

A LEAP OF FAITH
CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF SHARED LEADERSHIP IN THE
NEW BRUNSWICK REGION OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT CANADA

MONCTON HRCC PILOT PROJECT

By

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Abstract

This research project examined the concept of shared leadership in a large federal service delivery office in New Brunswick. Three key questions served as the foundation to the project: 1) Can the New Brunswick Region create an environment of shared leadership? 2) What are the major challenges to creating this environment? 3) Why should the New Brunswick Region make this an organizational goal?

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), like other federal departments and organizations, has undergone sweeping change over the past few years. To enable employees to serve clients as effectively as possible, they must be brought into the decision-making process.

The literature shows that with the increased emphasis on knowledge and continuous learning, managerial leaders must learn how to share power with their staff. Leadership needs to be shared throughout an organization.

This project used a qualitative research approach to learn about the experiences, insights, and perceptions that managers and staff in a service delivery have of leadership. It involved focus groups and one-on-one interviews with managers and staff in the Moncton Human Resource Centre of Canada (HRCC) office. The major findings included: data that supported giving staff a greater role in decision-making; improving staff access to their managers; closing the gap between managers and staff on how they believe each other perceives shared leadership; and creating a dialogue among management, staff, and the unions. Several recommendations were presented to help the Moncton HRCC move forward in creating a workplace of shared leadership.

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CHAPTER ONE STUDY BACKGROUND

1.1 The Opportunity

The purpose of this research project was to examine the concept of shared leadership in the context of a service delivery office in the New Brunswick Region of Human Resources Development Canada. This was a pilot project using the Moncton Human Resources Centre of Canada (HRCC), which includes the main office and three branch offices. A study of shared leadership from the perspective of the New Brunswick Region would have been too large in scope, taking into consideration the timeframe of the MALT major project.

The researcher's project report was presented to the Moncton management group. As well, copies were given to the New Brunswick Region's Regional Management Board. The Board will have the responsibility to determine whether further research on this topic will be conducted in the New Brunswick Region.

Because of the prescribed timeframe for this project, the researcher was not able to include a presentation at a conference following the data analysis and report preparation. The Moncton HRCC management group is interested in bringing employees together in the spring or summer of 2000 to discuss issues that emerge from the research and to discuss a course of action.

Three key questions underscored this project:

1. Can the New Brunswick Region create an environment of shared leadership?
2. What are the major challenges to creating this environment?
3. Why should the New Brunswick Region make this an organizational goal?

The five main objectives of the pilot project were:

- 1) To assess the attitudes of employees in terms of their willingness to assume more responsibility and leadership at work, and the willingness of managers to let go of control and share decision-making with them.
- 2) To assess employees' and managers' understanding of leadership, both managerial and shared leadership, including their perceptions and experiences.
- 3) To learn what are employees' expectations of themselves and their managers.
- 4) To learn what are managers' expectations of themselves and their staff.
- 5) To assess the learning needs of managers and staff in developing their leadership abilities.

1.2 The Organization

The New Brunswick Region of Human Resources Development Canada has experienced unrelenting change over the past five years. It has weathered downsizing, restructuring, and devolution to the provincial government. The size and levels of middle management have been reduced. The workloads of managers and staff have increased in both volume and complexity. Managers are finding it increasingly difficult to find the time for their own personal development as leaders, as well as having the time to act as coaches for their staff. What is needed is a new way of working, one that engages HRDC employees by increasing their willingness to accept more responsibility and to share in the decision-making with their managers. It means changing the role of the manager from the traditional directive approach to that of coach.

An environment of shared leadership, as discovered in other organizations, offers many benefits. However, achieving such an environment requires hard work and commitment by everyone involved, management and staff. It is indeed a journey, one taking years to attain a high level of shared leadership and empowerment. Shared leadership is not for every organization. In the case of the New Brunswick Region, some of the elements have begun to be developed in terms of empowering staff and encouraging them to assume greater leadership roles in their work.

To create a workplace of shared leadership is tantamount to effecting a major change in the culture of the New Brunswick Region. This is especially relevant to the manner in which leadership is perceived and practiced. This project's three questions brought to the forefront the importance of understanding that changing the culture of the New Brunswick Region is essential if a workplace of shared leadership is to be realized.

In the early 1990s, HRDC launched an initiative called Empowerment and Accountability. This was intended to enable employees to have more control over their work, in particular decision-making. Service to citizens would ultimately improve. This initiative eventually faded away as a result of Program Review, an interdepartmental initiative led by Treasury Board. The purpose of this initiative was to identify where operational and salary budgets could be reduced to satisfy the government's budget reduction goals. Empowerment is still, however, a desired aim of senior management.

The senior management group of the New Brunswick Region faces many issues and operational challenges as it prepares to guide the organization into the next millennium. A new approach to managerial leadership is needed if the organization is to provide relevant, timely, and high quality services to New Brunswickers. Managers must evolve from being transactional leaders to transformational leaders, in which they inspire their people, instill a sense of mission and vision, encourage critical thinking and innovation, and share power. This requires courage and will, but the outcome will be a stronger and healthier organization.

1.2.1 Organizational Context

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) was created in 1993 as a result of the merger of four federal departments (Employment and Immigration Canada, Health and Welfare Canada, Labour Canada, and Secretary of State). HRDC is the social face of the federal government, delivering programs and services to Canadians from birth to old age.

The department employs some 23,000 people across Canada in over 600 points of service. It has an annual budget of 59 billion dollars.

HRDC's new mission was unveiled in 1998: "To enable Canadians to participate fully in the workplace and the community." Underlying the mission is the following statement: "We will also respect our core values and continue to develop and build on the strengths of our people." (HRDC Business Plan, 1999-2001). To respond to the changing needs and expectations of Canadians, HRDC must be able to work in collaboration with partners and explore new ways of providing services. But to do so means that HRDC employees must be supported and given the necessary tools to do their jobs properly. A climate must be created that embraces continuous learning.

The New Brunswick Region of Human Resources Development (one of ten regions across Canada) has about 1,400 employees (including terms and casuals) located in two dozen points of service throughout the province. This includes the Human Resource Centres of Canada, two regional offices (Fredericton and Moncton), the new national firearms registry office, the Miramichi Investigation Centre, Labour Services, and National Services in Bathurst. What distinguishes HRDC in New Brunswick from other federal departments (and across Canada for that matter) is its highly decentralized structure. Most employees work in the HRCCs, directly serving citizens. Moreover, HRDC contributes an estimated three billion dollars a year to the New Brunswick economy, including Employment Insurance, pensions, program monies, salaries for HRDC employees, and local purchasing.

The New Brunswick Region is broken down into seven zones for administrative purposes, each with a zone director. In addition, the two regional offices include managers and directors who are responsible for such functions as finance and administration, information technology, human resource services, communications, strategic planning, and operations. The Regional Director General and Associate Director General for New Brunswick are located in the Fredericton Regional Office.

The Regional Director General, as the executive head for the Region, chairs the Regional Management Board, consisting of 13 directors, representing the zones and functional areas. The Regional Management Board has taken on a more strategic role in fulfilling its mandate and responsibilities. It underwent a lengthy strategic planning process in 1998, producing a mission and vision for the New Brunswick Region (see next section).

The managerial leadership cadre in the Region consists of almost 70 people, including the Regional Management Board. Those at the middle management level have, to a large extent, been promoted within the organization through the competitive process. Many of the managers are relatively new, especially those working in the HRCCs. While the majority of managers are male, the percentage of female managers has risen steadily during the 1990s. Furthermore, the age structure of the leadership cadre is oriented heavily in the 40 to 50 age group (this also applies to the employee population). The two key contributing factors to this age distribution have been government restrictions on hiring and the three year downsizing period, which witnessed many experienced managers and staff leaving the organization. A third factor is the devolution of staff to the provincial government in 1998.

By 2005, 30 percent of the Region's middle and senior managers will retire. If one includes those individuals who will be able to retire with penalty, the potential for departures rises to 69 percent for senior managers and 53 percent for middle managers (Human Resources Branch, New Brunswick Region). Of particular concern is how to attract employees to middle management positions. Many employees see the stress their managers are under, thus hesitating to apply for positions that become open.

The Region began to place greater attention on managerial leadership in 1994, when the leadership profiles of the service delivery managers were created and staffing actions initiated. In June 1996, a questionnaire survey was conducted of managers and staff in the Region. Serving as a baseline, the questionnaire addressed a variety of topics, for

example, workplace environment, management and leadership, communication and information sharing, teamwork, performance feedback, and recognition. Some of the key findings in the report prepared by the researcher of this project were that staff did not feel inspired to work to the best of their abilities; that performance feedback and recognition were lacking; and that teamwork was strongly endorsed as the new way to work. However, with respect to teamwork staff also noted that the supports (e.g., training) and managerial understanding of teamwork needed to be improved.

The New Brunswick Region has faced, and continues to face, many changes and issues. A major leadership challenge is to rebuild the confidence and trust of employees following a difficult downsizing and restructuring period, which included devolving some staff to the Province. Labour relations with the unions are tenuous. Negotiations continue with the provincial government with respect to co-locating federal and provincial employees in the HRCCs. A large number of national and regional initiatives must be managed and led, a notable challenge considering the large reduction in staff complement.

One key factor that is impeding the Region (and the department) from moving forward faster in establishing a more participative climate is its reliance on the traditional hierarchical model. This creates a paradox for managerial leaders because they (and their staff) are expected to work horizontally across the organization, yet they must contend with well established functional silos. In short, creating a borderless organization will be very difficult in the context of the traditional hierarchical model.

As a result of the many changes that have occurred during the past few years, the Regional Management Board approved the creation of the Leadership Development Working Group. Its mandate is to develop a leadership strategy for the Region. This group, of which the researcher is a member, is addressing leadership development from two parallel approaches. One approach is to deal with the recruitment, development, and retention of managerial leaders, in response to the impending departure of many managers in the next five years. The second approach is concerned with effecting a cultural change,

in terms of how leadership at all levels in the Region is perceived and practiced. Both approaches influence one another. Hence the need to take a holistic view of leadership development. The findings of the researcher's project will play an important part in the overall strategy.

1.2.2 Mission, Vision, and The Five Strategic Directions

The mission of the New Brunswick Region reads as follows:

HRD Canada is the federal department in New Brunswick dedicated to promoting human development and improving the quality of life for our citizens. We contribute to solutions that enable individuals and communities to adjust to social and economic challenges.

Our mission will enable us to strive towards our vision:

The people of HRD Canada, New Brunswick Region, make a difference in the lives of New Brunswickers and Canadians. By contributing to the improvement of social and economic conditions in our province, we are working toward the achievement of people's full potential and the elimination of poverty in our communities.

And our five strategic directions that will help us create the kind of organization that citizens and communities will find relevant are:

- 1) Our managers, staff, clients, partners, and communities must have a very clear awareness of who we are and what we envision for the future. We must communicate.
- 2) We must continually refocus on what is most effective and important in our mandate, thus ensuring a high quality service.
- 3) We must lead the way in providing information that includes the other elements of our broader social role.
- 4) We will offer communities our leadership and active support.

- 5) Our people must have the right skills and knowledge for their work. We will create a working environment in which staff continually develop their proficiency. (Our Strategy, HRD Canada, New Brunswick Region).

1.2.3 Moncton Human Resource Centre of Canada

The Moncton HRCC is located in Southeast New Brunswick (Zone Two). The HRCC is composed of the main office in Moncton and branch offices in Shediac, Sackville, and Richibucto. A total of about 120 employees work in the HRCC, with most of them located in the Moncton main office. In addition, there are several electronic, self-serve kiosks throughout the HRCC area. These kiosks assist the public to obtain information on HRDC's programs and services.

The HRCCs provide mail and in-person service to workers and employers in regard to employment insurance (EI). The offices process applications for EI benefits and operate investigation and control units to ensure the integrity of the EI program. An automated telephone service for employment insurance is available 24 hours a day. In addition to employment insurance, the HRCCs provide in-person service for Income Security Programs. The HRCCs also operate resource centres, which offer clients a wide variety of information on the labour market and workplace issues to assist them in their job searches.

The management team consists of the director and four service delivery managers. Each of these managers is responsible for specific service areas. These areas include administration, employment insurance, investigation and control, and income security programs. Each manager has up to 20 staff. This flat organizational structure, in terms of direct reports, is a sharp contrast to the pre-downsizing structure in which there were 21 managers and supervisors for the main and branch offices.

The Moncton HRCC is involved in several initiatives, driven primarily from the regional level. Those initiatives identified as priorities in the HRCC include: learning plans, skill

training (e.g., computer competencies), core competencies, teamwork, employee appreciation, wellness, the Universal Classification System, and 360 degree feedback for managers.

Now that some time has elapsed following downsizing and the transfer of employees to the provincial government, the Moncton HRCC has a somewhat more stable environment. This enhances the opportunity to create new relationships with partners and clients and to define new roles in the community. The means to success for the Moncton HRCC will be stronger teamwork and encouraging the involvement of all employees (HRCC Moncton Business Plan).

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Change in the Public Service of Canada

The Public Service of Canada is undergoing profound change. For the past few years, it has been renewing itself for the 21st Century. In her Fifth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, the clerk of the Privy Council Office, Jocelyne Bourgon, referred to a "quiet crisis," one in which it is becoming more difficult to retain, motivate, and attract people to the public service (Privy Council Office, 1998, p. 18). This is the consequence of several events: a large downsizing effort during the mid 1990s, a pay freeze that lasted seven years, a reduction in external recruitment, and the departure of many experienced public servants. Bourgon called this a quiet crisis because not only were people not talking about the problem, little was being done about it.

To address the challenges facing the public service, Bourgon's vision encompassed three broad goals. First, the public service must become a borderless institution, one in which ideas and information flow without being restricted by barriers. As she notes: "Some of the barriers are physical, others are built into our information systems, but most are cultural. The cultural barriers are the most difficult to overcome." (Ibid.)

The second goal is the creation of a learning organization. Senge (1990) defines this as: "...an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future." (p. 14) This involves an organization more than just surviving. It means that it must engage in "generative learning," learning that enhances our capacity to create." (Ibid.)

To work in a borderless, learning organization means that all employees must change, regardless of their level. Bourgon states: "Employees are expected to look for solutions, contribute ideas, share information with others, innovate and make a contribution." (Privy Council Office, 1998, p. 22).

The third goal is effective leadership. The way management is perceived by staff must be challenged. She urged the elimination of command and control, to be replaced with collaboration and inclusiveness. She spoke about sharing power, and that to be a leader does not imply that one is a manager. Leaders are found throughout an organization. To evolve to become a learning organization, it is necessary that managers and staff understand that leadership resides at all levels. This is where La Relève enters.

La Relève is a federal government, interdepartmental initiative that was created in 1996. The aim of La Relève is to encourage the participation of all public servants to help make the public service a better place in which to work, and in turn to ensure that Canadians are served well. It is about renewing the Public Service of Canada to help prepare itself for the challenges of the 21st Century. Every deputy minister in the federal government has signed a document called “A Commitment to Action,” the purpose of which is to show their intent to effect cultural change.

