SUCCESSION PLANNING STRATEGIES TO ATTRACT PARTNERS AT PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FIRMS

By

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS in LEADERSHIP

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May 2013

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ABSTRACT

As the struggle to attract, engage and develop talent in knowledge intensive firms increases, this paper sought to uncover succession-planning strategies professional services firms may employ to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership. Designed as an organizational action research study, this investigation elicited the perspectives of Chartered Accountants using a survey and interviews. Chartered Accountants at all stages of their career development at Collins Barrow Calgary LLP were targeted, including newly designated professionals, Managers, Senior Managers and Partners. The study found that although the role of partner is unclear to research participants, autonomy, compensation and an established firm infrastructure are enticing. Study recommendations included the creation of a compelling vision to educate and engage prospective partners, communicating attractants and barriers to advancement to partner and enhancing existing partnership talent development programs. This organizational action research project was designed in full compliance with Royal Roads University’s (RRU) (2007) Research Ethics Policy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Crafting a thesis is not a singular effort nor would this final product have been completed without the support, insight and dedication of many.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my husband, Rurik Turton for his unwavering support of my continuing education. His love and willingness to free up my time for academic pursuits was an invaluable gift.

I would also like to acknowledge faculty members David Regan for his helpful advice in recommending Nancy Greer as a thesis advisor; Guy Nasmyth, for his enthusiasm, patience and time to chat about my topic; Marie Graf for her ability to cut through the dross and help me envision an organizational action research path; and, Mel Macleod for helping me to refine my initial research concept. Each of their contributions was invaluable on this mission.

I am also grateful to Jennifer Stefura and Joel Matthews for their yeoman efforts in data collection. Their insights, recommendations and that most valuable commodity, time helped to propel this thesis forward.

I’d also like to thank my second year residency learning buddies, Phil Legate and Joe Juurlink. They listened patiently through one iteration of my concept paper after another and offered valuable advice. Thank you for your efforts on my behalf.

Many thanks are also due to Nancy Greer, my thesis supervisor. Her wise counsel and ever-present encouragement helped to sustain me throughout this research study.

Last, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the partners and staff at Collins Barrow Calgary LLP. Your support and trust meant the world to me. I sincerely hope that this thesis accurately reflects your perspectives and is beneficial on the road ahead.
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CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING

Professional service firms comprised of more than one professional “first appeared in the [United States] just prior to the American Civil War (1861–1865)” (Hazard, 2011, pp. 37-39). Early examples of professional associations and business organizations can also be found in Scotland in the early 1800’s (Lee, 2006). What most firms have in common is that they have been male dominated, particularly at the partner level, for a long time. “Even in 2004, surveys show that only a small percentage of women achieve partner status at Big Five accounting firms and just over 10 percent of women become partners in the top 250 law firms in the United States” (Accounting Firms Offer Lessons to Law, 2006).

I have worked in the professional services sector for eleven years and have been employed by global, national and mid-sized firms in the accounting, architectural and engineering domains. At the time this research was conducted I was and continue to be, the Director of Human Resources at a mid-market, Calgary accounting firm, Collins Barrow Calgary LLP (Collins Barrow). I report to the Managing Partner and I also indirectly report to every partner in the firm. The firm employs approximately one hundred people and approximately forty percent are Chartered Accountants. As a member of the firm’s leadership team, I play an active role in recruiting experienced Chartered Accountants to ownership opportunities at the firm. These individuals have been called direct admit partner prospects, and they have been typically employed as principals, associate partners or senior managers at other firms. I am also involved with supporting the development of our people to partnership. In recent years it had become increasingly difficult to attract new partners both internally and
externally and the firm was in need of solutions to rectify this issue. Hence the inspiration for this research.

Over the years, my experience in recruiting partners has mirrored that of research findings. Specifically, firms faced challenges in recruiting new partners and partnerships often lack diversity. For example, “surveys of those entering PSFs [professional service firms] indicate that less than 20 percent express a desire to become a partner or managing director within a firm” (Stumpf, 2002, p. 115). Further, women and minorities were under-represented in executive and leadership positions in firms.

Women comprise almost 50 percent of the workforce [in the United States] . . . [and] according to Pew Research . . . are rated higher than men in every area of leadership measured, except decisiveness . . . and companies with higher numbers of women at senior levels also have better organizational and financial performance according to McKinsey’s ‘Women Matter’ studies. (Stroope & Haggemen, 2011, p. 51)

Because “there is some evidence from the business literature and experimental economics that a culturally diverse team may outperform a homogenous team at problem solving or ideas-generation” (Lee & Nathan, 2010, p. 57) and given that professional service firms sell knowledge, expertise and services, there was and continues to be talk about how we need to recruit talent “to increase “‘cognitive diversity [and leverage] the ‘wisdom of crowds’, complementary skills and [exploit] a wider pool of talent” (Lee & Nathan, 2010, p. 57). Yet professional service firms struggle to attract talent.

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore how Collins Barrow can positively impact Chartered Accountant succession planning strategies in the firm. The action research inquiry question was: “What succession planning strategies can accounting professional services firms adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership?” Sub-questions included:
What is the role of a partner at Collins Barrow?

What do Chartered Accountants understand about the partnership selection process?

What are the attractants to partnership at Collins Barrow?

What are the barriers to advancement to partnership at Collins Barrow? and,

What implications do the findings have for the accounting professional services sector?

**Significance of the Inquiry**

At Collins Barrow, partners are the owners of the firm. They are responsible for practice development, practice management and staff recruitment and development (Collins Barrow, 2011). To facilitate growth, increase profitability, address upcoming partner retirements, and remain competitive in the marketplace, more partners were required. In the last few years, Collins Barrow has faced seven critical succession planning challenges. Three were addressed by recruiting direct admit partners from outside the organization and four partnership positions were vacant. Two partnership positions had been vacant for a few years. Because it takes a minimum of eight to twelve years to develop the skills and expertise necessary to practice at the partnership level at Collins Barrow, this was a long-term issue that could have impacted the future viability and sustainability of the firm. This inquiry sought to better understand what succession planning strategies accounting firms such as Collins Barrow can employ to attract internal partnership candidates who are Chartered Accountants, because failure to address these issues may have lead to: (1) inhibited firm growth and/or shrinkage; (2) outsourcing of local work; or, (3) an undesirable upstream merger. Thus resolution of these issues was critical to Collins Barrow’s long-term viability and prosperity.
Many anecdotal theories exist to explain why partnership is not coveted by the firm’s Chartered Accountants. Some include: “aversion to professional liability; long work hours; lack of work/life balance; and, generational differences” (K. Roworth, personal communication, May 16, 2012). For example, Collins Barrow had attempted to entice the incoming workforce with intrinsic rewards such as a meaningful job, career growth, and the opportunity to make a difference. However these strategies were not completely successful because “GenMe [born 1982 – 2000] actually values intrinsic work rewards slightly less than Boomers [born 1946 – 1964] did at the same age” (Hoffman et al., 2010, p. 1136). Prestige, wealth, autonomy and power no longer seemed to be the attractants they once might have been. Unfortunately many firms, including Collins Barrow, were unsure of how to inspire interest in partnership. There is a clear “gap between what we wish to do and what we [have been] able to do” (Torbert, 2004, para. 3). Collins Barrow has “recognized the need to develop a pipeline of capable leaders with the skills, experience and competencies necessary to step up and lead the organization into the future” (Hammett, 2008, p. 4).

**Organizational Context**

Collins Barrow was “a KIF [knowledge intensive firm which] refers to a [firm] where most work can be said to be of an intellectual nature and where well-qualified employees form the major part of the workforce” (Alvesson, 2000, p. 1101). Collins Barrow was also a partnership, owned by twelve partners who employed approximately 100 articling students, Chartered Accountants and support staff. According to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) (2012),
the characteristics of a partnership [include]: (1) association between two or more persons; (2) each partner is co-owner of the business and is responsible for the actions of the other partner; (3) each partner contributes money, property and/or skills; (4) each partner is entitled to a share of the profit/losses based on the partnership agreement; and, (5) each partner is considered self-employed. (CRA, 2012, para. 3)

Collins Barrow was also defined as a public accounting firm serving public and privately owned businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and individuals.

Hierarchical in nature, the firm recruited university graduates, who, as staff accountants, were enrolled in a professional education program and article for three years to become Chartered Accountants. Typically, people remained at the Chartered Accountant level for two years before being promoted to Manager. Senior Manager promotions usually followed three to five years later. After 1 to 3 years as Senior Managers, these individuals may or may not have been elected to partner.
Figure 1: Career progression at Collins Barrow

The firm did not maintain a formal “up or out” mode of operation, therefore “the formal flow of promotions . . . nonetheless [depended] on the existence of vacancies at senior level. This was “determined by the external demand for projects, or forecast turnover” (Babio & Rodriguez, 2010, p. 398).

Collins Barrow’s statistics pertaining to promotion to partner echoed research findings which have suggested “of all those who join a PSF, one in 15 choose, and are elected, to the partner rank. While this ratio may be adequate for the industry, the question [was] whether the best and most talented are the ones who remain in the partner candidate pool” (Stumpf, 2002, p. 121). At the time of this research, Collins Barrow employed: (1) talented senior managers who may have aspired to partnership; (2) talented senior managers who did not aspire to partnership; and, (3) capable senior managers who, regardless of their desire for partnership, did not possess the skills, abilities or traits necessary for election to the “holy grail of partnership” (Almer et al., 2012, p. 123).

David H. Maister (1997), professional service firm management guru stated, “one of the most interesting discoveries in my consulting work has been the fact that (apparently) every professional service firm in the world has the same mission statement, regardless of the firm’s size, specific profession or country of operation” (p. 3). Collins Barrow was no exception. The firm’s mission was “to attract, develop and retain the highest quality people [while] providing excellent and responsive professional services of value to quality clients that we serve and attract” (2012, para. 4). Led by partners who valued “people, excellence, entrepreneurial spirit,
respect and sincerity” (Collins Barrow, 2011, para. 6), these mission and values statements had served Collins Barrow well given the firm celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2012.

At Collins Barrow, people were promoted based on merit and “as business development supports adding partners to the partnership” (Stumpf, 2007, p. 483). At the inception of this research there were two fewer partners at the firm than there were in 2006, thus the firm has shrunk despite efforts to become age and gender diverse. Existing partners ranged in age from “36 to 63” (Collins Barrow, 2012), however the two oldest partners, those 63 and 55, were set to retire within 18 months. Further, the firm was gender diverse as women comprised 33% of the firm’s partnership group which “is not matched by the number of females in partner positions, [in the United States] which is between 7% and 14%” (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008, p. S66). To move forward, the firm needed to attract and retain new partners to: (1) regain its previous size; (2) support the volume of business it handled and intends to capture, and (3) facilitate future retirements.

