ORGANIZATIONAL LIFECYCLE IN NEW NON-PROFIT BOARD START-UPS:

AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

CENINA B. SAXTON

(Under the Direction of Khalil Dirani)

ABSTRACT

This study explored how the board of directors of a start-up chapter of a professional association utilized experiential learning to build their capacity as leaders while focusing on competing values that identify enablers of success. The research questions for this study were: (1) How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning? (2) How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization? (3) How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?

Data was captured through interviews, observations, and meeting notes used during the course of the study. The researcher conducted critical incident interviews. By understanding activities that had the most influence on learning, board members were able to change their behaviors. This allowed the board to focus on tasks enabling the chapter to be effective in day-to-day operations as well establish long-term stability.

Literature included in the study focused on experiential learning, Competing Values Framework, start-up organizations, and action research. Analysis of the findings generated the following conclusions: (1) Board members of the chapter gained more role clarity through experiential learning rather than standardized processes. (2) Through commitment and communication, interpersonal trust increased, allowing the board members to collaborate and work effectively as a cohesive unit. (3) New chapters experience greater success when focusing on “enablers” that align with their respective stage in the organizational lifecycle.

This study impacts theory by bridging the gap in how research addresses the learning needs of board members in non-profit, startup organizations. The study explores how non-profit boards utilize experiential learning and the Competing Values Framework to build competent leaders and understand which values are most critical to the success of the organization. The study shows the paradoxical impact of understanding individual’s role verses task.

The study suggests the following implications should be considered: (1) Individuals must understand their role when joining a board of directors. (2) Professional associations must attend to needs based on their respective stage in the organizational lifecycle. (3) Action research allows individuals to reflect and provide feedback that can be used to modify both individual and group behaviors.

INDEX WORDS: Action Research, Competing Values Framework, Experiential Learning, Non-Profit Boards, Organizational Lifecycle, Professional Associations, Start-up Organizations

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DEDICATION

To my parents, you have shown achievements in life come with determination, sacrifices, and most importantly humility. My father, Thomas Saxton, you allowed me to define my own path yet encouraged me along the way. Although soft-spoken in nature and of few words, I always reflect on you telling me, "Sister, you're smart." Those three words were all I ever needed to hear to continue any long-fought race. Not only do I have a father but I am also was blessed with a friend and confidant. "Tom", thank you for loving me through defiance, growth, and maturity. Love you endlessly!

I was afforded many opportunities through the sacrifices of my mother, Linda Holland-Saxton. As a child, extracurricular activities, a part-time job, and social outings were with one condition - maintaining an "A" average in all subjects. "Mama, I am now Doctor Cenina B. Saxton." Your prayers have carried me over the decades of my life. Many of those prayers were unbeknownst to me; however, blessings and favor resulted. Not only did you demonstrate the many virtues of a woman but she also showed me how to balance a career, community involvement, and family. Thank you Mama! Love you more and more each day!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey would not have been possible without my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You answered my prayers and wiped away my tears before this journey, along the way, and after it concluded. I pray that I continue to be covered by your mercy and receive blessings as I move forward professionally and spiritually. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13, New King James Version)

First, I would like to acknowledge my major professor, Dr. Khalil Dirani. Khalil, I thank you for providing me with guidance and support. Also, thank you for allowing me to guide my path and encouraging me even when I felt defeated. Much success in all that you do. Drs. Wendy Ruona and Karen Watkins, you both were so instrumental in my completion of this journey. You encouraged me to share a story that was much more vivid than what I initially set out to do. You saw what was emerging when I was still quite clueless as how to truly appreciate action research. I am thankful to have you both on committee.

To the entire faculty who supported this program, thank you for creating a learning space that I only wish every scholar-practitioner could experience. Each of you possesses a unique blend of realizing the potential in your students coupled with diverse subject-matter expertise. The sacrifices that you made to support each of us are worthy of recognition and praise. I immensely thank you!

I also acknowledge my grandmother, Gladys James. You are such an amazing woman – the matriarch of our family. The educational opportunities that I have been afforded are due much to your lifetime of sacrifices. You placed your life on hold to care for me as my parents worked. I am sure after many of my temper tantrums, you yearned to return to “your life”; yet, you stuck it out with me. Thank you for ensuring I was dressed for school and wearing a warm jacket and fuzzy hat on those winter mornings when I rebelled. A little piece of you is in every part of me. Love you immensely.

I could not end this journey without acknowledging my older brother, Patrick. We are so very different; yet our love for each other cannot be measured. You and Chimikki have given me two of the most amazing nephews. Being able to watch you parent Quentin and Rashaun has provided me with a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices one makes when taking on the role of parent. I applaud you for as you exemplify the traits of an outstanding father.

Lastly, I would like to thank my circle of friends and family who have been an unyielding source of encouragement. I am fortunate to be surrounded by a group of individuals who selflessly understood that the many times when I could only be present in thought. Friends and family, you could have easily written me off. Instead, you understood the importance of my journey and encouraged me along the way. Many thanks!

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ORGANIZATIONAL LIFECYCLE IN NEW NON-PROFIT BOARD START-UPS: AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Career progression takes many forms. While employers are responsible for creating work environments that foster learning and development, they expect employees to share in the responsibility of career development. One of the resources available to help advance individuals' career development is the professional association. Such organizations encourage professionals in similar career fields to network and share best practices and trends as a means of advancing toward professional goals.

Professional associations exist to represent professionals in a particular career field. These organizations aim to encourage exemplary practice and empower professionals by providing them with highly sought-after knowledge and skills. Some professional associations require certification or licensing to qualify for membership, while others act have no such requirements and function as learning communities. A strong professional association encompasses a robust membership base with a range of experiences. Professional associations best attend to the needs of the organization not by following a single, predetermined model, but rather by designing interventions that respond to the specific needs and contexts of the constituents. (McQuide, Millonzi, & Farrell, 2007).

Problem and System-Entry

"Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

This quote has always inspired me, and it resonated with me as I embarked on a journey to understand how a professional association influences career development. Initially, there was no clear path to take to understand how a new chapter of an existing professional association can be effective in delivering programs and services to its membership. One might expect a new chapter to shadow an existing chapter and imitate its processes and procedures. Yet when a new chapter differs significantly from existing chapters, this approach may not prove beneficial.

A professional association represents a formal group of practitioners in a specific profession (McCroskey & O'Neil, 2010). Just as for-profit organizations have a responsibility to respond to internal and external factors continuity of the group, non-profit professional associations face similar challenges. Members may have difficulty recognizing the benefits of membership, change careers, or look to other organizations as sources of professional development. When this occurs too frequently, membership declines, volunteerism decreases, and the cost of offering services increases as a result. These factors lead professional associations to seek methods of attracting non-members and retaining existing members, all while providing valuable services. The ongoing challenges of gaining and maintaining member commitment highlight the need for professional associations to identify the most effective means to attract and retain members.

Professional commitment can be measured by developmental activities such as pursuing continuing education, attending workshops, or presenting a paper at a meeting (McCroskey & O'Neil, 2010). McCroskey and O'Neil tested their assumptions that developmental activities are indications of commitment by sending 1,934 survey invitations to members of Delta Pi Epsilon, a national graudate honor society who members support the advancement of education and business. The survey received 1,696 responses. The study found that the top three reasons members joined the organization were to keep abreast of research in business, for professional/personal improvement, and to do their jobs betters. Also, the reasons members joined Delta Pi Epsilon were the same reasons they reported remaining in the organization.

Githens (2009) posits that professional groups provide opportunities for collaboration, professional socialization, and the formation of a community among practitioners. A study conducted by Zabel (2008) found that professional associations miss an opportunity to demonstrate value if they fail to position activities such as mentoring as opportunities to advance members' leadership skills.

I spent three years exploring the dynamics of a volunteer organization that aims to enhance the career success of human resources development practitioners. As new chapters join existing volunteer organizations, the board of directors must face the challenges of expanding the membership, onboarding new board members, and defining the mission and vision of the chapter. For a new chapter to be effective, learning must be integrated into the development of board of directors and the board must identify the values it will adopt to support organizational effectiveness. However, because the leaders of a new chapter are typically working together for the first time, they will inevitably confront differences in communication styles, leadership philosophies, and work behaviors.

The Association of Human Resources Professionals (AHRP)[1] is a professional association that seeks to advance the theoretical and practical knowledge of human resources development (HRD) practitioners across multiple industries and career levels. The organization provides a number of activities that support professional growth and development, including local chapter meetings, networking events, local and national conferences, and opportunities for community involvement. The national organization is comprised of over 35 local chapters.

This study focused on a new chapter, which officially launched in February 2012. The new chapter aims to share practices among colleagues from diverse industries, encompassing the private and public sectors, military, non-profit, academia, and the local community.

Undertaking this study provided me with an opportunity for significant growth in my career and enhancement of my skills as a practitioner. During the course of my career I have been a member of numerous professional organizations. My first experience as a board member began as an invitation to serve as a project coordinator for a professional association. Through the knowledge and experience I gained as a project coordinator, I was subsequently offered an opportunity to serve on the board of directors. Not only did I learn about the challenges new board members face through this experience, but I also gained much needed skills that I was then able to apply in my career.

On this occasion, I was a board member in an established chapter that had a strong membership base, a well-known mission, and a seasoned leadership team. Under these conditions, my development as a board member was fast-tracked. However, this was a very different experience from that of board members in a new chapter that is still creating its brand and forming its identity. In working with the board members of a new chapter, I sought to

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[1] Pseudonyms are used for all organizations and individuals in the study, with the exception of the action researcher.

provide them with a reflective process through which they could learn from their experiences, enabling them to more effectively develop future board members and thereby create a sustainable chapter.

Research Questions and Purpose of the Study

This study will explore how non-profit board members utilized action research not only to understand capacity building, but also to learn the key information necessary to implement and build a new chapter. The purpose of the study was to examine the enablers of success for starting a new chapter of a professional association. This study addresses the following research questions by examining how a team used action research (AR) to guide interventions and activities that either aid or hinder the growth of the chapter:

1. How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning?
2. How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization?
3. How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?

The Competing Values Framework (CVF), Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), and start-up organizations make up the conceptual framework through which enablers of success will be defined. The first element undergirding the study is the Competing Values Framework (CVF). The CVF emerged in the early 1980s as a tool to identify what makes organizations effective (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Hart and Quinn (1993) stated that effective leadership encompasses many capabilities, including decisiveness and reflectiveness, broad vision and attention to detail, bold moves and incremental adjustment, and a performance as well as a people orientation. The CVF suggests that two primary dimensions influence effectiveness – organizational focus and organizational structure. Effective organizations are faced with pursuing conflicting criteria (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, & McGrath, 1996).

Many researchers have used Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) to examine how leaders leverage their experiences as vehicles for learning. David Kolb (1984) defines knowledge as a combination of "grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). As organizations focus on the actions needed to create effectiveness, collaborative or experiential learning plays a vital role. For new board members of an organization, adaptability is crucial as they seek to learn their roles while also managing group dynamics. Research suggests that in this context, learning is most impactful when it centers on creating a space in which to learn together and share wisdom, rather than focusing on designing learning strategies geared specifically towards board development (Skotnitsky & Ferguson, 2005). Skotnitsky and Ferguson (2005) argue that interpersonal interaction in which individuals are involved in exploring a challenge acts as a conduit for learning.

The study which is situated in a non-profit, start-up organization aims to provide a better understanding of how start-up organizations move through the organizational lifecycle as they build the capacity of board members while determining which activities should be the primary focus for the long-term sustainability of the chapter.

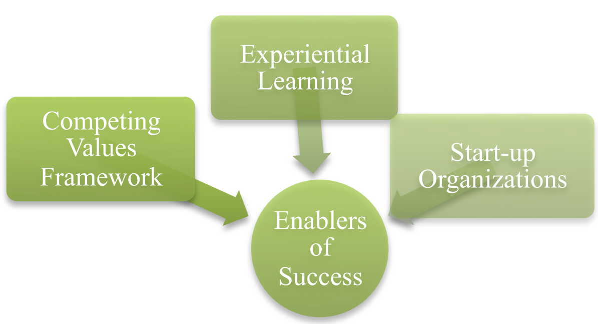

Figure 1: The enablers of success: Competing Values Framework, experiential learning, and start-up organizations.

Lastly, the study examines effectiveness and learning through the lens of action research. Action research focuses on an issue in the workplace and examines the organization's success or lack of success related to that issue (McNiff & Whitehead 2009). In this study, the action research team sought to identify the practices that strengthened the board and to identify challenges that emerged during the team life cycle. Integrating action research as a way of approaching learning and evaluating effectiveness can assist board members in reflecting on how they function in their roles and how well they support other board members. Moreover, Coghlan and Brannick's (2009) study suggests that as engagement in action research begins, the sequential steps of understanding, constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action are critical. Moreover, each step of the process has some dependency on the preceding step.

During early stages of the study, I introduced action research as cyclical process with potentially overlapping steps that include: pre-step, constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009. I also introduced other elements of the study including intervention design, implementation, and evaluation. Members of the action research (AR) team contributed to each component of the research process.

The CVF is a highly useful model for understanding organizations and the individuals who comprise them. It aids in understanding measures of effectiveness and leadership competencies. CVF can be used in a number of contexts either as a strategic resource or as a tool to understand dynamics such as management styles or organizational processes.

Similarly, experiential learning serves many purposes in organizations. It creates a foundation for individuals to learn through feedback and reflection while employing lessons learned from past experiences to new situations. Experiential learning works best when its lessons can be extrapolated to apply to other experiences. Experiential learning allows individuals to explore feelings and beliefs that spark particular reactions to critical events that influence the learning process.

The study aims to better understand the nuances of start-up organizations. Start-up organizations are unique as they not only vie for existing resources but also struggle to identify new sources of potential resources. As they do this, they attempt to attract leaders with needed skills who share an interest in carrying out the mission and vision of the organization. Start-up organizations attempt to gain intellectual capital while identifying applicable measures of success.

Utilizing action research enhances the contributions of the CVF and experiential learning in the study. The cyclical nature of action research enables the examination of problems not only through the lens of the researcher, but also from the perspectives of those who are integral to the system. Action research, unlike traditional research, yields interventions that are designed to address the particular needs of an organization, not to determine whether the organization fits a specific hypothesis. Action research thus enables the integration of needed changes that are uncovered during the evaluation of impact of an intervention. More importantly, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are key components of action research. These types of reflection assist participants in thinking through an action as it occurs, while also taking into consideration the behaviors that influence outcomes.

CVF, experiential learning, start-up organizations and action research were appropriate choices for this study for a variety of reasons. CVF aids in identifying what makes organizations effective. The study uncovered a number of activities that influenced the ability of chapter leaders to effectively learn from their experiences. Experiential learning has been used in many organizations to examine how leaders leverage their experiences as learning vehicles. Finally, the study examines how the team used action research to guide interventions and activities that either aid or hinder the chapter's growth. These approaches not only helped to answer the research questions, but also provided a holistic framework that other non-profit boards may leverage when onboarding new chapters.

Significance of the Study

Volunteer organizations play a vital role in identifying trends specific to their membership base and using this information to respond to the needs of their members. Volunteer organizations often provide forums in which like-minded individuals can share best practices that allow them to address issues in their homes, workplaces, and communities. Numerous studies have investigated individuals' motivation for volunteerism and explored the life cycle of a volunteer board. Yet these studies do not illustrate how learning and competing values also influence the enablers of success for a volunteer board.

An abundance of literature exists offering guidance for leaders of both non-profit and for-profit organizations on how to be better communicators, decision-makers, innovators, and visionaries. This study adds to that knowledge base by identifying how leaders of new chapters of professional associations can successfully navigate the onboarding process. This study not only seeks to impact theoretical knowledge in this area; it also aims to provide applications to help other professional associations identify best practices for onboarding new chapters and board leaders.

As AHRP grows nationally, expansion into non-traditional markets is likely as the organization explores onboarding international chapters. For this expansion effort to succeed, the leadership team will need a framework to guide new chapters through learning how to organize their board members and identify the enablers of success that are applicable to the chapter. The goal of this study was to identify activities that enable a new chapter to grow by learning from experiences and leveraging competing values.

The literature review served a twofold purpose for this study. First, research literature was examined that was relevant to the study, including research on volunteer organizations to identify the challenges these groups face in today's environment. This research was cross-referenced with the dynamics that occurred during this study. Experiential learning was examined as well, as much of the learning that occurred during this study resulted from trial and error rather than from formalized processes or curricula. Finally, action research was included in the literature to better assess if the group utilized the process to identify enablers of success.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes literature that focuses on the needs of board of directors in volunteer organizations. Studies of similar organizations and nature include gaining a better understanding of the needs of leaders who serve in a volunteer capacity. The chapter begins with an overview of start-up organizations, specifically, volunteer organizations, followed by discussion of the needs of board of directors, examination of success measures of organizations using the Competing Values Framework, and a review of literature focusing on experiential learning. The final section of the chapter is an exploration on how action research can be utilized in organizations.

Using The University of Georgia Library Galileo system, searches were conducted to find relevant studies and literature. Keywords used to examine the literature include the following: action research, board development, Competing Values Framework, experiential learning, non-profit organizations, professional associations, organizational commitment, organizational lifecycle, role clarity, startup organizations, and volunteer organizations. Sources of relevant literature included journal articles, practitioner-focused books, and research studies used for practitioner and scholarly dissemination. Table 1 summarizes studies that were a foundation for this study. In addition, table 2 offers, empirical studies that are related to start-up organizations.

Table 1

Literature Related to The Study

Focus	Resource	Findings/Recommendations
Action Research	Beckhard & Harris, 1997	Action Research teams should consider what needs to be changed and ways to implement the changes into a program.
	Reason & Bradbury, 2008	Learning and action research makeup a symbiotic relationship. Action research not only leads to practical knowledge but also provides the foundation to create new knowledge
Competing Values Framework	Quinn, 1998	Measures of effectiveness vary across each dimension of the Competing Values Framework
Learning Strategies	Kolb, 1984	Knowledge is acquired through transforming experiences.
	Argyris & Schön, 1978	Double-loop learning examines the error or issue then changing the conditions to achieve the desired result
	Dixon, 1999; Collinson & Cook, 2007	Individuals demonstrated organizational learning competence through dimensions that include the following: competence to learn from others and through diversity of opinions, collaboration and participation, communication, ability to deal with change, and to take responsibility for the results of the learning process
Non-Profit Organizations	Skotnitsky & Ferguson, 2005	In non-profit organizations, people prefer options as to when to meet as availability, work schedules, etc. vary greatly.
	Eisenberg, 1997	Non-profits should avoid implementing practices that are designed with for-profit organizations in mind.
	Prentice & Ferguson, 2000	Female board members attempt to make organizations more like a family
Organizational Commitment	Ghoshal & Barlett, 1994	Support attends to the level of autonomy and resources needed to carry out tasks and responsibilities. Trust looks at the role other team members play in decision-making along with individual competence

		to carry out a task.

Table 2

Empirical Research Related to the Study

Focus	Resource	Population	Findings
Competing Values Framework	DiPadova, & Faerman, 1993	Interviews conducted in 15 public sector organizations. Interview population included 67 individuals interviewed, 23 were upper-level managers; 23 were middle- level; and 21 were first-level.	Levels within the organization determine the role individuals play in an organization. As one moves up the hierarchy, they become more removed from day-to-day operations.
	Sendelbach, 1993	Research study conducted by Ford Motor Company and Michigan university aimed at developing learning opportunities and development programs using the Competing Values Framework to profile the organization. Study participants were managers at Ford Motor Company.	One of the study's findings suggests feedback from others was instrumental in changing behaviors Feedback offered aided participants in understanding how they were perceived verses how they saw themselves.
Experiential Learning		Sixty-three participants participated in a mixed-methods study aimed at exploring how a start-up organization utilized experiential learning to influence market performance.	The study showed one mode of learning included through trial-and-error where the original plan was abandoned as new information or knowledge emerged.
Start-up organizations	Werachai & Tips, 1989	Sixty-seven NGO participants were selected to to participant in a study that explored the responsibility of identifying start-up projects.	Study showed a systematic start-up process and internal communication were necessary to be effective in carrying out tasks.
	Romanelli, 1989	US-based start-up organizations founded to produce a minicomputer between 1957 and 1981 .	External or environmental factors affect the survive or longevity of start-up organizations.

Start-up Organizations and Organizational Lifecycle

Effective organizations strategically plan for the future by developing a mission statement and identifying goals that will enhance the organization's financial solvency (Bryson, 1995). Just as people grow and evolve, organizations move through similar cycles. Ideally, organizations would move through these cycles in a predictable manner. In reality, the organizational lifecycle is anything but linear or predicable. Nevertheless, successful leaders understand that the needs of an organization will change as the organization grows. As a result, a rigid, linear response to change will not result in longevity for the organization.

Early research focused largely on the lifecycle of mature organizations while passing over organizations that were in earlier stages of development. As research progressed, attention shifted to better account for the changes organizations experience in all stages of development. Quinn and Cameron (1983) examined organizational lifecycles and concluded that organizational growth follows identifiable patterns characterized by developmental stages. The stages are successive, follow a hierarchical progression, and incorporate a large number of activities and structures (Adizes, 1979; Bourgeois, et al., 1978; Cameron, 1978; Lavoie & Culbert, 1978). In addition to summarizing these organizational lifecycle stages, Quinn and Cameron proposed criteria for maintaining organizational effectiveness across each stage of development. This most appropriate model of organizational effectiveness is therefore highly contingent upon the developmental stage of an organization. Table 3 presents Quinn and Cameron's summary model of organizational lifecycles.

Table 3

Summary Model Of Organizational Lifecyles As Described By Quinn and Cameron (1983)

Entrepreneurial Stage	**Collectivity Stage**	**Formalization and Control Stage**	**Elaboration of Structure Stage**
• Aligning resources • Idea generation • Entrepreneurial activities • Minimal planning and coordination • Formation of niche • Prime mover holds "power"	• Informal communication and structure • Sense of collectivity • Long hours • Mission identification • Innovation emerges • High commitment	• Formalization of processes • Anchored structure • Attention to efficiency • Conservatism • Institutionalized procedures	• Elaboration of structure • Decentralization • Domain expansion • Adaptation • Renewal

As the summary model suggests, the organization's activities vary by stage, resulting in a need to identity different success measures for each stage. Quinn and Cameron (1983) posit that changes in the criteria for effectiveness over the course of the organizational lifecycle challenge earlier theories of organizational adaptation. Early theorists argued that organizations should adapt when faced with complexity, and that structured processes and procedures would create a stable environment. Quinn and Cameron's model suggests instead that an organization's response to change must align with its stage of development.

