understanding of the role presents a significant challenge. At a time when a new president is attempting to establish important relationships, develop a profile on campus and demonstrate how the president will add value to the institution, the expectations of the university community may be at odds with the reality of the demands of the role. Consequently, the research participants argued that presidents need to develop deliberate strategies to demonstrate the value-add of the role and how they are contributing in a positive way to their institutions.

### **Transition: improving the search process**

A third theme emerging from the research relates to improving the search process of a presidential transition and addresses the following research questions:

- What are the key features and considerations for the search process that have implications for the successful transition to a new president?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

This theme relates most directly to the search and selection phase of transition and draws in the search committee and stakeholders as key participants. Informed by both the research findings and the literature on systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, organizational culture and diversity, a series of practices emerged from the findings for inclusion in a smart practice guide.

Adopting a systems thinking perspective enables the viewer of the system to make interconnections between events and to draw conclusions about causality (Powel Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015). A systems perspective also has the effect of drawing boundaries around an issue, which then determines the stakeholders to the issue (Cabrera, Colosi & Lobdell, 2008). The literature on stakeholder engagement contends that effective stakeholder engagement strategies create opportunities for different stakeholders to engage at different stages of an issue and with different levels of involvement, depending upon their interest in the issue (Achterkamp & Vos, 2007). An effective engagement strategy adopts inclusive practices that support broad participation by stakeholders (Powel Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015). Organizational culture theories emphasize the importance of an understanding of organizational culture to leader success (Tierney, 2008) while the diversity literature highlights the value of a multiplicity of views in decision-making (Dunn-Jensen, Jensen, Calhoun & Ryan, 2016; Gupta & Raman, 2014; Kossek, Su & Wu, 2017; Phillips, 2014; Rhode & Packer, 2014). These concepts suggest that the search process is a key opportunity to engage stakeholders in the transition process, build support for an incoming president and provide candidates for the role of president an opportunity to deepen their understanding of institutional culture.

Specifically, activities that include the participation of important stakeholder groups in the search process have implications for the future integration of a new president into the university. The value of inclusion is underscored by an example offered by one research participant who described the outcome of a situation where a board failed to consider how a candidate for an interim president appointment would be received by the university community. The appointment, though on an interim basis, led to a deterioration of the relationship between faculty and the administration, and created significant distrust on the part of faculty members that the new president had to overcome once appointed. Had the board taken a systems thinking perspective and expanded its perceptions of relevant stakeholders whose views should be considered, the board may have made different choices and avoided undermining the relationships between faculty and the university's administration.

From the policy review it can be concluded that university boards are alive to the need to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the early part of a presidential search. Virtually all institutions use representative search committees to bring a multiplicity of perspectives to the task of identifying and recommending preferred candidates for the role of president to the board of governors. Based on the information available on university websites, board members form the majority of search committee membership in only 11 of 40 search committees, or in 27.5% of cases. In 77.5% of search committees, non-board members form the majority of members (See Appendix 7). That a majority of committees comprise non-board members may be a reflection of the observation that board members are not well-versed in the culture and norms of their institutions and community members who are closer to the ground may be better positioned to assess a candidate's suitability for the role of president in the context of their particular institution.

It is also common practice for the university community to be invited to provide comments on the attributes desired in candidates for president, as well as the priorities for the incoming president. A systems thinking lens applied to the community consultation suggests that early consultation may help to build support within the university community for the next president by drawing members of the university community into the decision-making process in a way that is appropriate to their interest in the issue and ability to give meaningful input. The community consultation is also a key opportunity for participating board members to gain a deeper understanding of the expectations of the president from the perspective of the university community, including the qualities and attributes that the next university president should possess. This touches on the earlier observation that board members are perceived as not understanding the institutions over which they have governance responsibility.

Despite the well-established practices of community consultation and the use of a representative search committee, the search process could be enhanced to improve the outcomes for the institution. The community consultation is typically a process to seek the input of the community but it could also be used to educate the university community about the role of the contemporary university president and, correspondingly, the breadth of skills and experiences required for successful leadership. Early efforts to build an understanding of the role of president could alleviate later perceptions that a president is not meeting the expectations of stakeholder groups and accompanying accusations that the president is disengaged from the university.

The search process would also benefit from improvements to the quality and types of information made available to candidates about the institution. Participants noted that the role profile is essentially a marketing document and not indicative of the institution's culture. Knowledge of institutional culture, however, is critical information for candidates assessing whether the position is a fit for them personally. While an individual may thrive in one environment, that same individual may find leadership in a different context extremely challenging and difficult to navigate (Tierney, 2008). One participant noted that sourcing out and viewing online videos of presentations by members of the university's leadership team to the university community provided a better sense of the university's culture than any of the written documents provided to candidates. This participant advised, "First of all, really do

everything you possibly can to understand the institution and its culture, ideally before you apply for the job. If that isn't possible, before you accept the job. And if you're still in doubt, certainly before you start the job" (personal interview).

In a similar vein, full disclosure to candidates of challenges and opportunities is critical to candidates considering the role. The majority of the research participants cited examples of key issues that were not disclosed prior to the new president arriving on campus. Such oversights can lead to circumstances in which a president may be caught unaware and ill-prepared to respond to a challenge.

The role of the executive search consultant should also be considered when looking for ways to strengthen the search process. Particularly with respect to diversity, the research participants observed that executive search firms need to find new models for searching out candidates and to think more broadly, and to encourage search committees to think more broadly, about the skills and experiences that are required of a president, and how candidates might present and demonstrate those skills. These observations echo the literature on unconscious bias and in-group favouritism that find that systems tend to perpetuate themselves (Benedick & Nunes, 2013; Rhode & Packel, 2014), and support calls for new ways of approaching candidate searches.

### **Transition: navigating the onboarding phase**

A fourth theme emerging from the research relates to the onboarding phase of a presidential transition and addresses the following research questions:

- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president to undertake following appointment to ensure his or her success?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

Within the conceptual framework, this theme relates to the transition team and the onboarding phase and indicates a role for stakeholders during onboarding. The literature on leadership transition and stakeholder engagement provides context for the issues related to this theme and a series of smart practices intended to support a successful onboarding emerged from the research.

The research participants spoke of transition as being more than onboarding, and a more engaged process than many boards likely appreciate. In keeping with stakeholder theories that point out that the perspective taken will define who is counted as a stakeholder (Cabrera, Colosi & Lobdell, 2008), the research participants spoke of transition and onboarding activities as a process that touches on all areas of the institution and extends beyond the bounds of the institution.

Also, several presidents shared the view that transition can be a multi-year process, depending on the context of the institution. As MacKinnon (2014) and Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008) find, external hires into the senior leadership role have a difficult time transitioning to their roles while they must simultaneously learn about their new institutions. The research participants noted that it can take several years for a new president to build support in the executive team and across the university for a new president's vision for the institution. This observation is supported by Shen and Cannella's (2002) findings that external CEO hires may be hampered in their ability to implement their own vision because members of the executive team feel an allegiance to the previous CEO. Consequently, the research participants stressed the importance of both boards and new presidents having realistic expectations of what can be achieved in a first term of appointment.

Though the research suggests that it is appropriate to take a long view of transition, the early days of onboarding are critical and require concentrated attention. New presidents have a relatively short period of time in which to create positive relationships and demonstrate their commitment to the institution. Research participants suggested, variously, that new presidents should enter the role with a plan for the first 3 months, the first 100 days, or the first year. If this is to be accomplished, then new presidents need an opportunity to engage with their new institutions to better understand the cultures, issues and key relationships.

A particularly valuable time in this process can be described as the president-designate phase, or the time following selection and appointment to the role of president but before taking up the office. While this particular phase in transition was not addressed in the literature on leadership transition, the majority of research participants identified this time as an important opportunity to engage with stakeholders both within and outside the university community. They spoke of the value of spending time on campus while still relatively out of the spotlight and not in a position to take decisions or make commitments. For these presidents, investing time in the institution before starting in the role of president enabled them to develop a deeper understanding of the institution and, correspondingly, a clear vision for their first 100 days (or first year, as the case may be) in the role of president. Essentially, they could “hit the ground running”. Those who had this opportunity described it as invaluable to the success of their transition and emphasized that institutions should take advantage of this opportunity whenever possible.

Whether the incoming president is able to take advantage of the president-designate phase or must wait until moving into the role of president before undertaking onboarding activities, a key objective of the process is the act of sense-making (Smerek, 2013). Sense-making is a process of engaging with members of the university community and stakeholders outside the institution to make sense of the institution. The research participants spoke of being exposed to a variety of voices, each speaking its own truth of the institution. For a new president, the challenge is discerning which narrative is trustworthy. In this regard, research participants noted that the participation of the outgoing president can be a valuable resource, providing context and background to frame the issues coming forward. Smerek (2013) finds that the administrative team can also be invaluable in the sense-making process and research participants identified the president’s executive assistant, the director of the president’s office and the university secretary as key resources to a new president. More than one research participant noted the value of the people in these positions to transition because of the depth of institutional memory that they usually hold.

New presidents will also benefit from advice on key stakeholders and in setting a strategic meeting agenda so that key meetings happen in the early stages of transition while less pressing meetings are scheduled at later dates. This prioritization applies to both internal and external stakeholders, and a transition team can be a valuable resource in identifying key stakeholders to prioritize.

If the outgoing president is a willing participant, she or he can be instrumental in bridging relationships with external stakeholders and supporters of the university. This observation is supported by Westphal *et al* (2006), who find that new leaders will try to adopt relationships with organizations in the external environment from the outgoing leader. These relationships include stakeholders such as alumni, donors, friends and supporters of the institution and different levels of government. Several research participants reported that they were surprised by the quantity of this type of activity that rests in the president’s office and a willing outgoing president can be helpful in creating connections for the incoming president.

The activities and challenges associated with onboarding highlight the need for a strong transition team to advise and support a new president. The policy review revealed that the use of a formally constituted transition team may become a fixture in the university sector as more institutions move towards adopting policies that require the establishment of broad-based transition teams. The membership of a transition team may include senior academic

leaders, professors representing the breadth of the institution's faculties, staff members from key business units, communications professionals, the president's executive assistant, the university secretary and members of the board of governors. Individual institutions will, however, need to determine membership in light of their individual institution's culture and structures.

## **Personal effectiveness**

Personal effectiveness emerged as a fifth, key theme of the research and responds to the questions:

- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president to undertake following appointment to ensure his or her success?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

This theme relates most directly to the onboarding phase of transition and draws on the literature on leadership transition, stakeholder engagement and organizational culture. In this domain, research participants, mining their rich experience and with the benefit of hindsight, offered valuable advice to new presidents on a number of practices intended to enhance their effectiveness in the role of president. Though comments were offered in the context of a new president learning a new institution and developing competency in the role, the practices have application beyond transition and support a president's ongoing fulfilment of the role. Under the banner of personal effectiveness, the comments of research participants can be categorized in three areas: skill development, relationships with others and relationship with self.

Beginning with skill development, Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008) find that a key focus of an effective leadership transition is learning and information gathering, and research participants confirmed the importance of this aspect of transition. In particular, they observed that understanding university governance is a challenge not only for board members but also for new presidents, since few roles in the institution provide a lens into board governance and the dynamics of working with a governing board. From the perspective of a new president, developing a keen understanding of university governance is a critical element to success.

Research participants also noted the value of formal training such as Harvard's Seminar for New Presidents or the program provided by Universities Canada for new presidents. More than one research participant observed that some new presidents do not take advantage of these opportunities but stressed that early investment in these programs will bring long term benefits.

In terms of relationships with others, Smerk (2013) asserts that establishing quality relationships is foundational to a president's success in achieving objectives but culture is implicated in relationship building as it provides the structure and guideposts for interaction within an organization (Giberson, T. R. et al, 2009; Hartnell, C. A., Kinicki, A. J., Lambert, L. S., Fugate, M. & Doyle Corner, P., 2016). In a sense, culture sets the framework for relationships. Research participants reported, for example, that some challenges will be worth pursuing while other are best left alone because the institution is not yet receptive to change in those areas. A new president must be able to read the culture, discern opportunities to move the institution forward and be able to build the relationships necessary to mobilize resources to action. In seemingly contradictory advice, however, research participants also counselled new presidents to recognize the weight of the office of president and the power that it carries. More than one research participant described incidents of musing aloud about an idea only to find that the musing set off a series of unintended activities.