Organizational Systems Analysis of the Inquiry

Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots . . . And, systems thinking is a sensibility – for the subtle interconnectedness that gives living systems their unique character. (Senge, 2006, p. 69)

For the purposes of this inquiry, Collins Barrow was the system of study. These interconnected systems within the whole system are illustrated below in figure 2. The firm itself was comprised of Chartered Accountants, articling students, support staff, clients, physical offices, and equipment. Because the firm sold accounting services, it possessed four types of capital including “financial, human, intellectual and social” (Stumpf, 2002, p. 116). Financial capital refers to “the net worth or realizable market value of the firm” (Stumpf, 2002,
Financial capital is initiated when, as a system input, clients bring their accounting work to the firm. Human capital refers to “the competencies and capabilities of the firm’s workforce” (Stumpf, 2002, p. 116). Without competent and experienced employees to do the work, the firm would not exist nor would it have produced any outputs, finished accounting engagements, for public and private enterprises and individuals. Intellectual capital is the ability of the firm to train its people, generate new ideas and collaborate. Because no accountant had the ability to answer every possible client inquiry, team members were highly interdependent. They relied upon the expertise of others. Lastly, “social capital involves the development and leverage of relationships in the conduct of your business” (Stumpf, 2002, p. 117). Collins Barrow’s employees and partners both cultivated and retained client relationships, for without them, the firm would not exist.
Figure 2: Organizational system analysis of the inquiry

A number of external factors had the potential to impact the firm’s operations and the fulfillment of its goals. For instance, local, provincial, national and global economies had the ability to impact the health of the firm’s clients, both at a business and at an individual level. If economies were robust, typically the demand for Collins Barrow’s services increased. If
companies were struggling to stay afloat, clients may be more inclined to price shop and/or defer financial planning exercises. The labour market may also have severely impacted Collins Barrow’s operations. Without a steady stream of well-qualified university graduates and experienced hires, the firm may have struggled to complete client engagements. When the labour market is tight, making it difficult to recruit, existing staff worked longer hours and this may have led to higher turnover. In addition, Collins Barrow typically lost its people to clients of the firm (Collins Barrow, 2012). While this may have enhanced the firm’s social capital, it negatively impacted the firm’s workforce. Lastly, the accounting profession has become a highly regulated profession in the wake of Enron and WorldCom scandals. Audit practices and approaches have become highly regulated by bodies that dictate accounting practices and audit the auditors. These bodies included The Canadian Public Accountability Board (CPAB) and provincial and national Institutes of Chartered Accountants. The Canadian governments’ adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) also impacted the work experience of employees. For example, the implementation of IFRS in 2011 significantly increased employee overtime as Chartered Accountants struggled to learn compliance requirements and then guided clients through the process (Collins Barrow, 2011).

Given the interdependencies inherent in this system, there was a need to “give up the assumption that there is an individual . . . responsible . . . everyone shares [some] responsibility for problems generated by a system. [However,] that didn’t necessarily imply that everyone involved could exert equal leverage in changing the system” (Senge, 2006. p. 78). It was the partners at Collins Barrow who determined the direction and work practices for the firm. As part of my action research inquiry, I looked for “deeper patterns lying behind the events and
the details” (Senge. 2006. p. 73) to better understand the gap between Collins Barrow’s aspirations to attract and retain more partners, and the firm’s existing state. I fully expected this inquiry would lead me to better understand “what is important and what is not important, what variables to focus on and which to pay less attention to” (Senge. 2006. p. 125).

Chapter Summary

Collins Barrow, a knowledge-intensive accounting professional services firm, was the subject of this study. In recent years, the firm struggled to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership. Hierarchical in nature, it takes between eight and twelve years to achieve the expertise to operate as a partner. Other factors such as the availability of talent, regulatory changes within the profession and profitability also impacted the firm’s ability to advance its people to partnership. Given partnership vacancies in recent years, the firm sought sound data on what attracts Chartered accountants to partnership so that fresh strategies to address this issue could be adopted.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines leadership theory, the role of partners in professional services firms and prevailing partnership talent development strategies and theories used to attract and engage talent in support of succession planning efforts. Barriers to advancement to partnership are also explored. These topics seek to illuminate existing views and theories to inform the inquiry question “What succession planning strategies can accounting professional services firms adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership?” Sub-questions include:

1. What is the role of a partner at Collins Barrow?

2. What do Chartered Accountants understand about the partnership selection process?

3. What are the attractants to partnership at Collins Barrow?

4. What are the barriers to advancement to partnership at Collins Barrow?

5. What implications do the findings have for the accounting professional services sector?

Partners as Leaders

Kouzes and Posner (2007) argued “credibility is the foundation of leadership. We must believe that [our leaders’] word can be trusted, that they’re personally passionate and enthusiastic about the work that they’re doing, and that they have the knowledge and skill to lead” (p. 37). Yet “in relation to the partner promotion process . . . it is here that other criteria beyond objective measures of technical competence become important” (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008, pp. S66-S67). Therefore, the objective of this inquiry was to understand what succession planning strategies will support the attraction of Chartered Accountants to partnership. To achieve this, it was important to understand leadership theory, what is
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

expected of partners and what presently attracts and impedes individual Chartered Accountant’s advancement to partnership.

Leadership theory

Leadership theory is complex.

One of the tensions that may perhaps be ever present at the heels of leadership theorising and research is the drive for universalization of concepts and principles that are thought to be core . . . [yet] the concept of ‘leadership’ with its associated principles appear to be eluding efforts at universalism. (Puplampu, 2010, p. 627)

“No one perspective of leadership is big enough for all contexts; no matter how you view or practice leadership, one can always find drawbacks and limitations to any one single perspective” (Shuck & Herd, 2012, p. 163). Some theorists defined leadership contextually, while others viewed it as a process and style. Pardey (2008) said “it is the context of leadership that presents the challenge, and the challenge is to develop a style of leadership that ensures that organizations are fit and nimble and able to respond appropriately and successfully” (p. 32). This was refuted by Shuck and Herd (2012) who state “leadership is a process, not an object or set of characteristics, and is by our definition, something everyone has access to” (p. 173). Despite this controversy, there appeared to be agreement that “leadership without followership is meaningless” (Pardey, 2008, p. 34). However,

The age of leader as position is quickly fading . . . [and] leaders needed in this new landscape - those who will ultimately lead and create the organizations of tomorrow – must be prepared with new perspectives, visions, and models that equip them to meet the challenges of an evolving landscape” (Shuck & Herd, 2012, p. 157).

Two models of leadership appeared to be most prevalent in the literature. These included transactional and transformational leadership models. Shuck and Herd (2012) described
a transactional-type leader, [as one whose] followers would be provided with clearly defined expectations, resources to complete their work, and a burgeoning low level of trust, but no more; little relationship, no personal development, and no emotion . . . Rather, leaders and follower engage in workplace barter and trade revolving around task completion. (p. 166)

Similarly, Rafferty and Griffin (2004) stated “transactional leadership involves an exchange relationship between leaders and followers such that followers receive wages or prestige for complying with a leader’s wishes. Transactional leadership encompasses contingent reward and management-by-exception” (p. 330). Alternatively, Lloyd-Walker & Walker (2011) viewed transactional leadership as a traditional model suited for specific environments. They said

Transactional leadership was the norm in the earlier part of the century and may still be seen as appropriate for highly process-oriented projects where following standard methodologies and getting the job done by the rule book is valued by the organisation and its project participants . (p. 386)

This definition clearly aligns with the structured and ever more regulated practice of public accounting. Yet times are changing and with it the need to lead in different ways.

“Moving beyond the basics requires a leader to develop an additional set of skills” (Shuck & Herd, 2012, p. 166). Lloyd-Walker and Walker (2011) suggested “skilled knowledge workers cannot be effective when treated as machines . . . they need to be engaged in dialogue to make sense of situations they confront so they may choose wisely from a wide repertoire of possible responses” (p. 386). Al-Beraidi and Rickards (2006) suggested this can be accomplished in public accounting despite “conventional wisdom [which] presumes that accounting professionals have little capability for creative thinking . . . [it may be argued] that there are creative possibilities in the accounting profession, albeit of an incremental kind” (pp. 26-35). Regardless of the public accounting landscape Pardey (2008) offered a cautionary
message to public accounting firm leaders when he said “in an increasingly well-educated and well-informed society, people are willing to follow, but are not willing to be misled” (p. 36). Thus alternative leadership models and theories are required.

“Transformational leadership can be seen as an expansion or extension of transactional leadership behaviour” (Reuvers et al., 2008, p. 229). Rafferty and Griffin (2004) contended “transformational leaders motivate followers to achieve performance beyond expectations by transforming followers’ attitudes, beliefs, and values as opposed to simply gaining compliance” (p. 330). Nielsen and Cleal (2011) concurred positing “transformational leaders exert behaviours that increase followers’ awareness of the mission or vision toward which they are working, thereby creating a situation where followers engage and involve themselves over and above what can be expected of them” (p. 344). Expanding on this premise, Lloyd-Walker and Walker (2011) offered

Followers – other team members – may not agree with all of the values and ethical standards held by their leader, but if they are lived by the leader and perceived to be not only based on self interest, but on values and ethical standards which will benefit the larger community, the leaders will be viewed as an authentic transformational leader. (p. 392)

So what values, behaviours and activities do transformational leaders adopt? Bell (2010) argued that “great leaders are great learners; they study great leadership. They read. They ask questions. They take notes and keep a journal. They test and challenge their own assumptions. They make mistakes and learn from them” (p. 10). Shuck and Herd (2012) asserted that to be effective “leaders must understand that what they say and how they act affects those around them and their ability, and/or willingness to perform” (p. 174). Similarly, Bell (2010) believed leaders “are students of their people and because they know their people
they can identify the opportunities that best match their strengths and aspirations (p. 9).

Essentially, “great leaders connect emotionally with their followers” (Shuck & Herd, 2012, p. 169).

**Differentiating leadership and management**

Leadership and management are unique yet interdependent activities. To achieve optimum results, partners at Collins Barrow perform both functions. Although they are responsible for leading the firm, they also manage engagements. This reality is supported by Toor and Ofori (2008) who recognized “in practice, many managers perform the leadership role, and many leaders do manage” (p. 62).

"Today's businesses need excellent leaders and brilliant managers, visionary leadership and high-quality management. Over emphasis on either one is neither healthy nor desirable for any kind of organization" (Toor & Ofori, 2008, p. 68). Similarly, (2007) said "true leadership is the rare ability of an individual to inspire people and organizations to transcend their own expectations . . . [Leading is] the act of putting principles, passion, ambition, and imagination to work on the behalf of others" (para 27). It can be argued that partners are responsible for creating a vision and inspiring followers. Yet, Fogarty and Al-Kazemi (2011) challenged these positions. They argued “that the concept of leadership of the accounting profession is fundamentally miscast . . . The people atop these organizations are deemed to be influential, but only due to their ability to influence the organizations that employ them” (p. 29). However, partners also make things happen and build capacity in others. Drucker defined management as “[making] people capable of joint performance by giving them common goals, common values, the right structure, and the ongoing training and development they need to perform, and
to respond to change” (as cited in Toor & Ofori, 2008, p. 64). Thus, because a partner leads, exercises influence and manages, as necessary, it is no surprise that “organizations of all sizes and industries face incredible challenges in preparing managerial personnel to assume future leadership positions” (Groves, 2007, p. 256).

**The role of partners**

Partners are people who have been invited to, or, are elected to join an exclusive group of business owners, those who lead a PSF. They “have an equity stake or share in the annual pretax income distribution (as in a partnership), and . . . are collectively responsible for leading the firm” (Stumpf, 2002, p. 115). Yet, not everyone is elected to partner and partnership election criteria are often kept secret. For example, Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) contended not all can become partners, and it is here that other criteria beyond objective measures of technical competence become important. What these criteria are has been alluded to but not fully articulated, as empirical studies of promotion processes within professional service firms, particularly outside the USA, are rare. (p. S67)

Stumpf’s (2007) research confirmed that not everyone is offered partnership as it can only be offered “as long as business development supports adding partners to the partnership” (p. 481). Stumpf (2007) also countered Kumra and Vinnicombe’s comments on partnership election criteria by arguing “high potential [partnership prospects] . . . are those that are able to simultaneously develop high-quality client relationships, book significant new business, lead larger or more engagement teams, and develop associates and senior associates so that they are promoted” (p. 483). This was supported by Almer, Lightbody and Single (2012) who stated, “the primary factors given for a firm’s decision to ‘push’ a professional on to the post-senior manager track rather than partnership were a lack of business development and leadership
skills” (p. 131). Although there is consistency across partner role definition, there is controversy surrounding election to partnership criteria.