To complement the work of La Relève, The Leadership Network was created in 1998. The purpose of this interdepartmental network is to “...promote, develop and support networks of leaders at all levels throughout the Public Service of Canada, and to assist them in the ongoing challenge of La Relève.” (The Leadership Network, 1998, p. 1). The Leadership Network works in conjunction with The Public Service Commission, Treasury Board Secretariat, the Privy Council Office, and the Canadian Centre for Management Development. The Network is guided by the principles of borderlessness, the learning organization, and effective leadership, as articulated in Bourgon’s Fifth Annual Report. (The Leadership Network, June 1998)

On January 12, 1999, Jocelyne Bourgon’s Sixth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada was presented across Canada on Business Television. As the outgoing Clerk of the Privy Council Office and head of the Public Service of Canada, this was her final report. Produced in video format, the report outlined the success that has been achieved in renewing the Public Service of Canada. In a speech following the

presentation of the video, she noted the need to learn the “art and science” of building partnerships, developing effective leaders, and working in teams. The barriers that inhibit public servants from serving Canadians properly need to be removed: “It is people who create a vibrant organization.” (Live broadcast).

The new Clerk of the Privy Council Office, Mel Cappe, has reiterated Bourgon’s message on developing leaders throughout the federal government. At a June 1999 symposium, he spoke to senior government managers about his priorities. He talked about the importance of managers helping develop the leadership potential of their staff. “You have an important role to play in nurturing their leadership....Where leadership at all levels counts. Whether you’re a receptionist, file clerk, or a manager, you’re a knowledge worker in many different ways. And people need the opportunities to develop their skills and talents to the fullest.” (Privy Council Office, June 1999)

2.2 Global Change

There are many forces driving the changes that the world is experiencing. Thurow (1996) observes that the interplay between the introduction of new technologies and new political and social ideologies (e.g., the fall of communism in Eastern Europe) is at the root of the changing economic structure of the world. Technology is making it more difficult to lead. Historically, great leaders emerged when followers understood that something had to be done. In the absence of followers there are no leaders. Although leaders may, in theory, create a followership during stable periods, instability, such as the world is currently experiencing, does not lend itself to this. Thurow states: “Followership almost always creates leadership; leadership only seldom creates followership.” (p. 162)

Thurow explains that the traditional, hierarchical model was designed to maximize the efficiency of the transmission of orders down the chain of command. Most organizations are still managed according to this model. However, he notes that this model performs poorly when it comes to sending information back up the chain of command. This poses a problem for organizations that are attempting to make effective use of the knowledge of

their employees: “If knowledge is power, and it is, the possessors of knowledge are going to be radically different in the future, and with that difference will flow changes in power relationships.” (p. 81)

Kotter (1996) presents a similar view of the world. He explains that there are four economic and social forces behind the need for major change in organizations: technological, international economic integration, the economic maturation of developed countries, and the fall of communist countries. These four forces are causing the globalization of markets, in turn creating both opportunities and risks. To avoid these risks or to seize opportunities, organizations have adopted such programs as total quality, reengineering, mergers, and cultural change. He notes that although many organizations have failed in their efforts to transform themselves, there are success cases. His belief is that the key to creating successful organizations is leadership. When he speaks of leadership he is referring to it throughout an organization. He asserts: “The twenty-first-century employee will need to know more about leadership and management than did his or her twentieth-century counterpart.” (p. 175)

Leadership from senior executives, however, will also be vital, as Ireland and Hitt (1999) state. They will need to know how to discharge their leadership responsibilities. Moreover, they must understand that leadership is not equated to position in the organization. Instead, they will need to ensure that the right questions are being asked of employees and stakeholders.

Two opposing forces are creating a tension that is dramatically affecting how managerial leaders lead: interdependence and diversity. Lipman-Blumen (1996) discusses the critical need for leaders to foster inclusiveness in their organizations and to understand the interconnections among events and people. She states: “As the tensions between interdependence and diversity escalate, the individualistic, competitive leadership strategies...will no longer work....We have no choice but to develop new models of

leadership, leadership more appropriate for coping with these contradictory forces.” (p. xi)

The global economy, Covey (1996) believes, is the driving force behind quality. He states that globalism is teaching us the principle of empowerment, trust, and trustworthiness, and that they govern the outcomes we desire. This leads Covey to explain that principle-centered leaders are the most effective leaders. They recognize that people are guided by natural laws. Belasco and Stayer (1993) follow a similar path, stressing that in a world that places increasing value on intellectual capital that people must be responsible for their personal performance. The work of the leader, therefore, is to set the direction, remove barriers, and to help foster a sense of ownership.

A world that is becoming more complex and turbulent, Handy (1994) explains, faces greater paradoxes. Uncertainty is needed to initiate creativity and a new order. Paradox need not be resisted. Instead, it should be accepted and made sense of within the context of our lives, communities, and nations. As he notes: “The market is a mechanism for sorting the efficient from the inefficient, it is not a substitute for responsibility.” (p. 15) There is a need, therefore, to adopt a new perspective on what is taking place. The traditional employment contract, for example, is over. Many organizations are realizing that the source of their competitive advantage lies in the minds of their people. And people, in turn, are coming to understand that employment security also resides in their knowledge.

Halal (1996) argues that technology is responsible for organizations evolving into a network of “...small, automated systems, managed in real time by changing assemblies of self-employed teams.” (p. 16) Organizations in the 21st century will need to be very flexible, relying heavily on self-directed teams. Drucker (1994), who coined the term Knowledge Worker, believes that this worker needs a very different approach to leadership. This new group of knowledge workers poses a challenge to organizations.

Technology is more than a tool or a means to accomplish work. Its power, Schrage (1995) explains, is in how people perceive their environment. He asserts: “Technology *is* the environment and it inevitably shapes the way people relate to one another.” (p. 13) This prompts the question, therefore, of how should workplaces be designed in order to support collaboration?

In an address to the MIT Sloan School of Management, Schein (1995) spoke about the rapidly changing environment. Global changes are forcing organizations to transform themselves. The need for organizational change is much greater now than it was 10 years ago. However, he observes that most organizations are not effectively managing the transformation. These social transformations, as Drucker (1994) calls them, are exerting permanent effects on society, the economy, and politics. The age of social transformation will extend well beyond the turn of the century.

Schein argues that the command and control model has worked successfully in a world that was much more predictable than it is today. Markets were much more stable and technology advanced at a less rapid pace. Organizational cultures, however, change very slowly. In fact, little change has been witnessed in organizations. He believes that in most cases that all that is achieved is “espoused” change: “...if the espoused changes really challenge an organization's basic assumptions, they are resisted, subverted, or misunderstood.”(p. 2)

Organizations that are sharing power with their employees and decreasing bureaucratic controls are in essence following the evolution of countries from feudal and totalitarian regimes. Pinchot and Pinchot (1994) explain that the evolution from hierarchy to ‘organizational intelligence’ involves a shift from dominance and submission to power-sharing and collaboration. Organizational bureaucracy is not capable of dealing effectively with the complexities of the world and the interdependencies among clients, partners, suppliers, stakeholders, and technologies. This has an important impact on leadership in this new form of organization. Although strong leadership is vital to

function as a catalyst to build a community, once formed this community becomes a community of leaders. They state: “The challenge in intelligent organizations is to establish strong and effective community so that everyone contributes leadership.” (p. 217)

The interdependencies in the global economy and within organizations require a broader view if sense is to be made of what is occurring and if organizations are to prepare themselves properly for the next century. At the level of the organization, taking a systems perspective to dealing with the multitude of interdependencies and complexities is essential. This is what the next section addresses.

2.3 Systems Theory

Senge (1990) talks about a framework for seeing interrelationships. His work on the five disciplines is important to this new thinking. These disciplines are team learning, systems thinking, mental models, personal mastery, and shared vision. Three of the disciplines, team learning, systems thinking, and mental models, are impeded by the traditional organizational model.

Systems thinking, the cornerstone of the five disciplines, entails being able to recognize complexities and the ability to see patterns in subtle changes. The inability to engage in systems thinking as a management competency is common to many organizations. The consequence is that organizations do not address root causes for problems that continue to persist. Handy (1994) talks about how governments need to “...reframe their view of the world.” (p. 47) They are surprised when their efforts do not solve such persistent problems as unemployment. They have not come to understand the paradox of the organization: organizations are able to grow while keeping their workforces constant, or in some cases smaller.

This line of thinking leads Senge to speak about the primacy of the whole, a concept that sees relationships as being more fundamental than things, and that wholes are of a higher order than parts. Managers are conditioned to see their organizations as “...things rather

than an patterns of interaction.” (1990, p. 7) They look for solutions that will fix the problems, instead of searching out their underlying causes. The consequence is the continued use of quick fixes, in turn contributing to problems that deepen. The outcome is a growing feeling of powerlessness.

The systemic issues facing organizations manifest themselves in relationships. Oshry (1995) uses the concept of The Dance of the Blind Reflex to illustrate the trap into which many organizations fall. The Tops (senior management) feel overwhelmed with responsibility and complexity. The Bottoms (staff) feel oppressed by The Tops. The Middles (middle management) feel stuck between the two other parties, with torn loyalties. They are anxious, confused, and frustrated. None of the parties involved acknowledge any part in creating this problem. In other words, blame is abundant in this environment. Everyone blames one another, in what can be seen as a circle of finger-pointing. Oshry explains that to step out of this dance that people must become co-creators of a new system or partnership. When people are able to see systems as wholes they begin to see power from a different perspective. Power in a system’s context has less to do with strength or toughness and the resources that one controls. It is about the “...ability to influence system process.” (p. 175)

This raises the concept of democratic systems. Wheatley (1997) believes that participation in organizations is not an option. The inclusion of people creates a global system. Autocracy works well under stability, but as soon as equilibrium is altered, the entire system collapses. People must be included in decision-making because this is how new relationships and systems are created. As she asserts: “If you’re interested in creating sustainable growth, sustainable productivity, sustainable morale, you can’t do that through autocracy.” (p. 3) Initiating change, however, in one part of the organization can prompt a backlash. Schein (1996) observes that when one sub-system changes itself to improve productivity, for example, this threatens the rest of the system because it upsets the equilibrium. The response from the rest of the system is to resist the change and to quash it.

The inability of many organizations to adjust well to change, Kellner-Rogers (1998) observes, is the consequence of their being seen as machines. Organizations are actually living systems, composed of complex human behaviors. "If organizations are machines, we reason, we can fix them like machines.... We need to understand that our organizations are participating in the organizing dynamics of life." (p. 19)

To create an environment of teamwork, continuous learning, and personal commitment, Ehin (1995) believes that organizations must operate as self-organizing systems. They must constantly learn and grow. Managerial leaders need to create environments where people can interact naturally and where there is form without structure. In Ehin's view, people should be able to interact to create networks that support relationships.

In complex organizations, senior managerial leaders are not the ones who create high performing employees. Hock (1994) argues that these leaders create the conditions for this to happen. They have a vision and act as a catalyst to create a community. They bring out the talents that each employee possesses. Human ingenuity, he states, is the most underused, and sometimes abused, asset in the world.

Helgesen (1995) uses the expression the Web of Inclusion to describe her model for involving people, for example, employees, customers, suppliers, and partners. This web functions as a process with respect to how people think and act, and in particular how they solve problems together. Tetenbaum (1998) takes an approach similar to Helgesen and Wheatley, noting that the focal point for chaos is what she calls the web of feedback loops. Attempting to predict future events in a rapidly changing world is dangerous. However, organizations, especially large ones, find chaos unsettling. To be an effective managerial leader in the future will require the creation of a new mental model, one that lends itself to a world of chaos.

Until managerial leaders deal with their mental models, they will have difficulty in coping with the complex problems facing their organizations. Argyris (Senge, 1994) explains

that our mental models are formed from what he calls The Ladder of Inference. This is a mental pathway that is built on an initial set of observable experiences. The individual selects from these experiences, adding personal meaning and making assumptions based on these meanings. Conclusions are then drawn and new beliefs adopted, culminating in action that is based on those beliefs. By the time people reach adulthood, their mental models have become well established.

The consequence of not addressing our mental models through a process of critical self-reflection is a distortion of our leadership lens. At a managerial level, this may be manifested through inconsistent behavior. Argyris (1991) differentiates between what he calls “espoused theory of action” and “theory-in-use.” The former pertains to what managers express openly. For example, they may state that they believe in sharing decision-making with their staff but do the opposite. Theory-in-use, in contrast, refers to their deeper mental models. In other words, this is what they really believe, in terms of their internal values, and how they actually manage and lead in the workplace.

O’Toole (1996) brings the concept of mental models into the workplace. He states that leaders must understand their own beliefs and assumptions if they wish to lead effectively. “...they must have thought through their assumptions about human nature....leaders must know their own minds” (p.46) This leads him to stress that leadership is about integrity. It is about telling the truth, honesty, and moral behavior. “People with integrity ‘know who they are.’” (Ibid.)

In a similar approach, Kouzes and Posner (1995) explain that as people proceed through a process of self-development they acquire the confidence to lead. They state: “The quest for leadership is first an inner quest to discover who you are.” (p. 336) Of particular importance is the question that leaders must ask themselves: “Am I the right one to be leading at this moment?” (p. 337) This leads to the next section on management and leadership.

2.4 Management and Leadership

Leadership, in the traditional approach, is about people who are in charge, make the decisions, and “energize the troops.” (Senge, 1990, p. 340) In the Western world, leaders are the heroes who have typically been males. They rise to the challenge of crisis. Senge examines the myths of leadership, noting: “So long as such myths prevail, they reinforce a focus on short-term events and charismatic heroes rather than on systemic forces and collective learning.” (p. 340) The old view of leadership is founded upon the assumptions that people are powerless, that they do not possess personal vision, and that they are unable to deal effectively with change. It is the role of the heroic leader to lead the powerless.

The modern view of leadership is still influenced heavily by the traditional notion of the heroic leader (Bennis and Biederman, 1997). It is often difficult to separate the leader from the hero. Bennis and Biederman assert: “In our society, leadership is too often seen as an inherently individual phenomenon.” (p. 1) Bennis (1999), more recently, has taken a stronger stand on the issue of what he calls “TOPdown” leadership, arguing that it is based on the myth of the “triumphant individual.” This myth is “...deeply ingrained in the American psyche and unfortunately fostered and celebrated in the daily press, business magazines, and much of the academic and popular writing.” (p. 72)

Block (1993) follows a similar line of thinking, stating that while leadership conveys initiative and responsibility, it also carries the mental model of behaviors that are tied to control, direction, and knowing what is best for others. He argues “...strong leadership does not have within itself the capability to create the fundamental changes our organizations require.” (p. 13)

“Leaders are given the gift of leadership by those who choose or agree to follow.”

(Drucker, 1990, p. 37) Drucker (1996) presents a simple definition of leadership: A leader has followers. Moreover, the effective leader’s followers do what is right. What matters

are results, not how popular a leader is. Leadership is not about position. Instead, it is about responsibility.

Management, according to Kotter (1996) is "...a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly." (p. 25) This encompasses such activities as planning, budgeting, controlling, and coordinating. Kotter sees leadership in a somewhat different light from Drucker. Leadership, for Kotter, involves defining a future, focusing people on a vision, and inspiring them to work towards it, regardless of the problems encountered along the way.