For example, innovation, creativity, and resource identification play key roles in organizational effectiveness during the entrepreneurial stage, suggesting the importance of the open systems model for this stage. As organizations transition to the collectivity stage, the human relations model emerges. In this stage, organizations tend to focus less on formal means of communication and structure and more on developing a sense of family and cooperation. High levels of member commitment and personalized leadership also appear in this stage. In the formalization stage, policies and procedures gain importance. At this stage, key drivers of effectiveness include goal setting, productivity, and stability. As organizations reach the elaboration stage, attention shifts to the external environment and the examination of open systems, providing the foundation for flexibility and growth.

The organizational lifecycle described by Quinn and Cameron (1983) offers a highly useful tool to understand the factors that foster organizational success. In recent years, researchers have examined the trends that characterize the growth of non-profit organizations in an effort to identify the organizational lifecycle of non-profits. In non-profit settings, the organizational lifecycle incorporates five key stages, as well as an idea stage that includes the initial conception of the organization. Figure 2 illustrates the non-profit organizational lifecycle.

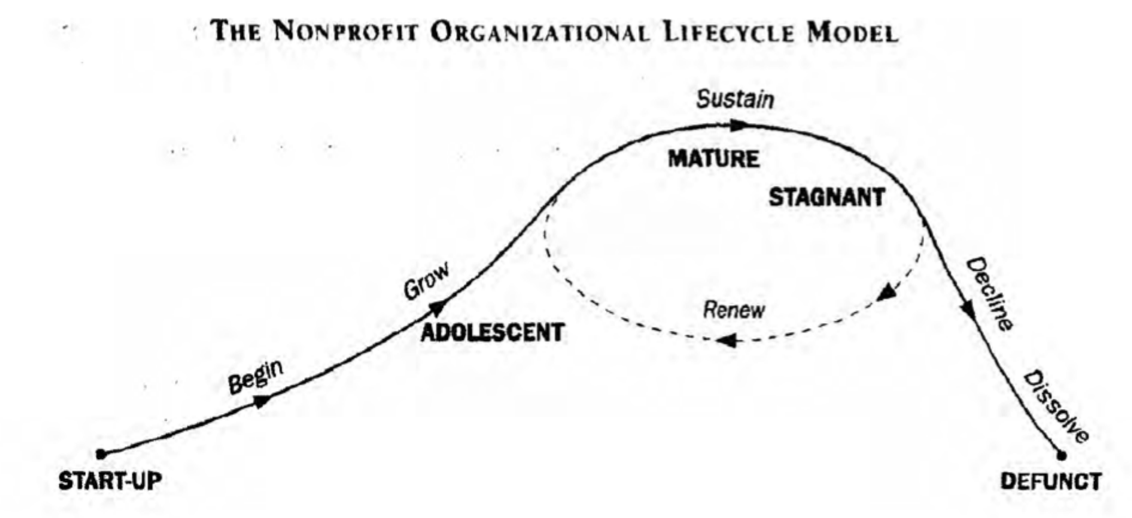

Figure 2: The non-profit organizational lifecycle as described by Connolly (2006).

Just as organizations themselves differ, lifecycles may emerge differently in each organization. The time spent in each stage may vary greatly across organizations. The non-profit lifecycle includes the start-up, adolescent, mature, stagnant, and defunct stages (Connolly, 2006). Often an idea emerges to fill a need although the organization to carry out the idea has yet to be formed. This may be seen as a test or beta phase. Founding members share their idea with others to elicit feedback and input. This engagement may lead to identifying potential board members. The idea also requires identifying revenue streams and determining potential sources of funding. It can often be difficult to determine which need(s) will have the greatest impact. Perhaps many others share interest in the idea, but garnering the support necessary to engage stakeholders may be an obstacle. Ideas merge into the start-up stage.

The start-up stage is characterized by excitement as creative energy flows within the organization. Flexibility and external support are enablers of success in this stage. As the organization transitions to the adolescent stage, it is necessary to build adaptive leadership capacity (Connolly, 2006). Adaptive leadership determines how a leader responds to the environment based on situational factors (Connolly). This stage is akin to the collectivity stage described by Quinn and Cameron (1983). During the adolescent stage, the culture of the organization prioritizes informal communication and structure, a sense of family and cooperation among members, high member commitment, and personalized leadership (Anderson, 1981).

As organizations move to the mature phase, more formalized policies and procedures emerge and a more conservative approach is taken, focusing on stability and efficiency (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). As organizations move toward stagnation, a feeling of unsettledness emerges. Stagnant organizations struggle to address challenges. Founding members may depart from the organization as reductions in budgets for key programs occur. The organization can identify new ways of functioning or ultimately decide to dissolve. If an organization reaches the dissolution or defunct stage, it moves through the necessary steps to cease to exist.

The lifecycle of a non-profit organization is important to understand for several reasons. The lifecycle stage aids in determining measures of effectiveness. An organization must recognize the stage in which it is operating in order to identify key performance indicators. The lifecycle stage also determines the most effective leadership style for board members to adopt to meet the current needs of the organization. During the early stages, understanding governance, establishing role clarity, and developing policy are key tasks. As the organization moves closer to maturity and subsequent lifecycle stages, attention shifts to board evaluations, strategy, and external partnerships. Moreover, the culture of the organization drives predictors of organizational effectiveness. In addition, diagnosing stages of the lifecycle supports members as they leverage experiential learning.

Volunteer Organizations

This study aims to differentiate the needs of a particular type of start-up organization by focusing on the needs of a non-profit, volunteer organization. For years, volunteer organizations in the U.S. have struggled to engage effective leaders who have the functional expertise and leadership skills necessary to sustain the organization. In 2012, the adult volunteer rate reached only 26.5 percent, down 0.3 percent from 2011 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). The volunteer rate is showing a slight decrease in recent years. Factors contributing to this may include: availability or time to volunteer, knowledge of the needs of organizations, or other priorities.

To further understand the nuances of a volunteer organization, it is necessary to define the term *volunteer*. Volunteers donate their skills, expertise, and/or time to an organization without compensation (Cnann, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). The contributions of volunteers are a necessary but not sufficient condition for establishing a sustainable volunteer organization. Many factors influence the sustainability of volunteer organizations. Population and economic shifts impact the availability of individuals who can provide leadership for volunteer organizations, often in unexpected ways. It might be assumed, for example, that a growing city with an influx of commerce would have a rich pool of potential volunteers. In fact, newcomers often lack a connection to local organizations and are therefore less likely to volunteer their time (Rupasingha, Goezt, & Freshwater, 2006). This suggests that volunteer organizations require specialized recruitment strategies to engage volunteers who can lead their constituency effectively.

Some researchers have found that individuals must identify with an organization's mission and values before they are likely to become volunteers (Cameron, 1999). This suggests that volunteer organizations must have a mission and vision that resonates with the individuals they hope to recruit to sustain their volunteer corps. Such organizations must therefore insure that they have a clearly stated mission and vision that align with the value systems of their intended members. In addition, the mission and vision together serve as a guide that helps shape an organization's programs, services, and recruitment strategy. Before a new organization can develop its mission and vision, however, it must first recruit a board of directors (BOD) who share an interest in carrying out the functions of the organization.

Board of Directors

The composition of a volunteer organization's board of directors is integral to that organization's performance (Brown, 2002). Those who serve in leadership roles on boards of directors may come from a broad array of professional and backgrounds (Axelrod, 1994). In the private sector, human resources practitioners aid leaders in identifying the competencies and functional expertise necessary to fulfill critical roles. Just as role clarity plays a significant role in the success of for-profit organizations, it is equally if not more important for volunteer organizations, which often lack sufficient resources (Lynn, 2003). However, many volunteer organizations lack the expertise to determine necessary roles and create supporting job descriptions. As a result, role ambiguity permeates many volunteer organizations (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Role ambiguity, defined as a lack of understanding of what is needed to perform tasks associated with one's role, can negatively influence job performance in any organization.

Moreover, the traditional roles and job descriptions of organizational leaders may no longer be sufficient, as organizations face competitive challenges that warrant the need for boards of directors with expertise in marketing, technology, and public relations (Jansen & Kilpatrick, 2004). Jansen and Kilpatrick (2004) suggest that to be successful, a non-profit organization must complete the following steps: (1) find and evaluate a CEO, (2) ensure adequate financial resources, (3) address organizational needs for expertise or access, and (4) build the nonprofit's reputation with important constituencies. Figure 3 illustrates the dynamic framework of a board.

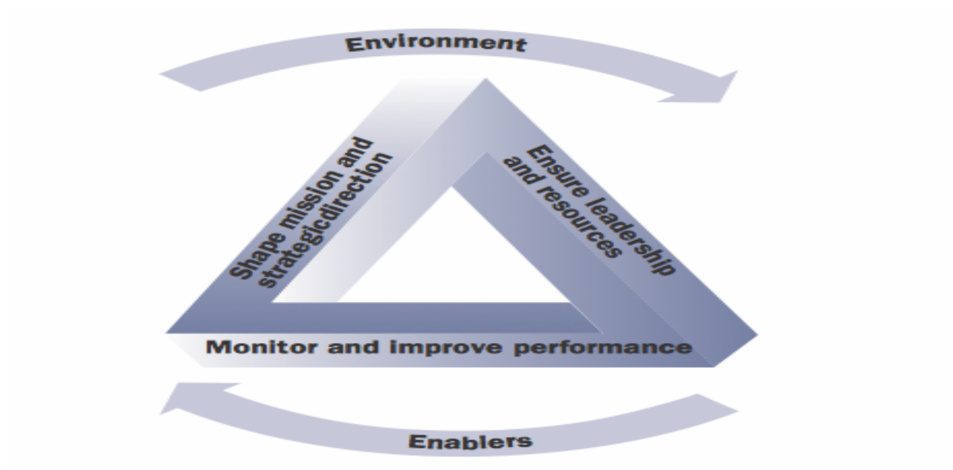

Figure 3: The dynamic non-profit board framework as illustrated by Jansen and Kilpatrick (2004).

Board Performance

Kennerley and Neely (2002) define *performance management* as the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of actions individuals and groups in an organization. When examining multiple measures, board performance has been found to directly impact organizational effectiveness. A study by Preston and Brown (2004) found that the following behaviors of board members elicit higher levels of performance for the organization: (1) attendance at required meetings and related social events, (2) quality of attendance, (3) knowledge of organization's mission, services, and programs, (4) knowledge of general board and organizational issues, and (5) recognition of when to provide assistance.

Board members will frequently offer assistance with tasks to support their board colleagues. Meyer and Allen (1997) suggest that this form of organizational citizenship behavior correlates positively with both affective and normative commitment. Organ (1988) defines *organizational citizenship behavior* (OCB) as:

> individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. By discretionary, we mean that the behavior is not an enforceable requirement of the role or the job description, that is, the clearly specifiable terms of the person's employment contract with the organization; the behavior is rather a matter of personal choice, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishable. (p. 4)

Meyer and Allen (1991) define *affective commitment* as an "employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization." *Normative commitment* refers to "a feeling of obligation to continue employment" (p. 67). Board members who achieve high levels of performance by offering support to others are likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment. However, caution should be observed when referencing objective behaviors such as attendance and OCB as effective measures of performance. These measures may not directly lead to performance at the organizational level. In addition, Vardiman, Houghton, and Jinkerson (2006) argue, "Effective leadership within an organization is often viewed as the foundation for organizational performance and growth. For leaders to be effective and meet performance expectations, commitment is needed. Organizations that lack strong leadership are likely to fail to meet performance expectations" (p. 93).

Role Ambiguity

Leaders of volunteer organizations require knowledge of their responsibilities along with an understanding of how their performance will be measured. Kahn et al. (1964) identified task ambiguity and socioemotional ambiguity as two potential detriments to job performance. *Task ambiguity* refers to one's understanding of what they should be doing, along with how to carry out the tasks. *Socioemotional ambiguity* indicates a lack of understanding of how performance is measured and of the consequences for failing to meet performance expectations.

Although ambiguity may influence performance, some researchers have argued role ambiguity has multiple dimensions and caution against relying solely on ambiguity as a performance indicator (Breaugh & Colihan, 1994; King & King, 1990). The notion of volunteers serving in multiple capacities perpetuates the blurred lines that exist in understanding their roles, increasing the occurrence of role ambiguity (Cuskelly, Hove, & Auld, 2006; Doherty, 1998; Merrell, 2000; Pearce, 1993; Widmer, 1993). Role ambiguity not only impacts performance but may also decrease an individual's commitment to the organization. A study conducted by Salancik (1977) linked the presence of role ambiguity to a lack of commitment in board of directors.

Organizational Commitment

As boards seek to maximize their effectiveness, their efforts can be misrouted when commitment is absent. Chelladurai (2006) suggests that organizational commitment directly impacts the effectiveness of an organization. *Organizational commitment* is defined as an attitudinal construct, manifested as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, p. 27). Meyer and Allen (1991) developed a three-component model that includes the following measures of commitment: *affective commitment* (AC), or an emotional bond based on identification with an organization's mission; *normative commitment* (NC), or a sense of loyalty based on perceived obligation to an organization; and *continuance commitment* (CC), or a sense of attachment based on the costs associated with leaving. Meyer and Allen concluded that these forms of commitment are not mutually exclusive; an individual may display any of all of these types of commitment, or no commitment at all. Although the model is highly regarded, the relevance of the full model for volunteers has been widely debated (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2008).

Organizational Trust

A robust understanding of organizational commitment requires insight into the related concept of organizational trust. High levels of organizational trust link to high levels of organizational commitment (Song, Kim, & Kolb, 2009). Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) describe *organizational trust* as the overarching belief that an organization in its communication and behaviors is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable, and worthy of identification with its goals, norms, and values.

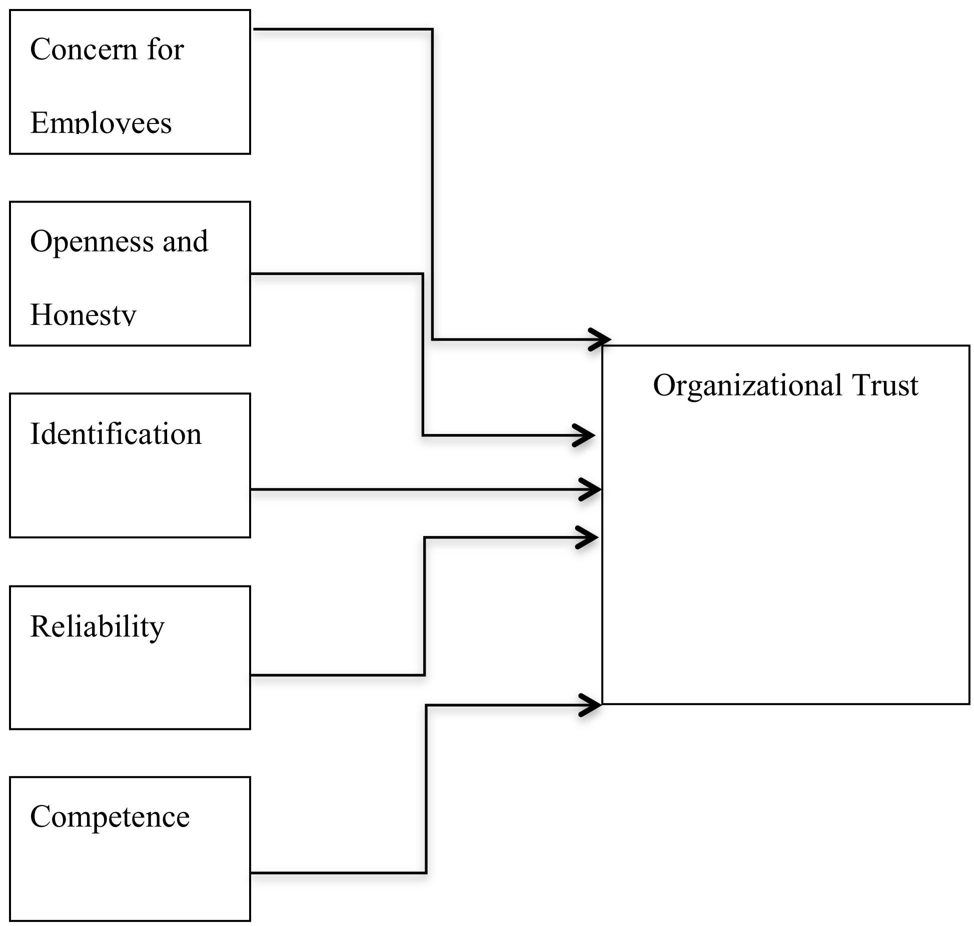

Figure 4: Model of organizational trust as defined by Shockley-Zalabak, et al., 2010.

Concern for employees and/or stakeholders focuses on communication and employment practices. It suggests that organizational communication must be not only top-down, but bottom-up as well. The *competence* dimension refers to the ability of the organization—through its leadership, strategy, decisions, quality, and capabilities—to meet the challenges of its environment, as well as to achieve the organization's objectives. Competence allows mobilization of the organization through its leadership, strategy, decisions, quality, and capabilities. Competence allows an organization to meet the challenges of its environment and achieve its objectives.

The *openness and honesty* dimension focuses on problem solving and the impact of decisions on the organization's members. Long-term strategic planning suggests the presence of openness and honesty. The *identification* dimension suggests that the values of individual members must align with the values of the organization itself. Essentially, an individual who identifies with an organization establishes a personal connection with leaders, peers, and the organization. *Reliability* looks at commitments and follow-through. Reliable organizations not only share changes that need to be made but also share why these changes must occur.

Trust impacts an organization in at least four ways: (1) bottom-line results, (2) organizational forms, (3) work effort, and (4) organizational learning (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). In addition, McEvily, Perrone, and Zaheer (2003) suggest that trust influences organizations through structuring and mobilizing. *Structuring* aids in establishing stable patterns in and between organizations, while *mobilizing* motivates individuals to contribute, combine, and coordinate resources toward collective efforts. High organizational trust positively transforms individuals and organizations through structuring, mobilizing, and learning (Benetytė & Jatuliaviciene, 2013).

Boards of directors face many challenges, often driven by conflicting agendas. They must provide clear direction to ensure that performance measures are in place while ensuring that each board member understands the expectations of their role. For a non-profit organization to be effective, commitment and trust from board members is paramount. Without these elements, goals may be left unmet and the needs of the membership neglected, and the organization may ultimately fail to carry out its mission.

Competing Values Framework (CVF)

Effective organizations must establish a balance between multiple agendas, between internal and external influences, and between the needs for flexibility and structure. The CVF emerged in the early 1980s as a tool to help explain what makes organizations effective (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Hart and Quinn (1993) found that effective leadership requires many capabilities, including decisiveness and reflectiveness, broad vision and attention to detail, bold moves and incremental adjustment, and a performance as well as a people orientation (Hart & Quinn, 1993). The CVF argues that conflicting values emerge within any organization (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, & McGrath, 1996). At times it is necessary for an organization to focus on self-organizing and collaborative learning, while at other times data analysis and monitoring progress are priority activities. When used effectively, the CVF can assist organizations in diagnosing problems in the current culture and outlining qualities in the desired culture and provide a tool to identify gaps in and interpret functions and processes of an organization (Quinn, 1988). Organizational focus and organizational structure are the two core dimensions of the CVF. *Organizational focus* places micro emphasis on people development and macro emphasis on the development of the organization (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). *Organizational structure* examines the emphasis placed on control and stability contrasted with the need for change and flexibility. The CVF is comprised of four quadrants: collaborate, create, compete, and control. In addition, four models – human relations, open systems, rational goals, and internal processes – align with the four quadrants (see Figure 5). This study references Kolb’s (1984) definition of experiential learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (p.38).” Activities resulting from organizational focus and organizational structure can lead to transforming experiences, enhancing learning.

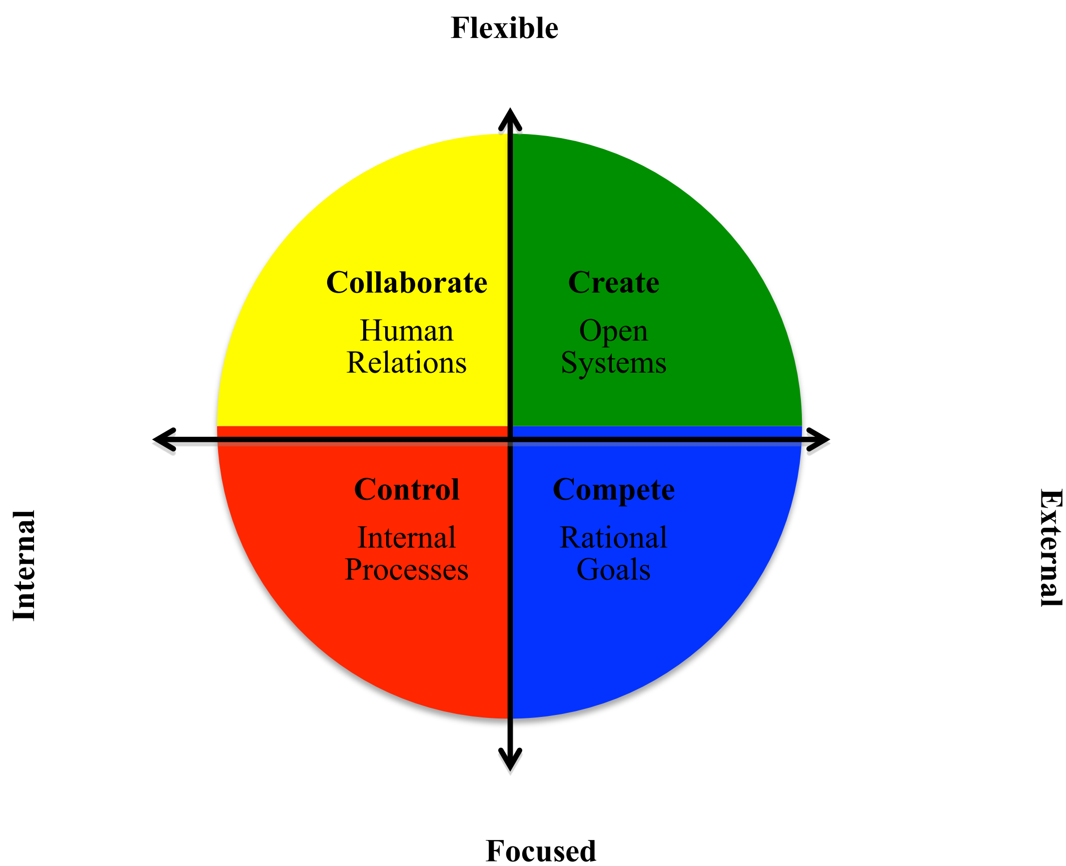

Figure 5. Dimensions, quadrants, and models comprising the CVF as illustrated by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983).

The four quadrants and their supporting models help illustrate how competing values emerge in organizations. *Human relations* focuses on maintaining the internal well-being of an organization through collaboration and human resources development initiatives. It suggests that individuals do not operate in a vacuum, but are instead part of an evolving system in which their performance adds value to the organization. *Open systems* suggests that value creation occurs through an external focus on areas such as resources and external alliances. *Rational goals* provide less flexibility than open systems but attend to goal setting, planning, and process efficiencies. Moving back to the internal well-being of an organization, *internal processes* give an organization a focused approach by establishing policies and standardized processes. For long-term success, organizations should identify achievable results in each quadrant (Gadiesh & Gilbert, 1998).