**Attractants and barriers to advancement**

Partnership as a career goal is attractive to some and unfathomable to others. Greenwood, Deephouse and Li (2007) contended “partnership is highly valued by professionals because it provides three benefits: significantly higher compensation, the right to participate in decision-making and high status” (p. 222). This research echoed dated yet relevant research conducted by Maister (1997), who stated the “essential ingredients [of partnership include] equity participation, tenure, autonomy, participation in policy making, income, and, internal [and] external recognition. If you are a partner, you receive, in most firms, all six rewards. If you are turned down, you are denied all six” (pp. 186-187). However, some people do not perceive these rewards to be attractive.

Research demonstrates attitudes and practices exist which impede advancement to partnership. It was noted some people believe advancement is futile because they will be “unable to continue to work within the firm because of the extreme demands that the partner role required” (Anderson, Vinnicombe & Singh, 2010, p. 180). Furthermore, even at entry level, “surveys of those entering PSFs indicate that less than 20 percent express a desire to become a partner or managing director within a firm” (Stumpf, 2002, p. 115).

More research is required to inform attractants and barriers to partnership. For instance, public accounting firm practices themselves may impede partnership advancement. Studies
indicate that the post-senior manager role does not appear, in general, to be either the equivalent of a partnership role nor a step to partnership, but rather allows the firms to create a ‘reserve army of labour’ to perform work traditionally undertaken by partners but without the status or remuneration of partnership. (Almer et al., 2012, p. 132)

By adopting practices such as these, “leaders move from being in control to giving over control” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 251); however, the lack of willingness to share rewards may lead employees to perceive partnership practices as exploitive and unattractive.

**Gender issues and advancement**

“Current data indicates . . . that after more than 30 years of attention to gender equity issues, attempts to redress this imbalance have brought only limited results and that men continue to dominate senior positions in organisations and on boards” (Clarke, 2011, p. 499). This declaration was reinforced by Kornberger et al.’s (2010) findings “that organizations, including accountancy firms, are constituted through practices that may gender reality. In other words, the status quo of male domination is maintained and perpetuated through ostensibly mundane, everyday practices” (p. 777). Clarke (2011) concurred with this theory but expands upon it suggesting “organizational cultures and embedded work practices continue to act as barriers to career advancement, particularly for women with family responsibilities. Career choices are limited by the reality of trying to juggle demanding jobs, childcare and personal interests” (p. 508).

Although “the extensive body of research concerned with women’s departure from public accounting firms often couches the decision to leave in terms of personal choice” (Wallace, 2009, p. 182), the issue is far more complex. Organizational structures, social norms and personal choice all influence women’s advancement opportunities. This complexity is illustrated by Haynes’ (2012) who uncovered
women attempting to progress to the higher echelons of professional services firms, particularly in the critical promotion to partnership, may find their progress inhibited due to a number of issues, including gender discrimination, the combination of professional and family commitments, stereotypical assumptions about parenting, the need to fit a prevailing masculine model of performance or success and ‘marked’ segmentation between largely feminine, community orientated and relatively underpaid specialisms on the one side and male-dominated, corporate oriented and remunerative practice areas on the other. (p. 492)

Alternatively, Lightbody’s (2009) research pointed to the long-term cumulative impact of both job factors and domestic factors . . . [Her] study clearly shows that in many cases, it was not factors inherent within the employment environment itself that were ultimately driving the women’s decisions to leave their employment. Rather, it was the total workload that each woman bore. (p. 73)

In contrast, Kornberger et al. (2010) found that sometimes organizational policies and practices conflict to sustain gender barriers to advancement. For example,

as a policy, flexible working offered a more balanced and customized use of an employee’s time. As a practice, it was the actual use of time, the total hours worked, time available to deal with sometimes illusory client demands, and ‘presenteeism’ – or face-time – that counted . . . [thus] the scalable, linear and commodified time . . . collided with a notion of time that was linked to the politics of visibility and performance . . [which defines] everyday organizational life and the social structure. (p. 788)

Another possible barrier to women’s advancement is related to gender differences in networking. Clarke (2011) found

Men are likely to look for networks that offer career support whereas women often seek psychosocial support, . . . [and] involvement in networking behaviours resulted in career progress for men more than women but suggest that this may reflect the nature of their networks with men more likely to have access to prestigious, high-level networks than women. (p. 510)

Thus the literature on this topic identified many barriers to women’s advancement. Many solutions have been proposed to address gender barriers to advancement. Yet
it is . . . apparent that career progress to senior positions is the result of complex factors, including work and non-work issues, individual motivations and contextual factors such as organizational culture and organizational support. Data from the last ten years indicate that achieving gender balance at senior levels will not be achieved through policies or programs alone. (Clarke, 2011, p. 512)

Lightbody (2009) recommended investing in a broader and longer term set of strategies as a means of addressing gender barriers to advancement. She suggested

while the current foci by employers on eliminating discrimination during pregnancy and providing maternity leave and part-time work opportunities for women with young children are essential, [her] study suggests such ‘short-term’ measures may not be sufficient to meet the needs of women who must provide childcare for their children for at least 18 years. To retain women in the long term, employers must understand that part-time work is often not a short-term option ‘until children start school’ but in reality may well be something women are forced by social and personal circumstances to do for decades . . . There is thus a need for employers to genuinely engage with identifying part-time or flexible long-term career pathways, as [her] study shows that part-time work options often lack sufficient challenge to retain intelligent and competent professionals. (p. 72)

In keeping with the need for a multi-faceted approach to advancing women, Clarke (2011) “confirms the value of women-only development programs” (p. 507). However, this may not address Haynes’ (2012) findings whereby “women are subjected to stricter performance standards than men when undertaking the same job and are likely to be rewarded less than their male counterparts” (p. 492). Clearly,

further research is also needed to explore the reasons why women apparently make different career choices than men . . . What is unclear is whether [women’s] choices are made primarily as a result of the work-family interface or because women are motivated by different factors. (Clarke, 2011, p. 511)

**Generational differences and advancement**

A generational group can be defined as “a group of people or cohorts who share birth years and experiences as they move through time together” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). Lloyd-Walker and Walker (2011) suggested
The labels ‘Baby Boomers’, ‘Gen X’ and ‘Gen Y’ are useful as a guide but the important issue that underpins this form of stereotyping is that it is the lived context of individuals that shapes their values, attitudes, and actions and thus the culture that they create. (p. 393)

In this section, references will be made to three different generational groups. These include Boomers, born between 1946 - 1964, Generation X, born between 1965 – 1980, and Generation Y [Millenials and/or GenMe] born between 1981 – 2000.

In the media, there has been much concern that generational differences may lead to issues in the workplace. Yet “the current body of peer-reviewed research does not support the popular media proclaiming a workplace crisis due to vast generational differences” (De Meuse & Mlodzik, 2010, p. 54). These finding were supported by Hansen and Leuty (2012) who “[suggested] that while work values of different generations may vary, the magnitude of these differences is quite small (Hansen & Leuty, 2012, p. 47). This lack of difference may have emerged because “one of the biggest challenges in research on generational differences is . . . the lack of a workable time machine. Most studies on generational differences in work values are cross-sectional, with data on workers of different ages collected at one point in time” (Twenge, 2010, p. 202). Thus, this body of research on generational differences continues to evolve.

There are a few notable differences in generational values. For example, “management experts noted that, while money is important, Millennials do not see money as their only source of happiness Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 233). Conversely, “extrinsic values such as valuing a high salary are higher among GenMe than the Boomers, but have retreated from the high reached by GenX’ers. (Twenge, 2010, p. 209). This was further confused by Hansen and Leuty (2012) who found “both women and men from Generation X endorsed increased
importance on Compensation and Working Conditions” (p. 44). Although it is difficult to ascertain from the research, who appreciates compensation more, GenMe or Generation X, it is clear that compensation is valued by both groups.

Studies also indicated that there are generational differences around work values that may impact retention, leadership development and advancement. For instance, Twenge (2010) noticed, “most studies . . . consistently find that GenX, and especially GenMe, express a weaker work ethic, believe that work is less central to their lives, value leisure, and seek more freedom and work-life balance than their Boomer counterparts” (p. 204). An alternative perspective is that millennials “believe that the quality of their work is more important than the number of hours worked” (Bannon, Ford & Meltzer, 2011, p. 64). Research also showed that millennials have high expectations about their work environment, growth opportunities, and rate of advancement. Unwilling to accept the traditional slow climb to the top, these professionals seek greater responsibility earlier and want to be involved in experiences that help them develop transferable skills. (Edwards, 2010, p. 37)

Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) concurred as their interpretations of “empirical studies indicate that, more like Boomers, Millennials thrive on recognition and promotions, but they also expect to become involved in projects that have a major impact on the organization” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 233). From a retention and development perspective “GenMe seems to be saying that they like their jobs and would like to stay in them, this attitude may break down when better opportunities arise” (Twenge, 2010, p. 206). It also appeared that “Millennials are willing to trade security and stability for the ability to better integrate their professional and personal lives” (Bannon, Ford & Meltzer, 2011, p. 63). “They are [also] less willing to work hard. (Twenge, 2010, p. 208). All of these differences may contribute to workplace challenges that arise when others’ “engagement with Millennial workers who spend
more time with their families and friends, and have diverse personal interests outside the workplace, may cause more senior workers to reconsider their own values” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 228).

Yet there are solutions that can be adopted that can aid in the development of leaders from many different generations. “You can make the generational issue irrelevant by concentrating on two things: developing a strong dose of self-awareness as a leader, and developing a deep understanding of the aspirations and capabilities of the people you lead” (Bell, 2010, p. 9). “Managers who possess stereotypes of generational cohorts, whether accurate or not, may unknowingly create factions within an organization. As with other stereotypes, managers may consciously or unconsciously adopt attitudes, behaviors and expectations based on sweeping generalizations rather than reality” (De Meuse & Mlodzik, 2010, p. 55). Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) also suggested “it is likely that Millennials will actively seek leadership opportunities” (p. 234). Regardless of these contrasting theories, De Meuse and Mlodzik (2010) argued “companies should be fairly confident that the current ‘best practices’ of HR and talent management systems have the capability to foster employee engagement, resolve conflict and enhance retention when implemented effectively—regardless of employee generations” (p. 56).

**Partnership Talent Development**

“The corporate world is experiencing a “leadership gap”, where leadership ranks are stretched too thin . . . and too little thought is given to formal development systems” (Taylor, 2005, p. 2). Although accounting firms invest in the training and development of their people, there remains a lack of clarity around talent development beyond the acquisition of technical
knowledge. This topic aims to compare and contrast current research on succession planning and talent development with the aim of better understanding: (1) how these practices complement each other; (2) why efforts fail; and, (3) best practices.

**Succession planning and talent development defined**

Succession planning is “a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement” (Rothwell, 2002, p. 6). Rothwell and Poduch (2004) expanded this theory when they stated succession planning is “about preserving the fruits of the organization’s experience – its institutional memory – as embodied in the heads of veteran performers at all levels who possess specialized knowledge about what needs to be done” (p. 406). However, succession planning is only one practice employed to address long-term organizational challenges. Talent development is also critical.

Ulrich (2006) defined talent in an individual context whereby “talent=competence + commitment + contribution” (p. 32). Blass (2007) viewed talent development in a broader context as “the additional management, processes and opportunities [that] are made available to people in the organization who are considered to be talented” (p. 3). Contrary to these views, the Economist reported “talent has become a synonym for the entire workforce in many organizations and a large number of companies do not even know how to define talent (as cited in Beechler & Woodward, 2009, p. 274).