The link between management and leadership is explained by Drucker (1998). He does not believe that they can be separated. He states it is "...nonsense—as much nonsense as separating management from entrepreneurship. Those are part and parcel of the same job. They are different to be sure, but only as different as the right hand from the left or the nose from the mouth. They belong to the same body." (p. 5) To Drucker, leadership is about what happens when the leader leaves. Does work still get done? Leadership is about responsibility, accountability, and doing.

In contrast, Covey (1996) states that there is a significant difference between management and leadership. Both are important, but each needs to be understood properly. Leadership means ensuring that the ladders we are climbing are placed against the correct wall. Management, on the other hand, concentrates on ensuring that we climb these ladders as efficiently as possible. Covey presents a principle-centered approach to leadership, which encompasses three roles: pathfinding, aligning, and empowering.

Management, Kotter (1996) observes, has dominated the twentieth century, the result of rapid economic growth. He points out that management has been embedded in many organizational cultures, in turn smothering efforts to help employees learn to lead. Managers who associate their identity with their position lack the ability to hear their employee. Employees are over-managed and under-led. He states: "...the lack of

leadership leaves no force inside these organizations to break out of the morass. The combination of cultures that resist change and managers who have not been taught how to create change is lethal.” (p. 29)

One general definition of management would be that managers plan, direct, control, and coordinate. Bolman and Deal (1997) examine this, posing the question: “How does one reconcile the actual work of managers with the heroic imagery?” (p. 266) They note: “Control is an illusion and rationality an afterthought.” (Ibid.) People will only follow provided they believe their leader is legitimate. Their voluntary “obedience” evaporates, along with the leader’s authority, when the leader loses legitimacy. Bolman and Deal support what Drucker says about the link between management and leadership when they observe that it is difficult to think of a highly effective manager as someone who is not an effective leader. But they follow this up with a comment that leadership should not be seen as being attached to senior positions.

Helgesen (1996) makes an important point on equating leadership to position. She states: “...our continued habit of linking leadership with position signals our inability to grasp how organizations are changing...in the future, our ideas about the nature of leadership will undergo a radical transformation.” (p. 22) What this new leadership will look like and what qualities it will embody are important issues. However, she states that organizations that address how power is distributed will have moved forward in creating leadership at all levels.

Managerial leaders, Bolman and Deal (1997) explain, face the paradox of how to sustain their integrity and mission without creating inflexible organizations. They state: “Leading means walking the tightrope between rigidity and spinelessness.” (p. 377) Kanter (1983), in contrast, sees managing participation as a balancing act between management authority and opportunities for individuals and teams. Participation needs to be managed, and there are three key elements to a well managed system: 1) a well designed management structure; 2) tasks that are realistic and meaningful to people, and that are assigned within clearly specified limits; and 3) a reporting structure with established accountabilities.

Leadership, to Kanter, entails keeping everyone focused on the vision. If participation is to work, she asserts, then leadership from senior management is essential.

Hodgkinson (1983) presents a different point of view on administration (his term for management) and leadership. “Administration *is* leadership. Leadership *is* administration.” (p. 195) He states that the word leadership is used loosely and not well understood. It is “...as if it were a sort of increment to the administrative-management process which might or might not be present.” (Ibid.) He believes that leadership extends throughout an organization. Leadership and management go together. The individual cannot avoid one without avoiding the other. He sees leadership, therefore, as “...the effecting of policy, values, philosophy through collective organizational action.” (p. 196)

Organizations that consistently achieve high performance have strong leadership at the top (Katzenbach, 1998). This is what distinguishes them from other organizations. Katzenbach dispels the myth that chief executive officers, or their equivalents in government, must be team players if they are to be effective in leading their organizations. What is key, however, is that they understand teamwork, embrace it, and provide the conditions that allow it to flourish.

Senge (1998) takes the view that leadership is a “distributed phenomenon.” Senior managerial leaders play a more subtle role in leading their organizations. The difficulty organizations face is how they perceive leadership. That is the problem, because the result is the inability of organizations to properly respond to major change. Leadership, to Senge, is “...a collective, creative process.” (p. 16) The heads of organizations do not change cultures—people do. Those leaders who are most vital at the start of a change process are the local line managers. “Real leadership occurs through a collaborative shared vision by groups of people who share aspirations.” (p. 17) This is echoed by Covey (1999), who states that leaders must create a culture that is founded upon personal integrity and empowerment. In the absence of such a culture, while there may be leaders in managerial positions there will not be true leadership.

Leadership does not mean, therefore, senior management. The term is “superfluous,” according to Senge (1999). Leadership is about creating community; it is not about hierarchy. He expresses his view of creating community within organizations this way: “Creating more sustainable organizations means accepting that the way we organize is a human invention, based on a set of habits. We can then begin to create deep, meaningful changes in the way we do business.” (p. 20)

That the cultures of organizations resist change efforts is well established. Senior leaders of organizations need to understand that deciding arbitrarily to change certain areas of an organization is likely to result in failure. Schein (1996) explains that these leaders can succeed in changing their organizations’ cultures by concentrating on their strengths and allowing weak areas to die over time. “Culture cannot be manipulated by announcing changes or instituting ‘programs.’” (p. 64) To effect change, an organization must begin to change its collective mental models. Senior leaders need to have a strong understanding of their organization’s culture. A key part of their task is to help the organization move from individual competence to collaboration, to create a climate of trust, and to promote open communication.

To continue Schein’s theme, Block (1993) addresses the issue of the distribution of power. He believes that, if power and control are not dealt with and renegotiated, attempts to change organizational culture will merely become an “...exercise in cosmetics.” (p. 27)

Senge (1990) explains that rather than pushing against resistance from within the organization as a result of a change effort, the effective managerial leader identifies the source of the resistance. The manager then focuses on addressing the behaviors and power relationships within which the values are contained.

The following comment by Hock at an address in 1994 helps synthesize the issues concerning the separate yet integrated roles of management and leadership and to put them in perspective:

The essential thing to remember, however, is not that we became a world of expert managers, but that the nature of our expertise became the creation and control of constants, uniformity and efficiency, while the need has become the understanding and coordination of variability, complexity and effectiveness. (p. 5)

This provides a segue to the area of organizational learning and its role in facilitating cultural change through the process of unlearning and relearning, and the impact this has on an organization's managerial and non-managerial leaders.

2.5 Leadership and Learning

To effect cultural change in organizations means that people must be willing to learn. McGill, Slocum, and Lei (1992) state that managers must open themselves to the wide range of opportunities that exist. This openness comes in two forms. First, managers need to give up control. Second, they must come to accept that their personal values and experiences are no better or worse than those of the people they manage. The authors call this "cultural-functional humility." Managers must take the initiative to learn about the effects of their behaviors on their subordinates. This involves developing a strong sense of self-awareness.

In his work with management consultants over 15 years, Argyris (1991) discovered that they were not were not effective at learning. They tended to look outside themselves during their consulting work with managers, deflecting any blame that arose as a result of their work. Argyris calls this defensive reasoning. He explains this by contrasting people's espoused theory of action (what they say) with their theory-in-use (how they actually behave). It is very difficult to change organizational culture if this type of

behavior prevails in an organization. “Until senior managers become aware of the ways they reason defensively, any change activity is likely to be just a fad.” (p. 13)

Teaching leadership through the conventional, institutional approach misses the essence of what is needed during complex organizational change. Vaill (1996) expresses his view of “leaderly” learning this way: “The behavior we call leadership is, before it is anything else, an initiative from within oneself...the crucial learning process for a leader is learning what he or she wants to see happen.” (p. 61) The managerial leader, in turn, leads his or her people to learn what needs to be done.

To begin the creation of a learning organization requires managerial leaders to embrace personal mastery and model this to their employees. People need to feel safe, Senge (1990) notes, if they are to challenge the status quo and explore opportunities. At the core of a leadership development strategy is modeling the desired behaviors. Managerial leaders need to function as models. Their espoused theories must be aligned with their theories-in-use. Senge asserts: “There’s nothing more powerful you can do to encourage others in their quest for personal mastery than to be serious in your own quest.” (p. 173)

To approach this concept from another perspective, Belasco and Stayer (1993) speak to the need for managerial leaders to change the “picture” to one where everyone becomes a leader in the organization. This means that to change one’s mental model of leadership it must first happen in one’s “gut.” They ask the question: “How must I be different to be an effective leader?” Their leadership solution is: “Understand that I am the problem. Accepting that enables me to be the solution.” (p. 41)

To accomplish this, Belasco and Stayer stress, means that managers need to unlearn what they have learned about avoiding responsibility, and in turn learn “I am responsible behavior.” (p. 59) It is about helping people empower themselves at work and to demonstrate leadership.

There is a strong connection between mental models and the significant impact they have on individual learning and systems thinking. Senge (1990) stresses that the failure to understand this connection undermines efforts to encourage systems thinking in organizations. Of significance is that mental models often lie below our level of awareness. This is where problems emerge. Although mental models may interfere with learning, Senge poses the question: "...why can't they also help *accelerate* learning?" (p. 178) On a similar track, Vaill (1996) sees learning as a system, one in which a continuous exploration is undertaken.

Critical self-reflection, as described by Cranton (1994), is the foundation of what she calls transformative learning. If people are to empower themselves to learn, critical self-reflection must accompany it. However, she poses the paradox of learner empowerment being a goal of transformative learning and also a condition. That the two are intertwined reflects the complexity of learning. The concept of critical self-reflection is at the core of leadership development. Cranton's work is important to understanding this. Moreover, it links with Argyris' work on mental models and The Ladder of Inference, and their roles in shaping how people see the world.

The literature has shown that to create an environment of shared leadership is tantamount to effecting large-scale cultural change in an organization. It must be managed and led from the top but driven throughout the organization. It is not enough that managers go through a process of critical self-reflection and transformative learning. All staff must eventually do the same.

Empowerment, to many managers, has meant handing off more responsibilities and work to staff while retaining control (Argyris, 1998). Staff, on the other hand, request more decision-making responsibilities yet resist the accountabilities that accompany this. Not everyone, Argyris emphasizes, wants to be empowered. They prefer the status quo. Management, conversely, believes that everyone wants to be empowered. The challenge for organizations is to find the balance that fits their culture at a point in time and to allow

it to evolve. The danger organizations fall into, according to Kanter (1983), is that they treat participative management as a gift to employees instead of a right. This focus is lost when participation is used primarily to deliver results. When performance does not improve, management adopts the attitude of “Why aren’t they grateful?” (p. 245)

Block (1993) follows a different track on sharing power. His stance is that it is dangerous to give power to people who respond that until they get what they want they will not assume any responsibility. “Power gratuitously given is inevitably abused....This is not partnership and empowerment, it is entitlement and appeasement.” (p. 225)

This introduces the concept of shared leadership, or what is also referred to as distributed leadership, democratic leadership, participative leadership, and post-heroic leadership.

2.6 Shared Leadership

The traditional top-down leadership approach worked relatively well when organizations did not experience as many external stimuli and when life was more predictable. These days are gone. To ensure their long-term existence, organizations must embrace a new form of leadership, one that enrolls and actively includes people at all levels. Bradford and Cohen (1998) state that heroic leadership was the old way of leading (or managing) people. We are now in the age of post-heroic leadership, in which managers share power with people. It is important to understand that the role of the manager does not become redundant, but rather what is required is a transformation of this role in the organization. Managers become, in effect, transformational leaders. Bradford and Cohen make the following observations:

Shared leadership does not eliminate the leader’s role or deny hierarchy; leaders still have plenty of work and remain accountable for the unit’s performance. But they must now encourage and build a shared responsibility system, where the leader and direct reports collaborate in the management of the unit....Power determined by management level cannot work where knowledge is widely

dispersed, where changes in technologies, markets, and competition are rapid, and where employees are highly educated....leadership extends in all directions. It is too narrow a definition of leadership to focus only on managing down. Everyone will have to manage sideways and upward. (pp. 15, 184, 317)

In a post-heroic world, Bradford and Cohen stress, everyone in an organization must accept responsibility for the future of the organization. It is not just a senior management issue. But managers do have to realize that they are not abdicating power or responsibilities. Post-heroic leaders, in fact, are completely engaged with their employees. This type of leadership is on the one hand more difficult because it is more dynamic and requires courage. However, it is also easier because once it is internalized it becomes part of all managerial elements.

There are critics who are cynical about the applicability of shared leadership in organizations. Stauffer (1998) addresses what he calls the 10 myths of post-heroic leadership.

1. There should be little conflict at work since people want to get along well.
2. The post-heroic manager is a "soft" manager.
3. Collaboration is in, competition is out.
4. The post-heroic leader is a facilitator and does not make decisions.
5. A leader who makes independent decisions is acting heroically.
6. All decisions must be made through consensus.
7. Team commitment to a decision overrides its quality.
8. Only the organization's top leader is allowed to have vision.
9. Managing as a post-heroic leader is slow and inefficient.
10. Post-heroic leadership does not produce short-term benefits.

He concludes that post-heroic leadership delivers the results that are needed in today's economy. It requires: "...decisiveness, sangfroid, and results-oriented thinking in small measure....a leader with a solid sense of self-worth and self-confidence." (p. 4)

Of particular importance to shared leadership is the manager having the self-confidence and self-worth to embark on this process. This connects to the need to go through critical self-reflection and to examine one's mental models.

Belasco and Stayer (1993) ask the question: "Am I creating owners or dependents?" They respond with their leadership solution: "If you want them to act like it's their business, make it their business." (p. 71) This requires a change in mindset by managers. Bennis (1998) urges that leaders must begin to "deploy the brainpower of their people, individually and collectively." (p. 3) He believes that organizations that do not do this will eventually die.

This perspective is shared by Block (1993), who states: "Our search for strong leadership in others expresses a desire for others to assume the ownership and responsibility for our group, our organization, our society....The effect is to localize power, purpose, and privilege in the one we call the leader." (p. 13) Covey (1991) urges managerial leaders to share their power through what he calls an "abundance mentality," referring to the notion that there is enough power for everyone. Managerial leaders need to learn that employees possess large yet untapped potentials.

To maintain the assumption that leadership is a set of "nonlearnable" character traits and associated with position, creates the self-fulfilling prophecy that only a small number of true leaders actually exist. (Kouzes and Posner, 1996) Instead, the assumption should shift to one of leadership is found at all levels of the organization. "If we assume that leadership is learnable, we can discover how many good leaders there really are....When we liberate the leader in everyone, extraordinary things happen." (pp. 109-110) DePree (1989) expresses a parallel viewpoint, but uses the term "roving leadership." Roving leaders allow their staff to "...share ownership of problems—in effect, to take possession of the situation." (p. 49)

These viewpoints are tempered by Argyris (1998), who explains that for employees to empower themselves they must be internally committed. Internal commitment comes from within, reinforcing empowerment. “Commitment is about generating human energy and activating the human mind.” (p. 2) External commitment, in contrast, is imposed on employees from the hierarchy. It can be seen as contractual compliance, in which employees feel little control over their future. His point is that management must come to understand that internal and external commitment can co-exist in an organization. Empowerment has its limits. When empowerment is pushed too hard in the organization, the result is often deepening cynicism. The key, Argyris argues, is to identify which jobs require internal commitment and which do not.