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Each quadrant and its supporting model help explain how competing values emerge in organizations. The model of *human relations* focuses on maintaining the internal well being of an organization through collaboration and human resources development initiatives. It suggests that individuals do not operate in a vacuum; instead, they are part of an evolving system in which their performance adds value to the organization. The model of *open systems* suggests that value creation occurs through an external focus on areas such as resources and external alliances. *Rational goals* provide less flexibility, focusing on goal setting, planning, and process efficiencies. *Internal processes* contribute to the internal well being of an organization, giving an organization a focused approach by establishing standardized policies and procedures. For long-term success, organizations should identify achievable results in each quadrant (Gadiesh & Gilbert, 1998). In addition, the CVF aligns with much of the work that explores the dynamics of organizational culture.

Organizational Culture

Early work by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified over 150 definitions of culture. Kroeber and Kluckhohn explain that the foundation of culture is two-fold: sociological, in that organizations have cultures; and anthropological, in that organizations are cultures. Culture taps into "links among cognitions, human interactions, and tangible symbols or artifacts typifying an organization" (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000, p. 853). The models that comprise the CVF have parallels in four types of organizational culture: (1) clan, (2) adhocracy, (3) market, and (4) hierarchy (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). Table 4 identifies each model with its corresponding culture.

Table 4

Alignment of CVF Models to Culture Types

CVF Model	Culture Type	Description
Human Relations	Clan	• High levels of commitment, collaboration, loyalty, and tradition • Emphasis on empowerment and individual development • Focuses on teamwork, participation, and consensus
Open Systems	Adhocracy	• Highly dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative • Characterized by risk-taking with leaders who are visionary and innovative • Wins defined by unique product and service offerings
Rational Goals	Market	• Focuses on external environment and market competition • Aims to achieve stretch goals and targets • Strives to gain market share
Internal Processes	Hierarchy	• Highly structured organization with adherence to standardized processes • Actions governed by policies and procedures • Long-term outlook driven by stability, predictability, and efficiency

Sashkin (1995) identifies four dimensions of organizational culture: change management, goal attainment, coordinated teamwork, and customer orientation. *Managing change* examines how individuals inside the organization perceive the organization's responses to change. *Achieving goals* assesses how effective the organization is in attaining its stated goals. This dimension bases goal attainment on the individual's or employee's perception. *Coordinated teamwork* refers to the organization's ability to coordinate work across individuals and groups. *Customer orientation* involves the organization's ability to meet the needs of its customers or clients. When entering an organization, an individual may have limited knowledge of its culture. Thus organizations need instill their culture through the following methods: selecting individuals with values similar to those of the organization, socializing individuals to adapt to the organization's culture, and demonstrating the behaviors that others are expected to follow (Schein, 1988).

The leadership style within an organization inevitably influences organizational culture. The research literature has identified two predominant organizational leadership styles: transformational and transactional. *Transformational leadership* exists when individuals are motivated by self-actualizing goals rather than external pay-offs. *Transactional leadership* includes a tradeoff between leaders and followers (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Often, transformational leaders lead non-profit or volunteer organizations where there is very little to exchange for the services provided. The selfless acts of transformational leaders fuel a culture characterized by a performance-oriented environment. Moreover, this leadership style balances the vision of the organization with the well being of the team.

Organizational culture aids in predicting outcomes such as organizational effectiveness. Cameron and Ettington (1988) argue, "the effectiveness of organizations is more closely associated with the type of culture present than with the congruence or the strength of that culture" (p. 385). Culture thus acts as the central vein linking leadership to organizational effectiveness (Chen, 2004).

Organizational Effectiveness

Discussions of organizational effectiveness have become ubiquitous across multiple industries and sectors. As a result, varying sets of criteria exist to define organizational effectiveness, and the concept is difficult to define succinctly. Effective organizations are faced with pursuing conflicting criteria (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, & McGrath, 1996). The CVF, for example, identifies how the roles of leaders align with various behaviors and attributes that compete with one another. Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) suggest that effective organizations must focus both internally and externally while satisfying needs for both a rigid and a flexible structure. Effective organizations perform well across the human relations, open systems, rational goals, and internal processes models.

Organizational effectiveness plays a vital role in organizations. Organizational leaders demonstrate their effectiveness through the decisions they make within their organization. Some researchers have argued that the level of conflict within an organization determines its level of effectiveness (Gabris, Golembiewski & Ihrke, 2001; Ihrke & Lombardo, 1999; Svara, 1990).

Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) has been used by many organizations to examine how leaders leverage their experiences as learning vehicles. Kolb (1984) defines experiential learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 44). Activities resulting from these experiences can lead to transformational experiences, thereby enhancing learning. As organizations focus on the actions needed to become more effective, experiential learning plays a vital role. A new board, for example, may demonstrate adaptability while learning their roles while also experiencing group dynamics. Research suggests that learning tends to be most impactful for board members when it focuses on creating a space in which individuals can learn together and share wisdom, rather than when learning strategies are designed specifically for the purpose of board development (Skotnitsky & Ferguson, 2005). Skotnitsky and Ferguson (2005) argue that interpersonal interaction, in which individuals join together to explore a challenge, acts as a conduit for learning. Moreover, leaders play an active role in shaping the way learning occurs within an organization or team. By modeling certain attributes a leader can encourage the development of those attributes within the team.

A collective learning environment or context for learning (CFL) in which all team members thrive and harness learning includes four common attributes: discipline, stretch, trust, and support (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1994). *Discipline* provides a means of establishing performance standards and maintaining an ongoing flow of communication. *Stretch* suggests that team members should extend themselves to the organization or demonstrate be commitment to the organization. *Trust* examines the decision-making mechanisms inherent within an organization while encouraging all team members to play an active role in critical decisions. *Support* attends to the resources team members require to effectively carry out tasks, as well as the level of autonomy they possess to make independent decisions.

Black and Boal (1997) suggest that a linkage exists between the CFL and CVF. Their research concluded that the environment or learning attributes, with the exception of trust, influence managerial skills. Learning takes place at the social level, and thus expands an individual's boundaries. A new capacity for behavior spurs learning for a social system (Schön, 1983). Schon further states that social systems are transformed through the process of navigating through disruption.

Learning Loops

Learning occurs in a variety of ways. Multiple authors have suggested that individuals may demonstrate a variety of types of organizational learning competence, including the ability to learn from others, from a diversity of opinions, or from cooperation, collaboration, and participation; competence expressed in communication or through one's ability to deal with change; the ability to learn from experience; and the willingness to take responsibility for the results of the learning process (Collinson & Cook, 2007; Dixon, 1999). Moreover, learning is a part of day-to-day activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Argyris and Schon (1974) investigated how individuals plan, implement, and review their actions, concluding that these actions are guided by a "mental roadmap" rather than by specific theories. They proposed *theories-in-use*, or descriptions of what individuals actually do, rather than *espoused theory*, or what individuals claim that they do (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Theory-in-use includes three elements: (1) governing variables, (2) action strategies, and (3) consequences. *Governing variables* refer to those elements that people intend to keep stable through action strategies. *Action strategies* are actions that aim to maintain stability within governing variables. A *consequence* includes both intended and unintended results of an action. Moreover, learning occurs not only as a result of detecting an issue or error but also through the process of correcting the error (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Such error correction provides the basis for single-loop learning. In single-loop learning, the governing variable is not in question. Instead, people tend to identify another strategy to for using their preferred behavior. Moving through the learning loop to scrutinize the governing variables lends to double-loop learning. Double-loop learning allows an individual or organization to question practices and processes to determine their impact on learning. Double-loop learning lays the groundwork for another key element of learning: reflection.

Reflection

The role and definition of *reflection* are largely dependent upon the context in which the term is used. Smyth (1992) offers the following definition:

> Reflection can mean all things to all people . . . it is used as a kind of umbrella or canopy term to signify something that is good or desirable . . . everybody has his or her own (usually undisclosed) interpretation of what reflection means, and this interpretation is used as the basis for trumpeting the virtues of reflection in a way that makes it sound as virtuous as motherhood. (p. 285)

Schön (1983) argued that reflection lies at the core of the way learning unfolds in a professional setting. As reflection becomes commonplace, learning becomes more explicit. Schön coined terms for two types of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. *Reflection-in-action* refers to a dynamic process that occurs in sync with actions. Reflection-in-action encourages immediate feedback that will be utilized to make changes in the moment. This type of reflection involves short feedback loops that may spark such feelings as confusion, bewilderment, or surprise. Knowing-in-action (KIA) is a key element of reflection-in-action. KIA aids in understanding what we know the action suggests is occurring rather than the action itself. In essence, reflection-in-action uncovers tacit knowledge that generally emerges during an “aha” moment (Schön).

Conversely, *reflection-on-action* takes place following the completion of an activity. It considers what went well and identifies opportunities for improvement. Reflection-on-action thus identifies best practices to leverage when facing similar tasks or dilemmas in the future. We reflect *on* action, “thinking back on what we have done to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome” (Schön, 1983, p. 26).

Reflection is a useful tool in transforming both thought and practice in real-life settings. According to Quinn (1988/2000), three fundamental processes are inherent to reflection: retrospection, or thinking back on an experience; self-evaluation, or analyzing and evaluating the feelings and actions associated with an experience; and reorientation, or using the results of self-evaluation to approach future situations. Mezirow (1994) defines learning as “the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action” (p. 223). When reflection is infused into the pedagogical process, learning occurs through the examination of assumptions, patterns of interaction, and the operating premises of action (Mezirow). Critical reflection results in transformational learning through reflective action.

Experiential learning plays a pivotal role in describing how experience influences learning, growth, and development in adults. In many settings, learning is more important than productivity or other key performance indicators (Kelly, 1999). Experiential learning help individuals understand how behavior modification can lead them to achieve desired results. This level of understanding provides a means of developing processes and developmental opportunities that not only enhance learning, but also influence individual and organizational performance. As learning occurs, individuals may reflect on lessons learned and apply them to similar situations in the future.

Action Research

Originated by psychologist Kurt Lewin, action research emerged in 1944 as a process to change and improve practices in organizations (Lewin, 1946). Action research focuses on an issue in the workplace and examines the ways an issue can be addressed using various alternatives (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Action research not only leads to practical knowledge but also provides the foundation to create new knowledge (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Reason and Bradbury (2008) define action research as:

> A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes . . . It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p. 1)

McNiff (2010) observes that action research allows practitioners to examine how work is being done and how it can be improved, while instilling a process of learning from others. Action research requires a commitment to observe behaviors or action, then to identify the problems that result from those activities (McTaggart, 1996). Action research incorporates a multi-part, cyclical process that requires teams or workgroups to reflect frequently and make changes as needed to achieve the desired result. For a team to be effective in executing action research, it must weave reflection into all of its processes. Subjectivity grounds action research as socially constructed (Hinchey, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Action research leverages a methodology in which practitioners guide a participatory process that engages stakeholders in all stages of the research cycle (Bradbury-Huang, 2010).

Coghlan and Brannick (2009) suggest that as the engagement process begins, constructing or a pre-step, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action are critical. Each step in the process builds upon the preceding step. In addition, a team must be open to reflection if they wish to fully understand what was planned, discovered, and achieved through action research (Raelin, 2000). Although action research incorporates a cyclical process, the pre-step does not repeat during the cycle. Action research begins by understanding the context and purpose of the engagement with the client followed by the action researcher and participants jointly moving through the steps of planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. Moreover, an action research project has two cycles: a core research cycle and a meta-learning cycle (Coghlan & Brannick). The core learning cycle includes each of the steps of the action research process. Whereas the meta-learning cycle is "the process by which learners become aware of and increasingly in control of habits of perception, inquiry, learning, and growth that they have internalized" (Maudsley, 1979). Action research is suitable for many settings but has particular applicability to experiential learning, because by enabling individuals to evaluate their experiences, it results in key lessons.

In action research, the researcher may reside inside or outside of the organization. Insiders must be aware of obstacles that emerge when doing research in and on their own organization. An insider action researcher faces many challenges that are absent from traditional research methodologies. An insider is not only a researcher but also a staff member or volunteer in the organization. As such, the researcher may be performing tasks or duties required for one role while mentally functioning in the opposite capacity (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009). The researcher must negotiate access, as action researchers may encounter opposition from organizational members. Moreover, power relations can influence outcomes in action research.

Action researchers must be aware of how their own positions impact power relations at the system level (Burns, Harvey, & Ortiz Aragon, 2012).

Action research is a cyclical process in which steps often overlap and repeated at various intervals during the study. Action research not only supports problem solving but also enables participants to reflect on the actions and behaviors that both helped and hindered the resolution. Action research is most effective when approached as a cyclical process that encourages observation, doing, observation, and redoing. These steps recur throughout the cycle. Moreover, sharing and reflection are woven into the cycle, leading to meta-learning that occurs throughout the action research process. Meta-learning promotes new ways of thinking and prompts behaviors that may lead to capacity building and sustainable change.

Furthermore, utilizing action research as an approach to learning and knowledge exchange can help individuals identify means of enhancing their capabilities as board members. Not only should researchers reflect on the steps within the action research process, but it is also important that they reflect on their role as the researcher. Action research helps individuals identify how they can do things differently to yield better results. Action research is thus a conduit to growth and efficacy.

Summary

The conceptual framework for this research aids in connecting each theory to the study. For an organization to be effective, it must determine the enablers of success by addressing both internal and external needs, while also balancing the needs for flexibility and structure. As the board of directors makes these determinations and develops processes and interventions to address each enabler of success, learning occurs for the board members. However, the changes and adjustments that result from the learning are equally if not more important than one’s awareness of the learning opportunity. Action research fuels the determination of measures of effectiveness while also evaluating the activities that are most and least effective. Action research allows incremental changes to occur at each step of the research process while taking into account the role of team dynamics, power, and influence

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used to address the research questions for the study. This study followed an action research case study protocol to examine how the board members of a professional association leveraged experiential learning and identified the enablers of success through the Competing Values Framework (CVF). In-depth documentation and analysis took place over a three-year time span. As the researcher, I collected data using a variety of sources, including critical incident interviews, meeting notes, and observations. Using multiple data collection methods ensured that each data point was trustworthy and valid. For an insider conducting action research, challenges and potential biases inevitably arise, and these will be discussed in this chapter.

Action Research Case Study

McNiff and Whitehead (2009) explain that action research focuses on an issue in the workplace and evaluates the activities utilized to address the issue. Action research involves a cyclical process in which steps often overlap or recur at various intervals. Coghlan and Brannick (2009) suggest that as the engagement process begins, understanding (pre-step), constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action are critical. Each step of the process depends in some sense on the preceding step. Action research takes place in the moment and evaluates actions as they occur. In contrast, traditional research suggests that an issue is present and others have hypotheses on why the issue exists. (McNiff & Whitehead). Furthermore, traditional research relies on adopting theories generated by others. In contrast, action research involves engaging in the process of inquiry that focuses on success or failure of one's own practices, producing knowledge that helps one become more effective in those practices.

To engage effectively in action research, the researcher needs an environment conducive to the reflective process. Researchers must reflect not only on the steps of the action research process, but also on their own role in that process. This notion leads to meta-learning occurring through the action research process. Meta-learning promotes new ways of thinking and generates behaviors that lead to capacity building and sustainable change. Furthermore, integrating action research as a way of approaching learning and knowledge exchange enables individuals to enhance their skills as board members while also helping to ensure the sustainability of an organization's new chapter.

This action research case study aimed to answer the following research questions: 1) How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning? 2) How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization? and 3) How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders? These research questions provided the foundation to develop the research design for the study.

Research Design

The study officially began once The University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval. In February of 2012, the chapter officially launched and I was introduced to the organization during a one-day launch ceremony. The ceremony was pivotal for me as an insider researcher, as I met key stakeholders, leveraged an opportunity to conduct initial observations, and learned more about the mission and vision of the chapter.

Following the launch ceremony, I attended board meetings for the next two years. During the first board meeting I attended, the president of the board shared my role as an insider researcher along with my experience as a former board member of one of the largest and most successful chapters of the organization. Observations of meetings and events were documented throughout the study. Critical incident interviews were conducted X. All participants signed a confidentiality statement. In X, the role of insider researcher came to a close. I continued my role as an advisor to the board for the remainder of 2014. Tables 5 and 6 provide an overview of the research design and the data collection and analysis process.

Table 5

Research Plan

Timeline	Activity
July 2012	• Monthly Board Meeting • AR team members participated in a conference hosted by Diversity Horizon • AR team members met with Delaware Growth o Meeting focused on unemployment and diversity across the state
August 2012	• Monthly Board Meeting • Meeting with Johnson and Johnson to secure a corporate alliance/membership

September 2012	• Monthly Board Meeting
	    o Review Membership Packet
	    o President's Expectations
	        ▪ Commitment
	        ▪ Visibility
	        ▪ Other Expectations
	• Created listserv to ensure that connections and networks receive ongoing communication regarding events
	• HR Forum "Associate Engagement"
	    o Event cancelled due to low registration

October 2012	• Monthly Board Meeting
November 2012	• Monthly Board Meeting • AR team-building event • Review of 2013 calendar
December 2012	• Monthly Board Meeting • Member Mixer • Created LinkedIn page

Timeline	Activity

January 2013	• Monthly Board Meeting
	    o Review of roles and responsibilities
	    o Administrative assistant joined board and AR team

February 2013	• Monthly Board Meeting
	    o Public relations consultant joined board
	    o Review of chapter strategy
	        ▪ Growth and retention
	        ▪ Building A winning diversity culture
	        ▪ Collaboration and networking
	    o Review of chapter goals
	    o Review of 2013 president's expectations:
	        ▪ Commitment, visibility, communication, accountability, delivery, driving results
	    o Review of outstanding deliverables for Diversity Exchange Forum
	        ▪ Developed registration form for focus group
	        ▪ Developed brochure to market focus group
	        ▪ Designed focus group protocol/questions

March 2013	• Monthly Board Meeting
	    o Reviewed survey data
	    o Agreed on an incentive to increase participation
	• Diversity Exchange Forum (DEF)
	• One-Year Anniversary Gala

April 2013	• Monthly Board Meeting
May 2013	• Diversity Exchange Forum (DEF) Focus Group • HR Forum, "Engaging Your Workforce"
June 2013	• Monthly Board Meeting • Diversity Exchange Forum (DEF)
July 2013	• Summertime Munch & Mingle Business Mixer • Leadership Retreat
August 2013	• HR Women's Forum: "This is My Story"
September 2013	• Diversity Exchange Forum (DEF): "Passion Drives Results"
November 2013	• Board of Directors' Year-End Review (2013)
March 2014	• Diversity Exchange Forum (DEF): "Taking Diversity To A New Level by Engaging And Understanding All Generations!"
Summer 2014	• Final Interviews

Table 6

Research Collection and Analysis

Research Question	Collection Method	Analysis
1. How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning?	• Critical incident interviews • Observational notes • Meeting notes/minutes	• Transcription of qualitative data • Data coding schemes developed • Triangulation across data points
2. How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization?	• Critical incident interviews • Observational notes • Meeting notes/minutes	
3. How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?	• Critical incident interviews • Observational notes linked to AR cycle	

Action Research Team

In order for the study yield meaning results, careful consideration was given to selecting action research team members. The AR team consisted of six individuals. Each team member brought a different type of experience to the chapter along with a commitment to ensuring the sustainability of the chapter. The AR team members were selected using a thoughtful, collaborative process that took into consideration professional expertise, current and/or past affiliation with professional associations, and expressed interest in the nature of the study.

Each person selected to participate expressed or implied that they have a comfort level working cross-functionally, and each understood that decisions would be made based on consensus rather than a majority-rule approach. Rather than instituting a formal, rigorous selection process, we agreed that allowing individuals to self-nominate for membership on the team might lead to greater engagement and participation. Figure 6 provides the hierarchy of the action research team.

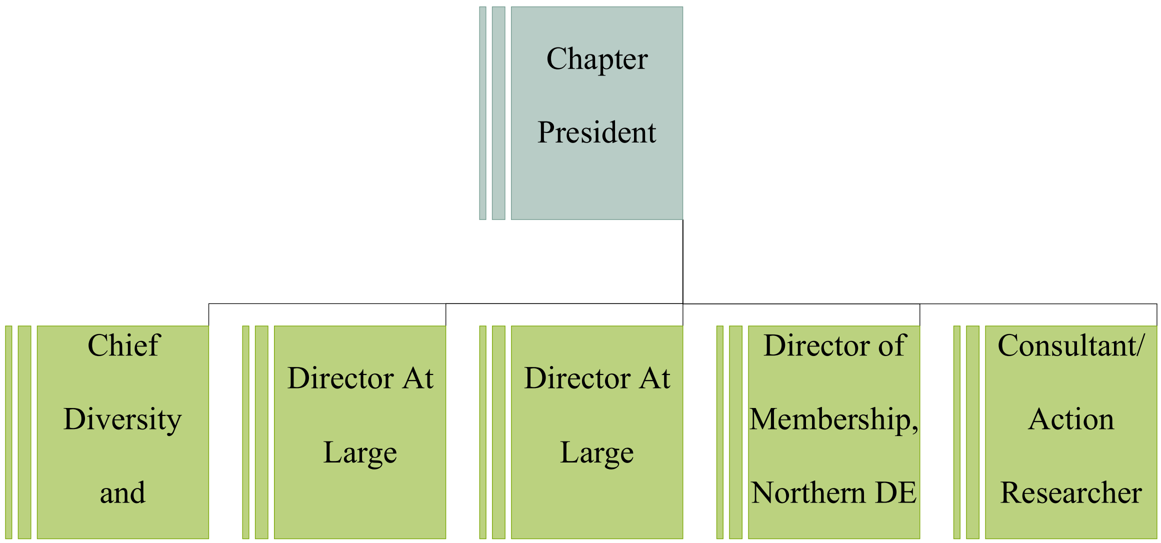

Figure 6: Local chapter's organizational hierarchy.

The president of the Delaware chapter is a human resources professional who owns a talent management firm. Her professional profile includes 15 years of recruitment experience along with many years of non-profit board experience. Her role on the AR team includes developing strategic initiatives, identifying key stakeholders, and providing approval of all team activities. The Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer has over 25 years of experience in diversity and inclusion along with expertise in strategic recruitment offerings. On the team, he provides oversight for all diversity and inclusion initiatives, including strategy development and connecting to the larger diversity and inclusion community across the U.S.

The role of the two Directors at Large is to identify relationships with key stakeholders within the Delaware region. This includes building relationships with potential subject-matter experts, in-kind sponsors, and community leaders. The Director of Membership focuses on designing programs to attract a diverse group of members to the organization. To achieve this, the Director of Membership fosters relationships with other professional associations and groups that have an interest in the benefits of engaging differences, e.g., diversity of thought, experience, etc. Lastly, as the action researcher my role is to guide the team through the action research process and gain commitment for program components that emerge during the study.