**Links between succession planning and talent development**

Succession planning and talent development are inextricably linked. “Together, [they act as] a driver for an organization’s commitment to develop its people and build its bench
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strength” (Rothwell, 2002, p. 32). Hammett (2008) concurred when he said “the goal of succession planning is to not only align an organization’s available talent to current needs, but to ensure effective development of talent needed for the organizations future needs” (p. 4). In contrast Kesler believed “many organizations confuse effective talent management with replacement planning, which is focused narrowly on identifying specific back-up candidates for given senior management positions and essentially functions as a forecast” (as cited in Groves, 2007, p. 240).

Accounting firms typically endeavour to cultivate talent at all levels because it impacts their profitability. Profits are generated from the firm’s ability, through its project team structure, to leverage the professional skills of the seniors with the effort of the juniors . . . If the firm can find a way to deliver its services with a higher proportion of juniors to seniors, it will be able to achieve lower service delivery costs. (Maister, 1997, pp. 8-9)

This model also ensures there is a pipeline of talent available to support succession planning needs. To achieve this objective the firm “[dedicates] considerable efforts to training and development programs intended to accelerate their employees’ learning processes . . . these investments are considerably higher than those incurred by other sectors” (Babio & Rodriguez, 2010, p. 396). Since PSF’s make significant investments in the development of their people, it is essential to have a clear understanding of succession planning and talent development theory as it pertains to organizational change.

One of the shortcomings of the available research on succession planning and talent development is that “most of the literature in this particular area [HR practices in knowledge intensive firms] suggest that the authors are more keen to study the large sector knowledge-intensive firms, MNE’s [Multinational Enterprise’s] and well known consulting firms”
(Majeed, 2009, p. 451). Further examination of succession planning and talent development as it defined and practiced in small and mid-market businesses is required.

**Organizational impediments to talent development**

Senge, (2006) stated that “new insights fail to get put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting” (p. 163). It is precisely these entrenched “mental models” (Senge, 2006, p. 163) that can inhibit the success of talent development programs within PSFs. For example, the dynamics between employers and employees has changed. Many employers now perceive employees as Pink described “free agents responsible for their own employability and employees now assume an active role in monitoring their own learning, skill and career development” (as cited in Beechler & Woodward, 2009, p. 276). These arguments may stem from a “prevailing model of success which is a masculine model” (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008, p. S72). In their study of the promotion to partner process in PSFs, Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) determined “female interviewees were less comfortable with the proactive nature of the [career management] process than their male counterparts” (p. S69). Thus PSF’s that develop and operate talent development programs, without considering the needs of a broad target audience, may be employing antiquated mental models that will impede their talent development efforts.

It could also be argued “many efforts at structural change fail because they start from an inadequate picture of current roles, relationships and processes” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 97). Take for example, changes to “work life cycles . . . Rather than a linear pattern – education, work and retirement – there is a move to” (Beechler & Woodward, 2009, p. 277)
“cyclic lifeplans, with periods of education, work and recreation overlapped and interspersed across a lifetime” (Potter, 2005, pp. 1-24). As a result, “this trend challenges . . . [standardized, one size fits all] development programs” (Beechler & Woodward, 2009, p. 277). Babio and Rodriguez’s (2010) work also suggested “there are not enough tools or methods aimed at understanding and managing the dynamic complexity of HR strategy in professional services companies” (p. 408). Thus “delays existing in the implementation process of HR policies” (Babio & Rodriguez, 2010, p. 409) is an impediment to talent development. Organizations that fail to understand the needs of their people may be unable to design sufficiently agile talent development programs to inspire internal prospects to pursue partnership.

Talent development strategies which lead to organizational change

An organization’s ability to develop and retain a diverse talent pool at all levels up to and including leadership, will contribute to its present and future success. To accomplish this research suggests that companies that excel at talent management ensure internal consistency and reinforce the practices they employ to attract, select, develop, evaluate and retain talent, as well as closely align those practices with the corporate culture, business strategy and long-term organizational goals. (Beechler & Woodward, 2009, p. 278)

With this same goal in mind, Senge (2006) offered “the discipline of managing mental models – surfacing, testing, and improving our internal pictures of how the world works” (p. 163). He “[promised that this will evoke] a major breakthrough for building learning organizations” (p. 163). This approach was supported by Hammett (2008) who purported “the call-to-action for senior executives is to genuinely assess their succession planning and management processes . . . most importantly organizations need to reflect on how their succession plans imprint on their employees” (p. 7). In contrast, Kumra and Vinnicombe
succession planning strategies to attract partners

(2008) suggested talent development solutions require more individual customization. They argued,

the nature of the PSF environment necessitates a self managed approach to career management due to its flat structure, relatively unmanaged environment in which it is unusual for managers to directly work with those they manage and there are constant absences from any central office as individuals are frequently working on assignments at client sites, often for extended periods. (p. S72)

Although there are commonly accepted strategic talent development approaches and practices that may aid PSFs in improving existing talent management programs it is clear from the literature that a uniform approach may not be universally effective.

Leadership talent development

There is a plethora of literature on leadership talent development perhaps because “the pace of organizational life and change has accelerated the need for leaders to become better leaders and better learners” (Leonard & Lang, 2010, p. 225). In addition, “leadership development is not just done for the sake of doing it; instead it supports the organization’s overall business strategy. The comprehensive strategy also ensures that development options are relevant, align to business needs and add value to leaders” (Weiss & Molinaro, 2006, p. 7). Yet, Pepe (2007) declared that “implementing leadership, and realizing the broad organization impact that most OD [organizational development] practitioners believe it can have, is difficult and rarely achieved” (p. 51). Weiss and Molinaro (2006) concurred stating “current approaches to building leadership capacity are failing to hit the mark, and many senior leaders have little confidence in their organization’s leadership development programs” (Weiss & Molinaro, 2006, p. 3). Complicating the issue is Shuck and Herd’s (2012) theory that “HRD [human resources development] professionals are often unable to locate needed resources to guide the
creation, development, and ultimate execution of interventions that support and enhance organizational performance through formalized leadership development programs” (Shuck & Herd, 2012, p. 160). Despite these difficulties, effective leadership development approaches exist.

Weiss and Molinaro (2006) suggested “leadership development in today’s world needs to be more integrated and sophisticated” (p.4). Yet the foundation of leadership development programs typically include a champion, an organizational self assessment, the formulation of a leadership development training strategy, and a combination of myriad tools to foster leadership development through a blended combination of formalized, action-oriented and supportive strategies designed to develop the individual.

Prior to designing a leadership development program organizations should appoint a champion and clearly understand the landscape in which the program is being developed. Pepe (2007) suggested the champion . . . must prompt the organization’s senior leaders to honestly consider the following: Do we believe that leader talent directly affects our organization’s performance? Is leadership seen as critical to our growth and vitality? . . . Do we differentiate employee performance? . . . Do we acknowledge that the full impact of a leadership development initiative will only be evident after several years of operation? Do we have that kind of patience?  (p. 54)

Similarly, Hammett (2008) proposed an honest appraisal of a company’s needs to develop “an understanding of the organization’s current and future business challenges and a framework of needed leadership competencies to address these challenges” (p. 8). At the assessment stage culture should not be ignored because “effective leadership development programs [respect] the culture and readiness” (Weiss & Molinar, 2006, p. 10) of the organization.
The literature on leadership development suggests that a multitude of strategies be employed to build future leaders. Groves (2007) suggested that to develop leaders organizations must:

- Develop the organization’s mentor network . . . fully engaging manager participation in leadership development activities including teaching courses and creating project-based learning experiences (e.g. stretch assignments and action –learning projects) . . . create organization-wide forums (e.g. leadership academy) for exposing high potentials to multiple stakeholders, including senior executives . . . [and] evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development practices . . . (p. 256).

Leskiw and Singh (2007) concurred stating that “best practices in leadership development include developing and implementing an entire learning system [comprised] of formal training, as well as action-learning activities that provide the opportunity to apply and improve the application of new learning” (p. 453). This position is supported by Weiss and Molinaro (2006) who argued “the blended methodology suggest that development options from assessment, coaching, learning and experience are selected and organized in a way so that they are aligned seamlessly adding value to one another” (p. 10).

Pepe (2007) also supported components of Groves’ approach suggesting that successful leadership development programs “capitalize on the connection between leaders and learners. Require participants from each successively higher level of leader development activity to share their experiences, knowledge, success and failures with their more junior colleagues” (p. 53). Leonard and Lang (2010) also supported components of Grove’s wholistic approach to leadership development by affirming “learning through doing [and acknowledging that it] has now become a familiar mantra in the training and development community” (p. 26). Drucker (1999) also suggested that “action learning is particularly effective . . . in “knowledge work” environments” (p. 229). Conversely, Harris and Craig (2011) had different suggestions for
developing analytical leaders. They argued “analytical leaders [are] often analytical professionals who have been promoted into senior management [and these individuals typically] combine strong business acumen with informed appreciation of analytical techniques” (p. 26). Harris and Craig (2011) also suggested that to successfully develop such leaders organizations needs to

- provide analysts with information about the business . . . 
- set clear roles and expectations [because] . . . analysts thrive in structured work environments . . .
- recognize that analysts place a premium on interesting, challenging work . . .
- ensure analysts’ technical skills [are] kept up to date . . .
- and creating a culture of trust and respect . . . because analysts often feel isolated within the business. (p. 29).

Despite the fact that leadership development programs can vary by organization and organizational needs, as well as the target audience, there is consensus amongst the literature that a blended approach to developing future leaders is the best approach.
CHAPTER THREE: INQUIRY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In support of this research inquiry which aimed to answer the question: “What succession planning strategies can accounting professional services firms adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership?” this section serves to articulate the approach, targeted participants and study conduct. Data analysis and ethical issues are also discussed.

Inquiry Approach

This thesis inquiry sought to inform the current body of knowledge on: what succession planning strategies accounting firms may adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership? Action research was conducted at Collins Barrow to inform this inquiry. “The primary purpose of action research [was] to provide the means for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation to ‘design’ an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness” (Stringer, 2007, p. 6). “Action research at the organizational level [meant] that the project [encompassed] the organization as an entity in a competitive economic and social environment” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 87).

Public accounting is a profession with a long history and in many cases, well defined internal operating systems. Typically, there is “commonality in the general backgrounds and training of accounting firm employees” (Chow et al., 2002, p. 358) and “much knowledge sharing in CPA [Certified Public Accountant] firms occurs via personal interactions, which can be formal or informal. Formal interactions can take place within teams or across people working on different teams or divisions” (Vera-Munoz et al., 2006, p. 140). Hicks et al. (2007) further elaborated “the most often-mentioned learning strategies [in public accounting firms] are informal activities that assist firm members in learning from experience and from others”
(p. 74). Thus because the public accounting firm environment is, by design, a learning environment where people learn from the expertise of others, organizational action research was philosophically aligned with the environment. In the context of Collins Barrow,

stakeholders [participated] in a process of rigorous inquiry, [acquired] information (collecting data) and [reflected] on that information (analyzing) to transform their understanding about the nature of the problem under investigation (theorizing). This new set of understanding [was] then applied to plans for resolution of the problem (action), which, in turn [provided] the context for testing hypotheses derived from group theorizing (evaluation). (Stringer, 2007, p. 11)

Given the quantitative nature of the accounting profession both quantitative and qualitative research methods were included in this study because they “[matched my] way of viewing the world” as an inside researcher at Collins Barrow. I also believed this approach would resonate with research participants and key stakeholders given the significant role that quantitative measurement plays in day to day accounting firm operations. However, it is important to note that “a quantitative survey . . . [was] supplemental to the dominant mode of data gathering” (Glesne, 2011, p. 14), which included interviews, and they were qualitative in nature.