Kouzes and Posner (1996) use the terms “external control” and “intrinsic motivation” when they speak about empowerment. External control saps an individual’s intrinsic motivation. However, it is the latter that is needed to achieve extraordinary things. They state: “...reliance on external power and control...over time diminishes the capacity of individuals and organizations to excel.” (p.181) Leaders must learn to use their power to serve their staff, not for their own self interests.

Although empowerment, shared leadership and other related concepts have been studied and discussed extensively during the past several years, they date back to Mary Parker Follett, who has been called by Drucker The Prophet of Management (Follett, 1996). Follett’s perspectives on leadership and power, which date back to the 1920s, are as relevant today as they were then. The following passage helps to synthesize the issues that many writers have attempted to address.

...one reason why people object so strongly to being “under” others, is that there has been too much pomp attached to the idea of being over someone, of giving orders. I am convinced that we have to change our thinking very radically in this respect. I am convinced that any feeling of exaltation because we have people under us should be conquered, for I am sure that if we enjoy being over people,

there will be something in our manner which will make them dislike being under us.” (p. 144)

Finally, Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) express their view that creating a workplace based on empowerment and shared leadership cannot be achieved quickly or easily. “It demands a willingness to embrace uncertainty, trust people, and exercise faith.” (p. 45)

2.7 Summary

The literature has shown that the changing global economy is exerting increasing pressure on organizations to adapt. Greater value is being placed on the knowledge people possess and ways to encourage continuous learning. This means that the manner in which managerial leadership is practiced must be reexamined. The traditional hierarchy does not lend itself well to the way organizations must operate in the future. To facilitate the shift to a culture founded upon personal and collective learning, a new form of leadership is needed.

The role of the managerial leader is changing. However, some writers view management and leadership as somewhat separate functions, while others see them as integrated. Further research is needed to understand better the link between management and leadership, and how it is applied in organizations.

In the area of shared leadership, the literature shows that managers must learn how to share power and decision-making with their employees. However, this does not mean that their role becomes less important. Instead, the role of managers changes to one where they become engaged with their staff. Leadership is then extended throughout the organization. Of particular importance is the need for cultural change if organizations are to truly embrace the practice of shared leadership.

This research project provided some insights into how leadership is perceived and practiced in a federal service delivery office. Of particular importance is acquiring a deeper understanding of the implications of sharing power and decision-making. Much more research is needed in this area to determine whether large, established bureaucracies are able to create an environment of shared leadership.

CHAPTER THREE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH STUDY

3.1 Research Methodology

This research project used a qualitative, inductive approach, or, more generally, participatory action research (PAR). PAR, as described by Deshler and Ewert (1995), is an “umbrella” expression that encompasses a variety of theories and practices, for example, participatory inquiry, collaborative inquiry, praxis research, or action research. Participation denotes a major move forward in making research more democratic. Of particular significance is that it includes citizens, volunteers, employees, and other individuals who are essential to generating new knowledge. Kirby and McKenna (1989) emphasize that “The research participant is not a passive participant, simply there to talk about her or his experience.” (p. 68) The participant has a very important contribution to make to the research process and findings. Through their interaction and sharing, the participant and the researcher may attain new insights and perspectives on the research topic.

The participatory research approach was chosen for this project because it is founded upon inclusiveness and involves a process of systematic inquiry. This process, Deshler and Ewert (1995) explain, involves the researcher working collaboratively with an organization or community to decide on the focus of the research, how and where to collect data, and the appropriate action to take to resolve a specific problem or issue. Lewis (1995) reiterates this, stating: “Qualitative research concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations. The key element here is the involvement of people where their disclosures are encouraged in a nurturing environment.” (p. 1)

Participatory action research fit well with this project because of the need to include employees at all levels of the Moncton HRCC. A collaborative approach to inquire into a

possible future path for the Moncton HRCC, and perhaps the New Brunswick Region, is considered necessary if a change in corporate culture is desired.

One major strength of PAR is that it incorporates the organization's history and culture. Stringer (1996) stresses that it does not offer solutions to all of the problems that affect an organization. It does, however, help employees get a better grasp on the important issues and to develop collaborative solutions.

When undertaking participatory action research, one begins with the premise that those in communities and organizations must own the research (Merrifield, 1997). The research is allowed to proceed because of the willingness of people to meet to discuss issues that affect their lives. Those who are the subject of the research play a key role in deciding the questions and the path it will take. Merrifield observes that traditional research is "top down," which excludes the people who are the focus of it. However, she cautions the action researcher to be aware that pushing a group for action may threaten some individuals. Achieving a balance in the search for truth and knowledge is often difficult.

Yukl (1998) explains that there is a growing debate over whether qualitative research is more suited than quantitative research for studying leadership. The critics of quantitative research argue that it reinforces the idea of single leaders. This form of research has relied on using questionnaires as the mechanism to gather data. Yukl claims that questionnaires are not appropriate for studying the complex field of leadership. This is especially important when one takes into the account the key roles that interrelationships and social systems play in leadership. In qualitative research, the researcher wants to uncover what people are thinking, feeling, and experiencing.

Those who do not support the use of questionnaires believe that a qualitative approach (e.g., one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and case studies) is a much more effective method of gathering information about complex issues. Yukl (1998) states: "These methods appear better suited for studying leadership from a systems perspective." (p.505)

Argyris (1994) comments on the use of surveys in organizations. When employees complete questionnaires, the tendency is for the responsibility to fix the problems to be passed on to management. Employees, in effect, disassociate themselves from any responsibility on their part to change their behaviors or to help the organization change for the better. Argyris has little use for these types of surveys, and consequently suggests that they not be used. He argues that double loop learning, a process of asking questions to get at root causes, is not achieved through the use of surveys. A qualitative approach facilitates bringing out issues that need to be discussed if real change is to be realized in an organization.

The researcher considered initially including in the methodology a questionnaire to the employees of the Moncton HRCC. However, based on the literature review, reflection, and discussion, a survey was not used for some very important reasons that are pertinent to the climate of the public service. Employees in Human Resources Development Canada have been surveyed repeatedly over the past few years. The most recent survey sent to all employees was at the end of May 1999. This questionnaire was developed by Statistics Canada on behalf of Treasury Board, and was oriented around employee morale.

The researcher led a team in the spring of 1996 to design and deliver a questionnaire to employees in the New Brunswick Region. This was, in effect, a climate survey. Other surveys have since been initiated, either at the national or local levels in the department. Consequently, employees in the department have been over-surveyed and have become increasingly skeptical of being asked for their feedback, only to find that subsequent action is often lacking. The issue of mounting skepticism in the Public Service of Canada is one of particular concern to senior management. Here lies the essence of the problem of surveys: the results are invariably passed over to management for response and action. But what this does is pass the burden on to them. As the literature has shown, if change is to occur in an organization then employees at all levels must be actively involved in

finding solutions to the problems. This is the power of qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research.

Questionnaire surveys may not get at the deeper issues in an organization. These issues are becoming more and more complex and diverse. Palys (1997) acknowledges that surveys are cost-effective and efficient. However, there are some important drawbacks to using them. It is very time consuming to sit down with each respondent to answer a questionnaire. When respondents complete a questionnaire on their own, certain problems may arise. They must be able to understand what it is asking, which leads to ensuring that the vocabulary is clear and concise. The researcher must also anticipate any ambiguities. Clarity is essential.

Respondents to a questionnaire survey only have so much space in which to write their concerns. Depending on how the instrument is designed, the respondent may miss out on airing specific concerns. In this project, it was critical that those invited to participate be able to engage in the process and contribute to the fullest extent. Consequently, the approach to gather data involved focus groups and subsequent one-on-one interviews.

Focus groups were created in the 1950s for consumer market research. DesRosier (1998) explains that focus groups do not give quantitative results. Instead, he offers qualitative results that "...offer descriptions of the vicarious experiences of the participants." (p. 22) He observes, however, that focus groups are vulnerable to bias by the researcher. Therefore, it is important that the person who facilitates the focus group be as neutral as possible.

O'Donnell (1988) defines a focus group as "...an interactive evaluation method that can provide in-depth answers to complex problems." (p. 71) A focus group usually consists of between eight and twelve people. Moreover, they are individuals who share a common interest or issue within their organization. She presents three main phases to delivering a focus group. The first phase is planning, which involves defining the problem, identifying the participants, and developing the questions. A focus group discussion lasts between

one and two hours. Because the discussions may raise related issues, the number of questions should be limited to about six. These questions are based on themes. "...a good moderator knows when to toss the interview guide out the window and let the group decide on the direction." (p. 72)

The second phase is conducting the focus group. O'Donnell notes: "Participants are often the best authorities, from an organizational view, on *what* brought on a problem. In addition, they're the only authorities on *why* and *how* the situation affected them personally." (Ibid.)

The last phase involves the analysis and reporting. The analysis of the researcher's notes and tape recordings requires time. O'Donnell suggests getting a printed transcript made from the tape of the focus group. It is important to listen to tone and how things are said on the tapes. Transcripts should be read for content and discussion themes. In particular, specific issues need to be identified. She suggests using a selection of quotations, which help to strengthen the analysis. Following the analysis a report is prepared. She makes the point: "The goal here is to interpret and not to editorialize." (p. 73)

Krueger (1994) notes that the primary purpose of a focus group is to encourage the participants to disclose their perceptions and experiences on a certain topic of interest. Therefore, it is essential that the proper planning be done first and that the session be conducted in a "...permissive, non-threatening environment." (p. 6) While the questions the moderator asks may appear to be simple, careful probing in a safe setting produces rich discussions. Moreover, he stresses the importance of the moderator to not pressure the group to reach a consensus. He states: "Although consensus sometimes occurs, it is not expected. The focus group helps people hear themselves and receive feedback from peers. This process keeps us grounded in reality." (p. 239)

One-on-one interviews were part of this project's methodology. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explain personal interviewing this way: "The opportunity to learn about what you

cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry.” (p. 65) They note the importance of taking the time to plan properly before conducting an interview. This includes when and where to meet and how long will the interview be? The method to record the information from the interview is important. In addition to taking notes, the interviewer should record the conversation. Transcribing the recording may also be advantageous, depending on the nature of the interview.

To ensure that the participants in the focus groups and one-on-one interviews have the opportunity to express themselves and delve into issues they deem important, the number of questions should be kept to between four and six. The moderator or interviewer needs to be able to probe deeper into issues that are raised with respect to a particular question. Moreover, a semi-structured approach may be useful when developing questions for interviews. This allows the participants to talk about the issues that are especially important to them. However, it is also important to frame the context of the interview to ensure that the participants understand what is its purpose.

3.2 Data Gathering Tools and Study Conduct

The researcher’s methodology consisted of five phases. The first phase involved the researcher presenting the research topic and suggested approach to the Moncton director. A meeting with the Moncton management group was held subsequently in the spring of 1999. During this meeting, the researcher explained the purpose of the project. The ensuing discussion produced a set of five objectives, to which the management group was in agreement. This meeting confirmed the Moncton HRCC’s participation in the project.

The second phase encompassed an extensive literature review before and during the second summer residency at Royal Roads University. Following the residency and during the summer, fall, and winter, the researcher continued to comb the literature for new insights on the project topic.

Preparing for the data collection was the third phase. This included confirming the participation of an internal organizational development consultant to work with the researcher on the focus groups. The Fredericton OD consultant who had agreed in the spring to assist was unable to continue with the project due to a changed workload and new priorities. The new OD consultant in Moncton was approached by the researcher to invite her participation. She agreed, which proved to be a benefit to the Moncton zone because it helped orient her to leadership issues and to become more familiar with focus groups. Her role was one of moderator during the group sessions.

The Moncton HRCC director arranged for the random selection of employees for the two staff focus groups. Each group was represented by staff from different functions in the main office, as well as staff from the three branch offices. An introductory memorandum was first sent out from the director to inform all staff of the research project. Those selected for the staff focus groups were invited subsequently. A few employees declined to participate as a result of workload issues. To maintain each focus group at eight people, the director then randomly selected another employee and invited their participation. Of the 16 staff who finally agreed to participate, all of them showed up on the day of the two focus groups. Moreover, once the researcher explained the informed consent form and stressed the voluntary nature of the project, all of these individuals made the decision to remain with the group.

The fourth phase involved the actual data collection through focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Three focus groups were held: one for the management group and two for staff. The focus groups were moderated by the new Moncton OD consultant. The researcher took on the role of assistant moderator, taking notes, setting up and monitoring the recording equipment, and providing background information on the project to the participants.

A local company provided the recording equipment for the focus groups, consisting of a pressure zone microphone, mixer, and tape recorder. The researcher was trained in the proper set-up and monitoring of the equipment. The result was high quality recordings of the sessions.

Following the focus groups, the researcher prepared a four page summary of the key discussion points and issues raised for each focus group. Each summary was shared with the appropriate group to obtain the participants' feedback as to its accuracy. The few comments received were then incorporated into the summary. This validation process helped confirm the data that was collected. In effect, it served to support the triangulation of the data collected from the two methods.

Following the focus groups, the research conducted six telephone interviews with a selection of participants from the three focus groups. Of the six people interviewed, two were managers. The questions that were developed for the interviews stemmed partly from the focus groups, but they also came from the objectives stated at the outset of this project.

To maintain confidentiality during the interviews, the researcher used his enclosed office. The participants, who were in Moncton, also secured a private location where they could talk freely. In addition to taking written notes, the researcher used a hand-held Sony tape recorder. The quality of sound that was produced was adequate for the purposes of the research. At the end of each interview, the researcher restated what he heard from the interviewee to ensure accuracy. Adjustments to his notes were then made.

The fifth phase involved the detailed analysis of the data and the subsequent preparation of the final report. This phase included the researcher presenting the research findings to the Moncton HRCC management group. In addition, the researcher prepared a summary of the findings, which were shared with all of the Moncton HRCC staff in the main and branch offices.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The principles that were followed in this project aligned themselves with those adopted by the American Psychological Association. (Palys, 1997) The participants at each of the three focus groups were asked to read and sign a one page, participant consent form. The researcher underscored the importance of his requirement to abide by Royal Roads University's code of ethical conduct when conducting research. Involvement in the project was voluntary, with participants being able to withdraw at any point in the process. Full disclosure was made at the outset by the researcher, who maintained an atmosphere of trust, openness, and honesty. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. The notes taken during data collection, including tape recordings, were kept in a secure, locked location. At the end of the research project, they were destroyed.

CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS

4.1 Study Findings

4.1.1 Focus Groups

The three focus groups for management and staff were presented with the same nine questions. The findings in this section are organized by each of the questions. The findings from the two staff focus groups are combined (to maintain the confidentiality as agreed to with the participants) and contrasted against those from the management focus group.

The first two questions were designed to help break the ice and get the participants talking. Questions number three and four were transition questions. Questions five to eight were aimed at the theme of this project. The final question was asked to give the participants the opportunity to raise any points that had not been made. This approach was based on Krueger's (1994) methodology for conducting focus groups.