Data Collection Strategy

This study follows a qualitative data collection strategy. A qualitative approach was selected for several reasons. According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative research contributes to "understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions" (p.22). A keen understanding of the context that engages members and prompts actions that are essential to career development is paramount for this study. For example, the study needs to uncover how participants utilize knowledge obtained from chapter meetings, seminars, or conferences.

According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative studies aid in the improvement of existing practices. As programs and services are evaluated, qualitative data will be leveraged to identify ways to enhance programs to attract more members, respond to the dynamic learning needs of human resources professionals, and build relationships with potential sponsors and strategic business partners. Charmaz (2006) suggests that qualitative data collected through interviews enables the construction or reconstruction of knowledge, as such interviews "provide particular accounts from particular points of view that serve particular purposes" (p. 47). Evered and Louis (1981) view qualitative research as "inquiry from the inside" that allows the data to tell the story.

Ospina (2004, p. 7) offers several additional reasons to use qualitative research:

- to explore a phenomenon that has not been studied before (and that may be subsequently developed quantitatively);

- to add rich detail and nuance that illustrates or documents existing knowledge of a phenomenon, generated quantitatively;
- to better understand a topic by studying it simultaneously (triangulation) or concurrently with both methods (mixing quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time or in cycles, depending on the problem);
- to advance a novel perspective of a phenomenon well studied quantitatively but not well understood because of the narrow perspectives used before;
- to try to "understand" any social phenomenon from the perspective of the actors involved, rather than explaining it (unsuccessfully) from the outside;
- to understand complex phenomena that are difficult or impossible to approach or to capture quantitatively;
- to understand any phenomenon in its complexity, or one that has been dismissed by mainstream research because of the difficulties to study it, or that has been discarded as irrelevant, or that has been studied as if only one point of view about it was real.

Participant Observation

Many researchers utilize observation as a data collection method. Observation provides an opportunity to gather data as it happens. Merriam (2009) defines observation as a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest. Observations allow the researcher to explore nonverbal cues and facial expressions, assess group and individual interactions, understand communication patterns, and see how much time is spent conducting activities such as decision-making, reflection, etc. (Schmuck, 1997). DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) explain, "the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method" (p. 92). Whyte (1979) argues that participant observation is most effective when informants are viewed as collaborators. Moreover, researchers and informants who have a rapport-based relationship improve the research as well as the skills of the researcher (Whyte). Observation thus aids in increasing the validity of a study.

As a participant observer, it was necessary for me to understand the challenges I would face acting as a participant while conducting observations. Merriam (1998) describes the participant observer's role as a "schizophrenic activity" (p. 103). It requires researchers to participate in the setting under study while being cautious not too become overly consumed in the activity, which would limit their ability to observe and analyze what is happening. Merriam argues that researchers must account for the impact of participation when explaining the data.

Critical Incident Interviews

Semi-structured critical incident interviews were conducted by phone to elicit participants' views of experiential learning and enablers of success during the first three years of the organization's existence. The interviews were structured to include an hour of dialogue and probing questions. The interviews began by exploring how participants were recruited as board members of the chapter. Participants then described the incidents that most and least influenced their learning during the first three years of the organization's existence. Next, participants were asked to discuss in detail the opportunities that spurred growth or propelled the chapter towards success. They were also asked to discuss organizational barriers that impacted the success of the chapter.

The interviews were then recorded and transcribed, then analyzed using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). CIT gained popularity in the 1940s after psychologist John Flanagan introduced it as a tool for practical problem solving in areas such as employee appraisal and performance enhancement (Flanagan, 1954). Flanagan (1954) defined CIT as a "flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand" (p. 335). An incident is critical if "it makes a 'significant' contribution, either positively or negatively to the general aim of the activity, and it should be capable of being critiqued or analyzed" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 338). CIT includes five key steps: establish the general aims, establish plans and specifications, collect the data, analyze the data, and interpret and report the data (Flanagan, 1954).

I selected CIT for use in this study because it provides: (1) integration into a qualitative methodology; (2) honest, profound answers within a context that is familiar to the interviewee; (3) clear data collection and analysis processes; and (4) a trigger for reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. CIT provides researchers with firsthand perspectives on behaviors and interactions. Focusing on observed incidents also brings authenticity to the research (Ellinger & Watkins, 1998). CIT has proven to be a data-rich research method that has been utilized in a variety of settings. The principles of CIT aid in implementing a practical approach to collecting and analyzing data.

Documents

Meeting minutes and notes captured from meetings and events were also analyzed. These documents provided data that was cross-referenced with observational data and findings derived from critical incident interviews. These notes supported many of the team's decisions regarding issues such as leadership retreats, program planning, and member onboarding strategies.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included an in-depth review of the audio and written transcripts from the critical incident interviews. One major goal of the interviews and participant observation was to create a casual setting in which participants felt free to openly share their experiences. While listening to the audiotape, I paid particular attention to voice inflections, pauses, moments of silence, and other cues that might suggest how the participant felt when responding to each question.

Transcripts of the interviews were uploaded to HyperResearch for data coding and analysis. The data was coded to identify key themes, words, and emerging categories. As I reviewed transcripts, I made additional notes that begin to identify themes. Themes were cross-referenced with observational notes. The process of making multiple notes allowed me to narrow these themes into major and subthemes. Once I completed coding for each transcript, I compared all transcripts to identify major themes and theories, which were then placed into categories.

For the observations, a similar process was completed as notes from the observations led to the emergence of themes. This data was cross-referenced with codes identified from the critical incident interviews. Once all data sources were analyzed, a final list of themes was developed.

Trustworthiness and Validity

As a participant in action research, I had a number of opportunities for continuous data collection. Continuously collecting data and capturing themes increases the credibility of the data. As a participant, I was able to collect data in a natural setting, eliminating the bias that may contaminate secondhand data. Lastly, I incorporated time for reflection into the data analysis process, allowing me to understand the data , interpret its meaning, and re-evaluate the findings if necessary. This is a vital step in acknowledging my personal positionality and biases. Given my membership in the organization, it was critical for reflection to be an integral, ongoing step in the research.

Leveraging existing literature and comparing findings also enhances credibility. More importantly, comparing and contrasting similar studies also demonstrates the reliability of the study. Triangulation supports reliability and was leveraged to confirm the reliability of the data. Audit trails and journaling also create opportunities to ensure reliability. According to Merriam (2009), an audit trail details how the study was conducted in areas including but not limited to data collection and category design. To support the audit trail, a journal provides detailed accounts of all actions that occur.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study relates to geographical boundaries. As a researcher, I was not located in the same city as the other team members. This put me at a disadvantage when in-person meetings took place and technology was not in place to allow for remote participation. In addition, it was difficult to attend special events, which required multiple days of travel and accommodations.

However, the major limitation of the study related to positionality, or the dual roles an internal action researcher must manage. Herr and Anderson (2005) reference bias and subjectivity as natural occurrences within the action research process. Nevertheless, my goal was to modulate my behaviors to prevent personal perspectives and concerns to contaminate the research process. During the interviews and observations, I heard responses that contradicted my personal experience. Instead of becoming defensive or rushing to refute them, I utilized this opportunity to delve deeper into the experience of the participant(s). Also, it was important that I did not attempt to challenge or change a participant's stance on an issue, but instead sought to understand what drove that feeling or response.

Moreover, I believe it was important to maintain a sense of self throughout the action research process. It is possible to lose one's self and to disregard personal and professional values in an effort to achieve desired results or complete the dissertation phase of action research. Given my personal affinity for the organization, it was particularly important to me that the data collection, analysis, and findings adhered to all ethical guidelines. It goes without saying that I want the chapter to be successful.

From a political perspective, the organization values the work produced through the action research process; however, I have reservations regarding how the leadership team will view the findings. Once I leave the organization, will they revert to business as usual? Or will the work yield such a transformation that such regression would prove to be impossible? Such questions warrant consideration, as the responses influence the overall effectiveness of the intervention. For me, the members of this organization have become like family. I have relationships with many of the leaders, who have provided personal and professional guidance that has positively influenced my career.

This organization aims to provide enrichment for human resources professionals. Notably, the vast majority of the members are female. Therefore, I "look like" most of those who have taken part in the study. Also, my upbringing and background may have served me well in the data collection process. Historically, those similar to me have been overlooked for key positions in organizations and denied the educational and career opportunities available to our counterparts who are Caucasian and/or male. My story is not one of adversity, yet it is one of hard work, dedication, and sacrifices that may have resonated with many of the participants.

Overall, this study contributes to the body of research available for professional associations seeking to advance the development of their board members. Ideally, professional associations in the future will be better equipped to address the needs of their leaders. Board members may transfer the skills developed in this leadership role back to their day-to-day roles in organizations, which should encourage employers to allocate funds for professional fees. Attending to the development of board members in professional organizations may encourage more individuals to not only join these organizations, but also to take on active roles that will enhance their leadership potential.

CHAPTER 4

STORY AND OUTCOMES

DO NOT GO WHERE THE PATH MAY LEAD

A *path* is defined as “a course of action, conduct, or procedure” (Dictionary.com, 2014). One might conclude that a path or course of action previously followed by others is the best path to take. While this may be true in some cases, time spent exploring not only the established path but also the ultimate destination may lead to the discovery of other, less traveled paths, creating a new trail for others. A less traveled path presented the foundation for this AR study. As the team co-created its journey, the journey it was not without conflict and chaos or success and triumphs. The team identified sources of experiential learning and the enablers of success for board members of a professional association.

The purpose of this study was to examine the enablers of success for starting a new chapter of a professional association. To support this purpose, the group sought answers to the following research questions:

1. How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning?
2. How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization?
3. How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?

The study unfolds through action research, defined by Coghlan and Brannick (2009) as incorporating “a pre-step (context and purpose) and four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action" (p. 8). This chapter will describe the steps of the AR cycle. The chapter further explains system entry, the composition of the team, the dynamics that emerged during the study, and the role of the reflective process.

Pre-step: System Context and Defining the Purpose

This research study takes places within a newly formed chapter of the Association of Human Resources Professionals (AHRP). This chapter's potential membership pool is smaller than those of most other chapters due to the size of the geography the chapter covers. However, those aligned with the chapter were eager to create a coalition of practitioners who could work together to transform the region's view of the role of HR professionals.

AHRP was founded in 1998 to provide human resources practitioners with a network of colleagues with whom to share information and best practices. AHRP provides leadership development opportunities that foster both personal and professional growth. The organization's national strategy focuses on leadership, stakeholder relationships, infrastructure, and organizational excellence. Its membership base spans the U.S., including 36 local chapters and well over 4,000 members.

To provide the best member experience, AHRP encourages individuals to identify the membership level that is most appropriate for their educational or career level. Membership categories include professional, lifetime professional, corporate, corporate elite, and student membership. The organization aims to provide robust programming to aid in career advancement and offers a wealth of benefits and services to its members, including volunteer, networking, and educational opportunities along with discounted services from partner organizations. Additionally, the organization provides resources for displaced members and members who seek other career opportunities. As AHRP continues to grow and provide programs that impact its membership, it seeks not only to add to the body of knowledge in the human resources field but also to position professional associations as a resource to foster learning, development, and career growth.

In 2011, the AHRP president asked if I would be interested in working with the Association's director to support potential new chapters in onboarding efforts. Although my time was limited by commitments to other projects, I eagerly accepted the challenge. Even more exciting was his interest in my research. During a subsequent meeting with the president, he mentioned that the national chapter welcomes research efforts that examine the organization's effectiveness. Typically, such research focuses on data collection and analysis, so action research presented a new methodology that the organization had yet to experience. Nevertheless, the president expressed interest.

During our meeting, the question the president and I grappled with was, "Why do members of the Association of Human Resources Professionals (AHRP) fail to take advantage of opportunities to gain leadership experience and hone competencies by volunteering in some capacity within the organization?" The national president mentioned that the association director was interested in researching this very topic, and that he welcomed insight and support. Once I confirmed that there was interest in the initiative, we outlined action items and next steps, including planning a virtual introduction for the association director and me.

Shortly thereafter, the association director and I met via conference call to discuss my research interest and brainstorm about how AHRP could better position itself as resource to help its members develop their careers. The association director serves as a consultant, identifying ways to support the organization in carrying out its mission. Additionally, his responsibilities extend well beyond the realm of consultation, simply because there is no one else to do much of the work that is required to keep the organization afloat.

One of the first questions I asked the association director was, “How do you anticipate the development of leadership competencies will benefit members of the organization?” His response was rather lengthy, but provided rich information. He discussed his desire to develop leadership from the perspective of local chapters. He stated that he wanted to understand the training needs of effective chapter leaders. Shortly after our meeting, the association director followed up to gauge my interest in a phone introduction to the president of a new chapter that would ultimately be the site for my research over the next three years.

Primary and secondary stakeholders exist within the context of the study. Stakeholders include special interest groups who serve in a decision-making capacity within the organization, benefit from affiliation with NAAAHR, or provide financial or other support for the organization. Findings derived from research and are relevant to these groups as both the national and local chapters respond to the needs of their members. Other professional organizations can utilize the findings to collaborate further with AHRP and to encourage their own membership base to support joint initiatives. Other professional associations may also find the study beneficial as they seek to identify best practices for member engagement. In addition, HR practitioners and professionals may take an interest in the activities the study finds can enhance leadership capabilities. Sponsors may also have an interest in the study as it demonstrates the mutual benefits of aligning strategies with the goals and initiatives of professional organizations. Figure 7 lists the stakeholders identified by the AR team.

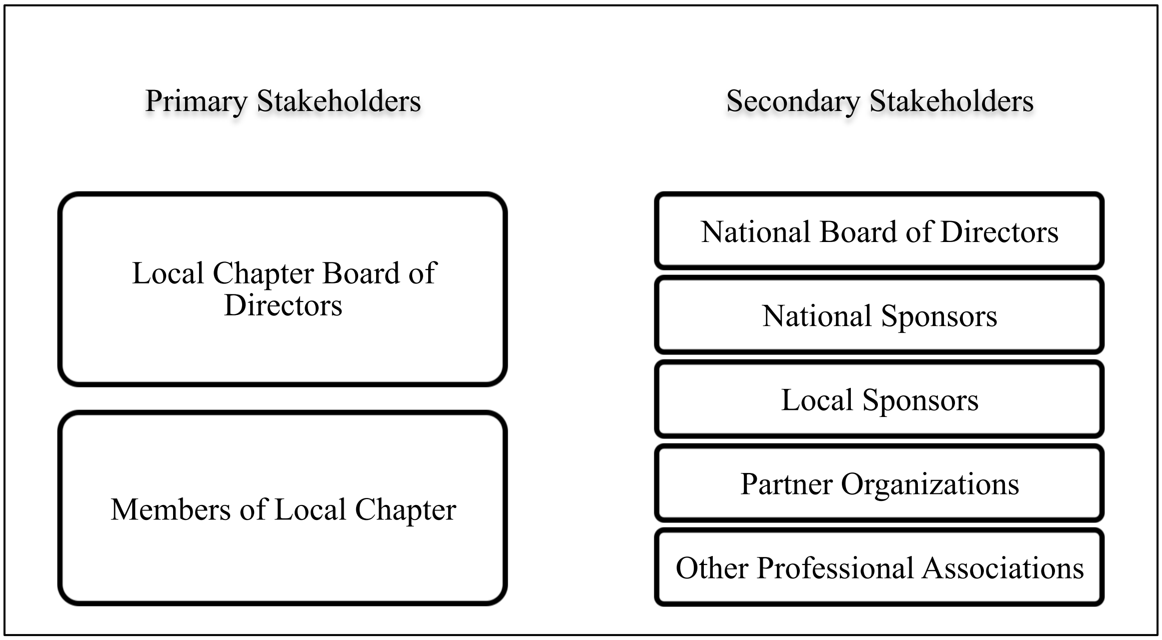

Figure 7. Major stakeholders who share an interest in the study.

Primary and secondary stakeholders were identified to determine who would be most interested in outcomes from the study. See Table 7 for major stakeholder groups and roles.

Table 7

Stakeholder Groups and Roles

Stakeholder Groups	**Roles**
Local Chapter Board of Directors	Creates the mission and vision at the local level. Develops programs based on feedback and interest of membership. Supports initiatives filtered down from the national chapter.
Members of Local Chapter	Serve as board and/or committee members at the local and national chapter levels. Provide feedback to leaders on programs and meeting topics. Engage non-members in attending events and/or joining a local chapter.
National Chapter Board of Directors	Sets the strategic direction for the association. Develops governance policies and procedures. Approves charters for new chapters.
Corporate Sponsors (National and Local)	Provide financial support for events and programs. May serve as panelists and guest speakers. Encourage employees to join

	chapters and/or attend events and programs.
Partner Organizations	Identify business objectives that are supported by AHRP. Market communication for chapters. Connect chapters with leaders of other organizations.
Other Professional Associations	Co-host events and programs. Provide expert speakers for events. Share best practices.

Table 8 describes key outcomes that occur during each step in the AR process.

Table 8

AR Stages, Actions, and Results

AR Stage	**Supporting Action**	**Results**
Constructing	• Ongoing monthly meetings to identify actions to be taken by the AR team • Leadership retreat to understand the role of each team member • Development of mission and vision for chapter • Collaboratively agreed-on intervention strategy	• Developed growth strategy • Clarified the role of a board member versus action research team member
Planning Action	• Identified how the board can be most effective o Defined roles and developed role clarity • Planned changes and programs for the Delaware chapter and for possible implementation throughout the region • Developed communication channels via e-mail, social media, etc. • Collaborated with local businesses and leaders who share an interest in the chapter's mission and vision	• Participated in leadership retreat facilitated by leaders of the national chapter • Revised job descriptions for each role. • Developed three-year strategic plan • Identified corporate sponsors and strategic partners • Invited members of strategic partner organization to play an active role in planning the Diversity and Inclusion Forum (D&I Forum) • Utilized survey feedback from a signature event as a tool to leverage experiential learning

AR Stage	Supporting Action	Results
Taking Action	• Changed board composition, including removal of inactive board members • Participated in a second leadership retreat focused on teamwork and collaboration • Invited board members of new chapters within the region to participate in signature event – DEF • Shared mission and vision with partner organization and national leadership team	• Co-created definition of collaboration • Identified first draft of succession plan for role of president • Acted as a subject-matter expert for president of a newly forming chapter
Evaluating Action	• Facilitated critical incident interviews with board members and action research team members	• Identified need for role clarity when onboarding board members • Determined success measures are dependent on stage of the organizational lifecycle • Reflection and feedback enable behavior changes at the individual and group level

System Entry

The action research team officially formed in February 2012. The president and I had initiated dialogue in November 2011, after the association director of the national chapter identified a local chapter as a potential source for the study. The site was selected as it is a new chapter forming in an area where distinct challenges exist, due to the absence of knowledge sharing and a lack of understanding of the nuances related to new chapter formation and board leadership.

The purpose of this study is to examine the enablers of success for starting a new chapter of a professional association. During the early stages of the research process, the action research team earnestly sought to identify opportunities to marry theory and practice in relevant ways. Several potential focus areas emerged, including board/leadership development training, competency models for board members, and governance standards for professional associations. However, it was during the late spring of 2013 that the team reached consensus around a focus that creates a value proposition for the chapter.

During the course of the study, both the national and regional leadership teams supported the onboarding efforts of the Delaware chapter, which included hosting a leadership retreat prior to the official launch of the chapter. The leadership retreat aimed to orient new board members to the organization while establishing essential operating policies and procedures to ensure that the chapter adhered to governance requirements. In addition, the retreat provided an overview of the roles and the expectations of the board members. Retreat facilitators included members of the national board along with the vice president of the East Region. After the retreat, the board moved forward in drafting key deliverables that would be tracked and measured during the course of the year. Deliverables included membership drives, attainment of sponsorships, and programs geared toward HROD practitioners.

Navigating Action Research

Although the team was familiar with several research methodologies, action research (AR) was a new concept. As such, it was important to set the tone for the interaction by describing the process. During the chapter's official launch meeting, the president introduced the board members and the AR team. Shortly after the launch meeting, the first board conference call took place, with an agenda focused on priority initiatives for 2012. During this meeting, I introduced action research as a cyclical process with potentially overlapping steps that include:

pre-step, constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

As 2012 progressed, team members frequently shared their optimism about the process; however, other commitments seemed to impact meeting participation. This often left the president taking ownership of tasks previously assigned to other team members. In addition, the group lacked the resources necessary for building an effective virtual team. Although the team was provided with a conference line to use for calls, the team did not have access to other meeting technology such as Adobe Connect, WebEx, Live Meeting, etc. Each conference call/meeting was recorded to allow those who missed a call to listen to the playback as well as review the notes captured during each meeting. This seemed to be relatively effective; however, many times decisions and plans related to issues discussed during team meetings were finalized prior to soliciting feedback from all team members. Despite such challenges, however, the team continued to move through the AR process.

Constructing

Constructing played a key role in helping the team organize and develop the mission and vision for the chapter. The team leveraged meetings and events to identify the skills that were needed, while applying learning from experiences to further build its capacity. The team held monthly meetings guided by an agenda to keep each meeting organized. Because the chapter was in its infancy stages, it was vital for the team to spend time defining roles and responsibilities while identifying key activities that were necessary for the success of the chapter. During the monthly meetings, each board member and advisory member provided an update on any projects or action items related to their specific role. In addition, the president solicited support from board members to assist with fundraising efforts and gaining entry into organizations that could potentially become corporate sponsors.

Before the team could begin to function, each board member agreed to participate in a half-day orientation session facilitated by the national leadership team. The purpose of this session was to provide a description of each team member's role. Importantly, the national chapter requires that certain roles are included in the board of directors, while the board may decide to include other roles as needed. Required roles include the president, director of finance, director of membership, and director of plans and programs. Other roles established by individual chapters include director of strategy and chief diversity officer.

In addition to the board of directors, the president determined that an advisory board was needed. The advisory was needed to provide subject matter expertise related to general board functioning. The advisory board's role was to connect the organization with key stakeholders and to serve as a voice for the communities that would be most impacted by the programs and initiatives developed by the chapter. Once the board members understood their roles and responsibilities as defined by the national chapter they were able to identify additional responsibilities that aligned with the needs of the chapter.

As the team moved through the constructing phase, the board determined that a mission and vision were needed to embed the organization's philosophy into the programs it developed. The team accomplished a number of goals during the constructing stage, including developing a mission and vision for the chapter, clarifying the role each team members played, and agreeing on an intervention strategy.

During the constructing phase, the team determined that a leadership retreat was needed to support the team in achieving its goals. Five months after the group was formed, the team decided a second leadership retreat should be designed. Although everyone considered the retreat a priority initiative, a year passed before the team scheduled it. Several of the challenges the team encountered might have been avoided if the retreat had taken place sooner. Although team feedback and observational data pointed to a lack of teamwork, the group placed other priorities ahead of developing a collaborative, team-oriented workgroup.