This study was designed using the Royal Roads University (RRU) (2011) organizational action research cycle whereby the research topic was co-created with the organizational sponsor, Collins Barrow. Formal data gathering occurred in fall 2012 and was later analyzed. Draft findings were then shared with firm’s managing partner and later with the leadership team to facilitate theory generation and to transition the results and methodology to foster future action research cycles at Collins Barrow.
Participants

Chartered Accountants are accredited professionals as defined by Industry Canada and typically partners in accounting firms possess an accounting designation. According to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act (2010),

a member of an accounting organization . . . or a partnership that conducts (a) an audit engagement, (b) a review engagement, or, (c) a public accounting practice using the title ‘Chartered Accountant’ [such as Collins Barrow] . . . must register the accounting organization as a public accounting firm in addition to any other registration held under this act. (pp. 40-41).

Hence, action research conducted at the firm targeted a homogeneous and purposefully sampled group that included only designated Chartered Accountants, as “this group . . . [was] affected by or [had] an effect on the problem or issue of interest” (Stringer, 2007, p. 43).

At the time of the data collection, Collins Barrow employed approximately 43 Chartered Accountants who worked in a single office and who maintained the following titles: Chartered Accountant, Manager, Senior Manager and Partner. The number of Chartered Accountants on staff at any given time fluctuated as employees fulfilled designation requirements throughout the year and because Chartered Accountants left the firm’s employ.

All Chartered Accountant employees of Collins Barrow were invited to participate in a survey. However, a stratified, random sampling process was applied in the selection of interview candidates based upon level within the organizational structure. For example, only the first four individuals who expressed interest, by job title, including Chartered Accountant, Manager and Senior Manager, were invited to participate in in-depth interviews. Interviews were employed to inform perspectives of those, below partner, because
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

... the logic and power of purposeful sampling . . . [led] to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which [I learned] a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (Patton, 2002, p. 46)

As a member of the firm’s leadership team and a researcher, I played a dual role during the study. Although none of the research participants reported to me, nor would they in future, I “[took] a neutral position with regard to [my] status [and] activities . . . [I couldn’t] afford to be associated too closely with any one of the stakeholding groups in the setting” (Stringer, 2007, p. 49). Because I was not excused from my duties as a leadership team member during this research project, and because of my close involvement with the partnership selection process, my sponsor approved the engagement of two impartial third party research assistants to receive expressions of interest to participate in, conduct and transcribe interviews so that the identity of any and all research participants remained completely anonymous. A copy of the inquiry team member letter of agreement can be found in appendix A.

Inquiry Methods

Data collection tools

In public accounting firms, time is money and reporting relationships are fluid. “Typically, trainees and managers [have] to account for every six minutes of the day” (Anderson-Gough et al., 2001, p. 113). “Adding to the complexity . . . is the hierarchical nature of the profession in which superiors evaluate the work of subordinates and wield considerable influence and power over subordinates’ future prospects” (Jenkins et al., 2008, p. 53). Therefore data collection methods were selected to fit the organizational environment. In addition, methods were chosen to inform “the unseen as well as the documented thus linking organizational, historical, political, ethical, evidential and personal factors with the
development of both theoretical and practical conclusions” (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007, p. 497). Ultimately, two data collection methods were selected to respect time constraints and individual privacy and confidentiality. These included a survey and interviews. After all

Qualitative data are collected using observation and a mixture of informal and formal interviews, while quantitative data on individuals’ perceptions of organizational ideology [were] measured with surveys. Convergence of data derived from these two sources [provided] greater depth of understanding than either methodology alone. (Jenkins et al., 2008, p. 56).

**Online survey**

Forty-two participants were invited to participate in an online survey because “the main benefits . . . [included]: reduction of costs and time, ease in reaching large numbers of potential respondents, and the possibility of providing anonymity to participants” (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006, p. 452). In addition, surveys were selected because they were used sparingly within the firm, typically on an annual basis, and participation rates were usually upwards of seventy percent (Collins Barrow, 2012). Survey data was also intended to inform the development of formal interview questions. Survey invitations addressed informed consent and the questions contained a collection of ten open and closed questions. The survey also asked several demographic questions to facilitate a description of the respondent pool and to allow for sub-group analysis of response patterns. A copy of the survey invitation and questions can be found in the Appendices D and F. The survey concluded with an invitation for survey respondents to express interest in participating in a face-to-face interview, lasting not more than one hour. Interested subjects were asked to email Jennifer Stefura, a research assistant, directly of their interest. This process ensured the anonymity of prospective interviewees. The
first four respondents at each level, including Chartered Accountant, Manager and Senior Manager were accepted as interviewees.

**Interviews**

Interviews were selected as the second data gathering method because “for depth of understanding, you . . . spend extended periods with fewer respondents” (Glesne, 2011, p. 46).

In addition,

> auditors in CPA firms [were] more willing to share knowledge through informal interpersonal interactions, such as face-to-face discussions that provide opportunities for feedback and training, than via formal mechanisms. (Vera-Munoz et al., 2006, pp. 145-146)

Before formal inquiry interviews were conducted, they were thoroughly piloted. I used “the pilot study to test the language and substance of [my] questions, and the overall length of the interview” (Glesne, 2011, p. 56). I also used the pilot to train my third party interviewers, Jennifer Stefura and Joel Matthews. In total three pilot interviews were conducted with two current partners and one retired partner. There were no ethical conflicts in engaging them in this process. The first pilot interview, I conducted to model the interview process for the research assistants. The second and third pilot interviews were conducted by each of the research assistants using the interview template. Once all three pilot interviews had been conducted, the data gathered was used to refine the interview questions. Minor edits to existing questions were made and two additional questions were added to the final interview question roster. A copy of the interview questions can be found in appendix I.

**Study conduct**

In advance of conducting the research, a comprehensive pilot of the process was conducted. The intention of the pilot was
not to get data per se but to learn about [my] research process, interview questions, observation techniques and [myself] . . . pilot participants [needed] to know that they [were] part of a pilot and that, as such, their role [was] to answer the questions [I asked], but with the intent to improve them.” (Glesne, 2011, p. 56)

I invited two current partners and one recently retired partner to participate in the pilot. Of the current partners, one had been with the firm for approximately five years and had been a direct admit partner, recruited from outside the firm. The second current partner had only been a partner for two years. The recently retired partner had been a partner at Collins Barrow for approximately twenty years. Of the pilot participants, two were female and one was male. Their input was used to refine all of the study tools and processes.

**Implementation of online survey**

Once the pilot was completed and the research methods and processes were refined, all Chartered Accountants employed by Collins Barrow were invited to participate in an anonymous survey via electronic invitation. Invitations were distributed to all prospective recipients via Gmail using the online survey instrument, SurveyMonkey. Because SurveyMonkey is constructed on an American platform, all survey recipients were informed that the information gathered via this tool could be subject to access via the Patriot Act. Also embedded in both the email invitation and the electronic survey was “written information about the aims, purposes, and processes of the study and [a method of gaining] written acknowledgement of participants’ willingness to participate” (Stringer, 2007, p. 55). Given their busy work schedules prospective research participants received two electronic survey invitation reminders. The first was sent on November 7, 2012 and the second was sent on November 12, 2012. A copy of the email invitation including the informed consent, the
follow-up survey invitation reminders and survey questions can be found in Appendices D, E and F.

Following the survey response deadline, which was November 15, 2012, survey results were generated by both electronic statistical means and manual theming. Quantitative responses to closed questions involved the generation of the percent of respondents choosing each response option and analysis of sub-group comparisons based upon the demographic questions asked. Qualitative data analysis was conducted manually, by coding and theming responses to open ended questions. Survey findings were then used to inform and further refine interview questions.

**Conduct of interviews**

Interview candidates were selected based on the first four survey participants to respond via email, by level, to Jennifer Stefura, research assistant. To ensure there were sufficient interview candidates for this study, prospective interview prospects names, as determined by their voluntary expression of interest, were listed by time of response. Thus, the next person on the list would have replaced any interview participant(s), who during the interview process, was unable to participate or who elected to withdraw from the study. A formal electronic invitation to participate in an interview was sent to each prospective interview participant by Jennifer Stefura so that participant identities remained anonymous. Interviews were scheduled in accordance with research assistant and research participants’ availability and they occurred during work hours. To ensure individual privacy, interviews were conducted in a private meeting room. The firm has numerous rooms to select from and none of these rooms was visible from my office. The content of interviews was recorded and
the impartial, third party interviewer also took notes. Post interview, the impartial third party interviewer also wrote down their personal observations and reflections of what transpired during the interview. A copy of the formal interview invitation, the informed consent document and the final interview questions and procedures can be found in appendices G, H and I.

In an effort to validate the trustworthiness of the data generated through the interviews, recordings were transcribed by an impartial third party research assistant who worked as a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist then provided research assistants with copies of the transcriptions which they reviewed before forwarding on to the research participant for review and edits. This served to “rigorously [establish] the veracity, truthfulness, or validity of the information and analyses that emerged from the process” (Stringer, 2007, p. 57). A copy of the data checking email communication to participants can be found in appendix J. In addition, the third party research assistant ensured that no identities could be determined from the transcriptions or the interview notes. Also, I, as the lead researcher did not listen to any tape recordings of the interviews as this could have caused a breach of anonymity.

Due to the seasonal nature of public accounting, all data gathering activities were completed by December 14, 2012 and all data collected was safeguarded using encrypted files and computers, which were kept in locked offices inside locked filing cabinets, accessible only to me and to the research assistants where they worked.

**Data analysis**

“The art of data transformation is in combining the more mundane organizational tasks with insight and thoughtful interpretations” (Glesne, 2011, p. 198). In this research study, both quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed. The quantitative data was analyzed statistically.
using the percent of respondents who selected each response option. However, the themes that emerged were reviewed alongside the qualitative data. Due to the largely qualitative nature of this organizational research project, the data gathered from open-ended survey questions and interviews was “[coded] to discern themes, patterns, processes, and to make comparisons and build theoretical explanations” (Glesne, 2011, p. 194). This coding was done on a line-by-line basis for both open-ended survey responses as well as interview transcriptions. Given that “when working with audio data, most experienced researchers listen to the audiotape while reading the transcriptions to ensure accuracy during interpretation” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 318), this approach was employed by the third party research assistant. Once the raw data had been stripped of all personal identifiers, I began the comprehensive data analysis phase. During the data analysis phase, “it [was] a time when [I thought] with [my] data, [reflected] upon what [I learned], [made] new connections and [gained] new insights, and [imagined] how the final write-up [would] appear” (Glesne, 2011, pp. 197-198). The data analysis also led to research findings that I shared with my sponsor and later the firm’s leadership team to foster future action research cycles at Collins Barrow.

All data, stripped of any personally identifying information, was slated for retention for sixteen months so that “an audit trail [may enable] an observer to view the data collected, instruments, field notes, tapes, journals, or other artifacts related to the study” (Stringer, 2007, p. 59).

**Ethical Issues**

“In planning a study . . . researchers usually need to take specific steps to ensure that participants come to no harm as a result of their participation in the research project” (Stringer,

**Respect for persons**

The Tri-Council (2010) states, “the welfare and integrity of the [research] participant must take priority over all else in human research” (module 1). As a result, research participants received, prior to participating, information about the research study, including the aim, processes, how results would be derived, how results would be handled, and the safeguarding of data. Research participants autonomy was also respected as participants were empowered to provide or withdraw consent to participate at any time. Data collection methods were also selected to provide maximum freedom and privacy as to when and where participants provided information. Lastly, data-checking methods were employed to ensure accuracy of data gathered.