The participants in all three focus groups were actively involved, with some more outspoken than others. However, there was a high level of respect during each session. The participants allowed each other to speak. It was seldom that someone cut off another speaker. Consequently, the discussions produced a rich amount of data for the researcher, which is reflected below. The pronoun "he" is used in the narrative to respect the anonymity of the participants.

1. What does the word "leadership" mean to you? When you hear the word, what comes to mind?

Management

The participants in this focus group discussed the importance of participating with people and guiding them to achieve results. It means being there for staff and helping them do their jobs. Leadership means looking for solutions, regardless of level in the organization.

It is a personal conviction, and involves taking a stand for something. It also means not being told to do something. Leadership includes sharing one's knowledge and good habits with staff.

Staff

The participants in the two staff sessions talked about leading by example: "walking the talk," and not dictating. Leadership means someone who is in charge, acts on a decision, and who has a plan. It involves being a guide and a motivator, yet someone who is also fair and establishes trust with staff. Moreover, it includes someone who acts on what he says he will do. He keeps his word. Leadership also means being able to see the big picture. One participant stated: "Leadership is the ability to take charge and to have the ability to point people in the right direction to achieve a common goal."

2. What are some of the key qualities of an effective leader?

Management

The managers talked about leading by example and modeling a positive attitude and enthusiasm. This contributes in an important way to getting people to take the lead on certain tasks and building commitment. The effective leader allows staff to share in decision-making. This means that the leader has confidence in himself and in others. They trust their staff. This leader allows staff to make mistakes, gives credit where it is due, is open to new ideas, encourages creativity, and is able to accept criticism. As one manager noted: "You're fair game, just as everyone else is."

Not being the first to give up is probably the most valuable thing a leader can do. This sparked the following comment: "It takes a certain amount of courage if you're going to embark on a risky course of action. This implies a certain amount of courage, because a leader is not always guaranteed that he's going to be successful." Another comment was: "The only way to know that you're not going to fail is not to do anything." A third was: "You can't expect people to follow what you're not doing yourself."

Staff

The participants discussed some of the same points as the managers: motivator, open to ideas, good listener, sharing decision-making, and who delegates. However, they raised a number of other points. They believed that an effective leader is compassionate, understanding, and respectful. This leader has good people skills and strong relationships with staff. Moreover, the leader is a member of the team. Specifically, the leader has a good knowledge of the work and is able to deal with the issues. Moreover, this person is a good problem-solver and is able to make a decision and enforce it, even if it is not popular with staff. But on the other hand, the leader does not shove decisions down peoples' throats. A good leader also shares information with staff and does not keep them in the dark.

Two comments made by staff were: "A leader should be available when a problem arises and not be off in three different directions." "We have supervisors who are supposed to be leading us, but they don't have the background knowledge."

3. *Where do you see leadership being practiced, or residing, in the Moncton HRCC Zone? Who are the leaders? What makes them leaders?*

Management

In their discussion, the participants noted that while managers are the formal leaders in the Moncton Zone they do not have an exclusive right to leadership. There are natural leaders in the staff who "...will take the ball and run with it." Although there is leadership at all levels in the Moncton Zone, it needs to be understood better. In other words, the managers believed that staff do not recognize that they possess leadership qualities, and that they still tend to look to managers as being the leaders.

The discussion noted that certain staff members have natural leadership abilities, and that when they are not happy they can lead their co-workers in criticizing management. Other staff show more positive leadership that fits with organizational goals. As one manager

noted: “We need people in the workplace who understand the department and who can influence others.”

Staff

The participants noted that staff turn to their co-workers for leadership because these people may be more knowledgeable or expert, or exhibit some natural leadership qualities. When someone feels comfortable, they will step forward to take on something. People will occupy a “vacuum” in such a case. For example, caring for clients will prompt someone to step forward to take the lead. They recognize the need of the client. Some staff sense the urgency of a situation and enlist and mobilize others to act. One manager commented: “Staff may not think they’re leaders, but simply doing their jobs.” A second observed: “A culture shift is occurring. Years ago, it would have been frowned upon by stepping forward to lead. It’s becoming more acceptable.”

The first comments made in both staff focus groups were that they saw leadership in their managers and supervisors. However, they also saw leadership in their co-workers. Leadership is not just practiced by those in management positions. Staff also saw leadership being practiced by their local union president and in the social side of the office.

The participants discussed how experienced staff demonstrate leadership, and also act as mentors to their peers, even though they are not managers. There is usually a “take-charge” staff person who steps forward to lead. This is governed by the experience of managers. When a client wants to talk to the manager and he is not available, it falls to the senior staff person to deal with the issue.

Leading is an inner need to take charge and a want to do it. Some people don’t want to stand back and watch. “They step up, not because they have to but because they want to.” “They don’t do it for the bucks.” But it was also noted that sometimes people are promoted to a management position, but yet they do not have leadership qualities. These

must be developed over time. As one participant commented: “Sometimes you don’t see your managers as leaders because they’re off doing something.”

The participants talked about the importance of leadership in the context of client service. One stated: “When you have the public coming in to your office, you do need a leader. Sometimes you have a situation that arises and you need someone to take the lead.” Another noted: “People work as a team. They feed off one another. Everybody is a leader in his or her own field.” This was echoed by another participant: “Everyone has a little part in leadership.”

4. How would you like to see leadership practiced in the Moncton HRCC Zone?

Managers

The managers discussed the need for them to let go and let staff take the initiative more often. Room for mistakes needs to be made, and everyone needs to work in a spirit of cooperation and support. A climate of shared leadership needs to be fostered, but it should be introduced in steps. Comments from this discussion included: “Shared leadership is less based on authority and based more on influencing people through a participatory process, not just through your thinking as a manager.” “Shared leadership needs to be nurtured to ensure it continues.”

Staff

The participants talked about better communication in the workplace. They expressed that managers need to be more approachable and accessible. They spend too much time in meetings, leaving experienced staff to deal with client and other issues. When staff do get to see their managers, they are often interrupted by phone calls or other employees.

The participants talked about the need for a better balance in leadership, for example, making decisions as a team, more negotiations with staff, getting closer to staff, and listening more to them. Staff want a stronger presence from their managers; they do not want to be babysat. Moreover, they want their managers to pitch in to help with the work.

As one participant commented: “Managers are so busy with their own positions that they’re not there for staff.” It was also noted that leadership has changed for the better in the Moncton Zone.

One topic that was brought up concerned performance appraisals. Staff want them reintroduced because they are receiving little feedback from managers. This feedback does not have to be done formally, such as with performance appraisals. What is required is informal, regular feedback on how staff are performing their duties.

5. *What are your thoughts on, or reactions to, the concept of shared leadership? What are the potential benefits of creating such a workplace? What are some potential challenges?*

Management

The participants agreed that shared leadership is the best way of leading and the “healthiest.” It represents a continuum, in which one starts by getting staff ready to assume leadership roles. The organization then gradually moves to fully shared leadership. Creating a workplace based on shared leadership cannot be done overnight. It is a process that takes time. People need to share values, which bind them together.

A workplace based on shared leadership would include several key characteristics:

1. More motivated and happier staff who enjoy coming to work.
2. Greater creativity and new ideas.
3. An easier change process because people would be involved in making decisions.
4. A greater sense of ownership by staff and a personal commitment to the department.

Managers would assume new leadership roles, engaging in activities that they had been putting off due to other priorities. Moreover, some of the anxiety that managers experience would diminish because when out of the office their staff would “rise to the occasion.”

The managers in the session also noted a number of challenges with such a workplace. To begin with, a lot has to occur in the organization before people are prepared to take a stand on their personal convictions. One participant posed the question: “Do we have the maturity, as an organization, in which people can make the decision to leave because their values don’t mesh with those of the organization?”

They noted that there are still barriers in work processes that are preventing shared leadership from happening. These need to be removed. The participants discussed individual barriers, in which some staff may not feel confident about changing themselves. It will take time for people to change, and it will be harder for some. Furthermore, some staff won’t change. As managers, the participants agreed that they have to understand this. Some staff prefer command and control, and want to be told what to do. Not everyone has to be a leader.

Other challenges that were raised include staff still seeing management as a separate class. Managers have the power and the authority. Staff, they noted, need to understand that managers perform certain functions, and are not people who possess status and authority. As one participant observed: “As an organization, we’re still a functional structure, which is a barrier to leadership. There are too many people who hold authority over things that you need to mobilize when you try to get something done.”

One other challenge is the issue of “turfs.” To get something done in the federal government can be very frustrating because managers have to get many people on side. When things get rough, staff should not think that it becomes the manager’s responsibility. However, they need to be helped to develop the skills and to be given the tools to address these situations.

The issue of traditional management-labour relations was raised as being a barrier to shared leadership. The local Moncton union is not a problem, but there are issues at the

regional level. The adversarial “paradigm” of management-union relations must be overcome.

One participant emphasized that “You can’t decree shared leadership.” Another stated: “If you try to stifle leadership in an organization where you want people to be intrinsically motivated, you’re working at cross purposes.” One other comment made was: “[Shared leadership] is based on the type of organization we want, where people aren’t controlled and monitored, and where we’re results-based, and where people get meaning from work. Leadership needs to be throughout.”

Staff

The two sessions produced a wide variety of comments and ideas. One participant noted that the organization could get into difficulties if shared leadership is pursued because of potential inequities in how clients would be served. This problem exists already because some staff bend the rules more than others and go out of their way to help clients. This participant noted that “chaos” could result with shared leadership.

A decision-making process would still be required in a shared leadership workplace. Criteria have to be followed and strictly monitored. It is a nice concept on paper, but it would be different to see it practiced. Management is trying, but they are not recognizing how burned out staff have become. If staff try to take a role in leadership, it adds to their workloads. More resources are needed if staff are to do their jobs and play a role with management.

Pushing down decision-making sounds good, but staff have had the experiences where those “on the top” would not pitch in. The attitude of managers was “It’s not my job.” Going to shared leadership means more work for staff. Moreover, when people are appointed to management positions, their workloads are shifted to staff.

Some participants commented that shared leadership is a good concept and has worked to a degree in the branch offices. But there are consequences to it, e.g., it becomes harder to make decisions. Thus the need to have formal leaders in place.

The union has raised the issue of staff taking the initiative to serve clients if they are paid at a different level than other staff (e.g., branch offices). This introduces the issue of equal pay. It creates a tension between the union and staff: serving clients versus maintaining the principle of being paid for your work. One participant stated: “The union is in a way a hindrance to the process of sharing leadership.”

Some of the comments made were: “The concept of shared leadership is not realistic to the Zone unless there are fundamental changes in how management is practiced.” “It’s a good idea, but management needs to provide the time and resources to make it happen.” To what degree is management prepared to accept this concept?”

The participants discussed some of the potential benefits of a workplace based on shared leadership. More work would get done. Staff would have a better sense of accomplishment. There would be lower stress and staff would get along better. Staff would be happier. And staff would show more initiative because they would not get the “run-around.” They would know to whom they could go for assistance. Staff would be able to lead projects without having to be in a formal leadership position. Clients would be served better. As one participant noted: “With a good team, you have shared leadership. You can’t have one without the other.”

There are a number of challenges. Some staff would “buck” the system, refusing to participate in such a workplace. There would also be a need to eliminate the mindset that staff at higher levels of classifications could say to their peers: “It’s not my job.” Creating better team-work would have some problems as a result. There could also be power struggles among those who do not want to share leadership. Trying to sell it to managers and staff would be hard because some may not want to hear about it. One participant

commented: “Some staff don’t have the big vision.” Another stated: “Some staff just want to be told what to do.”

Some staff may not want to be leaders, while some managers will want to stay at the top of the “totem pole.” In addition, varying skill levels among staff would make it harder for some to assume more leadership. Reaching consensus would also be harder. Therefore, formal leaders would still be needed.

This led the participants to talk about poor performance and how there are no consequences for it in the federal government. Moreover, the probation period is not adhered to. As one participant stated: “The federal government is not equipped to deal with people who won’t change. In others words, people need to be fired if they don’t perform.”

6. Where does the responsibility lie to create a workplace based on shared leadership?

Management

The participants agreed that they, as managers, must initiate the process and allow it to happen. Moreover, unless they are all on board, this type of workplace will not be realized. They noted that each employee has responsibility for his or her behavior. It is “trite” to say that it is everyone’s responsibility to create a workplace of shared leadership. Some people are less participatory. They just want to do their work.

Two questions were posed by participants: 1) What do you have to do to move along the continuum of shared leadership? 2) What is needed in terms of changing the organization’s structure?

Some of the comments made included: “You can’t dictate shared leadership in the old-fashioned way. That’s the challenge.” “What you’re trying to do is to get people to participate on a basis other than doing exactly what they’re told to do.” “You can only go as far as people will take you in a point in time.”

Staff

The staff sessions reflected some of the above comments. These participants agreed that the responsibility to create such a workplace must start with management. Specifically, senior management must begin the process, then move it down to middle management. From there it would go to team leaders. However, it was also noted that staff need to be willing to work together to see this workplace emerge. They must learn to listen, communicate, and be more flexible. As one individual commented: “It’s one thing to have the best manager in the world, but people still need to collaborate.”

It was also explained that shared leadership is more of an issue in the Moncton main office because it is much larger and has more functional areas. It is not an issue in the branch offices because leadership is already being shared. The comments were made: “Management must show the lead here and show initiative in moving the shared leadership concept forward.” “It has to come from the top. That it’s promoted and encouraged.”

Some of the participants believed that the distance between staff and management has actually widened. There is a new hierarchy of directors, managers, team leaders, and team consultants. The decision-making process is slowing down. Staff need to be able to talk to their managers about this. As one person stated: “If you have a good idea but your manager won’t listen to you, then what’s the use.”

There was also concern raised over the need to get rid of the “bad apples.” Management must stop avoiding the problem of staff who are not pulling their weight. The need to reintroduce performance appraisals was again emphasized.

7. *What do you see as your needs to develop your leadership abilities?*

Management

The discussion among the managers was less focused on their individual needs and more on management in general. They noted that the management group needs to be on the same wavelength; otherwise it will be hard if each manager goes his or her own way in fostering shared leadership. The employee appraisal process must be brought back in order to have a way to give feedback. This will help managers be more effective. In addition, feedback is needed from clients to help assess the performance of managers and staff.

A lack of time is a big issue because it prevents managers from taking learning activities. They end up missing out on these opportunities. One manager commented that he is interested in training workshops on best practices.

Staff

These discussions, similar to the management session, were oriented around employees in general. It was stated that not everyone can be a team leader, nor can people be forced to be leaders. Staff want to be team players, but hesitate to be team leaders. They're not sure if they want to make the tough decisions.

It was noted, however, that staff should be given the opportunities to gain leadership experience through assignments and projects. This would give those who are interested the chance to develop and practice leadership skills. One other comment was that training and working to lay the groundwork for shared leadership is important. Moreover, one participant stated that managers need to be sold on the concept of shared leadership.

A concern was raised that as a result of the organization having lost many experienced employees during the past few years that managers may not want to let go of those who are interested in assignments, especially staff with more experience.