Planning Action

Planning action proved to be a key task that required the group to examine the structure of other chapters and consider how its own composition should be designed. The team identified roles based on the major areas of focus for the chapter, such as membership growth, plans and programs, and strategic planning. During its early stages, although the team did not have a strategic plan in place, the group decided certain roles were needed to create and carry out a strategic plan. The team also identified programs that would bring the most value to the group's members, and made plans to utilize social media as a forum to communicate with the human resources community. However, several months elapsed before a concrete action plan was designed to integrate social media into the chapter's operations. This delay was due primarily to a lack of understanding of how to manage social media platforms and who would own the task.

In addition, the team purposefully targeted organizations it wished to recruit to support its mission and vision. The team utilized existing relationships with the selected organizations to schedule initial interest meetings. Criteria used to identify such organizations included community involvement, diversity and inclusion platforms, existing relationships with the respective organization, and recommendations from the national chapter. Although some of the relationships proved not to be mutually beneficial, the chapter forged an ongoing partnership with several organizations that provided both financial and other forms of support. These additional forms of support included meeting space, panelists for speaking events, and refreshments for attendees. The group reflected on the best practices gleaned from these relationships in order to engage other stakeholders in 2013.

Taking Action

In shifting from planning action to taking action, the team made several critical decisions. First, the group reflected on the participation of the board and committee members. The participation of several individuals fell off during the first few months after the chapter's inception. Yet it took the group several months to decide how to either engage those individuals or remove them from the board. During this time, key activities were either delayed or not completed. The most notable impact on the group resulted from the delay in planning the second leadership retreat. The board did not have the resources to design the retreat while also delivering the programs it had committed to providing in 2012.

In late 2012, the board moved forward in removing inactive board and committee members. In addition, the boards brought on two new members to ensure that tasks were completed in a timely manner. The new board members included a Director of Public Relations and an administrator to assist the president with tasks such as member and board correspondence and ad hoc projects. With the arrival of the new board members came a new level of momentum, resulting in the rollout of a three-year strategic plan. Following this rollout, the group forged relationships with established and emerging chapters and invited them to participate in the chapter's signature event – the Diversity and Inclusion Forum (D&I Forum).

Evaluating Action

In the evaluating action phase, I conducted interviews with the board members who also served on the action research team. In addition, chapter advisors also participated in the interview process. Although a significant portion of the evaluation process occurred during the spring and summer of 2014, evaluation through observational notes has been an ongoing process since the inception of the chapter.

I utilized HyperResearch to code the interview data. Interview data coding was compared to data that emerged from emails, meeting notes, and observations. Evaluating action proved to be critical for the chapter, as data from interviews provided the chapter with findings that point to how well the board leverages experiential learning to build its capacity. Moreover, the evaluation stage uncovered activities that aid board members in growing their skill sets.

Group Dynamics

When the action research team was initially formed, the president took an aggressive approach to identifying team members. She wanted all board members to be a part of the AR team. I did not object; however, I was curious as to the role each person might play on the team. In addition, I was concerned about the best strategy to manage an AR team that could potentially include 12 individuals.

The president soon learned that the level of engagement needed for productive AR team members was not achievable with such a large group. Most of the team members did not have experience working together, which contributed to the need for role clarity. In addition, scheduling conflicts and geographic limitations required most meetings to take place via conference call. Early on this was identified as a potential challenge, as members did not have an opportunity to fully engage as a team. Thus, team members felt they did not know their colleagues. As with other work groups, group dynamics influenced group interactions during the first few months of the team's lifecycle.

The Tuckman (1965) model aids in understanding how the group evolved and worked through challenges occurring over the course of the study. In 1965, psychologist Bruce Tuckman introduced the stages of a group's lifecycle. Each stage aligns with key behaviors that occur as a team moves through each phase. The stages include *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, and *performing*. In 1977, Tuckman and Jensen added *adjourning* as the final stage of the group lifecycle. Early on, teams may experience times of uncertainty and role ambiguity leading to a lack of productivity (Tuckman, 1965). Moreover, a team's performance is largely dictated by content or defined roles; process or guidance and direction; and feelings or emotions that drive behaviors and reactions. Over time, a team can arrive at a productive state once issues that concern processes and feelings are addressed (Tuckman). Table 9 outlines how each phase of team development aligns with behaviors or incidents occurring within the AR team.

Table 9

AR Team Development as Defined by Tuckman (1965)

Team Development Phase	AR Team Behaviors
Forming Uncertainty about roles, looking outside for guidance	• Requested a leadership workshop offered by an outside consultant • Members of national chapter facilitated a leadership workshop to define roles and responsibilities
Storming Growing confidence in team, rejecting outside authority	• Bickering among team members around goals and mission • Lack of participation in meetings, special events
Norming Concern about being different, wanting to be part of team	• Team collectively voted to ask non-participating members to resign • Others (members and non-members) offered support for events • Participation and attendance increased at board meetings and special events

Team Development Phase	AR Team Behaviors
Performing Concern with getting the job done	• Successfully completed DEF • AR team member asked to participate in events hosted by other organizations • President of another local professional association asked to join the team after attending another event • Created three-year strategic plan • National chapter requested that the programs and model designed by the Delaware chapter be used to pilot similar programs in other chapters
Adjourning Process of unforming the group and moving on to other agendas	• President identified as a candidate for a regional role • Group focused on succession planning • Individuals shared interest in continuing to serve on the board of directors

To capture dynamics, I recorded most team meetings while taking notes. This documentation allowed the team to identify trends and examine the group's ability to work collaboratively to inform the study. During the spring of 2012, group dynamics suggested the group might benefit from participating in a team building exercise. The president contacted a consult who specialized in teambuilding and group effectiveness. The workshop focused on leadership components that included collaboration, trust and rapport building, and interpersonal skills including effective communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. The facilitator focused on encouraging the team to open up and share details of their life experiences that influenced their personality, their current leadership style, and/or their communication style.

Although the workshop was perceived as quite engaging, the team gave the activity mixed reviews. Several board members stated that the workshop was helpful in team building but did not provide value in assessing developmental needs of the board members. The team felt the group's professional experience included numerous workshops of this nature. One team member stated, "I do not need to know the other board members intimately." In response, the president suggested that the board members commit to face-to-face meetings to gain awareness of the communication and work styles of fellow team members. Although some board members were receptive to the idea, they did not seem to believe this approach would provide the knowledge they needed to effectively lead the chapter.

In addition to differences among various individual and group value systems, issues involving power and position emerged during the course of the study. Power can be defined as "the capacity to cause effects, to have an impact on or change things, to do 'work,' either in the physical or social world" (Turner, 2005, p. 6). In an update meeting with the president, she expressed to me a pressing concern about the board, noting, "They have difficulty taking me seriously." For example, team members only sporadically provided deliverables to the president on the requested due date. The president believed that a contributing factor to this problem was her age, as she was younger than most of the team members. During this conversation, she also shared that one of the team members was her brother-in-law. After working with the team for over a year, this was new yet important knowledge for me. This relationship explained the reason he is one of the few team members who pushes back if the president becomes confrontational or defensive when her ideas are not immediately accepted.

I took this as an opportunity to share a personal experience I had when joining a project team as the newest team member. I suggested that she focus on forging relationships by soliciting feedback and gaining consensus rather than continuing to try to elicit support for her ideas. I suggested that this approach would encourage team members to demonstrate a greater commitment to decisions, as they would have a more active role in the decision-making process. As the team moved closer to norming, collaboration and consensus were key drivers in the decision making process. This enabled the team to transfer its energy towards intervention planning.

Group Actions

Board members of new organizational chapters face many challenges that influence the group's success. These include effective collaboration, decision-making and teamwork. Moreover, the group encountered issues such as securing sponsorship funds in a challenging economic context, retaining potential members, and meeting the expectations set forth by the national chapter. Often the team identified challenges but did not develop a plan of action to address them as the team moved forward. This represents a major error in the action research process, as planning action must not only look at actions to be taken but must also explore how a team reflects on its activities and makes changes as it moves forward (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

Although the team planned actions to be taken, reflection occurred sporadically, if at all. The lack of reflection suggested that the team might not consistently leverage learning to build their capacity to be effective board members. As noted previously, team members frequently missed meetings and events due to other commitments. This suggests that standing meeting days and times were not convenient for everyone on the team. The team might have considered offering multiple dates and times for meetings based on the team members' availability.

In 2013, the president proposed new meeting times. However, both suggested times were during the workday and multiple members stated that neither time aligned with their availability. Nevertheless, the meeting time was changed and attendance dropped off even more than it had during the previous year. These attendance problems may be symptoms of a deeper issue regarding the members' genuine commitment to the organization. They may also suggest an unwillingness on the part of team members to try to adjust their schedules, because they were not involved in the decision making process. Once the team passed the "storming" phase of team dynamics attendance began to improve, yet the change to the meeting time seemed to cause the group to revert back to previous behaviors.

For the team as a whole, reflection did not always occur. At the outset of the study, I introduced reflection as an element of the action research process. In addition, the president verbally encouraged reflection and feedback. Occasionally some team members offered suggestions, but deep reflection and updating action did not routinely occur. As a researcher, it was critical for me to note themes that emerged how the group utilized reflection as a part of the action research process. In addition, reflection was key to better assess whether experiential learning occurred and whether the board members enhanced their ability to function as a cohesive unit. Moreover, ongoing data analysis examines the role of action research in the study. Ruona (2005) explains the importance of ongoing analysis and data collection as it allows for reflection and continuous leaning.

Team Learning

Learning acts as a conduit for knowledge sharing. It can be argued that team learning is a conduit for successful collaboration while generating success measures for an organization. The work of Kasl, Marsick, and Deschant (1997) aids scholars and researchers in better understanding how group leaning manifests in organizations. Their works suggests individuals enter an environment with one frame of knowledge. As they gain new knowledge or perspective, original perspectives are challenged which leads to reframing of knowledge at the individual, subgroup, or group level.

Kasl, Marsick, and Deschant created a team-learning model which depicts collective thinking and action as key elements. Table 10 describes the learning model offered by Kasl, Marsick, and Deschant. Their model suggests learning follows a non-linear process referred to as “mode”. The model includes four modes: Fragmented, Pooled, Synergistic, and Continuous. Table 11 describes the modes of learning derived from the team learning process. These modes are connected to observations and outcomes occurring in the current study.

Table 10

Learning Processes and Definitions as Described By Kals, Marsick, And Deschant (1997)

Learning Process	Definition
Framing	Group’s initial perception of an issue, situation, person or object based on past understanding and present input.
Reframing	Process of transforming that perception into a new understanding or frame.
Experimenting	Group action is taken to test hypothesis or moves, or to discover and assess impact
Crossing boundaries	Individuals seek or give information, views, and ideas through interaction with other individuals or units. Boundaries can be physical, mental, or organizational.
Integrating perspectives	Group members synthesize their divergent views such that apparent conflicts are resolved through dialectical thinking not compromise or majority rule.

Table 11

Learning Modes, Definitions, and Study Outcomes as Defined By Kals, Marsick, and Deschant (1997)

Learning Mode	Definition	Study Outcomes
Fragmented	Learning takes place at the individual level; however, holistic learning at the group level does	Team members experienced a need to better understand their roles within the chapter.

	not occur.	
Pooled	Individuals begin to share information to create efficiencies within the group. Clusters within the group may learn but group learning remains absent.	Team members offered feedback to the president; yet the group did not convene to discuss reflections and feedback.
Synergistic	Mutual knowledge creation occurs at the group level. Perspectives are integrated into processes.	Group collectively decided that weekly update meetings and a recap meeting would occur to prepare and debrief when planning D&I forums. A survey was distributed to gather feedback around process improvement initiatives. Survey data was disseminated to the group with key action items assigned.
Continuous	Synergistic learning becomes habitual at the group level.	Brainstorming sessions that include feedback and suggestions from all members routinely occurred. This allowed all members of the group an opportunity to provide feedback to increase the effectiveness of the group.

Politics and Action Research

According to Stringer (1999), action research is a democratic process allowing participation of all people. Action research is a collaborative effort between the action researcher and study participants. The action researcher plays the role of instigator and change agent (Coghlan & Brannick 2001). Yet, action research is not without political challenges and influence of certain individuals or groups. According to Coghlan (2001), action researchers generate highly political information to inform decision-making.

The following reflection illustrates my personal view of the political nature of action research:

When I embarked on the action research journey, I spent time with the chapter president explaining the tenets of my research but also defining my role as an action researcher. The president expressed the importance of my role of [researcher]; yet, she often referred to me a student ambassador. By routinely referring to me a student ambassador, I often wondered if this diminished the perception of my role as an action researcher. I recall an incident when I requested time on a meeting agenda to discuss a potential leadership development series. Prior to the meeting, I was assured that I would have time to present. However, the meeting concluded without the mentioning of the topic. As I reflected, I thought about how to better position the role of the action researcher within this organization. I concluded my lack of visibility might have impacted the group's perception of the work that I hoped to do.

I spent over three years with the chapter but it was not until year two that I really felt like a valuable part of the team. The turning point occurred when I attended a two-day event. Although this was challenging as it required me to absorb the financial cost of travel and hotel accommodations, I felt it was necessary for the group to see that I was fully engaged. Shortly thereafter, I felt a new level of engagement with the group. The president grew more comfortable sharing reflections with me. In addition, she frequently encouraged the group to take part in the action research process. Study participants who participated in critical incident interviews shared that they appreciated having a space to share reflections and think through how the group might make changes to further sustain the chapter.

As my time as an action researcher drew to a close, I realized the research journey was one that was enlightening yet challenging. I gained my rich experiences that supported my growth as a researcher while providing me with skills that I integrated into my professional work life. If I were asked to offer advice to future action researchers, I would share that action research is a trail with complex twists and turns. To navigate the path, one must understand the role s[he] envisions may be very different from the role as defined by others. However, with time and perseverance, the role of an action researcher can evolved into one that the organization feels is required in order to influence change.

Conclusion

As an action researcher, my role included observing dynamics and guiding the team through the action research cycle. At the outset of our engagement, I shared the purpose of action research along with my dual roles as action researcher and team member. As the study progressed, I found myself stepping out of my role as an action researcher and into the role of a team member. Many times, team members asked me to share my experiences and lessons learned when I was a board member of another chapter. While this was helpful for the team as they focused on day-to-day operations, it detracted from my ability to keep them focused on the steps of action research. For example, I was called on to assist with setting up a group page on LinkedIn. I was happy to assist, yet this did very little to build my credibility as a researcher. During the pre-step, I explained the role of action research; however, I missed opportunities to revisit my primary role. I realized subsequently that this may have hampered the team's efforts to fully engage in action research.

Further reflection led me to wonder whether the interventions met the needs of the organization. Observational data along with explicit comments from team members identified the needed for leadership training. Most team members attended the leadership retreat and seemed to view it as a valuable experience. According to Kirkpatrick (1994), a favorable reaction to training yields greater learning. Yet others have refuted this claim, finding no linear relationship between reaction and learning (Alliger & Janak, 1989; Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett, Traver, &

Shotland, 1997). In the team meeting that followed the retreat, I expected the team to discuss how to further leverage their learning around teamwork and collaboration. However, the group spent very little time reflecting on the group would focus on teamwork and collaboration. This might have been the most glaring flaw that occurred during the study. Prior to taking part in the leadership retreat, the team might have considered what behaviors or process changes might be implemented that directly linked to the intervention based on outcomes from the retreat.

As the chapter moves into year three, the team plans to identify future successors. Although this is a much-needed step that many organizations neglect, I questioned whether the team had maximized any learning that could be transferred to new board members. During the final interviews with the group, these questions were explored to identify what might have inhibited the team from utilizing action research.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the enablers of success for starting a new chapter of a professional association. The study examined the enablers of success through experiential learning and the Competing Values Framework. A framework that is comprised of experiential learning, competing values, and action research supports the study. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning? (2) How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization? (3) How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?

The findings presented in this chapter were captured through observational notes, meeting notes, email communication, and critical incident interviews. Participants in the research study included chapter board members, chapter advisors, and council members. Council members were included due to their involvement in developing a key program that was co-sponsored by the chapter and a local organization. Select board members were also members of the action research team. Interviews supported by observational notes and meeting minutes lead to the major themes for the study. Table 12 summarizes the research questions, categories, and related themes.

Table 12

Overview of Study Findings

Research Question	Category	Major Themes
1. How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning?	Board members require an understanding of their roles to deliver on expectations. Role clarity emerges through two-way communication along with commitment to carrying out deliverables.	• Role clarity • Communication • Commitment
2. How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization?	An organization in the start-up or entrepreneurial stage gives more attention to the open system model of the Competing Values Framework.	• Resource alignment • External support
3. How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?		• Individual reflection • Feedback

Capacity Building through Experiential Learning

The first research question explores the influence of experiential learning on capacity building. According to Kolb (1984), learning is a nonlinear, continuous process that challenges individuals to reflect on historical record rather than make assumptions about future knowledge. Learning may not guarantee what future opportunities; however, it aids individuals in moving toward goals and desired future states. Dewey (1938) suggested:

> if an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future, continuity works in a very different way. Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into. (p. 31)

Critical incident interviews and observational notes helped illuminate which learning opportunities had the most impact in enhancing the board members' capacity. Several themes emerged that suggest board members need specific skills to be successful in their roles. These themes included (a) role clarity, (b) communication, and (c) commitment.

In addition, identifying board members for a new organizational chapter requires expanding beyond existing personal relationships to identify prospective chapter leaders. Although the study participants are highly skilled professionals in their respective fields, some reported that they did not have a clear understanding of the role they were assuming when joining the organization. A lack of role clarity may have increased the level of board turnover during the first two years of the chapter's lifecycle.

Table 13

Experiential Learning Opportunities as Capacity Builders

Research Question	Category	Major Themes
How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning?	Board members require an understanding of their roles to deliver on expectations. Role clarity emerges through two-way communication along with commitment to carrying out deliverables.	• Role clarity • Communication • Commitment

Role Clarity

Role clarity emerged as a primary component required for capacity-building among board members. Several examples were identified during the critical incident interviews that suggest group members need to understand their role. When asked what was needed to build the capacity of board members, Joseph[2] shared:

> I think one of the things that I wish I would've had or wish we as a whole would have had in place would've been role clarity. And again, I'm not sure why it was good or not . . . meaning that there were already other chapters that were established and I think when you're establishing a new chapter and it's a national organization . . . role clarity should be something to be figured out.

He went on to share:

> I think as a minimum, I wish we would have had some descriptions, if you want to call it job descriptions, role descriptions, from day one to make sure everyone was clear on

[2] Pseudonyms are used to refer to all study participants and organizations.

what their roles were. Because I believe people were taking positions because . . . I hate to say it this way, but I'll say it this way . . . because it looks good on a resume.

It is important to note that the board was formed during the start-up stage of the chapter's lifecycle. However, Joseph noted, the national chapter should have provided role descriptions prior to the launch of the chapter. During the first months of the chapter's existence, the national chapter did facilitate a leadership retreat; however, it focused on operational sustainability and financial reporting. Shortly thereafter, the group recognized a need for further leadership development, and organized a training session focused on interpersonal relationships. Although this was helpful, board members and advisors subsequently expressed a need for training that focused specifically on their roles within the chapter. Several months passed before this training occurred, facilitated by leaders of the national chapter. The agenda focused on the strategy for the national chapter and expectations for local chapter leaders in carrying out the strategy.

Sarah's reflections offered during a critical incident interview, further suggest the need for role clarity:

> I think understanding our role, understanding the expectation of our roles is key. I think it's needed…I know we'd talked about doing an off site next year about board responsibilities and honestly, I haven't talked to Erica about this but I think we need that sooner than later.

The study also shows a lack of role clarity delayed individuals from taking action. In a critical incident interview, Paul shared the following:

> First thing that comes to mind is that the first forum that I participated in as a council member. I wasn't really sure my role was, I wasn't really sure what I could do to help. It wasn't really clear and so…I think we were asked to volunteer to some different things

> here and there but without knowing exactly what they entailed. You know, you say, "Oh, do you want to do promotion activities?" Well, what does all of that mean? And so I had difficult signing up for things that I don't what all is going to mean because there is obvious implications, how much time is going to take, what skills is it going to take. So, if that stuff isn't laid out, I'm kind of reluctant to try things.

He further noted:

> So, it felt like some of the [our] associates that were involved with that forum didn't really do a whole lot and we usually got that feedback afterwards. And so, it kind of bothered me, I said, "Well, gee, I'll try harder next time and raise my hand make sure I volunteer for something"….it was hard that first time, it was just not knowing part of it, not knowing what I was getting into. So, I think it would have helped knowing more about what was going to be involved and I think that's been kind of addressed having descriptions of tasks and SOP's and things like that. I think other people learned from that, too. If you want people to do stuff, you need to have a description of it.

Several of the study participants expressed regret that there had not been more opportunities to gain a better understanding of their roles. In addition, role clarity might have been less of an issue if a different approach had been used to identify board members. Several participants commented that their involvement with the chapter stemmed from existing relationships that were personal, professional, or both. When asked what else was needed to build the capacity of board members, one participant recommended looking for prospective board members from sources other than existing relationships. In addition to considering other means of identifying board members, it was suggested that board members complete special training or board certification before accepting a board role.

The study found that leaders must set performance expectations for those who join the organization in a leadership capacity. With expectations, board members do not have clear goals making it difficult to hold them accountable for performance. Mary shared:

> I guess the lesson that I had to learn was to toughen my skin with the board and also set expectations and limitations. . . . you're not going to take my kindness for granted. Understand I still have a leadership role that I have to exercise high goals.

When asked whether Mary had shared these feelings with anyone, she responded:

> No. And I'll tell you something that I have learned through being an administrative leader in a company and being a head of HR. When you're in a leadership role . . . this is something my pastor always says . . . if you ever watch an eagle, an eagle does not fly in a flock of birds and so there is not a pack, you're not going to see that triangle of eagles flying over your head in the sky. . . .
>
> I never stopped to think about the idea of an eagle until he said that. They land in the highest tree, they fly alone, they never fly in a pack . . . even vultures, you'll see them circling around a carcass in a pack. You never see that of an eagle. The reason why leaders sometimes can't vent is because we can't share certain things because would a board understand, would the people who report to them understand?

Although leaders may not be able to fully share their thoughts and feelings, this does not detract from the need for effective communication.

Communication

Communication and commitment emerged as key conduits for learning. When asked to discuss a time when he learned a valuable lesson that enabled individual effectiveness, Joseph noted, “Communication between board members, team members, needs to be accurate, brief, and clear”

In a critical incident interview, Mary, the chapter president, commented on why communication was so important to her:

> But two people made me feel good about sending out so many [emails]. But they both said, “Mary, even if we don’t do what you asked us to do, we can never say that we are uninformed. You keep us informed about everything that’s going on.”