Research participants observed that context matters to relationships. Different stakeholder will have different understandings and expectations of the role of president. As well, different circumstances and institutional stressors will call for different approaches to fulfilling the role. Consequently, the president must be something of a shape-shifter, able to adapt to different expectations and circumstances. New presidents can bridge the divergent expectations of stakeholders and build quality relationships by acting from their values and their principles, and by being genuine in their engagement with others, both within and outside the institution.

Just as stakeholders hold varying views of the role of president, so too will different individuals who hold the position of president. In other words, there is more than one way to be a president. For a new president's direct reports, this can be a challenging situation. They may have previously reported to a president with very different ideas of how the role of president should be enacted. For new presidents, then, clarity in relationships and expectations of others, especially with direct reports, is paramount. Research participants observed that presidents and their direct reports need a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities and what falls in the scope of the president and what falls in the realm of the direct reports. This is supported by Manderscheid and Ardichvili's (2008, p. 125) finding that new leader success is dependent on establishing a clear understanding of expectations with direct reports.

The literature on CEO transition suggests that external CEO hires are associated with higher rates of turnover in the executive team (Friedman & Saul, 1991; Helmich & Brown, 1972, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015), and that a new CEO may quickly move to replace senior executives (Helmich & Brown, 1972, and Kelly, 1980, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 462), especially those who are aligned with the former CEO (Hayes et al, 2006, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, p. 462). Despite the findings of the literature review, the research participants recommended that a new president adopts a different tactic. Though some turnover at the executive level may occur and even be necessary, new presidents should not move quickly to replace members of the executive team. Instead, the research participants recommended that new presidents recognize the strength and institutional memory that exists within the institution and the executive team and build on those strengths.

Presidents must also be effective communicators. As one research participant observed, "... people are persuaded by people who are effective communicators" (personal interview). Chief among the communication skills that a president should demonstrate are listening skills. The ability to listen will serve a new president well and demonstrate a humbleness and willingness to learn about the institution. "If you aren't a listener, learn to be one", as one president put it. Research participants also recommend that new presidents develop the habit of publicly recognizing the work of others. One participant observed, "Everyone in the institution is looking for acknowledgement."

In terms of the relationship with oneself, the role can also be a lonely role and new presidents must find support networks outside of their institutions. Research participants noted that the role of president is an isolating role because presidents do not have colleagues in the institution with whom they can candidly share all of the challenges and frustrations that may arise. External networks of support can be a valuable resource to a president and offer fresh perspective on issues.

New presidents also benefit from practicing patience. Change can be a slow process and the collegial nature of universities means that decisions and actions cannot always be taken quickly. New presidents must be realistic about what can be accomplished in a first term of appointment. A realistic assessment of what goals are achievable is tied to an understanding of culture and what the institution is open to embracing.

Lastly, new presidents will benefit from a personal commitment to attending to personal health. Though only one president spoke directly to this issue and raised it as an important recommendation for new presidents, virtually all of the research participants described the job of university president as a persona that they never remove. They spoke of the requirement for evening and weekend commitments on top of the regular work day, as well as the requirement for travel, all of which suggests that work/life balance is a challenge for a university president. One research participant noted that presidents must take an extended vacation each year far from the university as this is the only opportunity to really step away from the role. Another noted that attending to personal health can bring upside benefits for the institution. A president can influence an organization's culture by modelling work-life balance and taking time out during the day for exercise and breaks.

## **Leadership and diversity**

In the conceptual framework, diversity was proposed as a key consideration throughout the transition process and as a theme it relates to all of the research questions:

- What are the key features and considerations for the search process that have implications for the successful transition to a new president?
- What institutional supports and activities are required of a governing board post-appointment to support the transition to a new president?
- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president to undertake following appointment to ensure his or her success?
- What practices emerging from the foregoing questions should be included in a smart practice guide to presidential transition for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors?

As universities respond to the call to create more diverse and inclusive learning communities, a presidential transition process presents an opportunity to further these objectives. The literature on diversity argues that more diverse groups results in better decision-making (Phillips, 2014, p. 43; Rhode & Packel, 2014), which suggests that diversity should be a key consideration in forming the search committee that will be responsible for identifying preferred candidates to recommend to the governing board and, more generally, as a factor in selecting candidates to serve on an institution's board. The literature review also highlighted bias, both implicit and unconscious, as an influence that limits opportunities for under-represented groups to progress through an organization and gain the experience necessary for advancement, and leads to negative but unsubstantiated assessments of job performance of some segments of society (Bendick & Nunes, 2013; Buell Hirsch, 2017, p. 48; Rhode & Packel, 2014). These findings suggests that boards will benefit from training in recognizing unconscious bias.

While some research participants offered comments on diversity in presidential search and transition that are congruent with the literature on the topic, the response rate on this theme was low relative to other issues raised by the research participants. Those participants who commented on diversity reported, for example, that diversity should be a goal for the pool of candidates considered for the role of president but noted that this goal remains largely remains elusive. Their observations are supported by Cafley (2015) and Turpin, de Decker & Boyd (2014), who noted that women account for only 20% of university presidents. Women, however, represent only one dimension of diversity. Strategies are also needed to increase the participation of individuals who represent other dimensions of diversity (Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015a).

The research participants observed that presidential search briefings sound remarkably similar regardless of the institution seeking a new president. Research participants suggested that boards may have a preconceived image of a university president and what constitutes an appropriate leadership style. One research participant noted, "I'm sure

you've run into people who you look at and go, this is the quintessential president. He's the guy. He looks the part, he sounds the part", while another reported that the board of the institution asked that the president "sound presidential" when representing the institution. Research participants suggested that boards need to consider new conceptions of leadership. Search committees and boards should broaden their understanding of what constitutes relevant preparatory experience and be open to candidates with atypical qualifications. Search committees should require that executive search firms provide a diversity of candidates and search firms should develop creative strategies to reach out to traditionally under-represented demographics. This last suggestion is supported by Eden and Ackerman (1998, as cited in Bryson, 2011), who argue that methods of stakeholder engagement must consider factors such as interest and power, and that engagement with some stakeholders will require targeted outreach. More generally, boards and universities need to pay attention to the internal processes by which the leadership potential of all employees is recognized and nurtured to build an internal pool of talent for leadership positions. This observation is supported by Rhode and Packel (2014), who find that diverse groups are underrepresented in the pipeline to leadership positions and that organizations' policies may unintentionally favour some employee groups over others in terms of providing access to experience that supports leadership development.

### **6.3 Bringing it together: the questions, literature review, conceptual framework and findings**

The purpose of this study is to identify smart practices to support presidential transition in a university setting. A literature review explored themes of systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, leadership transition, diversity and organizational culture as they relate to presidential transition. A conceptual model for leadership transition was conceived based on the literature review that incorporated and reflected the findings of the literature review. The framework situates leadership transition in the broader context of the post-secondary landscape, taking into account the changing nature of the role and the increasing scope of expectations placed on university presidents today. It highlights the need for a deliberate focus on activities related to valuing diversity and ameliorating unconscious bias through the search, selection and onboarding phases of transition, acknowledges the value of stakeholders throughout transition, and underscores the primary responsibility of a governing board in relation to these activities.

The research for this study consisted of a review of policy documents related to presidential transition currently in use in Canadian universities and a series of elite interviews with serving university presidents. Through the policy review, key practices were identified that are currently in use by Canadian universities during presidential searches. A key finding from the policy review is that universities may be moving toward a general practice of establishing robust transition teams to support presidential transitions.

Through the elite interviews, research participants confirmed that they enact the role of president within a larger system and are influenced by forces emanating from that system. Similarly, they confirmed that activities that occur early in the search process have implications for success later in the onboarding phase and beyond. They confirmed that stakeholder engagement is critical throughout the transition process and that the board of governors is a key partner throughout transition. Culture influences how a president is able to carry out the role and an understanding of institutional culture is critical to a president's success. While diversity was referenced as an important concern and goal, its relation to the transition process was not deeply explored, beyond the observation that universities continue to fall short in achieving their diversity objectives.

The research findings diverged from the literature review on three significant points. Firstly, a finding that was not apparent in the literature review but that emerged from the research is the suggestion that boards do not understand the institutions that they govern. Four of the nine research participants made specific reference to boards not understanding the institution or appreciating the collegial culture of university life, with three others noting that

boards are entirely reliant on the president for their knowledge of the institution. This finding indicates the need for boards and new presidents to prioritize ongoing education for the governing board.

Secondly, on the matter of executive team stability following a leadership change, the literature suggested that new leaders often replace members of the executive team as a means to achieve organizational goals and building support (Helmich & Brown, 1972; Keck & Tushman, 1993 and Kelly, 1980, as cited in Ma, Seidl & Guérard, 2015; Shen & Cannella, 2002). In contrast, the research participants suggest that new university presidents recognize the bench strength around them and capitalize on relationships with the existing executive team.

Thirdly, the literature failed to highlight the important opportunity that the president-designate phase presents to the transition process. This phase is not explicitly referenced in the literature on leadership transition yet this was an important and recurring subtheme related to the theme of onboarding within the university environment that emerged from the research. Based on the comments of research participants about the importance of the president-designate phase, an amended conceptual framework is proposed that incorporates the president-designate phase as a distinct phase in leadership transition within the university sector.

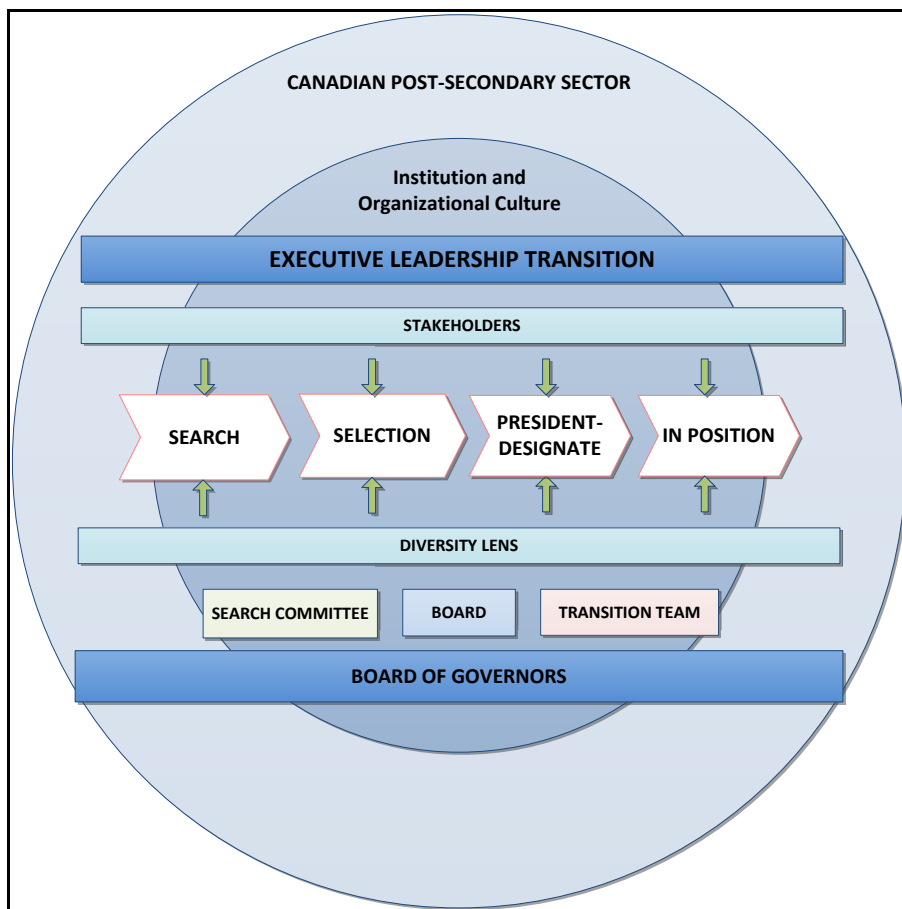


FIGURE 2 REVISED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IN A UNIVERSITY

The smart practices that emerged from the research and that are recommended to governing boards and new presidents to support a presidential transition are documented in Appendix 8, A Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition. Recommendations for their adoption are addressed in the next section of the report.

## 7.0 Recommendations

### 7.1 Introduction

This section of the report outlines eight recommendations for the Royal Roads University Board of Governors that are intended to promote a successful presidential transition at the university. The recommendations flow from analysis of practices currently in place at Canadian public universities, including established and emerging practices, and themes emerging from semi-structured elite interviews in which nine currently serving presidents of Canadian public universities reflected on their experiences of transitioning into the role of university president. Primary considerations in developing these recommendations was their potential for positive impact on the Royal Roads presidential transition and the ability of the institution to implement them. In keeping with the basic premise that smart practices are practices designed to leverage activities to achieve the greatest benefit from them, these recommendations point to ways in which the Board of Governors can take deliberate steps to support and enhance transition activities to achieve maximum benefit from them. It is recommended that the Board of Governors accept and implement each of the eight recommendations. The recommendations are followed by a brief discussion of institutional supports required for implementation.