Specific areas of concern that were flagged by some participants were communication training, people skills training, and training on guidelines on how to deal with problem employees. This sparked the comment about problem employees, or “bad apples.” Managers in the federal government have more limits imposed on them than in the private sector. These limits can not be crossed if the manager does not want to create problems for himself or herself.

8. *If you had a few minutes to talk to the Deputy Minister about leadership, what would you say to her?*

Management

The first point made by the managers was to eliminate the red tape so that they can enable their staff to take more initiative. Moreover, one manager urged to “Stop making everything so complicated.” One stated: “If you want to break down the barriers, get rid of them.”

The comment was made that being told by the Minister to take a “softer approach” with clients but having to do things the same way is difficult. One participant added: “If we’re going to talk value-added, then hold everyone accountable for it.”

Staff

One participant stated that he would tell the Deputy Minister to listen to the findings in this research project. A second added that action would be needed on the researcher’s report.

Managers, they agreed, need to look after their staff, which includes listening to them. Senior management says that it wants peoples’ opinions on such issues as client service, but they don’t listen. As one participant commented: “Managers need to consult the grassroots before making decisions. Frontline staff are the ones who see it every day.”

Better tools are needed in the local offices because they are the ones serving clients. Regional office and National Headquarters should not have better equipment than the local offices. They look after themselves first.

The issue of problem employees was raised again. “It’s time to have some restrictions lifted from management on how managers can deal with problem employees. These employees are causing morale problems while the workload has increased while the number of staff has decreased.”

Several comments were made on the thankless job of being a manager. Few people are interested in management positions. One person would ask the Deputy why is this so? Why don’t staff want to apply for these positions? “Management positions are stress and no thanks. Why would anyone want to do it?”

One participant would want to ask: “Does the Deputy Minister have a plan, or will she be overtaken by events?” Another would ask: “What does leadership mean to her? Because how leadership is practiced by senior management may be very different from what staff see it as.” This was also noted by another person who would suggest to the Deputy that the “picture” of shared leadership held by senior management probably is not the same as that held by staff. Even if management expresses its desire to see shared leadership introduced, staff will be skeptical.

9. Have we missed any key points in our discussion?

Management

A few observations were made in the management session. Managers were not sure if staff recognize when they are sharing leadership, yet they often do. “In the end, maybe some staff do realize they’re showing leadership. It’s about their self-perceptions.” “Are we, as managers, recognizing when staff share leadership? Do staff know that management recognizes this?”

This links back to where people associate leadership with formal position. But people demonstrate leadership outside of work with their families and in their communities. They need to see this: that leadership is something that is done on a day-to-day basis and under a whole range of circumstances.

Staff

One of the focus groups had nothing to add for this question. The other group, however, made several points. Staff used to be scared to make decisions. There are still people who need structure and to be told what to do. Good leaders are still needed in management, especially at the top of the organization.

There is a serious need to address the problem of those employees who are not carrying their weight. Downsizing and increased workload mean that the organization cannot afford to have employees who do not pull their own weight. It will be that much more difficult to introduce shared leadership if this problem is not addressed. Unfortunately, managers' hands are partly tied. As one participant expressed: "If everyone slacked off and did it regularly, who would do the work?"

Managers attend conferences and training courses to develop their leadership skills. However, they don't have time to practice these skills because they're never in the office. Staff end up having to manage themselves. Linked to this comment was another in which staff do not want to see the situation where shared leadership means managers pushing problems down to staff. Managers need to support their staff. As person one noted: "If a manager can't lead, how can they show others to lead?"

Two other comments made were: "Leadership shouldn't be as the old supervisor, which was like a dictatorship and a babysitter." "The organization has progressed a lot over the last few years. There used to be harassment and top-down management."

Major Themes

The discussions in the three focus groups produced many points and issues of concern to managers and staff. The inter-relationships among issues, when analyzed, reveal six main themes. Identifying these themes is helpful in initiating a conversation among management, union, and staff.

1. Staff want their managers to be more visible and accessible, and to work alongside them. This means that managers must understand the work of the units they manage.
2. While staff want to share in decision-making, they understand that managers play an important leadership role and must sometimes make tough decisions.
3. Unions have a key role to play in helping create an environment of shared leadership, but there must be a change in the union-management relationship.
4. Poor performers and those staff who resist change and create problems need to be dealt with. This is an issue for senior management.
5. It is important that senior management hear the needs and concerns of staff and to invite their active participation to improve the workplace.
6. The perceptual gaps in understanding shared leadership among staff and between management and staff must be closed. This requires opening up communication among everyone.

4.1.2 Interviews

Six telephone interviews were conducted with two managers and four staff during October 1999. The interviews lasted between 50 and 70 minutes, and were recorded on audio tape with the permission of the participants. To preserve the anonymity that the participants requested, their comments are presented as a composite. No operational unit is referred to in which a participant works. Although males and females were interviewed, to maximize anonymity the pronoun “he” is used in the narrative.

1. Describe a workplace in which you would like to work. What would it look and feel like?

From a physical perspective, people talked about a workplace that was open and bright, with good quality lighting. The “maze effect” of cubicles would not exist, although units would be divided off from one another. Within units, there would be short baffles that would allow some privacy but this would also not impede interaction among team members. They also noted the importance of having a more casual, relaxed, and less stressful workplace. Laughter would be an important element.

Those staff who do not serve clients directly would be located farther back in the office to give them a quiet space in which to work. There would also be more meeting rooms, which are now in short supply. The workplace would also be “neat” and “professional” in appearance.

There was a high degree of consistency in what the participants said about the people side of this workplace. They envisioned an environment where co-workers would be on the same “wavelength.” They would collaborate, share responsibility, support one another (including during times of personal difficulty), and know their jobs and priorities. Teamwork would prevail. The team would decide how to manage its work.

People would care about one another and pull their own weight and work hard. They would make good decisions and be able to “take the ball and run with it.” Communication would be open, and problems resolved constructively. People would trust one another and their intentions. This means that people would respect one another and value their differences. They would be comfortable raising issues at both the management team and staff team levels. Staff would be able to have honest discussions with their managers.

Staff would share important values, such as providing clients with the best service possible. Decision-making would be shared, and this would be done at the appropriate

level. Producing results that would be visible would be very important in this type of workplace.

Units would be smaller with less than 15 people, and classification levels would be more uniform. There would also be flexibility for those who wanted to telecommute from their homes. However, these individuals would also be in the office weekly to communicate with their co-workers. Some people prefer more autonomy in their work and do not place as much emphasis on daily social interactions. This would need to be respected as well.

They also saw the need for a manager to address such issues as budgeting, dealing with irate clients, and major issues. However, staff would decide on day-to-day issues, such as priorities, overtime, and distributing the workload.

2. How would leadership be practiced in this workplace?

- a) Where do you see yourself as a leader in this workplace? (your expectations)*
- b) What supports would you need to assume more leadership in your workplace?*

Leadership would be shared among staff. One participant noted, however, that more supervision would probably be needed at the front end of the main office because of the larger number of staff and the high pace and stress of dealing with client walk-in traffic. This means that there would be an important role for a manager to play. In this envisioned workplace, the manager would deal with such issues as facilitating the sharing of information; dealing with difficult client cases; budgets and resources; and longer-term, strategic issues and planning.

On a day-to-day basis, staff would work largely in a shared, collaborative mode, taking into consideration those areas where more direct supervision may be needed. Staff would be considerate of one another, take ownership of their work, and collaborate. It was suggested that staff would assume the leads for different tasks or projects.

Another participant commented: “Shared leadership would be ideal in this workplace.” People would collaborate and trust one another; they would not have to look over their shoulders. However, he stated that he was not sure if shared leadership would work in the Moncton main office as a result of its size. Another noted that the “readiness” level of the Moncton main office for shared leadership is higher within the smaller units. Larger ones are having more difficulties because of the larger number of diverse personalities and work styles. Furthermore, some staff do not take responsibility as seriously as others do, nor do they exhibit the same degree of caring for their peers. One comment was: “Some staff are not aware of the impact of their behaviors on peers and clients.”

People are on different levels of understanding in terms of shared leadership. In particular, some staff require more direct supervision. The comment was made that people have to change, but some more than others. If pressed too hard to adapt to a shared leadership workplace, these individuals could end up taking stress leave. This prompted the comment: “The people in a shared leadership team would need to be selected carefully. Those needing direct supervision might not be able to work in this environment.”

The manager of a unit would work among his staff, not in an enclosed office. He would have access to a meeting room when it was necessary to have a private conversation with an employee. Managers would hold regular meetings with staff, during which information would be shared, workload issues discussed, and priorities set by the team. Decision-making and power would be shared with the team by the manager. The manager would be a true member of the team.

The participants had high expectations of themselves as leaders in this envisioned workplace. They would perform high quality work and carry their share of the load. They would consult with their peers if they did not know the answer to a problem. Moreover, they would contribute to helping resolve team issues and making it work effectively. One person stated: “You’ve got to take responsibility, and I believe that I would do this. I take

initiative and responsibility. I don't see myself going to my manager very often. I solve issues with my team. We seldom go to our manager.”

Another person explained that he saw himself as a coach in this workplace, helping guide teammates. He would have higher expectations of himself and others in this environment, compared to his current role as team leader. An example given was that of greater consistency in how work would be done. People would understand their roles and responsibilities.

Leadership, to one person, meant being “...more pro-active in choosing which cases to deal with. It would mean more control and authority to decide what to address.” For this person, it would be important to have more flexibility and not having to follow what national headquarters prescribes.

The ability to respond to community feedback was identified as key to one person's leadership in this workplace. As a leader, he would not “spread himself as thin,” enabling himself to focus more on value-added work and priorities that fit with the community. He would be able to decide where his time would be better spent, and avoid dealing in areas where he has less of an impact.

The manager would also play the role of facilitator, enabling staff to assume greater leadership roles. In addition, one person (a manager) explained that he would continue learning, for example, observing good leaders inside and outside of government. Moreover, he would help his co-managers learn more about leadership. To do this means that managers must “let go” and enable staff to take on more leadership. Doing this would free up time for managers to learn new ideas and skills. “Time is always such a big factor. We need more time to be creative. We tend to go from one thing to the next.”

One suggestion was to create a managerial development position to help free up managers' time. Managers get involved in so many projects that they do not have time to

be creative or to plan properly. This led to the comment: “If staff learn to develop and become more comfortable taking a greater leadership role it does free up the manager’s time to do things that would improve the work environment.”

On the topic of what supports would managers and staff need to assume more leadership, the participants had some difficulty identifying what they personally would need.

Training in the areas of people skills (the “soft” skills as one person noted) was noted the most often. Training in staff relations, community consultation, mentoring and coaching, and leadership were also flagged. One person noted that a course such as Dale Carnegie would be very beneficial because it helps improve one’s self confidence and communication skills.

One person stated that the supports he would need would include better communication from the zone director and his manager in terms of expectations: what needs to be done and why. This person wants some upward influence on how decisions are made. “You can’t have shared leadership if decisions are dumped on us. Involve us in some of these decisions. Talk to us. Get our input.”

The suggestion was made to have a “staff advocate,” someone who would do research on course offerings, including workshops and conferences. Managers, this person observed, get to attend all of the conferences, but staff seldom get to go. Staff want to be included in being able to attend these events. The staff advocate would keep track of these events and share information. “It’s important to have these [events] for staff in a shared leadership workplace because it keeps morale up and the spirit alive.”

A few people noted that developmental assignments would be helpful, although it was pointed out that it would be important to be able to do the work in the unit to which one was assigned. One person also talked about the need for greater flexibility and delegated responsibility from his manager so that he could focus better on the needs of the community.

3. What would you bring as assets to such a workplace? And what could you do personally to help create this workplace?

The participants spoke about the knowledge they possess of the jobs and their abilities to do them well. They bring a sense of humour, enthusiasm, collaboration, and a commitment to serving clients well. One noted that his desire to perform his work well “rubs off” on others. Another stated: “My positive attitude is what I could personally do to move the shared leadership agenda forward.”

Two people stated that they bring significant involvement in community service to HRDC. Volunteer work enables them to look at HRDC from the “outside,” which helps them to understand the needs of the community and partners, as well as their perceptions of government.

One person noted a willingness to “let go” and share decision-making with staff. “I’m flexible and allow people to put ideas into place. There’s no such thing as a bad idea, only ideas that can be improved upon.” Another stated that he brings a strong belief in the strength of the team. “I’ve always believed that despite how smart you are, you’re never as smart as a group of people together.” This person added that he brings the ability to consult and his belief in involving people in making decisions.

During the conversations with the participants, one shared the anecdote of a longstanding employee (not part of the research participants) who had never been asked “what do you think about this issue” by his managers over the years. His current manager discovered this by asking this question during a work-related discussion. Now this individual is an active participant in meetings and contributes positively because he was finally asked “what do you think?”

When asked the second part of this question on what could the participant do personally to help create the envisioned workplace, some people were hesitant to respond. They

required some prompting to help put them in a frame of reference in which they could speak on how they could empower themselves.

One person, who jumped right into the question, stated that he could help create this workplace because he's not scared to take on new challenges and to try out new ideas. Another noted his commitment to seeing things get done. One person explained that he would inform his peers and superiors of his expectations and vision of his desired workplace. Moreover, he would stress what would be in it for these people to get them to share in this vision. A comment from another person was that, as a manager, he would initiate change and involve people more.

A more qualified statement came from someone who said that while he would bring his ideas to his manager, he realizes that his manager must deal with constraints and still produce results. Along a similar track, another person acknowledged that while he is listened to by his manager, there are still many rules to follow from national headquarters. But he still believes that he could exert an influence on how he works.

4. How realistic is this workplace? What needs to be done to see it emerge?

A relatively high degree of uniformity was evident in the responses from all six participants. They believed that a workplace based on shared leadership is realistic. The participants who are managers were a little more optimistic than the staff participants. Some important caveats as to how realistic this is were made during the conversations. First, it would be necessary to have the right people in place. They would need to be on the same wavelength and want to get along with one another. Second, a shared leadership approach to work exists to a large extent in the branch offices and even in some of the small units in the main office. In the large units in the main office more personality styles are evident, creating a more diverse group of people with different needs and expectations.

Third, it was noted that some staff in the front end are more strongly committed to serving clients. For example, some staff will open to serve the public, even when it is their turn to be closed. The instance was given where a clerk who is closed to serving the public (based on rotational shifts) may choose to open to help deal with a busy waiting room. On the other hand, some staff who are closed have to be told by their manager to open. This led to the comment: "I can't see a shared leadership approach in the front end because of their size and the nature of their work by serving clients directly in a fast-paced, high stress environment."

While one person said that he believes that shared leadership is very realistic, what would need to happen is to get people to work together. That would be the hardest part. There might also be a need for some organizational development interventions to deal with specific cases. The reason for this is that some people do not want to collaborate and do not trust others. "Some have the view that knowledge is power. Sharing knowledge is power gained to you. But not everyone sees this"

Another person stated that the office is already moving towards shared leadership. However, to move it forward (in response to the second part of the question), managers and staff need to be given the tools. This would require training in conflict resolution and inter-personal communication. "Soft skills" training would be an important element of this.