**Concern for welfare**

This research study was designed “to ensure that participants [would] not be exposed to unnecessary risks (Tri-Council, 2010, module 1). It was recognized that “during interviewing, the interviewee may share information that could jeopardise his or her position in a system. [As a result] this information [remained] anonymous and [was protected] from those whose
interests conflict with those of the interviewee” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 318). Further, because “teams [in public accounting firms] are fluid as employees transition through specific engagement teams, client portfolio teams, industry teams” (Jenkins et al., 2008, p. 56), a myriad of possible reporting relationships existed amongst Chartered Accountants which could negatively impact research participants. Thus, to protect research participants’ privacy and need for confidentiality, anonymous surveys and confidential face-to-face interviews were selected as appropriate data collection methods. In addition, for those not currently holding partner positions, a neutral third party was used to: receive expressions of interest in participating in interviews; conduct interviews; transcribing interview recordings; and, strip out identifying information to ensure a safe environment for those interviewees who aspired and those who did not aspire to partnership. As well, to demonstrate concern for the welfare of the research participant, it was made clear to the sponsor that the confidentiality of research participants would be maintained and that partners would not have any access, now or in the future, to the raw data gathered during the course of the inquiry.

**Justice**

Lastly, in an effort to ensure that “all people [were treated] fairly and equitably” (Tri-Council, 2010, module 1), research participant criteria surrounding inclusion and exclusion was well defined and interview candidates were selected on a stratified random basis based upon job level, the timeliness of their survey response and interest. All prospective research participants had equal access to and familiarity with the technology used and all were provided with details about the research study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This “first [cycle] of an action research process [enabled me] to refine [my] focus of investigation and to understand the ways in which primary stakeholders experience and interpret emerging issues” (Stringer, 2007, p. 106) related to the overarching inquiry question: What succession planning strategies can accounting professional services firms adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership? This section provides a summary of the responses rates, qualitative and quantitative data reporting notations, thematic analyses of the findings and study conclusions.

Inquiry Findings

Response rates

Research participants included only designated Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow. This included those whose job titles were: Chartered Accountant, Manager, Senior Manager and Partner.

An online survey was the first data collection technique employed in this research project and both genders and all generational groups responded to the survey. Both genders were equally represented on the survey with 11 respondents each. This resulted in a 51% total response rate. In addition, 52% of all women Chartered Accountants responded to the survey and 50% of male Chartered Accountants responded to the survey. With only a 2% differential, neither gender was over-represented. Also representatives from three generational groups participated in the survey. The majority of survey participants self report as Generation X and Generation Y. A summary of the number of people from each demographic group is presented in Table 1.
Table 1

*Number of Survey Participants by Demographic Year of Birth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of All CA’s in Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66 years +</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-66 (Baby Boomers) Born between 1946 - 1964</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-47 (Generation X) Born between 1965 - 1980</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 31 (Generation Y) Born between 1981 - 2000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of survey respondents</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews were the second form of data collection employed. A total of eight interviews were conducted with Chartered Accountants below partner. Participants included two Chartered Accountants, two Managers and four Senior Managers. Of the interview participants, four were male and four were female. Because of the fact that there are only a maximum number of 31 possible interview participants and that this number shrinks by level, the gender of interview participants by title had to be kept confidential to maintain the privacy of the research participants. However, of those participating in interviews, 24% of the Chartered Accountants below partner were women and 29% were men. Women presently represent the majority of Chartered Accountants below partner, numbering 17 out of 31.

**Qualitative data reporting notation**

“Many truths live side by side . . . The goal [of this research was] not to weed out conflicting truths, but rather to reach new, deeper, and more complex understandings of multiple truths” (Glesne, 2011, p. 274). The qualitative data, collected during this research
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

project from open-ended survey responses and interview commentary were used to form the primary basis for the findings contained in this chapter.

All survey respondents were coded according to the order in which they responded in an ascending numeric order (S1, S2, S3). These codes were used to identify the source of participant commentary in the open-ended survey response analysis. The interviewee responses were also coded in an ascending order as follows: Chartered Accountants (ICA1, ICA2), Managers (IMGR1, IMGR2) and Senior Managers (ISM1, ISM2, ISM3 and ISM4). A comprehensive summary of all survey data including numeric and open-ended responses can be found in appendix K.

**Quantitative data reporting notation**

Quantitative data reporting was supplemental to qualitative reporting in this inquiry. Quantitative data collection was included given the numeric focus of the work environment and the duties performed by research study stakeholders. In this study, quantitative data reporting was limited to closed question survey responses and “this information [was] included in the processes of meaning making that are essential to action research, but it [did] not form the central core of the processes of investigation” (Stringer, 2007, p. 20).

Quantitative data are presented in tables in support of the themes identified. For survey questions that provided respondents with multiple response options, respondents were asked to force rank their choices with 1 being the most important, most attractive or most discouraging and 5 being the least important, least attractive or least discouraging of their top 5 selections. Responses ranked as 1 by survey respondents were weighted as 1 and responses ranked as 5 by survey respondents were weighted as 5. Rating averages were calculated by multiplying the
number of respondents by the weighted value assigned to a column, from 1 to 5, adding these together and then dividing this number by the total number of respondents. Appendix K contains a full reporting of all quantitative results in the order in which the questions were asked on the survey.

Thematic analyses of findings

There were five key themes that emerged from the results of the survey and the face-to-face interviews. These included Partner Roles and Responsibilities, the Path to Partnership, Perceived Attractants, Perceived Barriers and Proposed Solutions. Each of these themes will be discussed in this section and are supported by the qualitative and quantitative data that led to their identification.

Theme One: The roles and responsibilities of partners

The first theme that emerged from the data collection process related to the roles and responsibilities of partners. Sub-themes included: uncertainty about what partners do and perceptions about what the partner role entails. This section explores these sub-themes in more depth.

Uncertainty about partner roles and responsibilities

Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow are unclear as to the job description of partners. In fact, 87% of interview candidates stated they did not know what was expected of partners in their roles. For example, one interview participant stated, “for me . . . I don’t know . . . what a partner does” (ISM1). Another said, “they need to be more open about what they do as a partner” (IMGR1). This finding was reinforced by a survey respondent who wrote “I don’t think any one of us really knows what the partner role really entails” (S5). This was echoed by
another participant who asked “what are the requirements of me as an employee versus me as a partner” (ISM4)? Similarly, it was said that “a lot of people . . . don’t . . . realize what they would be getting into” (ICA2). In contrast an interview respondent suggested that “I can see and envision what [partners] do [because] I see what they do, but what do they really do behind the scenes” (ISM3)? Further the question was asked, “are the partners really on the same page with respect to what it really [looks] like to be a partner” (ISM3). In contrast, two survey respondents suggested that there were other partner roles and responsibilities that weren’t listed on the survey option for question 4, however, they did not provide any written feedback to support their selection. Therefore, there appeared to be confusion surrounding the roles and responsibilities of partners.

*Perceptions of what the partner role involved*

Despite the lack of clarity around partner roles, respondents had unique perspectives as to what the partner role entailed. Based on both survey responses and interview transcripts, perceived partner roles and responsibilities corresponded to the following categories: oversight and administration; business development; recruitment, development and management of people; technical duties; client service and practice management. What follows is a detailed picture of perceived roles and responsibilities of partners.

*Oversight and administration.* Oversight and administration was a sub-theme of partner roles and responsibilities. “The partners are the ones [who] ultimately make the decisions, the direction the firm will take” (ISM1). They “[oversee] the operation of the entire firm – from hiring to firing, tone at the top” (ISM3). Partners also “[monitor] the profitability of the firm” and ensure that “it runs smoothly” (IMGR1). In addition, partners “[come] up with policies and
guidelines” (ICA2) and partners operate “at the macro-level” (ISM2). These statements were reinforced by the fact that 100% of survey respondents ranked contribution to the successful operation of the firm and protection of the firm’s interest in their top 5 partner roles and responsibilities out of 12 possible options. Contribution to the development of policies, practices and procedures was also identified as ranking 10th out of 12. Table 2 illustrates these findings.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Options for Question 4: Please rank partner roles and responsibilities based on what you believe to be the most important part of their role.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to the successful operation of the firm</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the interests of the firm and its people</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the development of appropriate polices, practices and procedures used by the firm.</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Business development. Research participants also identified revenue generation as a key role of partners. One interview participant stated, “every partner has to be a business developer, like the rainmaker bringing in money” (ISM3). This was reinforced by another interviewee who offered, partners “attract new clients and bring in business to support the firm. That’s probably their biggest responsibility” (ICA2). “They not only provide work but they go and find more work” (ISM4). Partners “[have] to bring in new clients” (S1). These perspectives were mirrored in the survey findings where generating business for the firm was ranked number 1 for most important role and responsibility of partners as depicted in table 3.
Table 3
*Perceived partner roles and responsibilities: Business Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Options for Question 4:</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please rank partner roles and responsibilities based on what you believe to be the most important part of their role.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating business for the firm</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*People development and management.* Research participants clearly viewed attraction, management and development of people as a critical role and responsibility of partners. Respondents suggested that partners were responsible for “recruiting and attracting talent to the firm” (ICA2). Partners decide

who they want to bring in, who’s [going to] have the technical expertise that they need. Who’s [going to] have the applied knowledge they need . . . who’s [going to] work well with clients . . . and who’s [going to] be good at recruiting new individuals . . . (ICA2)

They deal with “staff management and “taking care of everyone . . .” (IMGR2). Partners “make sure staffing is there” (ISM4) and are “responsible for managing [their] staff” (ISM3). In addition, partners were viewed as acting as mentors. This was demonstrated in the statement “I think partners are always willing to figure out a way to help you [towards partnership] if they think that it would be something in your path” (IMGR1). All of these comments were supported by survey data whereby respondents ranked survey options pertaining to the recruitment, development and management of people as being 7th, 8th and 9th as can be seen in Table 4.
Table 4
Perceived Partner Roles and Responsibilities: People Management and Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Options for Question 4: Please rank partner roles and responsibilities based on what you believe to be the most important part of their role.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing and training staff</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring staff</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting staff to the firm</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These remarks are contrasted by comments that suggested partners only manage more senior staff. For example “partners aren’t necessarily dealing directly with the junior staff” (ISM1). Regardless, people management appeared to play a significant role in the day-to-day activities of partners.

Technical expertise. Participants viewed partners as providing technical expertise to the firm. For example, ICA1 said partners provided “high level technical review of engagements before they [go] out the door”. Respondents concurred recognizing partners ensured technical compliance with all regulatory requirements as evidenced by the ranking of 4 out of 12 possible partner roles and responsibility options. This is evidenced by the results found in Table 5.

Table 5
Perceived Partner Roles and Responsibilities: Technical Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Options for Question 4: Please rank partner roles and responsibilities based on what you believe to be the most important part of their role.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring compliance with any and all accounting, audit and tax regulations</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conversely, there was disagreement in relation to the degree of technical oversight provided by partners. For example, one participant said partners were

      responsible for preparing more of the complicated engagements and getting help on, or getting other people to write the simple parts so . . . there’s more of that quality control because they have the experience and the skills to make sure that all those little miscellaneous [rules], no one ever thought of . . . are complied with. (ICA1)

Alternatively, some partners “are comfortable with their managers. They know they’re doing a good job. They don’t [do] detail review and look at everything again. They [will] just sign off, and look at the big/major [risk areas]” (ISM3). To add to this confusion, one interview participant offered “a partner only spends . . . two or three hours a day on actual file work” (ICA2). Thus, although technical skills and review were deemed key to a partner’s role at Collins Barrow, it is clear that research participants believed performance of this activity varied from partner to partner and was not a consistent responsibility of all partners.