### 7.2 Recommendations

#### Recommendation 1

- That the Royal Roads Board of Governors accepts the Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition as a guiding document for Royal Roads University's leadership transition.

The practices included in the Smart Practice Guide are a reflection of the transition experience of serving university presidents and practices currently in place in Canadian public universities. Consequently, the Guide offers the Board of Governors insights into practices that, from the perspective of a new president, may improve the transition process and support successful outcomes. The Guide is Appendix 8, A Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition.

#### Recommendation 2

- That the Board of Governors approve a budget of \$200,000 for transition related activities.

The Board of Governors will need to ensure that resources adequate to support an effective transition are in place. A preliminary budget estimate of \$200,000 to support the transition process has been developed. This figure includes \$150,000 for the search phase of transition and \$50,000 for the post-appointment phase of transition. The budget related to the search phase includes use of an executive search consultant and a community consultation, including administrative support to plan and coordinate the consultation process. The budget related to the post-appointment phase includes community engagement activities with the new president, meetings with key stakeholders, formal training for the new president and administrative support for a transition team. This budget is a guideline.

Recognizing that transition is an emergent process, it is recommended that the Board of Governors re-assess this budget once the new president has been selected and onboarding and orientation activities appropriate to the new president's experience and needs have been identified. Additionally, it is recommended that the Board of Governors periodically re-assess the transition objectives and activities to determine whether objectives are being achieved and

whether adjustments to the budget are required. The details of the preliminary budget are presented in Appendix 9, Preliminary Transition Budget.

### **Recommendation 3**

- That the Royal Roads University Board of Governors recognizes its integral role in leadership transition at Royal Roads University.

A governing board has the potential to be a significant contributor to a leadership transition in addition to its role in the selection of a new president. It is recommended that the Royal Roads Board of Governors formally commit to participation in activities in all phases of the presidential transition. Formal commitment will signal to the university community, external stakeholders and the incoming president the importance that the Board places on the transition process. The Board's commitment can be expressed in the early stages of transition through regular communications with the university community about the search process. Once a new president has been selected, the Board's support of a transition team, including assigning one or more members of the board to the team, would signal the importance that the Board places on the transition process.

### **Recommendation 4**

- That the Board of Governors holds a workshop on presidential transition.

Should the Board of Governors accept the Smart Practice Guide as a guiding document for the presidential transition, the practices described in the Guide will need to be adapted by Royal Roads University to reflect its unique culture, circumstances and challenges. The Board of Governors will benefit from a workshop on presidential transition, using the Smart Practice Guide as a basis for discussion. The workshop objectives should include developing a deeper understanding of the challenges new presidents face and how a board can support a successful leadership transition. The Board of Governors may wish to schedule the workshop as a topic for its October 2018 Retreat.

### **Recommendation 5**

- That the Board of Governors establishes a transition team to support the transition process.

A transition team comprising members of the Royal Roads University community should be established and the team provided with the Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition. The team should be advisory to the new president but the Board of Governors will need to establish channels for regular communication with the team. The team should be established as soon as practicable once a new president has been selected. Team members should be drawn from across the institution and selected for their knowledge of the institution and their ability to facilitate connections to a variety of constituencies. The team's terms of reference should provide for support to the new president for the first year of appointment, with the option for extension at the request of the new president.

### **Recommendation 6**

- That the incoming president is provided with a copy of the Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition.

The incoming president will benefit from early exposure to the advice on smart practices offered in the Smart Practice Guide. Once the candidate for president is selected, she or he should be provided with a copy of the Guide.

#### **Recommendation 7**

- That the Board of Governors supports and facilitates engagement between the transition team and the incoming president during the president-designate phase of transition.

The incoming president will benefit from early engagement with the university community, preferably during the president-designate phase of transition. To facilitate early engagement and capitalize on the president-designate phase of transition, meetings between the transition team and the incoming president should be scheduled as early as possible following the selection of the new president.

#### **Recommendation 8**

- That the Board of Governors conducts an assessment of the transition process one year after the start of the new president.

In the interests of continuous improvement, the Board of Governors should consider conducting an assessment of the transition process to understand its successes and opportunities for improvement. This assessment may inform future presidential transitions and may have implications for other executive-level transitions that the university may undertake.

### **7.3 Institutional supports for implementation**

The recommendations provided in this report are predicated on the Board of Governors accepting the Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition as the guiding document for the university's transition to new leadership in January 2019 and providing adequate resources to support a successful transition. The balance of the recommendations are presented in sequential order for implementation and align with the flow of the transition process. As noted in recommendation 2, a successful transition will require adequate resources if it is to succeed, but resources are not enough. The institution should prioritize supporting the transition process by recognizing that the individuals from within the university who support the search phase of transition and those who form the transition team will require some relief from other duties if they are to provide the input that will support a successful transition. If the need for accommodation is not recognized and granted, transition activities run the risk of becoming a secondary consideration in the context of a range of other demands.

## 8.0 Conclusion

This study sought to identify smart practices that support the successful transition to a new university president. In particular, it proposed transition as a concept beginning at the time a board is first made aware that a search for a new president is on the horizon and concluding when a new president reports having the institutional knowledge and resources in place to pursue the institution's priority strategic objectives. The role of the contemporary university president has evolved, however, to include responsibilities and stresses previously not associated with university leadership. These changes to the role and the challenges to which presidents must respond highlight the critical nature of the relationship between presidents and their boards, and require that each party approaches the relationship with a commitment to mutual support, respect, understanding and patience if our institutions are to thrive. Through the research a number of smart practices were identified that can be implemented along the transition continuum by governing boards and by new presidents to support a successful transition and to help nurture the president-board relationship and the president-university community relationship.

Chief among the findings is that executive leadership transition in a university environment is a longer and more involved process than is presented in the literature on leadership transition. Community consultation is a well-entrenched feature of a presidential search in a university, however, the concept of transition may be equated only with onboarding or orientation activities. The study bears out that transition in a university environment encompasses both activities, with the consultation process having downstream implications for the integration of a new president. Additionally, the support that is given to onboarding or orientation activities is often confined to the first 3 months, 100 days or possibly first year of appointment. While attention to this early window of onboarding is critical, research participants report that transition is a longer process extending beyond an initial orientation period. Transition, therefore, should be considered much more broadly than onboarding, early stage activities that occur in the search phase of a transition should be planned with future implications in mind and governing boards should be prepared to adopt a longer-term view of transition.

At cross-purposes to the finding that leadership transition in a university is a long and involved process is the observation that the board members who are ultimately responsible for presidential search and transition are generally drawn from business, government and non-profit backgrounds and lack experience in academia. Further, research participants reported that boards frequently do not understand the institutions that they govern and that they find the norms and mores of academia opaque. Consequently, their experience of executive level transitions does not typically include broad community consultation on the characteristics and qualities that an organization's next leader should possess. The importance of this element, the level of attention it requires, and the implications it has for the successful integration of a new president, may not be fully realized by board members. This means that a successful leadership transition requires that boards recognize the limitations of their experience and receive some education and orientation on presidential transition in the context of a university and, more generally, about the institutions they govern.

The research revealed that the university community has a limited understanding of the role of the president and that different constituencies will view the role differently. Yet in the community consultation process, community members are invited to provide input that will have bearing on the search and selection process. Just as board members are unfamiliar with transition activities in a university setting and require education about the process, the university community will benefit from education on the role of the president. The consultation process presents an opportunity to not only seek the input of the community but also share with them information about the role and the challenges that presidents face. Such information sharing may help to create a more realistic understanding of the

role. Despite this observation and the value that might accrue to the university and the new president, institutions may be challenged to find ways to effectively communicate the role of the president to the university community.

Another important finding is that the president-designate phase of transition presents a valuable opportunity for a new president. This phase, which is the period after an incumbent is selected but before the individual starts in the role of president, was not identified through the literature review but emerged from the interviews with the research participants. The research participants stressed the value of this period to a newly appointed president for the opportunity it offers to prepare for the role outside of the intense scrutiny that a president can expect once he or she starts in the role. Investment in the president-designate phase enables a president-designate to learn about the institution and prepare an informed plan for the early part of the presidency. Boards undertaking a presidential search should take into account the value of this period when entering contract negotiations and, where possible, make provisions for the incoming president to begin some of the critical orientation work during the president-designate phase.

The role of president is an inherently lonely role. Others within the institution report to the president, either directly or through a chain of command, and the president reports to the board. Consequently, the president of an institution lacks contemporaries with whom the president can have candid and confidential discussion. This phenomenon was identified in the literature review and confirmed by the research participants as a challenge. A complicating factor, though, is the reality that, frequently, university presidents must move to a new community to become a president. So, not only is the role of president inherently lonely, but also presidents find themselves in communities where they may have few social contacts. Taken together, these factors mean that the experience of being a university president can be isolating. New presidents should be aware of this reality and take active steps to build networks of support and boards should support presidents in this activity to the extent that they can.

The study finds that presidents and boards are partners in determining the success of institutional leadership but, as noted previously, boards have a limited understanding of the institutions that they govern. Additionally, governing boards experience frequent turnover in membership and in the role of board chair. These factors combine to make board education and orientation an ongoing but sometimes unexpected priority activity for presidents. For a new president who is still trying to gain a footing in the institution and learn about university governance, the added responsibility for orienting and educating board members can be particularly challenging.

Further areas for research also emerged from this study. In particular, diversity as it relates to university leadership is a key issue that would benefit from further research. Despite growing participation rates of women in academia, the university sector continues to lag in the diversity in its leadership, both in the participation of women as well as that of people who represent other dimensions of diversity. Further research is required to determine how to broaden the pool of applicants for these key leadership positions and to re-consider our conceptions of leadership.

The search process itself bears deeper examination. While smart practices emerged from this study that are intended to strengthen the search process it may be appropriate to consider in a more focused way how the search process might be structured to better serve our institutions. More than one president observed that the board hires and monitors the president's performance yet does not fully understand the institution. This paradox, coupled with the practice of seeking advice on the skills and attributes to be sought in the next president from a community of stakeholders that does not fully understand the role of president leads one to question whether there are gaps in the process that need to be bridged.

Board education is another area ripe for further research. While there was agreement amongst the research participants that boards do not have a deep understanding of the institutions they serve, further exploration is

required to understand how this challenge might practically be ameliorated without overwhelming board members with information or inviting them into the day-to-day management of the institution. Additionally, board members serve in a voluntary capacity and already give significant time and energy to fulfilling their commitments; requirements that board members devote additional time to orientation and familiarization with the institutions they govern may not be realistic.

The focus of this study was on the experience of presidents who had successfully transitioned to the role of president. Another valuable line of research might explore the perspective of governing boards on the transition experience to understand from their perspective the challenges of leading an institution through such a critical process.

The trend towards board establishing transition teams to support presidential transition presents another area for research. Research into transition teams could explore questions such as team composition, their effectiveness in supporting transition from the perspective of a new president and the reporting relationship of the team.