Staff also need to be allowed to make mistakes. "You can't put people down for making them." Moreover, managers need to learn to let go and to let staff decide things for themselves.

People must have a shared understanding of what is intended, in terms of a vision for working together. "We need to have everyone on board in terms of how leadership is practiced." Not only must managers be open, but staff must be open as well. This means that communication would play a critically important role in creating a workplace based

on shared leadership. Once staff see the benefits, then shared leadership will start to take hold. It was also stressed that patience is needed if this new way of working together is to advance.

One caution put forward by a few participants was the need to move gradually towards shared leadership. It needs to be introduced in steps. For example, the branch offices may be able to teach those in the main office what they have learned about sharing leadership. The same applies to those in small units in the main office. They may have something to share as well with the larger units.

What is needed, therefore, is a change in attitude on the part of some people in the office. Younger staff, for example, seem to be more open to shared leadership than those who are older. There is also the mindset of “What’s in it for me” that must be addressed. Moreover, there is the need to find the time to see this happen. “If we’re running all the time, it’s hard to see ahead.”

The union, it was noted, must play a role in creating this new workplace. However, one staff person observed that the union may not be prepared for this new mode of working together. They may perceive it as another attempt by management to push more work and responsibility onto the shoulders of staff. If this perception is not to occur, it is important to communicate and to involve the union from the start.

5. Do you feel there’s a gap in how managers and staff understand the meaning of shared leadership? If yes, how can this gap be closed?

While a few participants stated that they perceive a gap between how managers and staff understand shared leadership, it was more readily acknowledged that there may be a gap within management itself, and moreover that staff are on very different levels of understanding. One staff participant noted that management sees the bigger picture, concentrating to some extent on conceptual ideas. To this person, shared leadership is about how he does his work. Moreover, he stated that it is important to begin a discussion

on this topic among managers and staff to clear up misunderstandings on what shared leadership is and how it could be practiced in HRCC Moncton.

One participant stated that while there appears to be a general understanding among the management group on what shared leadership means, they do have a lot more to learn about how this is practiced. Furthermore, there is still the perception that staff see managers as “bosses.” Staff may not fully understand their roles in how decisions and power are shared. Perhaps up to half of the staff are not yet comfortable with the notion of shared leadership.

Another view was that most staff know what shared leadership is, but they do not want anything to do with it because it involves taking more responsibility and decision-making. As he stated: “It’s a ‘We’ thing, and not ‘I do this and this is my job,’ and then I go home....I think people who like shared leadership like it, and people who don’t like it, don’t. I don’t think there’s really a medium in it. Either they’re for it or against it.”

This participant was not sure how management sees shared leadership. They seem to understand it by consulting more with staff. But they have not gone the next step to sharing power and decision-making. “The situation is better now, but there is room for improvement.”

Another person commented that what he observes is that certain things are not communicated clearly to staff, for example, performance expectations. More face-to-face communication is needed to clear up misunderstandings on such issues as roles and responsibilities and expectations. He also noted that he was not sure if there is a gap in how people understand shared leadership. Staff may have different views from management. But what is required is to define clearly what shared leadership means. Furthermore, he was not sure himself just how far the Moncton office could proceed with implementing it. Some people prefer working in a more controlled and structured

environment, while others prefer more flexibility and autonomy. People have different personalities and they desire different work arrangements.

Closing the gap will involve a lot of communication and hard work to gradually create a workplace of shared leadership. Talking about it openly and then beginning to practice it is essential. New tools and techniques would be helpful. Managers also need to work closely with their units to move this forward. They must make a sincere attempt to invite people's participation.

Finally, there needs to be a stated commitment from the director that this is how the Moncton HRCC is going to operate in the future. "The old way of managing doesn't work; it's not acceptable." There was also a suggestion that managers should be assessed on how they manage and lead. The 360 degree feedback instrument will be helpful once it is introduced in the New Brunswick Region.

6. What other final comments would you like to make on the topic of leadership?

One staff member commented: "I think shared leadership is a good concept. I'm willing to try it. It's something to work towards. However, it's important to understand what management envisions and what are its expectations." This statement captured to a large extent what the participants expressed. They noted that shared leadership would make their work more challenging and interesting. As another person explained: "I've proven myself as an employee and would like to be given more responsibility in how I do my work and more input into decision-making. It's very frustrating to be told what to do" This was echoed by another person who asserted: "You need to be able to express your opinions and to be taken seriously."

Despite the potential it offers to the Moncton HRCC, shared leadership should be introduced gradually and in steps. For example, start with the branch offices and the smaller units in the main office. Moreover, it is important to learn from mistakes along the way and then adjust.

Much more communication is needed to improve the overall understanding of what shared leadership is and what will be involved to implement it. One person commented: “We have a lot of good leaders among ourselves. People already share leadership to a degree, but if they understood it better that would help. It’s still too gray, not clear, about what we’re talking about. A lot of staff think that management is trying to shove this concept down on them.”

One upbeat view was that if we can start this in the right process and get staff on board, then they will be happier and more productive. They would look forward to going to work every day. Shared leadership connects with the Supporting People initiative, and is “...the way of the future.” A similar set of comments came from a participant, who noted: “There’s a leadership role for everyone, no matter who they are within the organization. If that is allowed to grow and blossom, then we’ll all be a lot better off.”

Another perspective was given by a staff participant, who believed that management has made a significant effort to accommodate staff in their work environments. Management has worked at involving staff in leadership issues. He was not sure how much more management could do in this area. As he observed: “Staff have been given a lot of opportunities.... We can spend all of our time looking for ourselves and at ourselves as to how we can better fit in this organization. I think we also have to keep in mind who we’re serving.”

Major Themes

The interviews with the six individuals generated a great deal of insightful comments and perspectives into the workplace of the Moncton HRCC. The following seven themes incorporate the issues raised.

1. Staff want to see a collaborative workplace founded upon trust, in which people support one another, pull their own weight, communicate openly, respect their diversity, share decision-making, and are accountable for their results.
2. Managers and staff believe in creating a workplace based on shared leadership, but also acknowledge that much work is needed to raise the level of understanding and acceptance among all employees. The branch offices and the small units in the main office can share their experiences in leadership with the larger units.
3. There exists a perception gap between management and staff in how they perceive leadership.
4. Training in inter-personal communication is needed, as well as mentoring and coaching.
5. Staff want to have influence in decisions. This goes to the heart of inclusiveness.
6. Staff bring a wealth of experience and personal attributes to work, including community service work.
7. The union has an important role to play in creating a workplace of shared leadership.

The themes that emerged from the personal interviews were similar to those from the focus groups. There were, however, some differences, explained in part by the different set of questions asked by the researcher. The staff focus groups talked about the need for greater visibility from their managers and improved access to them. Moreover, they recognized the lead role that their managers play. The interviews did not generate these topics. However, they produced discussions on the attributes employees bring to the organization, including experience acquired from community service. The interview

participants also talked about the work that is needed to increase the understanding and acceptance of shared leadership among employees.

4.2 Study Conclusions

The focus group discussions and interviews produced a rich, qualitative database. Although several themes emerged, the overall result was shared agreement on key issues. Managers and staff seem to be genuinely committed to creating a better workplace, one where morale and performance are high, where clients are served well, where innovation flourishes, and where mutual respect underscores work relationships.

An overarching theme of the focus groups and interviews was the need for a change in the culture of the organization. There is a collective growing realization that the management group must work together as a team if a shared leadership workplace is to evolve. More specifically, this means that managers need to work systematically at sharing power and decision-making with staff and fostering a workplace that prides itself on initiative and innovation. With that said, the management group is very aware of the challenges that exist in changing the culture of the Moncton HRCC. It will take time and patience on the part of everyone.

The orientation of the managers' discussion was around participative management, modeling the desired behaviours, motivating staff, and sharing power and decision-making. Staff placed a great deal of emphasis on trust, fairness, leading by example, and honesty (managers keeping their word). This focuses on integrity. Moreover, staff stressed the need for both greater visibility of managers and access to them. In short, staff want to have quality time with their managers, and not be interrupted constantly when they do get to meet with them.

As this research project discovered, staff hold certain perceptions of what they believe is how management thinks and acts. Conversely, managers hold their own perceptions of staff. Many of the discussions in the three focus groups, and the interviews to a lesser extent, contained references to “they.” For example, staff recognize that they are informal leaders, especially more experienced people. Management believes, however, that staff do not see themselves as leaders and that they need to understand this. Conversely, management feels very stretched and overworked, and that staff are not fully appreciative of this. But staff do see what their managers face and the stress they are under. They want to contribute in a meaningful way.

A second example is the managers did not spend much time talking about what they need to do to change as leaders. Staff, likewise, discussed what managers had to do to change, but spoke little on what they need to do themselves. Managers believed that they must allow people time to change, and that some staff will not be able to make the transition. Again, this was a “They” attitude. This reflects what Oshry (1995) describes as The Dance of the Blind Reflex (see literature review). The other party is the one that needs to change.

Staff see their potential as informal leaders in their workplace, and they want to have this recognized. However, they also want to see formal leadership continue as a key element. Most staff are not interested in becoming managerial leaders. It is a thankless job, as some participants expressed. They are much more interested in creating a collaborative environment, in which people work as the members of a team and everyone contributes. This includes having their managers more closely involved in their day-to-day work. However, staff also want their managers to act as leaders.

Staff stated that they do not aspire to managerial positions. Is this attitude the result, in part, of a mental model that equates management with leadership? The literature, as discussed previously, is still influenced to a large degree by the heroic leadership mindset. Bennis and Biederman (1997), Block (1993), and Kotter (1996), for example, explain in

similar fashion that leadership is still equated with the strong individual, who operates in an autocratic manner. Helgesen (1996) argues that our insistence to associate leadership with position is out of step with how organizations are changing. Those organizations that learn to distribute power will have made a significant leap forward. To achieve this requires a significant change in an organization's culture.

The researcher's interpretation of the lack of desire by staff to advance to managerial leadership positions is supported by the hesitation of some participants in the interviews when answering the question: "Describe a workplace in which you would like to work." This type of question, based on an appreciative inquiry approach, seemed to throw some of the participants off stride because it forced them to envision a desirable future. They were being asked to talk about possibilities, not complain about what has been.

One challenge will be how to marry the desire by staff for an informal, collaborative workplace with management's view that leadership needs to be pushed down into the organization, despite some people not being receptive to this new approach. Moreover, there is a clear difference in how informal leadership is practiced in the three small branch offices compared to the main office. What lessons can the main office staff learn from their peers in the local offices? How can these lessons, where appropriate, be applied?

There is a tension between staff wanting to serve clients as well as possible yet respecting the union's stand on pay issues and classification. There is an obvious need for dialogue here, especially since the concepts of shared leadership, borderlessness, and inclusiveness are receiving significant attention at senior levels of the public service. How can the unions be brought into these issues in a constructive way so that the end result is a more effective public service that provides a superior level of service to Canadians?

Linked to is this the heated issue of problem employees who do not contribute sufficiently to their unit's work. Of all the issues discussed, this was the one in both staff focus groups that witnessed the most heated discussions. Staff are no longer prepared to put up

with those co-workers who are not pulling their own weight or who refuse to adapt to a changing workplace. They want senior management to address this problem as soon as possible.

The next step, now that awareness has been enhanced in the Moncton HRCC, is to begin to create a dialogue. Despite challenges and some obstacles, which are prevalent in any bureaucracy, the future looks bright for the Moncton HRCC. The management group wants to effect positive change, and staff appear willing to work with them. It is now a matter of bringing the two sides together, in partnership with the unions, to achieve a mutual understanding and appreciation of one another's roles and expectations. Moreover, it will enable them to chart a course for action.

4.3 Study Recommendations

The recommendations presented below are relevant not only to the Moncton HRCC but to the New Brunswick Region, as a whole. The issues that were uncovered during this research project are not unique to Moncton. The first two recommendations are directed towards the organization. Those that follow are presented for consideration by the Moncton management group.

1. Research

Human Resources Development Canada needs to conduct further research into the area of shared leadership (see Future Research, 5.2), with the thrust being a shift in its culture in how decisions are made and how power is shared. Cultural change is a process that takes a great deal of time. As the focus groups discussed in this project, shared leadership can be seen as a continuum. Moving to a new culture in the organization needs to proceed in steps.

2. Poor Performance

The issue of employees who do not pull their weight at work is outside the scope of this project. However, it is raised because of the attention it received by both staff focus groups. This issue is an important one for senior management to address because it became very clear to the researcher that it is having a large, negative impact on the morale of staff.

3. Dialogue

To help close the gap between managers and staff, in terms of how they perceive each other's understanding of leadership, the researcher offers some suggestions. A dialogue needs to be opened using such means as regular informal meetings with staff, in which the director and his managers talk candidly about what is on their minds. This could include the director meeting occasionally with a small group of staff over lunch or coffee. Moreover, managers should build in more time for frequent, yet short, meetings where they and their staff can talk about issues, but not just operational concerns. The point here is that staff want more visibility from the management group and more access to them.

One powerful method to create a conversation among management, staff, and the unions is Open Space Technology. The purpose of Open Space is to bring everyone in the organization (e.g., HRCC Moncton) together to engage in frank discussions on issues of mutual concern. Owen (1997), the creator of this methodology, explains that in Open Space people decide what they want to talk about, but they approach this from the perspective of making things better in their organization. Moreover, it should be seen as the beginning of a sustained dialogue, not as the solution. Open Space forums range from one to three days, depending on such factors as operational constraints and the extent to which the organization wishes to develop action plans.

A key strength of Open Space is that it is founded upon the principle of inclusiveness. In the context of this research project, the Moncton managers and staff would

collaboratively create the agenda for the issues to discuss at a forum, and subsequently develop an action plan to improve the workplace.

An Open Space forum for the Moncton HRCC community would fit with the desire of management to engage all staff in a one or two day event, in which people would talk about the issues that are important to them. Moreover, they would emerge energized from the forum with action items on which to begin working in a collaborative manner.

This recommendation is aligned with the interest the management group expressed in the spring of 1999 when the researcher met with them to discuss his project. At that time, the director and his managers indicated a willingness to bring all staff together in the spring of 2000 to discuss workplace issues and to chart a course for the future.

4. Sharing Decision-Making

Managers need to begin to share decision-making with their staff. Doing so will give managers more time to engage in other important activities, such as learning. This connects to giving staff more opportunities to acquire leadership experience through assignments and special projects. Staff will win by enhancing their leadership skills, and managers will win because they will be able to pursue other personal interests in the area of learning and professional development.

5. Staff Advocate

The position of staff advocate should be created. This would be a boost to staff morale, and facilitate the sharing of information on course and workshop offerings. Management needs to demonstrate its commitment to learning, and this position would support this. The position could be a 12 month assignment, and be tied to the learning centre in the main office.

6. Management Apprentice

To help reduce the operational load on managers, this position would be created. It could be offered on a six to 12 month assignment basis, in which staff would submit a request to be considered. This concept links well to learning plans for staff, in which they articulate their development aspirations.

7. Community Service

The community service work in which staff engage needs to be recognized and valued much more by the organization. The experiences and skills staff gain from this work benefits HRDC in many ways, one of which is leadership.