She continued:

> There is information out there that we don’t always know about and I have to hunt and peck and find this information and call people and make the time. And I think that’s what makes a president effective and just don’t sit around waiting for information to come across your desk.

As participants reflected on some of the everyday experiences that relate to their board experience, they realized communication often did not flow as smoothly as needed. This issue emerged early on when a subcommittee was tasked with planning an event geared toward men in human resources. As the subcommittee planned the event, the group encountered some challenges identifying who would lead the planning of the event. A study participant shared that these challenges stemmed from a lack of communication, since the board did not clearly communicated who should take on the role of project leader. Moreover, the person who was eventually chosen to lead the project failed to communicate the status of outstanding tasks.

During a critical incident interview, Joseph shared:

> The real lesson learned I think that came for me out of that event . . . I’ll kind of put it on two levels. . . . One is just put it on a general level of . . . working relationships within a

> group, if you want to put it as a project, if you want to put it as day to day . . . is communication. . . . in other words . . . and I'm not blaming him, as he was the individual to lead should have been clearly communicated and then he should have said either a) I can do this or b) I can't. So, that was one lesson.

Another example offered by Sarah during a critical incident interview also supports the importance of communication. When asked what would she do differently if she encounters a situation where a leader is being too hands on, she noted:

> I think I'd continue doing what I do, do, which is bring it to their attention and get clarity of what my role is and what you want me to do and how you want me to do it. So, I think being honest and up front about it is the most important thing and communicating, you know what I mean?

My interviews suggested, communication plays a vital role in the success of board members and ultimately influences the success of a professional association. The study found that a lack of communication resulted in role ambiguity, missed deadlines, and an inability to carry out deliverables. However, communication alone cannot resolve these issues. This study demonstrates the importance of commitment to tasks and to the mission and vision of the organization. Moreover, participants also provided examples of how a lack of commitment to the organization can hamper results.

Organizational Commitment

According to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment cements a relationship between an individual and organization. Meyer and Allen found that an individual's commitment hinges on a desire, need, and obligation to remain a part of the organization. In a professional association, there may be few compelling reasons for board members to remain unless they are invested in the mission and vision of the organization.

The Three Component Model (TCM) of organizational commitment was used to examine commitment in this study, and affective commitment was found to be most relevant to the study's outcomes (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Meyer and Allen defined affective commitment as the degree to which an individual identifies with an organization, plays an active role, and enjoys being a part of organization. Research suggests that individual attributes such as locus of control also influence levels of commitment (Rotter, 1966). Rotter (1966) defined *locus of control* as the way an individual attributes consequences for behaviors. Those with an internal locus of control believe they have control over their environment. Conversely, those with an external locus of control feel the environment controls their lives. According to Lau and Woodman (1995), internals believe they have more control of a change due to their control over the environment increasing their commitment to the change.

During the course of the study, commitment played a vital role. Several examples suggest that board members noted when levels of commitment wavered among some of their colleagues. A number of factors may have contributed to these changes, and it was beyond the scope of this study to investigate the underlying reasons for such declines in commitment levels. Instead, this study aims to explore examples of commitment divergence and how individuals learn to work through this dynamic.

During the first and second years of the organization's existence, observational notes provide examples of challenges that were exacerbated by issues with commitment. As the team developed, the group agreed to meet on a monthly basis. These meetings were virtual to allow flexibility for those who were remote. Initially, this format seemed to work. As time progressed, however, many team members failed to attend meetings without prior notification.

In several instances, team members who had agenda items to discuss with the group did not attend the meetings, nor did they provide a status update. This resulted either in delays in key decisions being made or in decisions being made without everyone's agreement even though they impacted the entire group. During the chapter's second year, active board members decided to ask those who were not active to resign from the board. Along with those resignations, several others opted to leave their positions due to conflicting work and personal demands.

Although board turnover seemed inevitable, it left the chapter in a difficult position. To be recognized as a chapter based on the national's chapter's bylaws, a minimum number of board members is required. If this minimum requirement is not met, a chapter faces dissolution. Board members therefore reached out to their personal and professional networks to identify individuals willing to assume vacant roles to avoid dissolution. Although the chapter was able to continue, several key board positions remained vacant.

During the critical incident interviews, challenges surfaced that resulted from a lack of commitment. These interview findings support the incidents that were documented in the observational notes. When asked about a learning experience that helped him become more effective in his role, Joseph reflected on an experience he had when planning an event:

> The second lesson that I've learned from that is . . . sometimes you have to ensure the others have what I'm going to call "skin in the game" . . . and this is my own lesson . . . I took the burden of pretty much taking everything off of their plates, so to speak. All the obstacles, I took away. So, I think it didn't allow the members any type of "skin in the game" because, honestly, I can't make someone market to their group of people that they

> know. They can either do it or they can't. They had no "skin in the game," in other words, I was taking all the risks of A) I had to get approvals, looked to my management, my leadership was ready to put some money out and things of that nature and so I had everything invested and no one else had anything really invested other than their time, their thoughts which is significant. But I don't think there was any commitment from their behalf because really there wasn't anything they had to do other than hopefully go out and market the people.

Research suggests that commitment level also varies based on the environment. Often times, individuals are more committed to work-related tasks verses volunteer efforts. For a startup chapter, commitment plays an integral role in the overall success of the chapter. Joseph felt there should be no distinction in the level of commitment and effort put forth in various environments:

> Because we are all volunteers and it's not to say that your commitment should be any less, because I really think commitment is a personal thing and it really shouldn't matter whether it's work, volunteer, home life, or whatever. When you're committed, you're committed; for me personally, there isn't any distinction between the different environments.

One participant defined success for the chapter as having a "fully functioning board that everybody rolls up their sleeves." Another participant stated, "there has to be a level of clear expectation and accountability, because without clear expectations and accountability then when life gets in the way, it's hard to say, "Hey, you're not meeting your commitment" if there are no expectations or accountability."

An interview uncovered the role of commitment expands beyond tasks that need to be completed. The organization needs committed individuals to sustain the long-term success of the chapter. When asked what is needed to support the chapter's growth, Paul shared:

> [We] just need some more folks who are willing to stand up, speak up, whatever, and keep things moving….because it's great to have a face for your organization but….it takes a number of dedicated people to really push it forward.

As the study shows, commitment to the organization contributed to the learning of board members. Through commitment, they were able to deploy value-added events for members, make meaningful contributions to the human resources community, and increase their knowledge as board members. As learning emerged at the individual level, members began to recognize what was necessary to grow the chapter from a grassroots start-up organization to a mature chapter that provided a roadmap for others to follow.

Influence of Competing Values on the Enablers of Success

The second research question looked at the influence of the Competing Values Framework (CVF) on the enablers of success for the professional association board. The CVF emerged in the early 1980s from the work of Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983). The CVF provides a tool to help organizations appreciate values situated in opposing quadrants while integrating these values to fuel effectiveness (Quinn & Rohrbaugh). Two core dimensions comprise the CVF: organizational focus and organizational structure. The framework considers a micro emphasis on people development interwoven with a macro emphasis on the development of the organization (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Organizational structure examines the emphasis placed on control and stability contrasted with the need for change and flexibility. Organizational focus considers internal emphasis on the people within the organization verses focus on the external environment. . As the framework suggests, the study shows the chapter placed on these dimensions. In particular, the study found that the micro focus required the greatest level of attention during the organization's early stages of growth.

Competing Values Spur Growth

The CVF provides a number of opportunities for organizations to examine effectiveness along with management styles. For this study, the CVF was examined to determine the values that most impacted the chapter's success. To fully understand the CVF, it is important first to understand the concept of organizational lifecycle.

Connolly described five stages of the non-profit lifecycle: start-up, adolescent, mature, stagnant, and defunct (2006). Attributes of a start-up organization include excitement, flexibility, and external support. In terms of the CVF, the study likens the start-up stage to what Quinn and Cameron (1983) refer to as the entrepreneurial stage of the organizational lifecyle. Six behaviors make up the entrepreneurial stage: aligning resources**,** idea generation, entrepreneurial activities**,** minimal planning and coordination**,** formation of niche, and prime mover holds 9"power."). In this stage, system inputs act as enablers for success.

This study focuses on the entrepreneurial stage; however, data emerged that suggested the organization is moving toward the collectivity stage. The collectivity stage reflects a shift towards the human relations model, in which commitment and cohesion are manifest. The human relations model places emphasis on the development of the people within the organization. Table 14 illustrates how the Competing Values Framework influences the enablers of success

Table 14

Competing Values as Enablers of Success

Research Question	Category	Major Themes
How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization?	An organization in the start-up or entrepreneurial stage gives more attention to the open systems model of the Competing Values Framework.	• Resource alignment • External support

Resource alignment. As research related to start-up or entrepreneurial organizations suggests, aligning resources is important to the success of a new organization. According to Quinn and Cameron (1983), an organization in the entrepreneurial stage relies on its ability to acquire resources. Data gathered in this study further supports the finding that organizations in the entrepreneurial stage rely on their ability to align resources and effectively function in the open system model. An open system self-regulates by way of throughput taken and given back to the external environment. In an open systems environment, an organization increases its interaction with the external environment.

During the course of the study, several examples emerged suggesting that specific resources were necessary to deliver the programs and services the organization aimed to provide. One of those resources is an engaged group of leaders. As the study shows, a lack of role clarity contributed to the challenges the chapter faced. However, board members also brought complementary skills to the organization. When asked what opportunities he believed spurred growth or propelled the chapter towards success, Peter stated, “Well, I think the chapter is highly energized in a sense of the board members all have energy and seeing that the chapter is successful. I think they have very good leadership on the board.” The participant further explained that having resources aligned requires "identifying what everyone needs on whatever it is, board member, council member, advisory."

During another critical incident interview, a participant shared what he believed was needed to advance the chapter. He said, "I think what would definitely propel us to the next level of success—and I think we're actually in the process of actually doing this—is really strategically looking at who and what type of person should fulfill various support positions." He continued, "I think establishing what I call 'new blood' on the board, and I'm going to say the new blood that we don't know, I think what it does is it allows you to build internal relationships, you know, you don't have any history and so everything that you're building starts from that moment moving forward." He stressed the importance of aligning the correct leadership resources to successfully move the board forward, and referenced basketball great Michael Jordan's ability to elevate his teammates in suggesting that new board members have a way of "elevating their team members."

As these examples show, identifying the right leaders is critical to building a new chapter. This study further shows that understanding and accepting the constraints imposed by limited resources helps increase the effectiveness of a new chapter. Early on, the chapter set very lofty goals, including having each board member secure a corporate sponsor and growing chapter membership to over 200 members in year one. Goals of this nature are challenging even for well-established chapters. Thus, it seemed unlikely that a new chapter could achieve these results within its first year.

When asked what moved the chapter forward on the path of success, Joseph stated, "I think we're evolving and I think we are now beginning to realize our limitations, which means . . . instead of trying to do 100 things and be adequate, let's just do 10 things and be great. I think we're heading in that direction right now." Peter agreed that numbers do not drive success, noting:

> It's not just about the numbers within the chapter; it's the impact that's made by the chapter, and I always say, as Mary will tell you, "Don't be moved by numbers, be moved by impact." If you have 100 people in a chapter and the chapter is doing nothing, okay, there is a chapter. If you have 10 people in a chapter and the chapter is making incredible impact to the state, that's more important.

Aligning resources allows newly formed organizations to function effectively, leverage the strengths of their board members, and build upon existing capabilities. In addition, having the right resources allows chapters to look outside their organization to gain support. This support further aids the organization in carrying out its mission and vision.

External support. New organizations are faced with several challenges during the onboarding process. New chapters may not have key connections to local organizations and community partnerships. However, building external resources provides an avenue to grow membership, increase resources, and deliver value-added services to key stakeholders.

One source of external support is corporate partners or sponsors. The chapter defines corporate partners as "organizations whose goals are rich in diverse leadership principles and engaging people perspectives." The chapter further describes these partners as:

> [O]rganizations whose long-term strategy incorporates critical components of how they engage their internal human capital, and those which aim towards excellence in:
>
> - Upholding the highest values and standards around global leadership execution
> - Providing learning and development opportunities to their human capital, and
> - Promoting leaders of diverse experiences, perspectives, and abilities.

During the chapter's first few months, it was thought that each board member would secure at least five corporate partners—an expectation that subsequently proved unrealistic. Several examples suggest that the lack of a realistic plan for securing and maintaining corporate sponsors may have stifled the growth of the chapter. Corporate partnerships were established, yet partners did not always understand the benefits they received from the relationship. In addition, some corporate sponsors felt the organization did not fulfill agreed-upon expectations.

In a critical incident interview, Peter, a council member, recalled his disappointment after his employer made an effort to support the chapter, yet the chapter failed to carry out its part of the agreement. The employer aided the chapter in organizing a local diversity conference. After the chapter sponsored several diversity events, the national chapter was pleased with the results and encouraged the chapter and its sponsor to expand the conference from a local to a regional event. Peter recalled:

> [W]e always wanted to keep it relatively small, knowing that the farther you go the more it would take, the more effort it would take, the more participants that you would need to have. But, for a lack of a better phrase, we gave in to the national [chapter]'s request to make it regional. We expected more support from nationals; we expected more support from the national chapters. We planned it based upon their recommendations and their commitment to numbers. We planned on having over a hundred participants and unfortunately, everyone didn't do their share, their part to help sell and coordinate the efforts to make this event successful. So, it was very stressful. It was costly.

Peter continued:

> I was offended, I was hurt, and I was disappointed because it was almost as though we were convinced to do something that went totally against our kind of principles, how we

> operate, and we were left hanging. And because we were left hanging, it left us in a non-profitable situation. And I have to say the goal of the [forums] is not to make a whole lot of money. That's not the goal; the goal is to share, the goal is to expand, and the goal is to make sure that diversity practitioners are getting information that they need to be successful in their professions.

In addition to the impact of the national chapter's failure to provide adequate support, other examples also illustrate the importance of external support for a fledgling chapter. Ruth described the support she received from her employer that helped her carry out her responsibilities as a council member:

> They allow us time, like they'll allow Sue and I time during our workday to work on things for the conference. So that's a plus for us, but I don't know if other companies would do that, you know? I don't know if other folks, their company is going to say, "Oh, okay, we'll let you work four hours a day on this????" I don't think that would happen. But I'm fortunate enough to be in a company that says, "Yeah, we're going to allow you time to do this because we think it's worthwhile."

Ruth is employed by one of the organization's corporate partners, which suggests that engaged board members and council members may also engage their organizations, garnering support that might otherwise be unavailable. In addition to the employer allowing her to allocate time in the office to work on deliverables for the organization, the employer also encourages other employees who may not be members to attend conferences and events hosted by the chapter. Reflecting on a previous forum, she stated, "We had a lot of [our] associates that attended the last one."

The study findings demonstrate that external support can come from a number of sources, including the national chapter and corporate partners. Another source of external support resides in the community in which an organization is located. Organizations therefore need to be aware of their local community and the needs of those stakeholders. Community leaders may look to professional associations to aid in building capabilities for the community at large. This requires the chapter to actively immerse itself in the community and understand the drivers of success for local constituents.

During the study, several opportunities arose for the chapter to build external support by connecting with the community. For example, the community in which the chapter is located has several colleges and universities that have robust human resources undergraduate programs. To build relationships with the higher education sector, a higher education professional serves as a board advisor. This advisor provides insight into higher education and the needs of emerging human resources professionals. To further build this relationship, board members often serve as participants in various programs and initiatives occurring at local colleges and universities.

Understanding that local students are the future of the chapter, the group explored ways to involve students who may not be able to afford student membership. The chapter plans to create a volunteer program to provide community service hours for students, and to invite students to work on project teams to plan forums. In addition to receiving community service hours, students are invited to attend forums where they can engage with seasoned HR professionals and deepen their knowledge of the HR discipline. By focusing on this group of external constituents, the chapter found an opportunity to gain general community support.

When asked about the importance of community relationships, Paul commented:

> The university tries to provide or connect people with ….there are so many opportunities and if there is no awareness of the organization or if it's not necessarily connected to these other institutions it's hard to build, I guess….but building awareness is one part of it whether it's through the media but it also has to be in the circles where the government people and the academic people operate. It's like if you're not known, nothing is going to happen.

From its inception, the organization emphasized giving back to the local community as a way to drive success. Early on, board members supported various local events by serving as panelists for career seminars and workshops. Supporting events of this nature assisted the chapter in building a framework for its signature event – the D&I Forum.

The D&I Forum emerged after a council member and a board member participated in a recruiting and staffing seminar hosted by a local organization. Leaders of the organization believed expanding the topics beyond recruiting and staffing would provide professionals with additional knowledge that would sharpen their skill sets. Initially, the D&I Forum was part of a seminar offered by the local organization. The group decided that a more focused approach was needed to create a meaningful D&I Forum. Moreover, the board felt forum had the potential to reach a wider audience if it was not offered as one workshop that was apart of a broader conference. According to Peter, "In a 30-minute session, we had over 30 people attend and they were just excited about the diversity element of that conference, and from there the [forums] were created."

Although the chapter has made strides in partnering with community organizations to provide relevant programs, more opportunities exist to increase support at the local level. In a critical incident interview, Peter shared:

> I believe the chapter just needs to take some time to find out what its constituent base is looking for and where they can really partner with them to help make a difference. So, what are some of the initiatives that the state is working on relative to diversity and inclusion, and see how the chapter can play a role in helping to drive the initiatives from another state level. And I think that would help bring more recognition, help drive more involvement, and help the state move forward in terms of growth.

Mary shared her thoughts on the importance of community relationships in response to the question, "What opportunities spurred growth or propelled the chapter toward success?" Mary noted, "I think eventually we will be a successful board and chapter, but I think we still have a lot of work to do." She continued:

> I think we're still in learning mode and building mode, too. Are we building a respect in the community? So when I look at success, I look at success as I have a fully functioning board, maybe minus one or two board members . . . but we're hitting all of the targets and that is reaching out to the community; that is, getting people jobs, not just running conferences.

As illustrated by the discussion of resource alignment and external support, an organization's lifecycle stage may strongly influence the values that emerge as most important for that organization. Along with values, organizations demonstrate cultural nuances that link to their respective stage in the organizational lifecycle.

Leadership Development through Action Research

Action research emerged from the work of Kurt Lewin (1947) and his colleagues as a way to use problem solving to improve organizations. Action research focuses on deep inquiry aimed at bringing positive change to the actions of an organization. Action research represents a cyclical process in which a group or organization may revisit steps in the process multiple times.

This study utilized action research methodology to study the development of a new organizational chapter over the course of three years. Many opportunities arose that might have allowed the group to utilize action research to advance development at the individual level. Although these opportunities were not always acted upon, this study explores three areas in which action research can be utilized: individual reflection, multi-level feedback, and process improvements. Findings related to action research as a tool to develop leaders are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15

Developing Leaders through Action Research

Research Question	**Category**	**Major Themes**
How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?	Action research allowed leaders to identify ways to build their capacity by reflecting, providing feedback, and making changes to internal processes.	• Individual reflection • Feedback

When initially accepting a volunteer role, individuals may not fully understand the scope of the tasks related to their role. As they move through the learning cycle, they may have opportunities for reflection-in-action. This level of reflection allows for changes in real time, or in the moment. Reflection-in-action can only occur if the organization or group makes space for it to occur. With this understanding, as the researcher my goal was to encourage the group to reflect-in-action and reflect-on-action. I presented this as a foundational component of the action research cycle.

Reflective Activities

The team was well into its second year before the group began to demonstrate behaviors conducive to the reflection process. When planning for an upcoming forum, the group made a collective decision to administer surveys to attendees. In addition, the group itself completed a separate survey to help them understand how they might work together more cohesively when planning events. A survey question asked the group to provide recommendations to improve future events. Peter shared, “I think that in order to pull off a successful event, it takes everyone’s commitment, time, and flexibility. I would like to see more raised hands for tasks given and more accountability of volunteers so that no one person or few people are doing it all.”

This reflection provides great value as it parallels findings related to experiential learning regarding the importance of commitment. In addition to affirming the need for commitment, the reflective process also demonstrates that learning is a conduit for development and change. The group was asked what they would do differently at the individual level when planning future events. One participant stated, “I think practice makes better. This is only the second event that has been delivered solely by X and X. There is learning that takes place, and that is how improvement comes about. I don’t have live examples, but I believe as a team that is forming, things are going well.”

The survey created a space for the group to reflect on a particular program. However, although this was helpful in planning future events, it generated very few thoughts on how the group might increase individual and group effectiveness. The critical incident interviews also provided the group with an opportunity to share reflections. In a critical incident interview, Joseph was asked to describe a time when he felt he was ineffective offered the following example, in which reflecting-on-action unfolded:

> I think I was somewhat ineffective as a board advisor leading into 2013 again. We had this big strategy and I can clearly see we didn't have those resources to achieve what the strategic plan was calling for and I've always voiced my opinion and I gave my recommendation, my advice . . . but I don't think I gave it strong enough and partly because . . . I'm not trying to tell you how I felt then, I'm just trying to reflect back on it then . . . I didn't want to seem like I was maybe bursting the bubble because we were a young chapter still trying to grow. And I think looking back on it, I wish I would have been a little bit more vocal or maybe a little bit more descriptive in my approach to sharing what I thought was maybe us biting off more than we could chew.

Ruth shared her personal story of reflection that encouraged her to consider an alternate career path after almost 30 years working in the IT field. The participant joined the chapter as a council member focused on executing ongoing diversity forums. After attending a forum, she shared the following:

> The first time that I went to school years ago was for HR. But I had switched to IT because I was just all excited about the world of IT. After this last conference, I came home and I signed up to be a life coach. I'd been taking classes for that and I have since told our HR in [company name] that I'd like to get into the world of HR. And that's all by me being involved with [] . . . it's just brought all of this out . . . I love working with people. I love helping people. And so it's just a lot of wins all over the place for me.

As these examples illustrate, reflection allowed participants to think about how they would change their behaviors in future situations, along with considering changes to their personal career paths. In addition to reflecting, the study demonstrates the importance of feedback.

Through feedback, the group was able to influence future performance both individually and collectively as a group.

Feedback

Feedback played a key role in fueling improvements at the individual and group levels in the organization. Feedback is captured theme for this study, as some members utilized it effectively while others chose to internalize feelings rather than sharing them with others. Mary, the chapter president, encouraged team members to provide feedback on processes and procedures. Meeting notes illustrate that during each meeting the team was given the opportunity to share feedback on updates and decisions that impacted the chapter, yet not everyone chose to offer feedback. Initially, this was due to a lack of participation by some team members, since not everyone attended the meetings in which decisions were made. When meeting attendance was low, the president often sent e-mails to encourage feedback or offer the opportunity to vote on implementing new processes or decisions.