    Client service. To prosper, data suggested Collins Barrow partners represented the face of accounting services to clientele. “The partner is always in front of a client, that [is] pretty much their main goal . . . [being] face-to-face with the client giving them their input on their business” (IMGR1). Partners “[take] care of client’s needs, what they want, meeting deadlines . . . keeping clients happy” (IMGR2). “Most times, partners are the ones that have a closer link to the client so they may know some key information . . . some planning that we want to do” (ISM1). As a partner “you [would] have to have [discussions] with clients” (ISM2). In essence, aspects of the partner role include “managing the client” (ISM4) and “being a [client] relationship [manager]” (ISM3). Therefore, there was consensus that partners were client facing and client serving as part of their day-to-day responsibilities.
Practice management. Practice management was identified as a key responsibility of partners. “Through [partner] actions, other people accomplish more, and focus on more important things, than they would if left to their own devices” (Maister, 1997, p. 208). Partners were perceived as being responsible for “[developing] some sort of plan to make sure that the process for getting the work done is completed and that it makes sense” (ISM4). Partners focus on the “bigger picture” (IMGR2). They “[make] sure the manager knows what they need to be doing” (IMGR2). Partners also “manage the client base . . . so that [the firm] can accommodate more people or more clientele [to earn] more profit” (ICA2). They also decide “which clients [the firm keeps] . . . [and] which clients we prioritize above other clients, if we have issues with timing . . . which one needs to get done first” (ISM4). These perceptions were mirrored in survey findings whereby practice management as a partner responsibility was ranked number 2 out of 12. Billings administration was also noted as a partner responsibility but it was ranked 11 out of 12 (see Table 6).

Table 6
Perceived Partner Roles and Responsibilities: Practice Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Options for Question 4: Please rank partner roles and responsibilities based on what you believe to be the most important part of their role.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice management</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approving all practice specific billings</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme Two: Path to partnership

The second theme that emerged targeted the election to partner process and partnership election criteria. In this category, two sub-themes appeared. First, there was consensus
amongst interview subjects that there was a lack of clarity surrounding how people are elected to partnership. Secondly, there were a myriad of perspectives as to what constituted partner election criteria. In this section both sub-themes are explored.

*Mystery surrounds the election process*

Interview transcript data signalled that the process through which individuals are elected to partnership was unclear. ISM1 reported partnership election criteria “[is] a mystery to me.” Another respondent stated, “there is definitely no checklist where you check off boxes, where [you] did this, you did this and you score a nine out of 10, you make it” (ISM2). ISM2 also believed the process was “very subjective and it can vary from person to person” whereas IMGR1 offered “it would depend upon what team [a partner prospect] is on.” Clearly, research participants agreed that the election process was vague.

Interviewees also disagreed about the process governing the partner election process. “Does it have to be unanimous to invite [a] person into the partnership? Does it only need half the partners? . . . I don’t know how that part of it works” (ISM1). This was contrasted by S4 who said “one tough aspect of the current system is that it is a unanimous decision to promote new partners.” This belief was echoed by IMGR1 who suggested “it [is] always unanimous type decisions at the partnership level.” Therefore, different interviewees had different perceptions about the partnership election process. ISM4 succinctly summarized many comments on this topic articulating that “not understanding the path to progression . . . makes it difficult to have people stick around”. Thus the path to partnership is ambiguous. In contrast, however, there were no quantitative data to support this finding as no survey data specifically targeted this question.
Perceived election criteria

The data indicated that there were many perspectives as to what constituted partnership election criteria. These included technical skill, self-direction, business development ability, interpersonal skills, and, commitment. The following section provides details on each of these perceived partnership election criteria.

Technical skills. The data revealed technical skill was a critical partnership election criterion. “You [have got to] know what you’re doing. You can’t be a partner if you’re not smart enough” (IGMR2). This was reiterated by ISM1 who said “technically, you have to be good. You can’t be a bad CA.” ICA2 concurred offering that to be a partner you must be “technically competent. However, they qualified their comments by saying “you don’t have to be at the top of your class. You don’t have to be the gold medalist . . . to be a partner, [but you] “do have to be fairly sound … in your technical area . . . [your] technical knowledge.” This was illustrated by the survey data whereby demonstration of technical skill was ranked 4th out of 10 possible partnership election criterion. This is evidenced in Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, what currently constitutes new partner selection criteria? Please rank you top 5 criteria with 1 being most important and 5 being least important.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of technical skill</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet the degree of technical knowledge required seemed to vary by respondent. For example IGMR1 stated “you have to know what the basics are of tax and accounting and be able to pick out the issues that are arising in different types of files” whereas S21 suggested “as a partner
you have to know all aspects of all types of accounting and all industries.” Regardless of the differing opinions as to the extent of knowledge required to be elected to partner, technical skill was identified as a key partnership election criterion.

*Importance of self-direction.* There was also consensus, predominantly amongst interviewees, about the importance of self-advocacy in the election to partnership process. This was supported by commentary that indicated “nothing [is] really talked about until someone has said, I want to be a partner” [and] “if someone is a strong advocate early on in their career that they [want to] be a partner, that certainly . . . helps” (ISM1). Partnership prospects need to “say . . . I think I can take over” (ISM3). S5 offered experiential comments in support of these assertions stating “I have been told that if I want to be a partner I just need to let them know and I could be put on the partner track.” This was reinforced by IMGR1 who stated “I knew from the beginning [I wanted] to be partner and so [I have] worked with [the partners] throughout the whole process on how I can get to [partnership].” Ultimately, “the ability to sell yourself in the firm . . . [is] one of the defining characteristics of who they might bump up to partner eventually” (ICA1). Clearly, those interested in becoming partners must “[show] an eagerness for partnership” (ISM4). Prospective partners “have to want [partnership]” (ICA1). In summary, being elected to partner involved “90% the person” (ISM1).

*Business development abilities.* Revenue generation was a partnership election criterion. This involved identifying and securing new clients and recognizing new business generation opportunities with existing clients. Business development was also described as “being able to solicit work” (ISM1). Research participants believed “the ability to network and bring in new clients” (ICA1) was critical for election to the partnership. “I think they want
partners . . . that can bring in business” (ISM3). “I think they look for people who are . . . [going to] be able [to] attract new work” (ICA2). Although revenue generation track record did not rate overly high on survey results for new partner selection criteria, research participants viewed adjacent business development skill sets and networks as supportive of business development objectives. For example, the ability to foster and maintain client respect and loyalty and the size of personal networks ranked 1 and 3 out of 10 possible options and revenue generation track record is also highlighted (see table 8).

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Partner Election Criteria: Business Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, what currently constitutes new partner selection criteria? Please rank you top 5 criteria with 1 being most important and 5 being least important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to foster and maintain client respect and loyalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of personal network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue generation track record</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, business development was identified as a key partnership election criterion by research study participants.

Interpersonal skills. The way in which prospective partnership candidates interact with others was deemed a key partnership election criterion. The possession of soft skills was important. For instance, “having a good rapport with the current partners” (ICA1) was essential. “You have to get along with the current partners that are there” (IMGR1). “You have to be liked by other partners . . . not that it [is] a popularity contest or anything like that but . . . if they don’t get along with you, you [are] not [going to] ever become a partner” (IMGR2). An
alternative description was provided by ICA2 who said “you need to fit [the] mold . . . I think our partners are, very social . . .they’re very personable.” S21 reinforces that the “personality / demeanor other partners would like to have sitting around the boardroom table next to them sharing in the decision making [is] important.” ISM4 further acknowledge that one of the partnership election questions includes, “is this person [going to] fit in with the culture?” All of these statements were reinforced by 68% of survey respondents who cited rapport with partners as being a key partnership election criteria (see table 9).

Table 9
Perceived Partnership Election Criteria: Interpersonal Skills – Partner Rapport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, what currently constitutes new partner selection criteria? Please rank your top 5 criteria with 1 being most important and 5 being least important.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapport with partners</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, people needed to be liked by others to be admitted to the partnership. “I don’t see that they ever made a person a partner if they do [not] have those soft skills and those outgoing personalities . . . a selection [criterion] is the soft skills and the ability to talk to people” (ISM3). Others described the selection criteria as “personable” (IMGR2) and “how well liked they are both up and down” (ISM4). Others said prospective partners needed to “be fairly approachable . . . it’s not the big scary boss at the top” (ISM1). “If you don’t get along with a certain segment of the staff . . . it’s pretty hard for them to vote to bring you into [the] partnership if you have [not] made an effort to get to know everyone” (ISM4). Although not the most highly ranked new partner selection criterion in the survey data, rapport with staff was ranked as 9 out of 10 on the partner election criterion as evidenced in Table 10.
Table 10

*Perceived Partnership Election Criteria: Interpersonal Skills - Rapport with Staff*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, what currently constitutes new partner selection criteria? Please rank you top 5 criteria with 1 being most important and 5 being least important.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapport with staff</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commitment.** Another partnership election criterion was commitment. It was defined as a desire or willingness to commit to the firm, acceptance of responsibility and a demonstrated work ethic in the delivery of the firm’s service offerings to clients. One respondent suggested that prospective partners needed to be “willing to commit . . . willing to step into the role” (ISM4). Another suggested

> You have to be able to work [with] the existing partners and [you] have to look at who else behind you can potentially be a partner one day and decide if you would want to work with these people for the next 30 years. I think to want to be a partner you have to look at it for the long term. (S5)

Further, “what is needed “is willingness to commit to the partnership [and] to the common values held by the existing partners” (S8). These remarks were supported by survey responses that highlighted commitment to the firm as the number 2 ranked partnership election criterion as illustrated in table 11.

Table 11

*Perceived Partnership Election Criteria: Commitment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, what currently constitutes new partner selection criteria? Please rank you top 5 criteria with 1 being most important and 5 being least important.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the firm</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the data commitment was also described as “working hard” (ISM3). “I think it [is] probably important that you [have] put in a [lot] of overtime to show that, you know, this is a priority for [you] in your life” (ICA2). “It [is] kind of funny because until you’re ready to really commit, you don’t really know what it entails to be a partner” (ISM3). “Potential candidates need to want to be a partner and have a fire in their belly to be committed in the role” (S17). Hence, commitment is a partnership election criterion identified by research participants in this study.

**Theme Three: Attractants to partnership**

The third theme identified addressed what attracts people to partnership. The sub-themes identified in this category included: control over own practice, control of own time, compensation, client relationships, and, resources. A detailed explanation of each of these themes is provided in this section.

*Control over own practice*

Autonomy pertaining to work was an attractive feature of partnership amongst survey and interview respondents. As a partner, “I think you get more selection over the type of clients and engagements you can work on” (ICA1). “Partnership offers a lot of control in being able to dictate how you want to run a business, how you want to operate” (ICA2). ISM2 further elaborated saying

The ability to develop your own practice the way you want . . . if you [want] to concentrate on the technical side, you can do that. You can become a leader . . . if you want to be more of a marketer . . . you can . . . if you want to strive to be managing partner, you can. If you want to have a three million dollar practice and work from Monday to Sunday till midnight every day, . . . or if you want to have a small practice . . . with a smaller pay . . . you can work your nine to five.
These remarks were reinforced by survey data that highlighted features of partnership that allow for personal control and which ranked as number 1, 5, 6 and 7 respectively out of 19 possible options. These findings are illustrated in Table 12.

Lastly, ISM4 identified the joy of professional autonomy when they stated “it [is] fun to direct you own group and it [is] fun to make decisions and it [is] fun to meet with the clients and go out.” Clearly a sense of control over what an individual does every day is something that inspired people to seek advancement to partnership.

Table 12
Attractants to Partnership: Autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attractants to Partnership: Autonomy</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to align my practice with my interests.</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge associated with managing own practice</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to realize personal potential</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control over own time

Working in professional services often involves working long hours during specific busy seasons and/or when client work is deadline oriented. Research participants identified control over how personal time is allocated as an attractive feature of partnership. For example, IMGR2 found it appealing “to pick months where [you are] not [going to] be as busy and . . . able to schedule your life a little better.” ICA2 suggested partnership was enticing because of
the flexibility in terms of when you take on certain work and, when you want to take holidays . . . There’s nobody above telling you . . . you can [not] take this time off, you can [not] take that time off. You dictate your own schedule.