8. Access to Managers

Staff require access and quality time with their managers to discuss work issues and other concerns. Managers need to remain sensitive to this, and ensure that they build in time each day to talk to their staff.

9. Speaking the Same Language

The creation of a “mindset,” or mental model, in which managers and staff learn to speak the same language is needed. This would greatly assist in eliminating the prevailing perception gap between managers and staff, and within staff, on what shared leadership means. Moreover, it would contribute to creating a conversation on what are the expectations of staff with respect to their leadership aspirations. The Open Space approach, as described above, is one way to initiate the conversation. But it requires a daily effort on the part of managers and staff to communicate and to express their expectations, needs, fears, and aspirations.

10. Lessons from the Branch Offices

The director and his managers should initiate a process, in which the branch offices share with the main office what they have learned about sharing leadership. This would apply especially to the larger units in the main office. This could be done as a half-day

workshop, involving a branch office employee presenting on a specific theme. The essence of the workshop would be for a conversation to begin among staff.

11. Performance Feedback and Recognition

To respond to the strong desire from staff for feedback on their performance, management needs to reinstate regular appraisals. Moreover, staff want ongoing feedback. Therefore, managers must also ensure that they take the time to give informal feedback on a regular basis to their staff. Recognizing the contributions and efforts by staff must also be given by managers. If approached sincerely and with consistency, feedback and recognition will produce immeasurable benefits to the Moncton HRCC.

12. Union Involvement

There is a key role for the local unions to play in the dialogue that is necessary between staff and management on ways to create a more inclusive workplace. And furthermore, what the impact this will have on client service. The director and his managers need to keep this at the forefront as they work with staff to improve the workplace. Likewise, the union has a responsibility to demonstrate its commitment to working in partnership.

CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Organizational Implementation

After five years of restructuring and downsizing and establishing itself as a new department, Human Resources Development Canada is now poised to enter the 21st century with a clear mandate on its role in Canadian society. Because of its scope and size, changing its culture will take several years. The many national and regional initiatives that have been introduced present a challenge to managers and staff to see them from a systems perspective. They are interdependent and affect one another, whether directly or indirectly. Layered on top of HRDC's own work are those federal government initiatives involving the renewal of the public service.

From the vantage point of a HRCC office, it can be overwhelming to attempt to respond to this juggernaut of change. Just in the area of leadership development, there is significant work being done in HRDC at the national, regional, and local levels. Perhaps the advice provided by the participants in this research project should be heeded: take the necessary time to begin creating a culture of shared leadership in the Moncton zone. Introduce it in steps.

The main office can learn from the three branch offices, which have worked in a shared decision-making mode for several years. Within the main office, some small units have begun to work in a manner reflecting shared leadership principles. They should be able to help teach the larger units. However, it may also make sense to examine reducing the size of the larger units, because this was flagged as an issue.

The Moncton HRCC may serve as a pilot for the introduction and application of a shared leadership approach in the New Brunswick Region. However, because this research report will be part of the Region's longer-term leadership development strategy, there

may be a desire on the part of senior management to see a number of pilots implemented around the New Brunswick Region.

What is of paramount importance in moving forward with shared leadership is that the New Brunswick Region take a coordinated approach, one in which the interdependencies among the various initiatives are understood and communication is open and continuous. Although Human Resource Services is very involved in leadership development, leadership needs to be seen as an overarching theme that requires the ownership and commitment of all directors and managers. Further consideration needs to be given to how the Region wishes to approach leadership development, including research.

To date, leadership development in the New Brunswick Region has been focused primarily on the workload issues of middle managers. Because they are facing so many operational demands combined with broad spans of responsibility, including in some cases very large numbers of direct reports, middle managers have little time to think about their own leadership development. Connected to this is the general lack of desire among staff to advance to managerial positions. They see the punishing demands that are placed on managers.

A challenge for the New Brunswick Region, therefore, is how to integrate better its strategy with that of national headquarters, not to mention leadership development work underway in other regions. This raises the issue of adopting a more systems-oriented approach to leadership development, one that is more corporate in nature but that also respects unique regional needs.

The interdependencies in the global economy and within organizations, as examined in the literature review, require a systems perspective. In a large bureaucracy such as HRDC, a systems approach to leadership development would address the many interconnected initiatives. Senge (1990) sees systems thinking as the cornerstone of the five disciplines. Of particular relevance to HRDC is systems thinking's strength of seeing patterns in

interdependent, complex issues. Moreover, it enables one to understand the primacy of the whole, in which those in managerial positions are able to see their organizations as webs of relationships and not as things.

Adopting a systems approach prevents what Schein (1996) explains is a backlash to change in one part of the system. Moreover, initiating change, such as in the area of leadership development, will be more successful if it is achieved by including people, not through top-down decision-making. The Web of Inclusion, as described by Helgesen (1995), encompasses everyone in an organization, as well as stakeholders. The power of the Web is its ability to create a process in which people think and act together.

One of this report's recommendations is for improved dialogue in the Moncton HRCC. At a larger level, there must also be an improvement in talking among the regions and national headquarters, with respect to a more corporate approach to developing the leadership cadre of Human Resources Development Canada. Taking a systems approach that incorporates inclusiveness would greatly facilitate the leadership development process.

5.2 Future Research

To change the culture of any large organization requires time and a sustained commitment by senior management. Furthermore, it means working towards a common understanding of what is envisioned. One major roadblock to creating a new culture of shared leadership is perceptions. Consequently, more attention and effort are required to understand the concept of shared leadership and what is involved to put it into practice. Empirical research is needed to obtain the insights, perceptions, and experiences of employees (managers and staff). This type of research would help bring the concept of shared leadership down to the working level where it can be understood and introduced at a broader level. Moreover, it would provide the catalyst to opening a dialogue between

managers and staff. This is essential if the current mindset of “they” is to be eliminated and a “we” approach to working together is adopted.

Some specific areas that are worthy of further research include:

1. Understanding what managers in HRDC actually do. What is their “work?” This could examine frontline managers, as well as those managing functional areas.
2. A variation of the above would be to examine how do managers learn? What is the optimal method of helping them develop as leaders, taking into account the operational demands they face.
3. An exploration into the mental models held by staff on why they still tend to defer to managers, with respect to decision-making. How do we transcend this mindset to actually bring about a workplace that is based on truly shared leadership?
4. Examine the role that shared leadership may play in creating the Workplace of Choice, the priority set by the current Clerk of the Privy Council Office.
5. As a next step to this research project, engage people in an Open Space forum to delve further into issues that affect the creation of a workplace of shared leadership. This would form an excellent base from which dialogue would emerge.

CHAPTER SIX LESSONS LEARNED

6.1 Research Project Lessons Learned

The research question for this project was very pertinent to Human Resources Development Canada, and more broadly the federal government. Shared leadership continues to receive significant attention by senior leaders in the Public Service of Canada. These leaders recognize that what is required is a dramatic cultural change in the federal government. The researcher understands, as well, that this type of change requires time. But it especially needs a sustained commitment on the part of senior management.

The data collection methodology that was used was timed well. HRDC employees have been subjected to a number of quantitative surveys over the past few years, the most recent being in May 1999. The qualitative approach used not only gathered a wealth of information it was also well received by managers and staff, especially the latter because it gave them a forum in which to express themselves.

The researcher's decision to initiate the focus groups ahead of schedule turned out to be a good one. Two weeks after the focus groups were held in Moncton, the office was closed for several weeks as a result of severe flooding. Because the office's employees had to relocate to temporary premises, the researcher was delayed in completing the one-on-one phone interviews. However, had he waited until later in September (the time when the flooding occurred) to do the focus groups, he would have had to reschedule until November. The lesson learned here is to expect the unexpected when carrying out a project. The flooding that affected Moncton, which stemmed from extremely heavy rain, caught everyone off guard.

The second lesson is to build in adequate buffers to one's project schedule. Projects rarely follow their schedules because of external, uncontrollable variables. Therefore, a third lesson is to be flexible and be ready to adapt one's methodology to fit the revised

schedule. In this project, the researcher ended up conducting the phone interviews over a period of three weeks in order to accommodate the work schedules of staff. Initially, the phone interviews were to be done over two days.

While the focus groups and interviews went very well, there were times that it was necessary to take more time to explain a question to a participant. People had different levels of comprehension of the questions. Some needed a specific explanation for a question, with an occasional example added. Once this was done, they would proceed with their response. Other participants were able to deal at a more general, or conceptual, level with questions. The lesson here is to be patient with participants and to help orient the question to their frame of reference. Moreover, it is also very important to be openly non-judgmental during focus groups and interviews. What is important is to invite an eclectic mix of views from people. In other words, the researcher learned the importance of openness during qualitative research.

One key learning for the researcher was the value of silence. As people, we tend to be averse to it. However, the moderator of the focus groups, Yolande Essiembre, dealt with this very well. Sometimes it required a moment of silence once a question was asked to let the participants think and reflect briefly. The lesson here is for a moderator not to immediately jump in because he or she is uncomfortable with the participants not talking. It is also important that the moderator be prepared to rephrase a question, or if necessary to prompt discussion by using an example. The skill is in knowing when and how to do this.

The researcher discovered that the focus groups provided a welcome change for managers and staff. The management session, in particular, was very relaxed and contained stimulating discussion. The managers seemed to enjoy being able to slow down for two hours and talk about leadership.

One of the most important lessons that the researcher has learned through this project, and the MALT program in total, is to be open to outcome and not attached to it. The researcher went into this project with personal beliefs and biases about leadership, in particular shared leadership. The results from the focus groups and interviews validated some of these beliefs, but more importantly they presented new insights into how people perceive and experience leadership.

The researcher intends to further the development of his competence in qualitative research by engaging in new studies. In particular, his aim is to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the design and facilitation of focus groups and one-on-one interviews. This project served as the launch point for the researcher's journey into action research.

6.2 Program Lessons Learned

Required Competencies

1c. Provide leadership

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Continued to stimulate thinking on leadership issues in HRDC through the preparation of regular newsletters and papers. These documents were shared with other federal departments via The Leadership Network and the researcher's learning site on the internet. He contributed in a very important way to the New Brunswick Region's leadership development strategy, and also provided constructive input and feedback to the national leadership strategy, referred to as the HRDC Leadership Roadmap.
- Led a research project that dealt with a topic that is receiving substantial attention in the literature and in the federal government, as well as in the private sector. His methodology sought to include employees at different levels of the organization in the

Moncton zone, thus reinforcing the importance of inclusiveness when addressing an issue (shared leadership) that has a broad ramifications for the department.

- Modeled the behaviours and leadership competencies that HRDC is encouraging, including demonstrating an ethical approach to how he worked with managers and staff on a variety of project files.

2b. Apply systems thinking to the solution of leadership and learning problems.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Recognized the interdependency among federal and departmental initiatives on leadership and learning, and strove to help others understand this.
- Demonstrated adaptability in dealing effectively with ambiguity and complexity, as it pertained to his work and environment.
- Identified patterns and trends within the organization, and more broadly at the global level, and the significance of the latter's effects on government.
- Enhanced his understanding of the consequences of when an organization does not address root causes, and the subsequent trap of fixes that fail.

5a. Identify, locate and evaluate research findings.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Gathered information that was pertinent to the research topic, including a comprehensive literature review and qualitative data.

- Selected and used data collection methods that fit well with the workplace environment and the purpose of the project. In particular, the researcher took great care in respecting the anonymity of the participants, and was successful in collecting a great deal of useful qualitative data.
- Performed a careful analysis of the findings and assessed them in the context of the project. This enabled the researcher to form conclusions and recommendations, identify areas for future research, and present lessons learned.

5b. Use research methods to solve problems.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Demonstrated a solid understanding of data collection methods and their appropriateness to a given situation.
- Used triangulation to validate the data collected.
- Identified areas for possible future research.

7b. Communicate with others through writing.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Provided substantial content in the project report, encompassing information on the organization, context within the Public Service of Canada, literature review, methodology, research findings, and lessons learned.

- The information presented in the report, based on the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, was consistent with the methodology used.
- Expressed himself clearly and concisely in the final report.
- Organized the final report in a logical manner, conforming to Royal Roads' publication policy.

Optional Competencies

1a. Describe leadership styles and theories.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Continued to read and write extensively on leadership issues at home and at work, in addition to his research project. The knowledge the researcher acquired was shared with HRDC employees, as well as with the MALT community and other outside people.

1b. Demonstrate leadership characteristics.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Maintained a sense of integrity by always treating people with respect and being open and honest with them. This included the participants in the focus groups and interviews, peer managers and superiors, and staff.
- Demonstrated his trustworthiness by safeguarding the data collected and respecting the confidentiality of the research participants.

- Took the initiative to share the findings, beginning with the HRCC Moncton management group and staff. This was done through oral presentations and the preparation and distribution of written summaries.

1e. Recognize ethical considerations.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Took every care to protect the identities of those people who participated in the focus group and the personal interviews. This was accomplished through safeguarding the data collected in written and audio-recorded form and destroying them at the completion of the project.
- Created a climate and trust for those who were involved in the focus groups and personal interviews, and ensured that everyone gave their informed consent.

4e. Help others learn.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Continued to share his learnings with co-workers, others in the Public Service of Canada, and the MALT community through the preparation of regular newsletters and papers on leadership issues. This was linked to his major project, based on ongoing research and reading with respect to enhancing his literature review and understanding leadership issues and trends. The vehicles used to disseminate these information documents were the researcher's Learning Site, located on the World Wide Web and email.

- Assisted his MALT 98-1 colleagues with their projects by suggesting literature sources and offering tips on the recording of focus groups.

4f. Manage own learning to achieve maximum added value.

During the completion of the major project and preparation of the project report, the MALT candidate:

- Continued to explore leadership and learning issues by reading a wide variety of periodicals and books, as well as internet sites.
- Took on new assignments at work to gain exposure to new ideas and to acquire experiences in different areas.

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title:

A Leap of Faith: Creating an Environment of Shared Leadership in the New Brunswick Region of Human Resources Development Canada: Moncton HRCC Pilot Project

Researcher:

Jim Taggart, Operations Secretariat, Fredericton Regional Office

Please read the following page carefully and sign it if you give your consent to participate in this project. The following approach will be used.

- The focus group will last about two hours.
- Depending on your availability, you may be invited to continue in the project with one or two further in-depth interviews. The interviews will be recorded through written notes and by audio tape. The audio tapes may be transcribed.
- You will have the right to have the tape recorder turned off at any time during the focus group or interview (if applicable), or to request that the tape not be transcribed.
- All interview data and conversations will be kept confidential.
- Your identity will not be revealed in research notes, transcripts, or in the final report. Anonymity will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms.
- All data will be kept in a secure location.
- You will be contacted following the focus group by the researcher, who will provide you with a summary of the discussions. You will then have the opportunity to provide anonymous clarification to the notes.
- At the end of the project, all notes, transcripts, and tapes will be destroyed.
- You will be given access to the final report and/or summary of the report.
- Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your signature indicates that you understand the safeguards protecting you in this project and your agreement to participate. Please do not hesitate to ask for clarification at any point during your involvement in this project. Questions or concerns should be directed to Jim Taggart, Fredericton Regional Office (452-3198).

Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.