In closing, this research provides an opportunity to glimpse into the experiences of nine serving university presidents and addresses a topic that they see as important and in need of attention. Nineteen university presidents were invited to participate in this research and over half of those individuals quickly agreed to do so. The willingness of the participants suggests that presidents need a safe venue to share their thoughts and speak candidly about their experiences. Approximately five minutes before the end of each interview's allotted time, each participant was advised that the interview would be concluding shortly. Many wanted to continue, with more than one president commenting that he or she was enjoying the opportunity to speak freely about the role and its challenges, an opportunity rarely afforded them. As one president responded, "I'm really enjoying this. It's refreshing." Our institutions place significant responsibility on their presidents and ask much of them. In return, it is the responsibility of boards and institutions to support their presidents and create the conditions for their success.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Royal Roads By the Numbers



**ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY:  
DISTINCT. ADAPTABLE. INNOVATIVE.**

### **ROYAL ROADS – BY THE NUMBERS**

- **More than 5,000 students** (as of May 2018)
- **70%** graduate students
- **70%** are working professionals – online and blended learning
- **40** average age of graduate students – each rich with work and life experience
- **10%** of doctoral students identify as Indigenous
- **60** interdisciplinary graduate, undergraduate and graduate certificate/diploma programs
- **75** core faculty
- **More than 400** associate faculty
  - scholar practitioners on short term contract (from industry, government, retirees) allows more flexibility for RRU to mobilize instructors to meet student program demand
- **30%** reduced greenhouse gas emissions since 2010
- **50%** GHG reduction goal by 2020 – exceeding provincial targets
- **More than \$22M** in infrastructure & capital investment projects in 2017-18
  - This includes the Centre for Environmental Science and International Partnership project. A revitalization project to breathe new life into a 100-year old horse stable and create a modern, innovative teaching and learning facility for a growing student population
- **More than \$120M** in total targeted capital expenditure investments in the current five-year business plan

May 25, 2018

## Appendix 2 List of Universities and Policy Instruments Related to Presidential Search and Transition

Institution	Policy instrument	Link
Acadia University	Guidelines for the appointment and review of senior academic officers	<a href="https://board.acadiau.ca/tl_files/sites/board/resources/BOG%20File%20Info/Guidelines%20Document%202012%20-%20current%20document.pdf">https://board.acadiau.ca/tl_files/sites/board/resources/BOG%20File%20Info/Guidelines%20Document%202012%20-%20current%20document.pdf</a>
Algoma University	Terms of reference for the presidential search committee	<a href="https://www.algomau.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/pres-search-TOR-2017.pdf">https://www.algomau.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/pres-search-TOR-2017.pdf</a>
Athabasca University	Advisory search committee for president policy	<a href="http://ous.athabascau.ca/policy/administration/advisoryse archcompres.pdf">http://ous.athabascau.ca/policy/administration/advisoryse archcompres.pdf</a>
	Advisory search committee for president procedures	<a href="http://ous.athabascau.ca/policy/administration/advisoryse archcompres_pro.pdf">http://ous.athabascau.ca/policy/administration/advisoryse archcompres_pro.pdf</a>
Bishop's University	Statutes of Bishop's University	<a href="http://www.ubishops.ca/wp-content/uploads/Statutes Revised June 2012.pdf">http://www.ubishops.ca/wp-content/uploads/Statutes Revised June 2012.pdf</a>
Brandon University	Presidential search policy	<a href="https://www.brandonu.ca/governors/files/Presidential-Search-Policy.pdf">https://www.brandonu.ca/governors/files/Presidential-Search-Policy.pdf</a>
Brescia University College	Policy on the appointment, review and renewal of the principal of Brescia University College	<a href="http://brescia.uwo.ca/about/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/09/B-59-Principal-Selection-June-2015.pdf">http://brescia.uwo.ca/about/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/09/B-59-Principal-Selection-June-2015.pdf</a>
Brock University	Policy on appointment and reappointment of the president and vice-presidents	<a href="https://brocku.ca/policies/wp-content/uploads/sites/94/Policy-on-Appointment-Reappointment-Pres-VPs.pdf">https://brocku.ca/policies/wp-content/uploads/sites/94/Policy-on-Appointment-Reappointment-Pres-VPs.pdf</a>
Campion College	Policy: Appointment of the president	<a href="http://campioncollege.ca/about-us/administration/board-of-regents/policies-and-procedures/71-appointment-of-the-president">http://campioncollege.ca/about-us/administration/board-of-regents/policies-and-procedures/71-appointment-of-the-president</a>
Cape Breton University	Board of Governors bylaws	<a href="https://www.cbu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Board-Bylaws-Approved-October-2017.pdf">https://www.cbu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Board-Bylaws-Approved-October-2017.pdf</a>
Carleton University	Appointment guidelines for president and vice-chancellor	<a href="https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/president-guidelines-may-2017.pdf">https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/president-guidelines-may-2017.pdf</a>
Concordia University	Policy on senior administrative appointments	<a href="http://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/common/docs/policies/official-policies/BD-5.pdf">http://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/common/docs/policies/official-policies/BD-5.pdf</a>
Concordia University of Edmonton	Board of Governors bylaws	<a href="http://www2.concordia.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CUE-Board-of-Governors-Bylaws.pdf">http://www2.concordia.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CUE-Board-of-Governors-Bylaws.pdf</a>

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Policy instrument</b>	<b>Link</b>
Dalhousie University	Senior administrative appointments policy and procedure	<a href="https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/university_secretariat/policy-repository/SeniorAdminApptPolicy-amended-2017June27-V2.pdf">https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/university_secretariat/policy-repository/SeniorAdminApptPolicy-amended-2017June27-V2.pdf</a>
Emily Carr University of Art and Design	Presidential selection policy	<a href="http://www.ecuad.ca/about/leadership-and-governance/presidential-search/presidential-selection-policy">http://www.ecuad.ca/about/leadership-and-governance/presidential-search/presidential-selection-policy</a>
Kings University College at Western	Policy on the appointment, review and renewal of the principal of King's University College at Western	<a href="https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/office-of-the-principal/principal-selection-process/">https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/office-of-the-principal/principal-selection-process/</a>
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	Presidential search advisory, appointment and re-appointment policy	<a href="http://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Policies/HR22%20Presidential%20Search%20Advisory%2C%20Appointment%20and%20Re-appointment%20Policy.pdf">http://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Policies/HR22%20Presidential%20Search%20Advisory%2C%20Appointment%20and%20Re-appointment%20Policy.pdf</a>
	Presidential search advisory, appointment and re-appointment procedure	<a href="http://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Policies/HR22%20Presidential%20Search%20Advisory%2C%20Appointment%20and%20Re-appointment%20Procedure.pdf">http://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Policies/HR22%20Presidential%20Search%20Advisory%2C%20Appointment%20and%20Re-appointment%20Procedure.pdf</a>
Lakehead University	Presidential search process policy	<a href="https://www.lakeheadu.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/106/policies/Presidential%20Search%20Process%20Policy.pdf">https://www.lakeheadu.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/106/policies/Presidential%20Search%20Process%20Policy.pdf</a>
MacEwan University	President search and selection, review and compensation	<a href="https://www.macewan.ca/wcm/Policies/CurrentPolicies/index.htm?policySearchText=presidential+search&amp;policyType=&amp;policyCategory=&amp;searchByCode=yes&amp;displayCode=no&amp;StartRow=1&amp;PageNumber=1&amp;performSearch=yes">https://www.macewan.ca/wcm/Policies/CurrentPolicies/index.htm?policySearchText=presidential+search&amp;policyType=&amp;policyCategory=&amp;searchByCode=yes&amp;displayCode=no&amp;StartRow=1&amp;PageNumber=1&amp;performSearch=yes</a>
McGill University	Advisory committees	<a href="https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/advisory">https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/advisory</a>
Mount Royal University	Presidential search and appointment policy (approved Feb 2018)	<a href="http://mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/PoliciesAndProcedures/view/128ff9EWxFbMvPRXIfRzu6PXKn1_rPSN">http://mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/PoliciesAndProcedures/view/128ff9EWxFbMvPRXIfRzu6PXKn1_rPSN</a>
	Search, selection and appointment of a new president procedures (approved Feb 2018)	<a href="http://mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/PoliciesAndProcedures/view/1JhWlQut-x-kTZLwsrqog-dyOWiZdLqwG">http://mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/PoliciesAndProcedures/view/1JhWlQut-x-kTZLwsrqog-dyOWiZdLqwG</a>
	Presidential search committee terms of reference (approved Feb 2018)	<a href="http://mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/PoliciesAndProcedures/view/16C9-SfdBwDbKdPVVt1NGigVoxGsE_4pM">http://mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/PoliciesAndProcedures/view/16C9-SfdBwDbKdPVVt1NGigVoxGsE_4pM</a>
NSCAD University	By-laws of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design	<a href="https://nscad.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/nscad-by-laws.pdf">https://nscad.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/nscad-by-laws.pdf</a>
Queen's University	Joint Board/Senate principal search committee terms of reference 2018	<a href="http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.uslclwww/files/files/trustees/JointBSPresidentialSearchCommitteeTOR.pdf">http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.uslclwww/files/files/trustees/JointBSPresidentialSearchCommitteeTOR.pdf</a>

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Policy instrument</b>	<b>Link</b>
Royal Roads University	Presidential search committee terms of reference	<a href="http://www.royalroads.ca/about/presidential-search">http://www.royalroads.ca/about/presidential-search</a>
Ryerson University	By-law No. 1 Being the general by-law of Ryerson University	<a href="https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/governors/documents/governance/General_ByLaws_of_Ryerson_University.pdf">https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/governors/documents/governance/General_ByLaws_of_Ryerson_University.pdf</a>
Saint Francis Xavier University	By-laws of St. Francis Xavier University	<a href="https://www.stfx.ca/sites/default/files/University%20By-laws%20amended%20to%20February%2023%2C%202018.pdf">https://www.stfx.ca/sites/default/files/University%20By-laws%20amended%20to%20February%2023%2C%202018.pdf</a>
Simon Fraser University	Presidential search committee policy B10.06	<a href="http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/board/B10-06.html">http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/board/B10-06.html</a>
St. Thomas More College	General by-law, being a general by-law relating to the conduct of the affairs of the St. Thomas More College Corporation	<a href="https://stmcollege.ca/about/admin-governance/BofG/21Oct2017%20STM%20General%20Bylaw.pdf">https://stmcollege.ca/about/admin-governance/BofG/21Oct2017%20STM%20General%20Bylaw.pdf</a>
St. Thomas University	Presidential search committee terms of reference	<a href="http://w3.stu.ca/stu/facultyandstaff/senate/pdfs/dec2009/PresidentialSearchCommitteeTermsofReference.pdf">http://w3.stu.ca/stu/facultyandstaff/senate/pdfs/dec2009/PresidentialSearchCommitteeTermsofReference.pdf</a>
Thompson Rivers University	Presidential search procedures	<a href="https://www.tru.ca/presidential-search/process.html">https://www.tru.ca/presidential-search/process.html</a>
Trent University	Special resolution III.2 Presidential absence, review and search policy	<a href="https://www.trentu.ca/administration/pdfs/SpecialResolutioniii2.pdf">https://www.trentu.ca/administration/pdfs/SpecialResolutioniii2.pdf</a>
University of Alberta	Presidential search procedure	<a href="https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Procedures/Presidential-Search-Procedure.pdf">https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Procedures/Presidential-Search-Procedure.pdf</a>
	Presidential search and review procedures (Appendix A): Committees for president position definitions and eligibility	<a href="https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Procedures/Presidential-Search-and-Review-Procedures-Appendix-A-Committees-for-President-Position-Definitions-and-Eligibility.pdf">https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Procedures/Presidential-Search-and-Review-Procedures-Appendix-A-Committees-for-President-Position-Definitions-and-Eligibility.pdf</a>
University of British Columbia	Presidential search committee terms of reference 2016	<a href="https://bog.ubc.ca/?page_id=10228">https://bog.ubc.ca/?page_id=10228</a>
University of Calgary	Presidential search and appointment policy	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/presidential-search-and-appointment-policy.pdf">http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/presidential-search-and-appointment-policy.pdf</a>
	Presidential search committee terms of reference	<a href="https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/presidential-search-committee-terms-of-reference.pdf">https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/presidential-search-committee-terms-of-reference.pdf</a>
University of Guelph	Policy on university appointments	<a href="https://uoguelph.civicweb.net/document/70569/University%20Appointments%20Policy_FINAL%202017%2004%2021.pdf?handle=A47437083E6F47C4818B5ECF9D45C399">https://uoguelph.civicweb.net/document/70569/University%20Appointments%20Policy_FINAL%202017%2004%2021.pdf?handle=A47437083E6F47C4818B5ECF9D45C399</a>
University of King's College	By-laws, rules and regulations of the University of King's College made by the Board of Governors	<a href="http://policies.ukings.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Blue-Book.pdf">http://policies.ukings.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Blue-Book.pdf</a>