Although it seemed that the foundation was laid for members to provide feedback, a critical incident interview revealed that not all members viewed the president's leadership style as encouraging feedback. When asked about barriers that impacted the success of the chapter, Sarah shared:

> I'd also say that, again, just because of Mary's passion, sometimes I think she can be narrow-minded about certain things because she's focused on "I'm going to achieve Point A no matter what' (laughs) which, again, is a good thing. But…sometimes that can also be very limited in hearing other people's perspective and mindset.

In addition to team members not always providing feedback, the president at times also withheld feedback to the group. She shared, "The reason why leaders sometimes can't give feedback is because we can't share certain things because would a board understand, would the people who report to them understand? They have their own opinion involved. If they've never been in the seat of a president, could you ever expect them to understand?"

Other critical incident interviews provide examples of feedback shared across the group. Joseph discussed an experience in which he was helping to plan an event. Many incidents occurred to derail the planning process, resulting in the cancellation of the event. When Joseph was asked if he shared his feedback with anyone, he recalled:

> Yeah, I did share it with Mary. I'd say I didn't share it [as] directly as I share it with you just now . . . with the other individuals involved. I probably shared it a little bit less direct with them because I was . . . trying to coach and persuade and influence, we were trying to kick this off, that, "Hey, this is what we need, this is what you need to do." Gave out some assignments, tried to get people to commit to it, and I'm not going to say it's bad on me, but when certain things weren't done . . . I kind of said, "Okay, it's not done yet, I'll go ahead and pick up this slack," so to speak.

Another participant described his experience of providing feedback to the national chapter. In a critical incident interview, Peter shared that the group felt compelled to sponsor an event at the urging of the national chapter's leadership team. In addition, the national chapter committed to providing resources and support to ensure that the event was well attended. However, the group encountered challenges in hosting the event when the expected number of attendees did not register. When asked about the nature of his feedback, Peter noted:

> Pretty much . . . disappointed that we didn't get the support that we needed. Disappointed that there was very little acknowledgement . . . so, in all honesty and candor, there was little acknowledgement of, "Okay, so you guys are in the hole, here's how we're going to

> help you out" . . . it was more each chapter was more of a franchise and they have to kind of manage their chapter accordingly. Which I can understand that, yet when you are highly suggesting or recommending one does a regional event, there should have been more financial support.
>
> Now, I don't know all of what was given, but at the end of the day the Delaware chapter was in the hole a significant amount and it didn't have to be that way. So yeah, I did provide feedback and they did and he shared with me how things operated and shared with me that in the past national have done conferences and they came out in the hole and that's kind of the course of doing business. . .

In addition to sharing this feedback with leaders of the national chapter, Peter also shared his feeling with Mary. As a result of this feedback, the group decided to focus its attention on sponsoring local conferences rather than regional events. As this example demonstrates, feedback enabled the group to make a decision that dictated how future events would be planned, including identification of a reasonable target audience.

In summary, research question three provides examples of how reflection may influence behavior changes. In addition, feedback impacts the decision-making process; however, some group members may choose not to offer feedback if they believe no action will be taken in response. Reflection and feedback were the primary components of the action research process utilized by group members to advance their development as leaders.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the enablers of success for starting a new chapter of a professional association. By examining how a team used action research (AR) to guide interventions and activities that either aided or hindered the growth of the chapter, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning?
2. How do competing values influence the enablers of success for a new volunteer organization?
3. How do volunteer organizations utilize action research to develop leaders?

This chapter discusses the findings gathered and analyzed over a three-year period. Study participants included board and council members who played significant roles in developing the chapter and delivering key programs. The organization on which the study focused is a professional association, which is one of many forms of volunteer organizations. This association was of particular interest because it was in the early stage of formation. Given that the organization was so new, it was assumed that the enablers of success would be very different from those of organizations in later stages of the organizational life cycle.

Study Summary

Critical incidents provided much of the data for this action research case study. An action research team, comprised of leaders in the organization, was formed to carry out the study. Over time, changes within the leadership of the organization impacted the AR team; however, the team continued to work together to deliver on the mission of the organization. After significant data was captured through meetings and observations, critical incident interviews were conducted to identify—and in many cases support—other potential themes that were identified earlier in the study. My initial interest in this research resulted from an informal conversation with the person who served as the president of the national chapter during the early stages of the study. The president was intrigued by action research and how it differs from traditional research methods. This interest led to another conversation in which we discussed initiatives of the national chapter, and I was able to visualize ways in which action research could help advance many of these initiatives. However, not until later did we determine that I could best serve the organization by working with a new chapter.

During the course of the study, my role expanded beyond that of an action researcher; this was due largely to my previous experience working in a leadership role in a professional association. This experience allowed me to offer operational expertise and also increased my credibility. I believe this helped me to build the trust I needed to work effectively with the organization.

This study sought to identify activities that enabled a new chapter to grow by learning from experiences and leveraging competing values. As formal training opportunities was not readily available for these new board members, the study aimed to determine which experiential learning opportunities were beneficial in building these leaders' capacity. As discussed in previous chapters, experiential learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984). Moving beyond experiential learning, this study utilizes the Competing Values Framework (CVF), which was popularized in the 1980s as a tool for assessing the effectiveness of organizations (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983).

In addition to its focus on experiential learning and CVF, this study attempts to illuminate the influence of action research on volunteer organizations. A key element of action research is evaluating action. Action research is therefore valuable for this study, as it helps the team identify practices that strengthen the board as well as identify challenges that emerge in a team-based environment.

Role Clarity, Communication, and Commitment

The first research question yielded three major findings, which identified how board members of professional associations build their capacity through experiential learning. The first finding demonstrates that board members need role clarity to effectively carry out their responsibilities. In a new chapter, roles will evolve as the chapter matures; however, a core description of the tasks and responsibilities associated with the role is vital when onboarding new board members. There is a basic expectation that the national chapter will aid in providing role clarity, just as it provides chapters with foundational operational guidelines.

The second finding was the importance of accurate and ongoing communication. Board members need to engage in two-way communication in which information flows up to the president and, when necessary, flows further to the next level of leadership at the regional or national chapter. In addition, information needs to flow downward from the national leadership team to the local chapter's president and supporting board members. Findings show that the chapter president did not always receive information she needed from the national leadership in a timely manner.

Furthermore, the local chapter president found that it was necessary to seek out information that should have flowed downward from the national leadership team. Although the president frequently communicated information, a lack of consistent communication channels prevented needed information from reaching her. In addition, study findings highlighted the need for team members to communicate with each other specifically when working on committees and projects. A lack of communication around the status of deliverables and expectations contributed to the third finding – commitment.

As shown by the study, the chapter encountered challenges in establishing commitments and completing agreed-upon tasks. A lack of commitment resulted in a lack of equity in the distribution of tasks, and major events had to be cancelled as a result of the chapter's inability to achieve key milestones. Other pervasive commitment issues resulted in the premature resignation of some board members, while others were asked to resign. It is important to note that many of the challenges that arose were not due to a lack of willingness or desire on the part of board members, but resulted instead from personal or work challenges that impacted the board members' ability to fully engage in their role.

Resource Alignment and External Support

The second research question explored the impact of competing values on the success of a volunteer organization. According to the Competing Values Framework (CVF), the stage of the organizational life cycle aids in determining which values tend to emerge as greater priorities for an organization. The organization in this study was in what CVF defines as the *entrepreneurial stage*. Findings show that this organization is similar to other organizations in the entrepreneurial stage in that resource alignment and external support were key organizational concerns.

The president of this start-up organization was charged with recruiting board members. Initially, the president accomplished this task by reaching out within her existing personal and professional networks and sharing the vision for the chapter. Most of those selected for the board had significant leadership and human resources experience. Without clearly defined roles, however, it was difficult to place board members in roles for which they had specific skills. However, the board soon realized that specific skills and experiences were needed to be effective in their roles. With no specific training available for board members, the chapter learned the importance of selecting board members whose past experiences fit the needs of a particular role.

In addition, the study's findings point to the need for significant external support. External support includes guidance from the national chapter along with support from the local community. In this study, the primary sources of community support were other organizations within the local community. By building relationships with other local organizations, the chapter obtained financial resources, recruited council members, and expanded membership opportunities. The chapter found that identifying knowledge gaps and community issues was a necessary step in creating programs and services that appealed to local HR practitioners. The chapter also recognized that this was a huge undertaking that they could not carry out alone. By establishing a relationship with a well-known local organization, the chapter expanded its financial and human resources and thus increased its capacity to carry out many of these tasks.

Individual Reflection and Feedback

The third research question examined how the volunteer organization utilized action research to develop board members' capacity to successfully lead a new chapter. Over the course of the study, the group moved through each stage of the action research process. Findings show that board members utilized action research as an opportunity to reflect and consider alternative behaviors, should they be faced with similar challenges in the future. Also, board members utilized feedback to propose changes to processes and share concerns about challenges that impacted the success of the chapter. Critical incident interviews were the primary source from which the researcher gather examples of action research utilization. In addition, data collected through observations also point to examples of action research at work within the group.

Action research allowed chapter leaders to identify ways to build their capacity by reflecting, providing feedback, and making changes to internal processes. The following section will present a deeper explanation of each conclusion. Conclusions will also be compared to existing literature and related studies.

Study Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Board members of the chapter experienced a paradoxical phenomenon as they needed degrees of role clarity and standardized processes.

Individuals assume a variety of roles when joining the board of a professional organization. Often these roles are vastly different from the day-to-day tasks they perform in their jobs. To further complicate role clarity, new chapters of professional associations may not always clearly define the tasks that are associated with each role. Role clarity has been a pervasive issue in multiple organizational settings for many years (Hickson, 1966). It is important to note that research on role clarity often uses the related phrases *role ambiguity* or *role specificity* (Hickson). In this study, role clarity is defined as (1) a clear understanding regarding what is expected of a specific role (objective role clarity), or (2) the feeling of having the needed information for a role (subjective role clarity). A lack of role clarity has implications at both the individual and group levels.

In this study, board members realized that what they anticipated would be readily available information provided during organizational onboarding instead had to be learned over time. As time progressed, the board members relied less on standard processes and procedures and more on their experiences as drivers of future actions and behaviors. Kolb (1984) defines experiential learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 41). According to Kolb, cognitions, environmental factors, and emotions all influence how an individual learns. Kolb also argues that experiential learning differs from cognitive learning theories. For example, metacognition focuses on thinking through processes related to learning while knowing what is needed to learn to learn (Winn, 2003).

Board members found it difficult to engage fully in their respective roles, as they did not always know what needed to be done nor could they identify the resources needed to carry out stated tasks. This points to the absence of both objective and subjective role clarity, which often resulted in tasks being partially completed or left to others. Those who assumed tasks discarded by others thus took on additional responsibilities, creating an even greater need for clarity. A study conducted by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) found that a lack of subjective role clarity resulted in greater tension and less job satisfaction than when roles and expectations were clear.

This also points to another challenge faced by the chapter. During the chapter's first year of existence, the board experienced high levels of absenteeism, which resulted in turnover. As turnover increased, new board members joined the organization; yet expectations and tasks associated with roles remained undefined. The board turned to the national chapter for help in ensuring that board members understood the their roles. The national chapter committed to facilitating a leadership workshop; however, other priorities delayed the workshop. When the leadership workshop was eventually delivered, much of its content focused on conveying the specific needs of the national chapter, such as sponsorship and financial reporting. Although this was helpful in renewing the energy of the team, it did little to provide in-depth role clarity.

After the workshop, the board members identified key takeaways related to collaboration, commitment, and communication. First, the president tasked each board member with creating standard operating procedures for his or her respective role. With much of the group's efforts centered on delivering diversity forums to the local area, the group recognized a need to have processes and procedures in place for planning the event. This was a turning point for the group members, as they realized that many of the negative team dynamics they had experienced might have been eliminated if standardized processes and procedures had been in place. More importantly, standardized processes and procedures may provide all team members with a better understanding of the responsibilities of their colleagues. As board members began to identify their perceived responsibilities, the group made suggestions about how tasks might be streamlined or reassigned based on previous feedback provided by the team.

This study demonstrated that learning is not a linear process for board members. Without a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, team members worked either in chaos or not at all, thereby stifling both individual and organizational growth. The study furthers the notion that reflecting on experiences allows individuals to turn experiences into opportunities to close knowledge gaps. In the absence of reflection and/or behavioral changes, board members performed poorly or continuously failed to complete tasks, often resulting in the termination of their relationship with the board. As board members reflected on experiential learning opportunities, they gained a greater appreciation of the need for commitment to and communication within the organization. Figure 8 depicts the experiential learning process for this group.

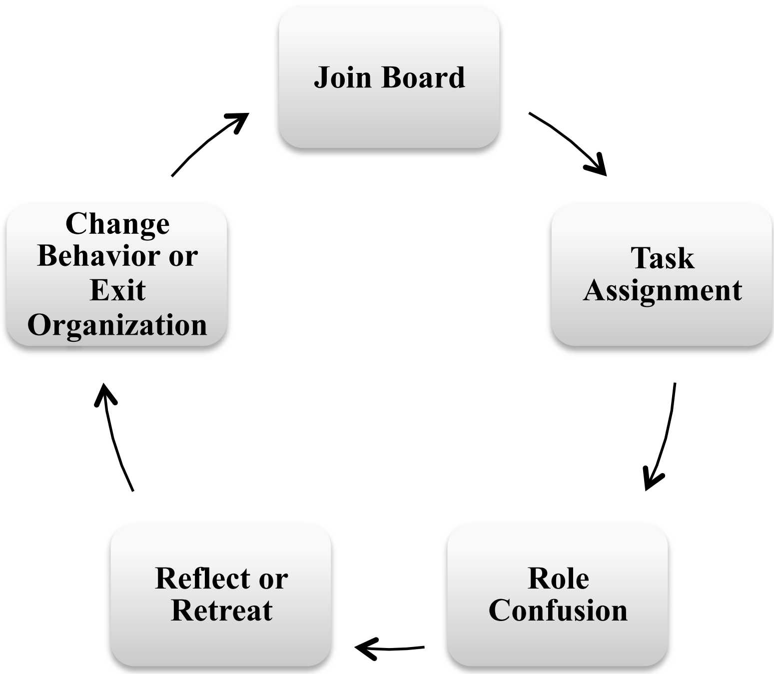

Figure 8. Experiential learning cycle for board members as identified during study.

The experiential learning cycle demonstrated in this study does not illustrate the ideal learning environment in a similar setting. Based on findings from the study, it can be argued that board members require role clarity prior to taking on tasks. As shown in this study, board members discovered the need for role clarity when tasks were not successfully completed. This posits a unique paradox suggesting learning occurs through successes and failures. For this organization, a failed attempt to develop a program offering for chapter members, provided space for reflection and feedback. Initially, these learning opportunities were situated in the fragmented mode of learning, which was identified in the work of Kals, Marsick, and Dechant (1997). The learning was compartmentalized at the individual level. As the group realized opportunities existed to share information, the team moved towards a pooled mode of learning allowing for an exchange of ideas and feedback. The group moved towards a synergistic mode of learning when meaning making occurred through open feedback and communication. More importantly, the study suggests an ideal experiential learning cycle that may create optimal learning resulting greater efficiencies earlier in the organizational lifecycle. Figure 9 illustrates the ideal experiential learning cycle for boards in non-profit, start-up organizations.

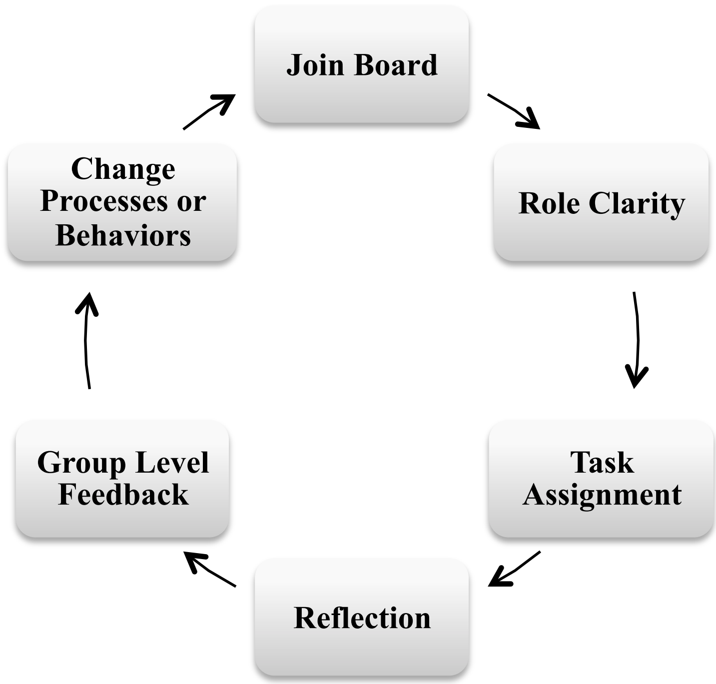

Figure 9. Desired experiential learning cycle for board members in non-profit, start-up organizations.

Conclusion 2: Through commitment and communication, interpersonal trust increased, allowing the board members to collaborate and work effectively as a cohesive unit.

Board members of new chapters face many challenges as they engage multiple stakeholders and audiences. Early on, board members must work through the nuances of board structure, role clarity, and process standardization. For board members to be effective in carrying out these tasks, trust among the board must be established. Trust, defined as reciprocal faith in one's intentions and behaviors (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1992), fosters positive relationships within groups and organizations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994. Trust can be further broken down into subcategories. For purposes of this study, the focus is on interpersonal trust, referring to the relationships between individuals and work groups within an organization (Dirks, 1999).

During the study, I found that in the absence of sufficient commitment and communication, board members did not develop trust in one another's ability and willingness to carry out the mission and vision of the chapter. Board members spent time following up with others to ensure that tasks were completed. This suggests board members did not trust each other to complete tasks. Similarly, the president felt a constant need to follow up with group members and to be a part of all decisions and activities, which limited her ability to develop strategies to grow the chapter and expand services to the HR and local communities.

As board members' understanding of their roles increased, the group experienced a shift not only in commitment but also in communication. Board members demonstrated higher levels of engagement; for example, attendance at meetings and chapter-sponsored events increased. Although attendance was unquestionably important, however, the increase in the quality of participation was even more important. Individuals prepared for meetings and events by completing action items in advance. In addition, they seemed more willing to engage in meaningful discussions that impacted the chapter. They expressed interest in participating in the decision-making process by offering suggestions and helping the president consider outcomes of decisions. By weighing outcomes, the group generated action plans to support final decisions. As time passed, the president was able to be less involved in tasks that were delegated to other board and committee members. In the critical incident interview, she expressed that she felt a level of comfort in "stepping back."

This study also showed that the life cycle or stage of an organization largely dictates the importance of trust. Trust proved to be a crucial element for entrepreneurial or start-up organizations. Start-up organizations spend less time standardizing processes and procedures than more mature organizations. By establishing trust early on, the need for oversight and rigid procedures is reduced (Powell, 1990).

Trust is particularly important in environments with high levels of uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). At the time of this study, the organization was in its early stages, seeking to identify the role it would play in sharpening the skills of human resources practitioners in the local area. The board faced uncertainty regarding how to create a value proposition as a professional association that aimed to attend to the professional needs of a diverse membership base. As the organization positioned itself in the local market, it was challenged in deciding whether to partner with a similar professional association or attempt to compete. After several failed attempts to partner with the organization, board members decided it would neither partner nor compete. Instead, the chapter positioned itself as a professional association that addressed issues related to diversity and inclusion that impact any practitioner regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Doing so allowed the chapter to carve out a market niche that had previously received little if any attention from other professional associations.

Conclusion 3: New chapters experience greater success when focusing on “enablers” that align with their respective stage in the organizational lifecycle.

Quinn and Cameron (1983) identified four stages of the organizational life cycle: the entrepreneurial stage, collectivity stage, formalization stage, and elaboration of structure. At the outset of this study, the organization was in the entrepreneurial stage; it progressed toward the collectivity stage by the study’s conclusion. Organizations in the entrepreneurial stage move toward finding their niche in the market while developing support and acquiring resources. In contrast, high levels of commitment and communication among group members characterize the collectivity stage. Cameron and Whetten (1981) suggest, measures of success shift as an organization advances through the stages of the organizational life cycle. As shown by the current research, this organization experienced a shift in success measures as it evolved and experienced different stages of the life cycle.

Early on, the chapter reached out to numerous other organizations to solidify relationships and obtain external support. The chapter began to build these relationships prior to its official launch. Once the chapter was launched, several organizations verbally committed to supporting it. Support was provided in the form of corporate sponsorship, event sponsorship, and expert panelists who volunteered to participate in forum discussions and workshops. The chapter eventually developed a relationship with an organization that agreed to co-sponsor all future diversity and inclusion events. This might have been the most important relationship for the chapter. In addition to sponsorship support, this relationship created an ongoing source of board and committee members along with general body members for the chapter.

This focus on building external relationships attends to what Cameron and Whetten (1983) refer to as *inputs*. In Cameron and Whetten's life cycle model, inputs include resource acquisition, establishment of credibility in the market, and product quality concentration. In an effort to obtain the needed inputs, organizational team members benefit from having skills that align with each of these focus areas.

Implications for Theory

Regardless of the nature or purpose of their organization, leaders approach learning in multiple ways. Research shows leaders learn by doing (Center for Creative Leadership, 2011). It can be argued that on-the-job learning is more impactful than formal training. This model of learning, formally known as the 70-20-10 development model, suggests that 70 percent of professional development consists of on-the-job learning, supported by 20 percent coaching and mentoring, and 10 percent formal training (Center for Creative Leadership). The 70 percent of learning comprised of on-the-job learning is akin to experiential learning. Experiential learning theory (ELT), which first gained popularity in the 1980s, is defined by David Kolb as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984).

As the 70-20-10 model suggests, learning involves a blended approach in which learners enhance their capabilities by leveraging each component of the model. This study focuses on informal or experiential learning, allowing learners to reflect on and utilize tacit knowledge. The need, motivation, and opportunity for learning drive this type of informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) emerged in the 1980s as a tool to measure the effectiveness of organizations (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). As a conceptual framework, the CVF shows that organizations operate within one of two dimensions. The first dimension involves centralization and control processes versus decentralization and flexibility. The second dimension looks at an organization’s focus on the internal environment versus the external environment. Although considered primarily a leadership tool, the CVF is widely used to assess a number of organizational components such as communication, culture, and strategy. Moreover, the tool has been used in various types of organization across several hierarchical levels.

Both experiential learning and the CVF framework can expand current knowledge regarding start-up professional associations. As the 70-20-10 rule suggests, most learning occurs through experience. The percentage may be even greater for leaders of professional associations in the early stages of the lifecycle, who require time to reflect on what they might have done to produce a different outcome. This level of learning requires *reflection-on-action*. According to Schön (1983), "We reflect *on* action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" (p. 26). As reflection occurs, leaders need awareness around the dimensions of the CVF in which it is operating. For example, an organization functioning in s flexible, internally focused environment , determine how to best hone its leaders skills through training and development. Although there is no wrong dimension in which to operate, leaders must understand the culture and needs of the organization and adapt accordingly.