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Policy instrument</b>	<b>Link</b>
University of Lethbridge	Philosophy for the selection, evaluation and compensation of senior administration	<a href="http://www.uleth.ca/policy/sites/policy/files/policy/Philosophy%20for%20Selection%20Evaluation%20Compensation%20Senior%20Admin%20Approved%20June%202017.pdf">http://www.uleth.ca/policy/sites/policy/files/policy/Philosophy for Selection Evaluation Compensation Senior Admin Approved June%206 2017.pdf</a>
	Process for evaluating and determining the president's compensation	<a href="http://www.uleth.ca/policy/sites/policy/files/policy/Philosophy%20for%20Selection%20Evaluation%20Compensation%20Senior%20Admin%20Approved%20June%202017.pdf">http://www.uleth.ca/policy/sites/policy/files/policy/Philosophy for Selection Evaluation Compensation Senior Admin Approved June%206 2017.pdf</a>
University of Manitoba	Policy: President	<a href="http://umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/officers/214.html">http://umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/officers/214.html</a>
University of New Brunswick	Search committee with board representation - appointments	<a href="http://es.unb.ca/apps/policy-repository/">http://es.unb.ca/apps/policy-repository/</a>
University of Ontario Institute of Technology	Committee to recommend a president	<a href="https://usgc.uoit.ca/governance/board-of-governors/presidential-search-2017/committee-to-recommend-a-president.php">https://usgc.uoit.ca/governance/board-of-governors/presidential-search-2017/committee-to-recommend-a-president.php</a>
	Presidential transition committee	<a href="https://usgc.uoit.ca/governance/board-of-governors/committees%20/terms-of-reference/presidential-transition-committee.php">https://usgc.uoit.ca/governance/board-of-governors/committees%20/terms-of-reference/presidential-transition-committee.php</a>
University of Ottawa	Procedure for the selection of a president	<a href="http://www.uottawa.ca/administration-and-governance/selection-of-a-president/procedure-for-the-selection">http://www.uottawa.ca/administration-and-governance/selection-of-a-president/procedure-for-the-selection</a>
University of Prince Edward Island	Presidential review committee terms of reference	<a href="http://files.upei.ca/upei_presidential_review_terms_of_reference.pdf">http://files.upei.ca/upei_presidential_review_terms_of_reference.pdf</a>
University of Regina	Out of scope academic administrative appointments policy EMP-010-030	<a href="https://www.uregina.ca/policy/browse-policy/policy-EMP-010-030.html">https://www.uregina.ca/policy/browse-policy/policy-EMP-010-030.html</a>
University of Saskatchewan	Transition committee terms of reference	<a href="https://www.usask.ca/presidentialtransition/transition-committee.php">https://www.usask.ca/presidentialtransition/transition-committee.php</a>
	Report of the joint committee on the review of the search and review procedures for senior administrators	<a href="https://www.usask.ca/secretariat/Governing%20Documents/SearchAndReviewProcedures.pdf">https://www.usask.ca/secretariat/Governing%20Documents/SearchAndReviewProcedures.pdf</a>
University of the Fraser Valley	Procedures for presidential search	<a href="https://www.ufv.ca/media/assets/senate/resources/Procedures-for-Presidential-Search-approved-at-Senate-2016-02-12.pdf">https://www.ufv.ca/media/assets/senate/resources/Procedures-for-Presidential-Search-approved-at-Senate-2016-02-12.pdf</a>
University of Toronto	Policy respecting the appointment of a President	<a href="http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppfeb041999.pdf">http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppfeb041999.pdf</a>
	Office of the Governing Council memorandum re: presidential transition	<a href="http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/News+and+Announcements/x0410.pdf">http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/News+and+Announcements/x0410.pdf</a>

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Policy instrument</b>	<b>Link</b>
University of Victoria	GV0300 Procedures for the search, appointment or re-appointment of the president and vice-chancellor	<a href="https://www.uvic.ca/universitysecretary/assets/docs/policies/GV0300_1010_.pdf">https://www.uvic.ca/universitysecretary/assets/docs/policies/GV0300_1010_.pdf</a>
University of Waterloo	policy: The President of the University	<a href="https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-50">https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-50</a>
University of Windsor	website: search for the 7th president and vice-chancellor	<a href="http://www.uwindsor.ca/secretariat/309/search-seventh-president-and-vice-chancellor">http://www.uwindsor.ca/secretariat/309/search-seventh-president-and-vice-chancellor</a>
Vancouver Island University	bylaw #17 recruitment of the president	<a href="https://www2.viu.ca/board/bylaws/17.pdf">https://www2.viu.ca/board/bylaws/17.pdf</a>
Western University	presidential search policy	<a href="http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/presidential_search/policies.html">http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/presidential_search/policies.html</a>
Western University	presidential search website	<a href="http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/presidential_search/index.html">http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/presidential_search/index.html</a>
Wilfrid Laurier University	news release: Laurier implements presidential transition plan	<a href="https://www.wlu.ca/news/news-releases/2017/feb/laurier-implements-presidential-transition-plan.html">https://www.wlu.ca/news/news-releases/2017/feb/laurier-implements-presidential-transition-plan.html</a>
York University	Presidential search (principles)	<a href="http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/presidential-search-principles/">http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/presidential-search-principles/</a>

## Appendix 3 Invitation to Participate in the Research

Dear XX,

My name is Karen Hakkarainen and I am a student in the Master of Public Administration program at the University of Victoria. To fulfill the requirements of the program I am conducting a study on smart practices in presidential transition at Canadian universities. The client for this project is Dr. Allan Cahoon, President, Royal Roads University. The results of my research will inform the Royal Roads University Board of Governors as it undertakes a search for the university's next president.

I believe your reflections on your experience of transitioning to the role of president would provide valuable insights to my research objectives and I would welcome the opportunity to interview you. The interview will take up to 45 minutes. Additional time may be required for you to reflect on the interview questions in advance of the interview.

The interview would be conducted using BlueJeans conferencing technology, which is a web-based application that supports both video and telephone conferencing. With your permission, the interview would be recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Please be advised that this research study will include temporary data storage in the U.S.A. As such, there is a possibility that information about you that is gathered for this research study may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the U.S. government in compliance with the U.S. Freedom Act.

The following research question provides the overall framework for this project:

- What smart practices support the successful transition to a new university president?

Secondary questions that further delineate the project are:

- What are the key features and considerations for the search process that have implications for the successful transition to a new president?
- What supports and activities are required of a governing board post-appointment to support the transition to a new president?
- What activities and priorities are recommended to a new president following appointment to ensure his or her success?

I will be pleased to share my findings from this study with you when it is concluded.

This research has been approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board, certificate #17-337. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kimberly Speers, Assistant Teaching Professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. She can be reached at [\(250\) 721-8057](tel:(250)721-8057) or by email at [kspeers@uvic.ca](mailto:kspeers@uvic.ca).

If you agree to participate in the research please complete the attached consent form, scan it, and return it to me by email attachment. Alternatively, you may fax it to my attention at [\(250\) 391-2554](tel:(250)391-2554) (my Royal Roads University fax number).

Please note that if you agree to participate in the research you would be free to withdraw from it at any point without explanation or any repercussions. It would be your option whether data collected before you withdrew from the research would be included in the research or deleted. If you agree to participate in the research and later withdraw, I

will ask that you send me an email stating your preference either to have your data included in the research or excluded from the research and immediately deleted.

To provide a fuller understanding of the research and your participation, I have attached the following documents to this email:

- Abstract that provides a general description of the research project
- Interview questions that will form the basis of a semi-structured interview
- University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board – Certificate of Approval

I look forward to discussing with you this opportunity for you to contribute to this timely research. I can be reached at [\(250\) 885-7201](tel:2508857201) or by email at [KarenHakkarainen@gmail.com](mailto:KarenHakkarainen@gmail.com) to address any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Karen Hakkarainen

## Appendix 4 Abstract of the Research

*Abstract: A smart practice guide to executive leadership transition in the post-secondary sector*

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A public sector governing board is an overseer who holds the president of an organization responsible for its performance while also providing the president with advice and support. The president, on the other hand, is accountable to the board for leading management and recommending and implementing strategy. Consequently, the president occupies a key strategic position in the organization and one of the most important responsibilities of a board is the recruitment and selection of the organization's president.

The Royal Roads University board of governors comprises twelve members, the majority of whom are volunteers appointed from the community. Normally, board members do not have experience in the traditions and norms of the post-secondary sector and, in particular, the recruitment and selection of a university president.

The purpose of this project is to provide the Royal Roads board of governors with a smart practice guide to executive transition in the context of the Canadian post-secondary sector.

The transition experiences of successful university presidents will provide the basis for the research. The scope of the project will include the presidents' experiences of the search and selection phases of recruitment and the post-appointment phase of the transition. Analysis of university policies on presidential transition will provide additional context for the smart practice guide.

## Appendix 5 Interview Questions

### SEARCH PHASE:

#### Understanding the role:

1. What was the most effective thing you did to help you understand the role?
2. What did the board do that was most effective to help you understand the role of president?
3. What improvements could help presidential candidates better understand the role of president?

#### Understanding the institution:

4. What was most effective thing you did to help you understand the institution?
5. What did the board do that was most effective to help you understand the institution?
6. What improvements could help president candidates better understand the institution?

### POST-APPOINTMENT PHASE:

#### Key actions/activities/processes:

7. What actions on your part were effective in supporting your transition into the role?
8. What actions by the board and other bodies of the institution (e.g. University Secretary, staff) were helpful in the transition process?

#### Gaps in transition:

9. What were you unprepared for or surprised by when you assumed the role of president?
10. What were the shortcomings in the transition process provided by the board or other bodies of the institution (e.g. University secretary, staff)?

#### Recommended actions:

11. In hindsight, what actions could you have undertaken that would have been beneficial to supporting your transition but that you did not pursue?
12. In hindsight, what actions by the board or other bodies in the institution would have been beneficial to supporting your transition to the role of president but did not take place?

### BIAS:

13. From your perspective, was there evidence of bias in the search, selection and transition process? If so, what did you observe and how did it impact the process? How do you think this bias could have been overcome?
14. Overall, what advice would you give to presidential candidates in applying to positions?
15. Overall, what advice would you give to boards related to presidential searches?

## Appendix 6 Human Research Ethics Consent Form



### Participant Consent

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#### **A smart practice guide to executive leadership transition in the post-secondary sector**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *A smart practice guide to executive leadership transition in the post-secondary sector* that is being conducted by Karen Hakkarainen at the University of Victoria.

Karen Hakkarainen is a student in the Master of Public Administration – Online program in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. If you have questions about the study or this consent you may contact her by telephone at (250) 885-7201 or by email at karenhakkarainen@gmail.com.

This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kimberly Speers, Assistant Teaching Professor. You may contact her at (250) 721-8057.

One of the requirements of the Master of Public Administration program is the completion of a substantial analysis of a management, program or policy problem for a client. The client for this project is Dr. Allan Cahoon, President, Royal Roads University.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to develop a smart practice guide to presidential transition in the Canadian post-secondary sector.

#### **Importance of this Research**

The president of a university is responsible for the strategic leadership of the institution. Consequently, the successful recruitment, selection and integration of a new president is critical to a university achieving its mission of providing quality higher education. Identifying and implementing smart practices that support the successful transition of leadership will better position universities to fulfill their roles as cornerstones of Canadian society.

#### **Participant Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have successfully transitioned into the role of president at a Canadian public university. Your experiences of the search and selection process and in adapting to this role will provide valuable perspective on those practices that help a successful transition and those that hinder transition.

#### **What is involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your commitment includes participating in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. It is anticipated that the interview will take up to 45 minutes and will be conducted using BlueJeans videoconferencing technology, which is a web-based application. The interview will be conducted at a location of your choice. Please note that electronic files of interviews recorded through BlueJeans

technology will reside temporarily in Cloud-based data storage in the U.S.A. before being downloaded to the researcher's personal, password protected laptop computer.

Interview questions will be provided to you in advance of the interview and will form the basis of a conversation that may explore other related topics relevant to presidential transition that you wish to raise. The researcher will take notes during the interview and, with your permission, the interview will also be recorded for later transcription. The researcher will analyze the data using qualitative content analysis to identify themes and trends in practices that support a successful leadership transition.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you: time in advance of the interview to reflect on the questions and the time required for the interview itself.

### **Risks**

The risks to participating in this research are minimal. There are approximately 80 public universities in Canada and, of the pool of serving presidents, approximately 30 meet the criteria for inclusion in this research. Participants to the research should be aware that readers of the final project report and smart practice guide may speculate about the identity of the research participants. However, you are being asked to share only the information that you are comfortable sharing. To further mitigate breaches to anonymity and confidentiality, the report will focus on trends and themes, and avoid reporting on specific experiences of individual research participants. If quotations or examples are incorporated into the final report and smart practice guide, then any identifying markers, such as size or location of institution, gender of the research participant, or time specific time frames in which events occurred, will be removed to limit the possibility of a reader correctly attributing a comment to an individual research participant. Also, research participants will be assigned pseudonyms to further protect their identity.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include:

Benefits to self: You will be provided a copy of the smart practice guide when the research is completed. This may be of benefit to you as you move through your career into other leadership positions or are charged with supporting a leadership transition.

Benefits to society: Society will benefit from stronger institutional leadership.

Benefit to the state of knowledge: As the Canadian population ages, we can expect to see increased numbers of senior leaders leaving the workforce and organizations will need to prepare themselves to transition to new leaders. Society at large will benefit from a deeper understanding of how to effectively support leadership transition.

### **Compensation**

Beyond receiving a copy of the smart practice guide, there is no compensation for participating in this study.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation.

## **On-going Consent**

Consent to participate in this study means consent to participate in the 30 – 45 minute semi-structured interview. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or explanation. If you withdraw from the study, you will be asked whether data collected up to the point of withdrawal may remain in the study. If you withdraw and do not wish your data to remain in the study, it will be deleted.

## **Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity, your identity will be anonymized in the reporting of the research. The reporting will focus on trends and themes rather than individual experiences; however, where examples are cited in support of findings, pseudonyms will be used and institutions will be described in general terms without including identifying details, such as location, size of the institution or timeframe of events.

## **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all materials related to this study in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. Electronic audio and video files will be stored temporarily in Cloud storage based in the U.S.A. before being downloaded to the researcher's personal, password-protected laptop computer.

Please be advised that, because data will be temporarily stored in the U.S.A., there is a possibility that information about you that is gathered for this research study may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the U.S. government in compliance with the U.S. Freedom Act.

## **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways:

- Participants will be provided a copy of the smart practice guide.
- The final report and smart practice guide will be provided to the client.
- The Royal Roads University board of governors will receive the smart practice guide.
- The final report and findings will be subject to an oral defence before a supervisory committee consisting of faculty from the School of Public Administration, University of Victoria.
- The final report and smart practice guide will reside on UVicSpace, a learning and research repository that provides digital access to scholarly works by University of Victoria graduate students.

## **Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be disposed of once the student has passed the oral defence for the study. Paper files will be shredded before being disposed of through a confidential paper recycling service. Electronic files will be deleted from the researcher's personal computer.

## **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study are:

- Karen Hakkarainen, MPA candidate, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria
- Dr. Kimberly Speers, Assistant Teaching Professor, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

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*Name of Participant*

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*Signature*

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*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix 7 Analysis of Website References to Presidential Search or Transition, from Universities Canada Member Institutions

Name	community consult 0 = no 1 = yes	search cttee req 0 = no 1 = yes	search cttee size	board majority 0 = no 1 = yes	Committee Members						
					board	faculty	student	staff	alumni	senior admin	other
Acadia University	1	1	13	0	5	5	1	2	1	1	
Algoma University	1	1	10	1	10	3					
Athabasca University	0	1	14	0	7	4	2			1	
Bishop's University	1	1	14	1	5	4	1	1	1		2
Brandon University	1	1	20	0	3	7	2	2	1	3	2
Brescia University College	1	1	15	1	7	2	1	2	1	2	
Brock University	1	1	12	0	6	4	2	1		1	
Campion College	1	1	6	0	2	1	1	1			1
Cape Breton University	0	1	11	1	10	2	2			1	
Carleton University	1	1	13	0	6	3	2	1		1	1
Concordia University	1	1	12	0	4	5	2	1			
Concordia University of Edmonton	1	1									
Dalhousie University	1	1									
Emily Carr University of Art and Design	0	1									

Kings University College at Western	0	1	18	0	6	4	1	2	1	2	2
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	1	1	22	0	4	8	3	2	1	4	1
Lakehead University	1	1	14	0	5	3	2	1	1	1	1
MacEwan University	0	1									
McGill University	0	1	14	0	4	4	2	2	2		
Mount Royal University	1	1	15	1	8	2	1	1		2	3
NSCAD University	0	1									
Queen's University	1	1	18	0	9	4	3	1		1	
Royal Roads University	1	1	9	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	
Ryerson University	0	1	13	1	9	4	1	1	1		
Saint Francis Xavier University	0	1	8	0	4	2	1				1
Simon Fraser University	1	1	16	0	3	4	4	1	1	3	
St. Thomas More College											
St. Thomas University	1	1	10	0	5	2		1	1	1	
Thompson Rivers University	1	1	16	0	3	5	1	1	1		5
Trent University	0	1	9	1	6	3	2	1	1		
University of Alberta	0	1	15	0	4	4	3	1	1	1	1
University of British Columbia	1	1	21	0	4	6	3	3	2	3	

University of Calgary	1	1	15	0	5	3	2	2	1	1	1
University of Guelph	1	1	9	0	2	3	2	1	1		
University of King's College	0	1	8	1	6	2	1	1	1		
University of Lethbridge		1									
University of Manitoba											
University of New Brunswick	0	1	7	0	3	4					
University of Ontario Institute of Technology	1	1	13	1	7	3	2	1			
University of Ottawa	0	1	14	1	9	3	2	1		1	
University of Prince Edward Island											
University of Regina		1									
University of Saskatchewan		1									
University of the Fraser Valley	1	1	13	0	3	3	2	1	1	2	1
University of Toronto	1	1	15	0	3	5	3	1	3		
University of Victoria	1	1	20	0	4	11	2		1	1	1
University of Waterloo	1	1	19	0	6	10	2	1	1		2
University of Windsor	1	1	10	0	5	1					
Vancouver Island University	1	1	17	0	4	2	1	2		5	3
Western University	1	1	10	0	5	4	1				
Wilfrid Laurier											

University										
York University	1	1	14	0	7	5	2	1	1	

Analysis										
		Cttee size		board	faculty	student	staff	alumni	senior admin	other
website references	48									
mandate public	40									
average size		14								
largest		21								
smallest		7								
board marjority			11							
constituent representation				40	40	36	32	24	22	16
requirement to consult	31									

**Appendix 8 A Smart Practice Guide to Presidential Transition**

**A SMART PRACTICE GUIDE  
TO PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION**

*A RESOURCE FOR GOVERNING BOARDS AND NEW PRESIDENTS*

*OF CANADIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES*

Karen Hakkarainen

June 2018

## **What is a smart practice?**

Practices are observable actions that mobilize resources to produce outcomes. Smart practices are actions that are planned and coordinated with the objective of optimizing the potential for those outcomes. They yield the greatest benefit for the effort and resources invested in the actions, and their effectiveness has been demonstrated by their use in other jurisdictions or circumstances to good effect. They are general enough that they can be applied across a variety of organizations and situations and can be adapted to the context of the particular situation to which they are applied.

This guide outlines some smart practices to support a presidential transition in a university setting. The guide starts by providing some context for presidential transition, highlighting not only the complexity of today's university and the role of the president, but also some of the constraints and challenges facing the university sector and the risks associated with a leadership transition. This is followed by a listing of recommended smart practices for presidential transition. The smart practices included in this guide are drawn from research into the experiences of individuals who have successfully navigated the transition to the role of university president.

## **The contemporary university: A complex environment**

Universities operate in complex environments populated by many stakeholders with diverse interests. Students, faculty, staff, alumni, funders and donors are some of the stakeholders that readily come to mind but this list is not exhaustive. Different levels of government, the local communities in which universities are located, NGOs and interest groups also look to universities to fulfill certain responsibilities and expectations. Finally, Canadian universities must be alive to their responsibilities to Indigenous communities and the opportunities that lie in those relationships and partnerships.

The ability of the university to meet the expectations of stakeholders is influenced by the larger landscape in which universities operate. Factors that Canadian universities must contend with include an aging population and, concurrently, a shrinking pool of students who fit the traditional demographic of a university student; fiscal pressures; and public demand for "job ready" graduates coupled with scepticism over the value of a university education. As a sector, universities are responding to these challenges through a number of strategies, including building international student enrolments; focussing on non-traditional students and programming to meet their needs; developing partnerships to create pathways for students; implementing new methods of program delivery that capitalize on technology; and investing in initiatives to increase access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students.

## **University presidents: who are they and what do they do?**

Presidents are the individuals that we look to for strategic leadership in navigating this complex environment. They must provide an inspirational vision for the future of the institution, while being keen stewards of scarce resources. They must be oriented to the external environment and represent the institution in public fora, while also being grounded in the institution with a strong on-campus presence. They must be credible in the eyes of the academy, while possessing the management skills necessary to lead a complex enterprise. They must be collegial and consultative, but willing to take hard decisions and stand by them. To balance these divergent demands, a president must be something of a shape-shifter, able to communicate with, and demonstrate value to, a variety of stakeholders, each of whom has different expectations of what a president should do and be.

## **Universities at risk during leadership transition**

Given the pivotal role of the president, a presidential transition is a particularly vulnerable time for an institution. During a transition, key decisions and initiatives are often deferred and universities may operate in a “holding pattern” pending the arrival and integration of a new leader. Constituencies within the institution may take the opportunity to articulate their positions on issues and try to advance their interests. Stakeholders of all kinds will be watching the institution and keenly attuned to signs of the institution faltering. Funders and donors, in particular, will be concerned about the stability and continuity of the institution and seeking assurance that their investments are well-protected. A turbulent leadership transition can have significant, negative outcomes for the university, including, for example, loss of funding, reputational damage, derailed initiatives, strained relationships with key constituencies, loss of key personnel and, with them, loss of institutional memory. Smart transition practices can help to reduce the risks associated with a leadership transition.

## **Presidential transition: a long view**

Frequently, timeframes such as the first three months, the first 100 days, or even the first year of a presidency are referred to as the period of transition. This is, however, a narrow interpretation. A more inclusive interpretation recognizes transition as starting when a governing board first becomes aware of the need to begin the search for a new president and concludes when a new president reports a sense of having the institutional knowledge and resources in place to pursue the institution’s priority strategic objectives. To an extent, the duration of the transition period depends on the new president’s degree of familiarity with the institution, however, it is a process that can extend for several years and, along this continuum, a range of smart practices can be initiated to support the selection and integration of a new president.

## **Diversity in university leadership**

As a sector, universities lag behind other sectors in the diversity of their leaders. Women, for example, comprise approximately only 25% of Canadian university presidents. Increasing diversity in all its dimensions in leadership roles should be an objective of every institution; however, this takes concerted effort on the part of universities. Universities can, for example, create programs that support the development of leadership potential in all employees and examine human resources practices to identify and change those that privilege some employees over others in terms of providing access to experiences that are required for advancement to leadership positions. The presidential search is one opportunity to pursue diversity by ensuring that the pool of candidates for the role includes members of under-represented demographic groups, that the experiences and accomplishments sought in candidates reflect the competencies required for the position, and that individuals involved in the selection process are provided training to raise their awareness of their unconscious biases.

## **Context matters**

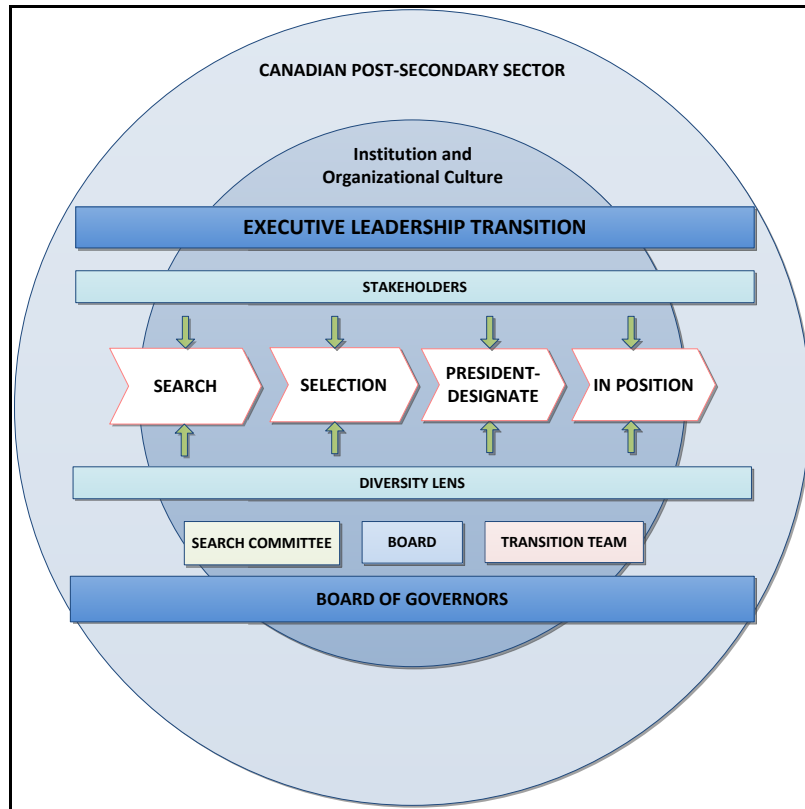
The context for a presidential transition matters. Each institution embarking on a transition will face a unique set of circumstances, opportunities and challenges that will need to be accommodated within the transition process. Smart practices provide flexibility in responding to these needs. They can be applied at any institution, regardless of the institution’s size, location, student demographic or the political environment within which the university operates, and adapted to the unique requirements of the institution. Governing boards, search committees, transition teams and

new presidents can all refer to these smart practices and adapt them to their circumstances, taking into account stakeholders, institutional resources and structures, and organizational culture.