ELP and CVF provide a framework to aid professional associations in preparing leaders to lead their organizations effectively. Combining the premises of these theories creates a foundation for a new theory that may inform the development of leaders of start-up professional associations. By understanding the value of experiential learning and the Competing Values Framework, professional associations may develop efficient, well-defined, internal processes and decision-making protocol, train and develop more effective leaders, and establish more meaningful goals that create a competitive advantage.

By applying the experiential learning theory to the developmental of board members, experiences can be transferred into concepts or ideas that board members can utilize when growing building their capacity as leaders. As they use these concepts to move through trial and error, they generate new experiences. New experiences result in new knowledge that can be shared across the organization. Moreover, learning occurs as individuals gain new knowledge and reconfigure previous learning. As knowledge is applied when addressing challenges and approaching new tasks, the chapter may find itself emerging as a learning organization. To further refine the theory, future studies may consider how experiential learning impacts learning at the group level.

This study further informs the utilization of the Competing Values Framework (CVF) in diagnosing how an organization determines the applicable measures of effectiveness. The CVF proved to be applicable to examining the enablers of success for a volunteer organization. As a start-up organization, the organization was subject to the demands of both the internal and external environment. However, the CVF provides a foundation that can be used to prioritize the values an organization should focus on by understanding its stage in the organizational lifecyle. Additionally, the study showed as the organization responded to internal changes, it shifted its focus to other values. This shift demonstrates a key premise of the CVF proposing organizations often face competing values with each being equally important. Furthermore, considering the similarities and differences of volunteer organizations verses other types of organizations can enhance this theory. Past usage of this theory focused primarily on for-profit organizations while applying the model to quantitative studies. As demonstrated by this study, meaningful findings were derived through qualitative findings and analysis in a non-traditional research setting.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for individuals working with professional associations and other non-profit organizations. In addition, the study recommends proactive measures existing organizations can take to prepare to onboard new chapters. Well-established organizations may also benefit from this study, as they may experience a need to develop new leaders, identify processes to increase effectiveness, and utilize reflection to help their leaders learn from experience.

For Individuals

Individuals join professional associations for a variety of reasons. Professional associations provide opportunities to interact with others whose professional background and interests are similar to one's own. Through networking, individuals can share best practices and exchange knowledge. Many professional associations are considered leading organizations in developing practitioners. Consequently, affiliation with these organizations can build credibility. Moreover, many professional associations provide certifications and designations that enhance the credibility of practitioners. Lastly, professional associations may provide numerous types of resources for professional development, including formal learning opportunities for members, although this study focused on professional development through an experiential learning lens.

This study shares important lessons learned from board members who embarked on starting a chapter of a professional association. Each board member experienced different "aha" moments; each experienced individual lessons learned and reflected on how they might alter their behavior in future situations. Schön (1983) noted:

> When a practitioner reflects in and on his practice, the possible objects of his reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the systems of knowing-in-practice that he brings to them. He may reflect on the tacit norms and appreciations that underlie a judgment, or on the strategies and theories implicit in a pattern of behaviour. He may reflect on the feeling for a situation that has led him to adopt a particular course of action, on the way in which he has framed the problem he is trying to solve, or on the role he has constructed for himself within a larger institutional context. (p. 62)

When reflecting on experiences that promote learning, individuals may face the difficult decision of whether to share their reflections with other in their organizations or reserve their insight in an effort to maintain harmony in their organization. One might conclude that it is best to always share one's reflections to influence future behavior of other members of the organization. Yet Schön (1983) offered a different perspective, stating,

> competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing in practice, most of which is tacit. . . . Indeed, practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice. (pp. 8-9)

Understanding the complexity of reflection requires a thoughtful approach where individuals consider how they intend to utilize their reflections. This study identified several instances in which reflection occurred but did not lead to action. For example, the president felt compelled to withhold the feelings she experienced when board members failed to carry out responsibilities. Instead of sharing her feelings and reflections, she adjusted her behavior by completing tasks that were previously assigned to others. This resulted in those assigned with ensuring deliverables were met.

Douglas McArthur wrote, "A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent." This is an important lesson for all leaders; however, leaders of professional associations in particular must understand the importance of the reflective process. Reflection does not always evoke communicating a response. During a critical incident interview, a participant shared a quote that was shared with her: "Leaders are much like eagles: they don't flock; you find them one at a time." When assuming a leadership role, it is important for individuals to understand that they will at times make unpopular decisions, which personal relationships may be affected, and that unproductive emotions might emerge. At times unpopular decisions may result in leaders feeling isolated from those they lead. However, this should not deter a leader from making a decision that increases the effectiveness and overall quality of the organization.

For Organizations

Although this study focuses primarily on professional associations, its findings provide points of interest for many types of organizations that are in the start-up phase of the organizational life cycle. Starting a new chapter of an existing professional association or other organization requires determination and perseverance. The study demonstrates that identifying and developing qualified leaders is as important as identifying a mission, vision, and strategy for the organization.

Start-up organizations should spend time ensuring the right people are selected for leadership roles within the organization. "We found, instead, that [organizational members] first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats. And then they figured out where to drive it." (Collins, 2001, p. 41). Jim Collins' insight from his book *Good to Great* provides valuable, practical knowledge for start-up organizations seeking to identify board members who need to be "on the bus" to drive the organization forward. As this study pointedly suggests, identifying leaders should not be left to chance. In the early stages of this study, board members were identified based on existing professional or personal relationships. There was a sense of urgency when selecting leaders in these early stages; however, as time progressed, current board members determined that more rigor was needed in selecting board members. Board members should be selected based on their skill sets and their desire to carry out the work of the organization.

Other professional associations can learn from this example. It can be argued that it is important to select board members and other leaders who not only have complementary skills, but who also have experience in their respective roles. This can be a challenging yet reachable task. Organizations like 501(c)ommunity and boardnetUSA provide resources for non-profit boards, including matching non-profit organizations with board members. Utilization of these types of services adds a systematic approach to the selection of board members. Once the right board members are "on the bus," this board can move forward in developing a strategy to attract new members and grow the organization.

Like for-profit organizations, professional associations often exist in highly competitive, evolving environments. Professional associations must begin by understanding the dynamics of their niche. The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) defines professional associations as "organizations that are established to further specific professions and the interests of those who work in them with a membership comprised of individual members within the profession who share a common belief or purpose" (ASAE, 2012, p. 6). This definition establishes high expectations for professional associations. A professional association must remain at the forefront in understanding policy changes, workforce shifts, and industry knowledge. In turn, this information must be disseminated to members, who expect the organization to keep them abreast of trends that impact their profession.

For professional associations moving through their formative stages, this study provides useful insight into the importance of selecting board members who have the tenacity to carry out the mission of the organization. In addition, professional associations must identify the foundational values that yield the greatest effectiveness. This study demonstrated that a start-up professional association must ensure role clarity for its board members while creating value-driven services for its members. Moreover, to be successful such organizations need to focus simultaneously on internal development and on developing relationships with external constituencies.

Recommendations

This study provides a resource for new chapters of professional associations aiming to expand the knowledge and enhance the effectiveness of board members. Throughout the study, examples demonstrate the importance of establishing role clarity for board members before they can effectively undertake tasks and assignments. Critical incident interviews found that study participants believed role clarity should have been established prior to joining the board. This resulted in several inefficiencies that impacted performance.

New chapters of professional associations need to ensure role clarity for each active role on their board of directors. One option to assist in this process is to require board members of a new chapter to shadow the board of a more mature chapter, enabling them to see their roles in action. Doing so will allow new board members to better understand their roles while allowing for modifications to attend to the culture of their respective chapter. However, this may be a challenge for new chapters that are not in close proximity to more established chapters.

Another approach requires the national chapter to take on an active role in onboarding new board members. Actions may include drafting role descriptions for the positions that are required for a new chapter. These general role descriptions can provide a template for defining roles that are specific to local chapters. A final option that emerged is for the president of an established chapter to act as a mentor for the president of an emerging chapter. Through this mentoring relationship, the president can share best practices related to the standardization of processes and identification of key board roles. This relationship fosters camaraderie between the chapters, encouraging them to collaborate and co-create initiatives that allow both chapters to reach individual goals.

In this study, action research enabled the participants to reflect on action, presenting a new way of thinking for these participants. Action research provided the participants with an opportunity to evaluate not only their activities but also their behaviors. However, often the participants did not leverage reflection and feedback, thereby delaying the opportunity to impact outcomes. Action research can be integrated into the onboarding of new board members of professional associations. However, this requires a full commitment to and ongoing communication about the action research process, to maximize the benefits of this model not only for building the capacity of board members, but also for generating enablers of success.

Table 16 compares recommendations from this study to findings examined across various literatures.

Table 16

Comparison of Recommendations to Empirical Findings

Focus	Resource	Empirical Findings	Study's Findings
Competing Values Framework	DiPadova, & Faerman, 1993	Levels within the organization determine the role individuals play in an organization. As one moves up the hierarchy, they become more removed from day-to-day operations.	Initially, the chapter president was actively involved in tasks and day-to-day operations of the chapter. As strategic oversight became necessary, she relied on board members to ensure tasks were completed and the chapter was operating effectively.
	Sendelbach, 1993	One of the study's findings suggests feedback from others was instrumental in changing behaviors Feedback offered aided participants in understanding how they were perceived verses	Individual feedback was considered when implementing changes to programs offered by chapter. The president requested feedback from the group when implementing new processes or making decisions that

		how they saw themselves.	impacted the chapter.
Experiential Learning		The study showed one mode of learning included through trial-and-error where the original plan was abandoned as new information or knowledge emerged.	Early on, board members did not have a clear understanding of their role. This resulted in failure of tasks completion. As team member began to better under their roles, they offered suggestions to improve processes. Eventually, the group created a space to routinely provide feedback around processes and procedures.
Start-up organizations	Werachai & Tips, 1989	Study showed a systematic start-up processes and internal communications were necessary to be effective in carrying out tasks.	The team was most productive when each group member had an opportunity to share his or her feedback. The group participated in a communication exercise to better understand how they could effectively work together. This exercise resulted in a shared definition of collaboration "coming together to support AHRP activities by sharing your talents and abilities to achieve a desired result in a well organized manner".
	Romanelli, 1989	External or environmental factors affect the survival or longevity of start-up organizations.	During the start-up stage of the chapter's lifecyle, the group focused on developing external support and aligning resources by making connection with local businesses and community organizations.

Future Research

This study raises questions regarding how leaders utilize experiential learning in professional associations. The study considers the impact of competing values and how these values either aid or hinder the success of an organization. An important consideration involves the life cycle stage of the organization. Although experiential learning allows leaders to build their capacity, there are other success factors that may be evaluated.

This study presents several opportunities to engage in future research. This study was limited to one chapter of a professional association, and further research is needed to test whether these findings are consistent across other professional associations. The chapter also differs from other chapters within the organization due to its geographic location. The demographic makeup and the cultural milieu of the region in which the study took place may therefore have influenced engagement levels of various stakeholder audiences. In turn, this may have impacted the chapter's ability to obtain external support, and the level of effort required to attract external support might have been greater than it would be for chapters situated closer to thriving metropolitan areas. Although the data from this study does not highlight geography as a challenge that impacted success of the organization, future research may consider how new chapters develop goals and strategies based on the demographics and culture in their area.

Future research should also continue to investigate board development in start-up or new chapters. This study demonstrates that board members of new chapters have specific needs that fuel capacity building. Role clarity, commitment, and communication were enablers for success. Yet the chapter went about its day-to-day activities with little understanding of these elements. It was not until the board experienced absenteeism and turnover that it began to address these issues. By expanding research on new chapters of professional associations, an onboarding or board development model might be created that decreases the time it takes board members to assimilate to the organizational culture, while increasing their effectiveness.

Another area of research might explore how board members of organizations in other stages of the organizational life cycle utilize action research. Moreover, this theoretical focus might consider the applicability of experiential learning in more mature organizations. Although this study did pay particular attention to other forms of learning, such as cognitive or formal learning, as organizations transition to different stages of the organizational life cycle, meaning making will undoubtedly require a different focus, and what was once essential for learning may no longer be relevant. Organizations in each stage of the organizational life cycle can draw on action research and learning to grow the capacity of board members and identify enablers of success.

Conclusions

This study illustrated how board members of a new chapter of a professional association leveraged learning opportunities to grow the skills needed to become successful leaders. As several examples demonstrate, board members were initially unclear about their roles. These first board members were selected based on existing personal or professional relationships. Although many of the board members did bring past volunteer experience to the organization, they were not selected based on having prior experience with up-and-coming professional associations. This selection process lacked the rigor necessary to ensure that those selected had the necessary skills to function effectively in their roles. In addition, the national chapter provided little support to orient board members to their roles; as a result, an on-the-job approach was the primary method for board members to learn to carry out the specific tasks associated with their roles. The president learned that many of these early board members did not understand the time commitment and were not prepared for the level of uncertainty they would encounter in starting a new chapter.

In addition, this study showed that enablers of success differ based on the life cycle stage of an organization. Several examples demonstrate the need for board development to ensure that individuals understand their roles. This points to the collaboration quadrant or human relations model of the CVF. In this study, an emphasis on developing leaders within the organization was critical. The board members did have considerable subject matter expertise, and many had served previously in various capacities on other non-profit boards. However, as one participant noted, serving in start-up organization is very different from working in a mature organization. This study shows that the stage of the organizational life cycle largely determines how leaders deploy their resources.

Finally, this study provided evidence that organizations need to do more than focus on the external environment in their early stages. Instead, emphasis should be placed on defining roles, communicating effectively, and gaining commitment. These finding suggest that further research is needed to identify the effectiveness measures that are applicable to start-up professional associations. As the study shows, these measures are vastly different from those that apply to a mature, well-established organization.

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APPENDIX A

Study Sponsorship Letter

I am pleased to provide consent for Cenina Saxton to conduct a doctoral research study at National Association of African Americans in Human Resources (NAAAHR). This study, entitled "Professional Associations Influence on Career Development," *aligns with the mission and objectives that our organization has identified are important for professionals in the practice area of Human Resources.*

I understand that the purpose of this study is to identify the programs and opportunities offered by the organization that foster thought leadership while meeting the developmental needs of human resource practitioners. At the conclusion of the study, the organization is hopeful a model will emerge that will benefit both the membership and the organization alike.

I understand the participation of our organization and its members is voluntary, and that participant names will not be used on any documents related to the research.

Only the researcher and her doctoral supervisor will have access to any data collected for the purpose of this research. I understand the researcher, Cenina Saxton, will answer any further questions about this research, now or during the course of this project. I can contact her by calling 678-644-3385 or through email at csaxton3@uga.edu.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to her research at NAAAHR.

____________________________ ________________________ ____________________

Name Signature Date

Telephone: ______________________

Email: _______________________

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
Additional questions or problems regarding your rights should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411: Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX B

Logic Model

Program: **AHRP (Association of Human Resources Professionals) Logic Model**

Situation: The chapter aims to grow the capabilities of its board members. To effectively do this, the chapter intends to understand the enablers of success.

Inputs	Outputs: Activities	Outputs: Participation	Outcomes: Short	Outcomes: Medium	Outcomes: Long
National Chapter Board of Directors	Identify learning opportunities that aids in building caabilitues	Action Research Team	Awareness of board members' developmental needs.	Practices are in place to constantly reflect and gather feedback to modivy behaviors.	Chapter is viewed as a top-tier professional association that attends to the needs of HR professionals and local community initiatives. The chapter identifies success measures to track and montior during each stage of the organizational lifecyle. Thereby, performance measures are established. Board member commitment increaeses. This may create a pool of potential successors to assume the role of the president once his/her term ends..
Chapter Board Members	Design intervesion strategies	Action Research Team	Chapter builds a network of like-minded professionals who share a passion growing HR knowledge.	Knowledge and best practices are transferred back to the workplace.	
HR professionals in local community	Develop community relationships with local business and community leaders	Board Members & Business/Community Leaders	Leverage community relationships to support initiaves that influence diversity and inclusion efforts throughout the state.	Disparities that are a result of power and influence shift in a positive direction.	
Local community leaders & businesses	Measure the effectiveness of learning opportunities influence and understand the enablers of success	Action Researcher	Board of directors understand the enablers of success for each of stage of the organizational lifecyle.	Other new local chapters follow a similar model to build their capabilities.	
Other professional organizations					

Assumptions: Board members are familiar with their roles and responsibilites. Opportunities exist to enhance existing skill sets and competencies of board members. All board members are committed to carrying out the mision and vision of the organization. Start-up chapters leverage resources provided by the national chapter to build internal proceses ad procedures.

External Factors: Experienced individuals who can quickly assume role on the board of directors. Board members have other priorities that may supercede their board responsibilites. Availabiity of resources from local businesses and community organizations.

APPENDIX C

Critical Incident Interview Email Script

Good Morning Board of Directors and Diversity Exchange Council

You have played an integral role in carrying out the mission and vision of NAAAHR Delaware. Through active participation, you have great insight around the enablers of success not only as a board or council member but as a chapter as well. Over the next few weeks, I will be conducting interviews to gain your perspective about your experience as a member of the board of directors or Diversity Exchange Council.

The interviews will last approximately one hour and will be conducted via phone on various dates and times. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. Your name will not be attached to any results.

Below is a link to the Google Doc. Click the link to select the date and time that you are available to take part in the interview. When opening the document, a tab is included for each week that interviews will be scheduled. Add your name to the preferred time slot. Prior to your interview, you will receive a confirmation meeting invite that will include conference line details. Attached, you will find a consent form that must be signed and returned via email prior to your interview.

I appreciate your willingness to participate and value your feedback. My hope is the interviews will offer insight to aid the chapter in building capabilities and delivering outstanding programs to its members.

If you have any questions, please contact me via phone at 678/644-3385 or by email.

APPENDIX D

Research Participant Consent Form

I , ___________________________________, agree to take part in a research study titled "Experential Learning And Organizational Effectiveness Influence On Board Sustainability", *conducted by* Cenina B. Saxton, a doctoral student in the University of Georgia's Adult Education Program (678-644-3385) *under the direction of Dr. Khalil Dirani, Associate Professor in the University of Georgia's Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, Adult Education Program (*706-542-2490).

I understand my participation *is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or* loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. *I can ask to have information* that can be identified as mine *returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.*

<u>Purpose of the Study:</u> *I understand that the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how active involvement in a professional association might provide me with competencies and skills that may have a positive influence on my career through the development of leadership competencies and skillsets. The researcher hopes to add to the body of knowledge on both leadership development and career progression along with the value profession associations provide to its membership.*

<u>Procedures:</u> *If I choose to participate, I will be asked to do the following:*

- Meet with interviewer, via phone, individually or in a focus group to openly and honestly answer questions about the impact of membership on my professional development. The interview may take approximately 1-2 hours of my time. I will be provided advanced notice of the date and time of the interview. The interview or focus group will be in person with one or more researchers.
- Allow researchers to observe my participation in meeting settings. Such settings may include chapter meetings, local chapter board meetings, national board meeting, conferences, or other settings deemed appropriate through data collected via interviews and focus groups.
- Complete surveys and questionnaires delivered via the internet related to my membership experience along with career related information to include but not limited to current job title, career level, and professional certification status.
- Review a summary of my interview or focus group to verify that the investigators understood my intended meaning. This interview will take approximately 1-2 hours of my time. Dates and times of interviews will be provided in advance.
- Understand interviews/focus groups will be recorded for transcription purposes, in order to maintain accuracy and clarity in the conversation.

- No discomforts or stresses are expected as a result of this study. Risks are not expected.
- The study and my participation will take place over the course of two years.

Benefits to me: As a participant, I will benefit by gaining a better understanding of how I can leverage membership in a professional association to support my career goals and aspirations.
Benefits to larger community: I understand this research will contribute to the understanding of how other professionals can utilize membership in professional associations as a source of learning and career development. By gaining a better understanding, others may realize the value of not only joining professional associations, but also actively participating in volunteer opportunities, conferences, training, and educational programs. The findings will allow HR practitioners to look outside of their organizational setting to develop sought after competencies.
Confidentiality: I understand that my name and the name of my organization will not be used on documents related to the research. Only criteria for the selection of participants will be published and it will not be made clear who participated and who did not.
Only the researcher and her doctoral supervisor will have access to the tapes. The tapes will be transcribed and then destroyed. Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. Once the information is received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. A code number will be used to identify each piece of data resulting from interviews/focus groups. Names or specific affiliations will not be included in any report or publication of the study findings. Quotes used in any report of the findings will not be attributed to me or other participants of this research study by name or in any other way that would lead to identification of the participant or the organization. Even though the researcher will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future.
I understand the researcher will answer any further questions about this research, now or during the course of this project (678-644-3385 or csaxton3@uga.edu).

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Research Study Participant

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411: Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.
Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX E

Critical Incidents Techniques (CIT) Interview Guide

CIT Overview

- Explain background
- Provide instructions around consent form
- Review audio recording disclaimer
- Conduct interview

Purpose of CIT

The focus of today's interview is to understand "your story" as a board member. I would like to learn about some of the enablers that influenced you as a board member along with those enablers that helped to grow the chapter. When answering each question, think about telling a vivid story. For example, you may include where you were, what was going on around you, how, and you felt i.e. nervous, excited, optimistic, etc. Remember, with a story, there is no right or wrong answer. It is simply how the story unfolds along with any "aha" moments.

1. I would like to start by hearing how you came to join the board of the organization.

2. Let's talk about your experience as a board member.

    a. Tell me about a time when you felt you learned a valuable lesson that enabled you to be an effective member of the board. Describe the setting i.e. others who were involved, the context, your role in the experience. What was the situation? What were your actions or response? What was the end result?
    b. Tell me about a time when you had an experience that led to you being ineffective as a board member. Describe the setting i.e. others who were involved, the context, your role in the experience. What was the situation? What were your actions or response? What was the end result?

3. Think about the chapter for a moment.

    a. What opportunities spurred growth or propelled the chapter towards success? Describe the setting i.e. others who were involved, the context, your role in the experience. What was the situation? What were your actions or response? What was the end result?
    b. What organizational barriers existed that impacted the success of the chapter? Describe the setting i.e. others who were involved, the context, your role in the experience. What was the situation? What were your actions or response? What was the end result?

Questions for Additional Probing

- What else do you remember about the situation?
- What did you learn?
- What feedback did you provide?
- What feedback did you receive?
- What made you feel this way?
- Did you share this with anyone else?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What else is needed to build the capacity of board members?
- What else is needed to make the chapter a success?

APPENDIX F

Final List of Data Analysis Codes

CODE	THEME
CLA	Role Clarity
COM	Commitment
COMM	Communication
EXT	External Support
FDB	Feedback
IDV REF	Individual Reflection
RES	Resource Alignment