## A framework for smart practices

The objectives of a leadership transition may include supporting a new president to gain a deeper understanding of the institution, its opportunities and challenges; meet members of various constituencies and establish a presence on campus; and form a strong executive team. The objectives may also include developing, communicating and building support for a new or refreshed strategic vision for the institution. These are all important activities that contribute to the successful integration of a new president but can be expanded to reflect a broader view that recognizes transition as beginning when the governing board is first made aware that a presidential search will be necessary. This broader view expands the objectives of transition to include, for example, enhancing the governing board's understanding of the institution, educating stakeholders about the role of the president and building stakeholder support for new leadership. It also brings into focus the need to articulate the leadership opportunity in a way that attracts a field of diverse and high quality candidates for the role.

A framework for presidential transition is provided below. It presents the search process as the first phase of a transition, moving into the selection phase, followed by the president-designate phase and concluding with the in-position phase when a new president has taken up the role. It underscores the responsibility of the governing board throughout the transition process, highlights the need for stakeholder engagement and input, and puts a focus on diversity and the potential for bias at each stage of the transition process. The framework draws attention to the larger context within which presidential transition takes place and situates the institution and its culture as the backdrop to the transition process.



# Smart practices to support presidential transition

The smart practices outlined in this guide are organized as follows:

1. Smart practices for the search and selection phase of presidential transition
2. Smart practices following appointment of a new president
  - a. for governing boards
  - b. for new presidents

## **1. Smart practices for the search and selection phase of presidential transition:**

Actions taken during the search and selection phase of presidential transition lay the groundwork for the institution's later acceptance of a new leader. In this section, a number of smart practices are recommended that will strengthen this groundwork, facilitate a successful search and increase the likelihood for later acceptance by the university community of the successful candidate for the role of president.

### ***Recommended smart practices:***

#### **1. Carefully assess the decisions to be taken by the board in the year prior to the appointment of a new president.**

Governing boards should ensure that decisions taken in the period leading up to the appointment of a new president fall within the board's realm of authority and do not stray into management decisions. Boards should also defer decisions that have the potential to fetter the ability of a new president to lead the institution and bring a new perspective to the institution's strategic vision until the new president is in place and able to contribute to the decision-making process.

#### **2. Educate members of the governing board about the institution and its culture.**

Board members should be open to the possibility that they may not fully understand the institution that they govern. Before beginning the search process, resolve unanswered questions that board members may have about the institution, its culture, the challenges it faces and opportunities on the horizon. Board members should "look beneath the covers" and seek a deeper appreciation of the unique aspects of the institution and the challenges a new president will face. This deeper knowledge will position the board to better assess the candidates against the needs of the institution and have confidence in their final selection for the role of president.

#### **3. Set performance expectations for the executive search firm.**

If using an executive search firm, ensure that the services that the search firm will provide and the activities they will undertake and those that will be undertaken by the institution are clearly articulated and agreed. Clearly communicate expectations regarding diversity in the field of candidates for the role. Search consultants should be privy to the strengths of the institution and its challenges so that the consultant can convey a realistic sense of the opportunity to candidates.

**4. Constitute a search committee to recommend one or more candidates to the board of governors for final selection.**

Establish terms of reference for the committee that clearly articulate the mandate of the committee, including the number of candidates the committee should present to the board for its final consideration and selection of the next president. The terms of reference should also address committee membership and provide for broad representation from the university community. Stakeholders who are members of the university community may be better positioned than board members to assess the fit of candidates to the institution so consideration should be given to the proportion of committee seats allocated to board members versus representatives from stakeholder groups. Diversity in the committee membership should be an overarching principle in selecting committee members.

**5. Educate the search committee on the role and responsibilities of the president and elements of the institution.**

Committee members must be equipped to respond to questions from candidates. They should be well-versed in the institution's strategic direction, competitive advantage, financial health, significant challenges, areas of strength and opportunities available to the institution, and the implications of these factors on the expectations of the next president.

**6. Bring a diversity lens to the search process.**

Diversity should be a consideration at all stages to the transition process. In the search and selection phases, this can be achieved through initiatives at the outset of the process, such as training on unconscious bias for search committees and board members. Governing boards can also challenge themselves to broaden their thinking on the kinds of experiences that candidates are expected to have and the ways in which that experience can manifest.

**7. Conduct a robust community consultation to solicit input into the qualities sought in the next university president.**

Some stakeholders advocate for open searches in which candidates for the role of president provide public presentations and the university community provides feedback on the candidates' suitability for the role. Open searches, however, tend to limit the pool of candidates. Consequently, closed searches have become more common. A robust community consultation should be conducted in the early stages of a presidential search as an alternate means of seeking the views of stakeholders and building support for new leadership.

A variety of consultation activities should be coordinated so that stakeholders have multiple opportunities to provide input on the qualities that the next president should possess. Search committee members should be actively involved in the consultation process. The consultation is also an opportunity for board members to gain a deeper understanding of the institution and its culture, either through direct participation in the consultation process or by receiving reports on the feedback received from the community.

**8. Use the consultation process as an opportunity to educate the university community about the role of the president.**

The role of the president, and the complexities of and constraints on the role, are not well understood by the university community. Use the community consultation as an opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap about the role of the president and create a more realistic understanding of the role amongst key constituencies.

**9. Seek board approval of the position profile.**

The community consultation should inform the position profile that will be used during the search for candidates. The board of governors should approve the position profile and ensure that it reflects not only the university community's perspectives but also the board's expectations of the next university president.

**10. Address conflict of interest.**

Ensure that search committee members and board members understand what constitutes a conflict of interest, real or perceived. Search committee members and board members should declare any pre-existing relationships to candidates and attest to their ability to assess candidates in an impartial manner.

**11. Make comprehensive information about the institution available.**

Potential candidates for the role of president need information to understand the institution and assess interest in the opportunity. Provide comprehensive information about the institution's strategic direction, strengths, assets and opportunities.

Individuals who are successful in one institution may be exceedingly uncomfortable in another institution's culture. Think creatively about how to communicate the culture of the institution early in the search process, taking advantage of a variety of media to express institutional culture.

As much as possible and respecting the need for confidentiality on some matters, make information on current issues and challenges available to individuals who declare themselves as candidates for the role.

**12. Provide opportunities for finalist candidates to develop a deeper understanding of the institution and the leadership opportunity.**

Candidates who are short-listed as finalists need to explore more deeply whether their strengths align to the institution's needs and to develop a deeper understanding of the opportunity. Activities that could be offered include campus and community tours and meetings with key personnel. Under a confidentiality agreement with finalist candidates, the search committee should fully disclose the issues, risks, challenges, opportunities and priorities facing the institution in the short, medium and long term. There should be no surprises for the successful candidate once the candidate assumes office.

**13. Fit matters.**

As an institution evolves, its leadership needs change. From the institution's perspective, the successful candidate must "fit" not only the institution's culture but also the type of leadership required at that point in

the organization's development. Ensuring the fit of the finalist candidate to the institution and its future vision should be paramount to those responsible for making the final selection of the successful candidate. Create opportunities for decision-makers to meet with the finalist candidate for unstructured dialogue and exchanges. Observe the candidate in a variety of settings.

## **2. Smart practices following appointment of a new president**

Orientation and onboarding is a time when a newly-appointed president is deeply invested in a process of sense-making, with the objectives of understanding the institution and navigating its culture. There are many smart practices available to the board and to the new president that will support a successful outcome. Some will be initiated or sponsored by the board while others can be adopted by the new president to enhance the president's personal effectiveness. Some practices will be more relevant during the earlier stages of sense-making while others will have application beyond the orientation and onboarding phase and contribute positively to the long term integration of the new president into the institution and its culture.

### **A) Smart practices for a governing board:**

As the president's supervisor and overseer of the institution, the governing board carries significant responsibility in supporting a new president through the transition process. Successful institutional leadership rests on a strong partnership between the governing board and the president, and boards must trust their presidents. A number of smart practices are described in this section that will help to build this trust and demonstrate the board's support for the new president.

#### ***Recommended smart practices:***

### **1. Establish a broad-based transition team and assemble comprehensive briefing materials to support the new president.**

Effective onboarding and orientation takes into account the needs of the new president and the needs of various stakeholders, such as constituencies within the institution and external supporters. A transition team should be established to support the president through this process and continue until the president determines that transition team support is no longer required.

The transition team may include some members of the governing board, but the membership should not be drawn primarily from the board. Instead, the transition team should draw its members from across the institution. The appropriate committee composition and size will vary from institution to institution, but the VP Academic, the executive assistant to the president and the university secretary should be considered for membership because of the institutional knowledge they normally possess.

The terms of reference should stipulate that the transition team is support to the president at the president's request; all activities undertaken by the team should be designed to support the new president and should be determined in consultation with the president. The transition team should have the authority and resource allocation necessary to carry out its work.

Comprehensive briefing materials about the institution should be developed and available to the incoming president during the president-designate phase.

**2. To the extent possible, use the president-designate phase to facilitate transition.**

Generally, there is a lag of several months between the time that contract negotiations with a candidate are concluded and the start date of the appointment. The value of this period of transition, which can be referred to as the president-designate phase, should not be underestimated. Boards and new presidents should take full advantage of the opportunity it presents for the sense-making process.

Onboarding and orientation normally includes a range of activities designed to increase the new president's understanding of the institution and support the president in building relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. Many of these activities can be initiated during the president-designate phase without undermining the outgoing president's final months of leadership.

If the board and incoming president determine that engagement will begin during the president-designate phase, the new president should commit to remaining at a distance from operational decision-making. Instead, engagement should focus on quiet information gathering; observing at meetings and events, such as senate or board meetings and convocation; and initial outreach to constituencies and external supporters of the institution. At appropriately timed opportunities and with the outgoing president's agreement and cooperation, the outgoing president may provide a bridge for the new president to external stakeholders and supporters of the institution and facilitate transferring key relationships to the new president.

If an internal candidate has been selected as the new president, this individual may benefit from a sabbatical between the prior appointment and the new appointment as president. A sabbatical not only allows the incoming president to re-focus on a new set of priorities but also provides the institution an opportunity to reset its perceptions of the individual and prepare to work with the individual in a new relationship.

For both internal and external hires, formal training, such as the Harvard Seminar for New Presidents, may also be pursued during this time.

**3. Establish a framework of goal setting and regular, formal and transparent feedback to the president.**

Boards must commit to transparency in its communications with the new president. A formal system of goal setting and performance feedback is key to ensuring that the new president and board of governors share an understanding of the board's expectations for the president in the first year of appointment and in subsequent years. The board should periodically check in with the goals, assess progress against them and offer feedback to the president. Suggestions for how the president's effectiveness can be enhanced should be offered as they arise. At the end of the first performance cycle, there should be no surprises for the president in the feedback provided by the board.

Feedback mechanisms such as 360 reviews may be valuable in providing new presidents with feedback from the perspective of their direct reports. The purpose of the feedback should be to support the president's leadership development and identify opportunities for additional formal training or coaching.

In considering the performance feedback to give to a president, boards should be mindful that each president will have a different conception of how the role of president should be enacted. Boards must be open to a new president carrying out the role differently than a predecessor or differently to a board member's expectations.

**4. Establish informal mechanisms for regular and transparent feedback to the president.**

Informal and candid feedback and support should be provided regularly to the president, primarily by the board chair through a schedule of regular one-on-one meetings with the president. In the first year of appointment the new president may benefit from more frequent meetings than in subsequent years. The board chair may seek the input of other board members in order to provide the president with a balanced view of the president's performance from the board's perspective.

Board meetings provide another opportunity for board members to offer comments, feedback and support directly to the president. Include a short, private discussion in each meeting to allow board members to raise issues without the president present. After the private discussion, the board chair should meet with the president to discuss any issues raised by board members in the private discussion.

**5. Consider the board's relationship with the new president through a diversity lens.**

Leadership takes many different forms and styles and boards should be open to supporting the leadership style that the new president brings to the job. Board members should be alert to their unconscious biases when critiquing the new president's performance.

**6. Support formal training and coaching for the new president.**

There are few opportunities in the academy to closely observe a president in all aspects of the role and new presidents lack an internal network of colleagues to whom they can turn for advice. Consequently, a new president will benefit from formal training that not only offers facilitated discussion about the role with seasoned leaders but also supports a new president to develop a network of support with others new to the role. Examples of formal training that may be considered include Harvard University's Workshop for New Presidents and Universities Canada's seminar for new presidents. New presidents may also benefit from formal coaching on an ongoing basis.

**7. Support a strategic approach to the first 100 days of the new president's appointment.**

Once a new president starts a term of appointment, there is very little time for that individual to be oriented to the institution before the university community will expect the new president to begin taking action. Consequently, the early days of the new president's appointment must be strategically managed.

The new president should be supported in engaging with the university community but the order in which meetings and activities occur should be carefully planned to prioritize key meetings and defer those that are of less strategic value. The president will need to create a presence on campus and care should be taken to ensure that the president's engagement with constituencies starts off on a positive tone.

External stakeholders and supporters of the institution will also require careful attention. Some relationships will be vested in the outgoing president and new presidents will be challenged to establish

their own connections with these stakeholders. Consequently, new presidents will benefit from advice on and support with engaging with key external stakeholders and building a presence in the broader community, especially if the president is also new to the community. Because Board members are usually well-connected in their communities they can be especially helpful in introducing a new president to organizations in the external community.

**8. Commit to ongoing board education about the institution and university governance.**

Presidential derailments can be attributed in part to lapses in governance practice. Board membership turns over frequently, which means that boards require ongoing professional development to ensure that good governance practice is maintained. Boards should also implement processes for regular assessment of its governance practices and seek opportunities for improvement.

Boards should also recognize that it has a limited understanding of the institution that it governs. Board education about the institution should be a recurring activity and not limited to the initial orientation that members receive on appointment to the governing board.

**9. Commit to fully supporting the president in public.**

In public, the president must have the full support of the board. Divergent views on institutional plans and priorities or issues with performance should be addressed in confidential meetings with the president.

**10. Practice patience.**

Transition is a long process, extending beyond the first 100 days of a presidency. Boards must have realistic expectations of what a new president can accomplish in the first year of appointment.

Similarly, boards should have patience with respect to subsequent years in a president's appointment. Presidential derailments are particularly damaging to an institution and should be avoided. Only in circumstances of egregious behaviours or actions on the part of the president should a termination be considered by the board.

Re-appointment processes are generally robust undertakings that are implemented early in the last year of a president's term of appointment. Feedback from the university community and external stakeholders may be considered during the process and inform a board's decision on whether to re-appoint a president. This is an opportunity for a board to decide whether a new leader is required and, if necessary, take a managed approach to leadership transition.

**B) Smart practices for a new president:**

While boards must trust their presidents, presidents must be worthy of their trust. At the same time, newly appointed presidents face a steep learning curve as they start the sense-making process. Even internal candidates who have the advantage of knowing the institution's culture will need to develop a greater understanding of university governance, build relationships with the board chair and board members and establish working relationships with constituencies under a new authority structure. This section describes smart practices that will support a new

president to build strong relationships with the governing board and learn about and integrate into the university community.

***Recommended smart practices:***

**1. Use the president-designate phase to enhance understanding of the institution.**

A new president has a very small window of time to become oriented to the institution once the term of appointment begins. The president-designate phase is, therefore, an important opportunity to learn more about the institution and begin engaging with key stakeholders outside of the spotlight. To the extent possible, capitalize on this time while respecting that the outgoing president is still the serving president. Begin developing a presence on campus and use the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the university, its stakeholders, culture and strategic priorities.

**2. Have a plan for the first year in position prior to starting the appointment but be open to adapting it.**

New presidents will benefit from having a clear plan for the first year in position. A new president who is able to engage with the university community during the president-designate phase will be at an advantage in terms of understanding the priorities of the institution and its culture and be well-positioned to “hit the ground running”. New presidents who are not able to invest in engaging with the university community prior to starting the appointment should still develop a general first year plan that will underpin the president’s communications during early engagement with internal constituencies and external stakeholders. The first year plan can be adapted as the new president gains a deeper understanding of the institution and its strengths and challenges.

**3. Recognize that learning culture takes time.**

A new president’s success depends on a clear understanding of the university’s culture. Recognize that learning culture takes time and investment in interacting with the university community. Each institution will have its own approach to decision-making and internal communications. Commit to learning the prevailing culture before attempting to shift it.

**4. Recognize the impact of the “office of president” on the institution.**

Develop an awareness of the weight that the president’s office carries within the institution. Do not underestimate the downstream effect of an inquiry or suggestion from the president’s office. Presidents may benefit from developing a circle of trusted individuals with whom a president can candidly engage in speculative discussion about ideas for the institution without being perceived as launching a new initiative or assigning a new project.

**5. Recognize the bench strength around you and build on it.**

Respect and build on the capacities of the institution. Many external friends and supporters of the university and individuals within the institution will have contributed to creating the institution as it is today and, though change may be required, new presidents should honour the work that has gone before them. By respecting past contributions a new president will solidify support and be better positioned to lead the institution in new directions and to new priorities.

## **6. Create deliberate strategies of engagement.**

New presidents need to establish a presence both on and off-campus in a short timeframe. Recognize that each constituency and stakeholder understands the role of the president differently and has different expectations of the president. Consequently, presidents must be adaptable to the needs of different audiences and should develop differentiated strategies of engagement, targeted and tailored to the various stakeholder groups.

Strategies should address short-term and longer-term objectives. They should take into account not only students, faculty and staff as broad constituencies for engagement, but also key influencers within the institution, external friends of the university, funders, donors, different levels of government and alumni.

Recognize the value of being visible on campus. Seemingly small acts, for example, attending student or employee events, walking the campus, or having coffee in public spaces, can earn significant social capital. Presidents will also benefit from more formal engagement structures that invite interaction with internal constituencies, such as president's breakfasts, blogs, speakers series, town halls or faculty meetings.

Relationships with external stakeholders can require a significant investment of time and energy for a president. Be prepared to prioritize social activity with friends and supporters of the institution.

## **7. The outgoing president can be a resource.**

New presidents may be unaware of some aspects of the role of president or not appreciate the extent to which certain activities and responsibilities will dominate the president's agenda. Recognize that the outgoing president may be a significant resource, able to provide a sense of the organizational culture and a roadmap to challenges on the horizon. Where possible, cultivate this relationship.

## **8. Develop external networks of support.**

The role of the president can be lonely. Unlike other positions, presidents do not have contemporaries within the institution who can act as confidantes. Consequently, new presidents will benefit from networks of support external to the institution.

Relationships with other university presidents who live a similar experience will be valuable resources and should be cultivated. Regional and national networks of university presidents will provide opportunities to establish these relationships and new presidents should take advantage of these networks.

Recognize, however, that networks of support with other university presidents will be limited by the extent of the competitive relationship between institutions. Depending on the issue, another university president may not be an appropriate confidante. Relationships with leaders from outside academia who can provide a fresh perspective can be a viable alternative to supports offered by other university presidents.

## **9. Develop an internal network of support.**

New presidents face the challenge of discerning among competing narratives about the institution as individuals and constituencies within the institution attempt to advance their priorities and interests. Part of the sense-making process is determining which of these narratives is reliable. Seek out individuals within

the institution who can provide a balanced perspective of the institution, its priorities and challenges. The vice-president academic, the executive assistant to the president and the university secretary may be valuable resources to this aspect of the sense-making process.

**10. Pursue formal training and coaching.**

Take advantage of executive coaching and opportunities for formal training, such as the workshop for new presidents sponsored by Universities Canada or Harvard University's Seminar for New Presidents.

**11. Prioritize learning about board governance.**

Few positions in the academy provide members of the institution an opportunity for exposure to the governing board and, frequently, new presidents will not have experience working closely with a board of governors. Commit to learning about board governance and university governance.

**12. Prioritize the relationship with the board chair and the board of governors.**

New presidents should not underestimate the importance of the president's relationship with the board of governors. Frequent turnover on the board and in the position of board chair means that significant energy and attention must be given to this most important of relationships. Building relationships with the board is an ongoing activity for a president.

**13. Prioritize the orientation and ongoing education of board members.**

Because of frequent turnover on the governing board, the education and orientation of board members is an ongoing responsibility of the president. Recognize that board members are generally drawn from outside academia and are unfamiliar with the collegial approach to decision-making that is a hallmark of most institutions. Consequently, board members require orientation and education about university governance and the university, its culture and norms of decision-making. External speakers can provide a valuable 3<sup>rd</sup> party perspective on matters related to governance or issues unique to academia.

**14. Commit to transparency in communication with the governing board.**

There should be no surprises in the relationship with the board of governors. President's should commit to proactive disclosure of all issues and governors should have full information and context for the decisions they are asked to make. Reports to the board should clearly align to the university's and the president's strategic goals and invite boards to engage in issues at the appropriate time and with the appropriate level of involvement.

**15. Seek clarity with the governing board on roles and decision-making authority.**

Both the board and the president must be clear on the boundaries around their respective domains of decision-making and respect those domains. External experts can be a useful resource to resolve questions about scope of authority and provide a balanced perspective on the structures of university governance.

## **16. Be clear in roles and responsibilities with direct reports.**

Each president will have a different conception of the role of the president and fulfill the obligations and responsibilities of the role in different ways. Direct reports require clarity in the lines between the responsibilities of the president and their own responsibilities. Invite a candid discussion with direct reports to clarify expectations. Periodically revisit the discussion to ensure that all parties share a common understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

## **17. Attend to personal health.**

The responsibilities of the president demand constant attention. Presidents should be disciplined about balancing work and home life. Reserve time for personal activities, such as regular physical activity and family commitments.

## **18. Practice patience**

Just as boards should practice patience, so, too, should new presidents. Goals and objectives for the first year and subsequent years should be realistic and informed by the context of the institution, its culture, strengths, opportunities and challenges.

## **19. Develop good listening skills.**

Presidents who demonstrate good listening skills will realize significant benefits in terms of relationship building with constituencies and the governing board.

## **20. Be genuine and commit to transparency in communications with stakeholder.**

Building trust with stakeholders is key to a president's success. Being genuine, leading from your values and committing to transparency in communication will create the conditions for establishing trust.

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## **Acknowledgement**

The smart practices to support a presidential transition that are described in this guide emerged from a study into the transition experiences of nine serving presidents of Canadian public universities. Each of the presidents had successfully navigated the transition process and was serving a second term of appointment as the president of her or his institution. With the benefit of hindsight, the presidents were asked during interviews to comment on their experiences, the practices that were most helpful to their transition and those that impeded it, gaps that should be closed and recommendations for boards and new presidents navigating the transition process. The findings from the interviews were supported by a review of literature related to leadership transition, organizational culture, stakeholder engagement, diversity and systems thinking. Lastly, the smart practice guide is informed by a review of policies related to presidential search, selection and transition currently in use by Canadian public universities. The author extends her deepest thanks to those presidents who so generously shared candid comments, observations and advice on the transition experience.

## Appendix 9 Preliminary Transition Budget

SEARCH EXPENSES (Estimated)			
ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION		ACTIVITY COST    TOTAL COST
<b>Administrative support</b> (.4 FTE for 6 months)			
	annual salary	\$45,000	
		0.4	
		0.5	
	pro-rated salary	\$9,000	
	benefits rate	1.25	
	estimated cost		\$11,250
<b>Meeting costs</b>			
	campus town hall	\$2,000	
	stakeholder meetings	\$2,500	
	interview facilities	\$10,000	
	estimated cost		\$14,500
<b>Executive search consultant &amp; supports</b>			
	search consulting, advertising, candidate travel	\$125,000	
	estimated cost		\$125,000
	<b>Estimated search costs</b>		<b>\$150,750</b>
TRANSITION TEAM EXPENSES (Estimated)			
<b>Administrative support</b> (.2 FTE for one year)			
	annual salary	\$45,000	
		0.2	
	pro-rated salary	\$9,000	
	benefits rate	1.25	
	estimated cost		\$11,250
<b>Meeting costs</b>			
	campus town hall	\$2,000	
	meetings with business units	\$2,500	
	hosted events with external stakeholders	\$10,000	
	estimated cost		\$14,500
<b>Travel</b>			
	stakeholder meetings - international		
	- president-designate & outgoing president	\$10,000	
	estimated cost		\$10,000
<b>Formal training</b>			
	Harvard seminar for new presidents		
	- seminar, travel and accommodation	\$18,000	
	estimated cost		\$18,000
	<b>Estimated transition team costs</b>		<b>\$53,750</b>
	<b>TOTAL ESTIMATED EXPENSES</b>		<b>\$204,500</b>