These comments were supported by survey results that demonstrate the ability to manage own time was deemed the third most attractive feature of partnership out of 19 possible options, as illustrated in Table 13.

Thus, Chartered Accountants participating in this study classified control of individual time as an enticing aspect of partnership.

Table 13
Attractants to Partnership: Control over own time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please select and rank 5 items from the list below to indicate what you find attractive about becoming a partner, with 1 being most attractive and 5 being least attractive.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to manage own time</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compensation

Research participants identified earning potential as a major inducement when defining what was attractive about partnership. “Money is a motivator” (ISM4). This is supported by survey results whereby income earning potential was ranked as the second most attractive reason for becoming a partner (see Table 14).

Table 14
Attractants to Partnership: Compensation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please select and rank 5 items from the list below to indicate what you find attractive about becoming a partner, with 1 being most attractive and 5 being least attractive.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income earning potential</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I think there is a perception that [partners are] making loads and loads and loads of money” (ISM1). Similarly, partners were perceived as “[living] a comfortable lifestyle . . . earning what a partner does” (ICA2). In fact, IMGR2 suggested “financial reward has a lot to do with [the attractiveness of partnership]. I know a lot of people stay in the hopes of that financial reward in future.” This was confirmed by ISM3 who said “if I can make two to three times more money for the same amount of hours, that’s attractive to me” (ISM3). Yet, details about what partners actually earn may not be known. ICA2 said “I don’t think a lot of people in the firm know necessarily how much the average partners makes [or] how the revenue sharing works.” Regardless of whether or not people had detailed information about partner income, there was consensus that compensation was an attractant to partnership.

Client relationships

Qualitative evidence demonstrated that some Chartered Accountants pursue partnership because of the opportunity to interact with and solve client issues. For instance, S19 said “the number one reason [for pursuing partnership] is the opportunity to work with clients in fulfilling their needs in the areas of service that we provide.” This was echoed by IMGR2 who declared “. . . helping [clients] figure out what to do . . . with their business and coming up with ideas . . . it [is] interesting.” IMGR1 also found that “being in charge of clients and helping them grow their business and helping them get to where they want to be with their business” is what is attractive about partnership. Feedback from project participants suggested that opportunity for “client interaction and responsibility” (ISM1) is a big part of what made partnership appealing.
Resources

Respondents also recognized that becoming a partner in an established practice was appealing because business resources already exist. ISM1 observed “it [is] an established partnership . . . You’re not starting from scratch in terms of setting policies and all that kind of stuff.” The “systems [are] in place already. We [have] got an established group of employees and [an] established presence for hiring new employees . . . We [have also] got clients that have been with us for a long time” (ISM4). “You [have also] got other partners to [bounce] ideas off of . . . [and] each partner brings certain expertise to the table” (ISM3). These sentiments were reflected in select survey response options pertaining to the established reputation of the firm and membership in a partnership of like-minded entrepreneurs that were ranked as 4 and 8 respectively out of 19 possible partnership attractant options. This data is summarized below in Table 15.

Table 15
Attractants to Partnership: Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of the firm</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in a partnership of other like-minded entrepreneurs.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of the existing infrastructure, people, partners, policies and marketplace reputation, partnership was attractive because “you’re not completely alone” (IMGR2).
**Theme Four: Barriers to partnership**

The fourth theme that emerged focused on barriers to pursuit and election to partnership. This theme is comprised of eight sub-themes including: perception of personal sacrifice, long term role commitment; lack of opportunity; insufficient skills; risk; lack of self awareness; lack of self advocacy and partnership dynamics. Each of these sub-themes is explored in detail.

*Perception of required personal sacrifice of time*

Partners were perceived as contributing a lot of time to the firm and this was equated with personal sacrifice. ISM4 said “the time commitment frightens me . . . when I see some of the partners and how [many] hours they work right now.” S18 asserted that “comparing partners to CFO clients, partners put in far more hours.” This view was further supported by observations that

some partners do work . . . 12 hour days, every day and I think that turns people off when you can go into industry . . . you have to work overtime there but . . . the pressure is not necessarily on you to be that last person to have to sign off and know everything. (ISM2)

These statements were corroborated by survey data depicted in Table 16 which illustrated time commitment as being the number 2 deterrent that dissuades Chartered Accountants from pursuing partnership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 16</th>
<th>Barriers to Partnership: Perception of Required Personal Sacrifice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please rank your top 5 reasons that discourage you from pursuing partnership, with 1 being what most discourages you and 5 being what least discourages you.</td>
<td>Average Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential time commitment to the</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was clear that “what prevents me [from pursuing partnership] is being afraid that if I get into this partnership, I’m [going to] lose touch with everything that is important to me outside of work” (ISM3). There was also a “perception that women need to give up too much life balance to be a partner” (S17). “During busy season you work a ton of overtime and you’re always here and you always have to be available” (IMGR1). Conversely, “there [are] a lot of people that just would rather go to a nine-to-five, Monday to Friday job and not have busy season ever” (IMGR2). Therefore, perceptions of the time investment required to become a partner was a deterrent and a barrier to individual pursuit of partnership.

*Long term role commitment*

Another barrier to the pursuit or election to partnership was the long term nature of partnership. S5 declared “to want to be a partner you have to look at potentially being here for the rest of your career.” To some, “it [is] a pretty daunting idea [to] know you [are] locked in for 10 to 20 years” (ICA2).

It seems like everyone’s pretty mobile and pretty willing to jump ship a lot of times and I [have] talked to some of my other colleagues who are CA’s as well and . . . they [cannot] imagine staying in the same job for x-number of years . . . making a big commitment and basically promising [their] career to the firm. (ISM4)

S22 agreed and stated if you advance “you would be locked into a long-term partnership commitment” (S22). In addition, you need to spend so many years as a manager, so many years as a senior manager before it can happen . . . I think that [is] the roadblock for a lot of people [on] becoming partner . . . they don’t want to sacrifice anything now for the long term” (ICA2).
And, “newer [generations have] much different views on what work-life balance looks like and values outside of work [and it is] much more important than running a successful, growing, demanding business” (S12). The prospect of being in the same role for years and possibly decades was not appealing to some Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow.

_Lack of opportunity_

Some Chartered Accountants believed opportunities to become a partner at Collins Barrow were limited. The firm hasn’t “really grown much. They’ve always been at 12 to 13 partners so . . . it [is] tough to get into [the] partnership group” (ISM2). “If the queue is already full then, they have to decide whether or not [they] can take on another partner or whether or not it has to be a waiting game” (ISM4). “If they [are] not at the point where they [are] ready to grow more, you might not get the opportunity you want” (ICA1). These remarks were supported by respondents who ranked, lack of partnership spots, as number 9 out of 15 possible options. This is reflected in Table 17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 17</th>
<th>Barriers to Partnership: Lack of Opportunity (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please rank your top 5 reasons that discourage you from pursuing partnership, with 1 being what most discourages you and 5 being what least discourages you.</td>
<td>Average Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough partnership spots available</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, data from survey question eight added more depth to this issue. The data in Table 18 illustrated that the lack of urgency to elect or admit a new partner was ranked 3 out of 9 possible options by 9 respondents and, a lack of established practice to inherit and the
profitability of the current practice inhibited advancement to partnership were ranked as barriers to election number 7 and 9, respectively.

Table 18  
*Barriers to Partnership: Lack of opportunity (B)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rank what you perceive are the top 5 barriers to being elected to partnership with 1 reflecting the biggest barrier and 5 being the smallest barrier.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of urgency to elect or admit a new partner</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of established practice to inherit</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current profitability of the partnership</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings were reinforced by ISM3 who remarked, “realistically, what, one in a thousand people might make partner that have been home grown in Collins Barrow . . . it [is] almost unattainable” (ISM3). These barriers to advancement were further undermined by statements that claimed “the partnership role is not offering anything better than working at Nexen. Or across the street or being self employed” (ISM2). Similarly ICA2 believed “the opportunity exists for other bigger things . . . outside of partnership.” Thus, it appeared that not everyone believed genuine opportunities for partnership existed nor were they highly attractive.

*Insufficient skills*

Skills in this sub-theme are defined as interpersonal or technical in nature and lack of these skill sets were identified as both barriers to pursuit and election to partnership. “One of the current barriers [to partnership] is . . . social ability” (ICA2). “If you piss off the wrong person along the way or, you don’t go that extra mile to build relationships, I don’t think the
likelihood you [will] become a partners is [going] to [happen]” (ISM3). This opinion was echoed by ISM4 who suggested “if you [do not] get along with a certain segment of the staff . . . then [it is] pretty hard for them to vote to bring you into [the] partnership.” These opinions were supported by survey data illustrated in Table 19 that ranked insufficient interpersonal skills as being the primary barrier to being elected to partnership.

Table 19
Barriers to Partnership: Insufficient Skills (A)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rank what you perceive are the top 5 barriers to being elected to partnership with 1 reflecting the biggest barrier and 5 being the smallest barrier.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient interpersonal skills</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient technical skills</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient recognition of my skills and abilities</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet, ICA1 proposed “very technical people sometimes don’t make the best people” and lack of technical skills was also an issue. Insufficient technical skills and the perception of the technical skills required to become a partner or the lack of these skills in existing partners also presented a barrier to pursuit of and election to partnership, ranking 2 and 4 Tables 19 and 20, respectively.

Table 20
Barriers to Partnership: Insufficient Skills (B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rank your top 5 reasons that discourage you from pursuing partnership, with 1 being what most discourages you and 5 being what least discourages you.</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the technical skills or lack thereof of existing partners</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Related to technical skills there was also controversy over what is required. For example IMGR1 argued “[you are] never [going to] be a partner [if you have] only one single industry” [of expertise] whereas IMGR2 stated partnership prospects need to “specialize more.” Furthermore, there were issues surrounding insufficient recognition of skills and abilities. This was substantiated by ISM1 who asked “how do [existing partners] make sure that this person [a partnership prospect] is getting the opportunity to demonstrate what these partners have seen to the other partners in the firm?” Therefore evidence shows that both interpersonal and technical skills as well as insufficient recognition of individual skill sets resulted in barriers to the pursuit of and election to partnership.

Risk

Regulatory requirements and liability risk were also barriers to pursuit of partnership. In particular, fear of liability was articulated by five out of eight interview participants. As a partner “your name [is] going on the audit report, if there’s something wrong . . . you can be sued . . . that would be the biggest thing that I would be worried about” (IMGR2). Described another way, “if something goes south, you [are] on the hook” (ISM4). ISM1 also suggested that as “accountants, we [are] risk adverse” (ISM1). These statements were reinforced by survey results revealed in Table 21 liability risk ranked 7 out of 15 options as a key deterrent to some in regards to the pursuit of partnership.
Table 21  
Barriers to Partnership: Risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory requirements related to the role of partner</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liability risk</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hence, liability risk was identified as a deterrent to the pursuit of partnership.

Lack of self awareness or desire to become partner

One of the sub-themes in the barriers to pursuit of partnership was a lack of knowing or lack of a clear desire to become a partner. For example, “I don’t know if I [want to] be a partner” (ISM1). It appeared “the biggest barrier is the person themselves. [Some] people do [not] know whether they want to be a partner or not” (IGMR1). “There [are] a lot of people that just do [not] want to do [partnership]” (IMGR2). “I struggle with [the question] . . . am I ready for [partnership]” (ISM4)? Lastly, “a lot of the people you see at the firm are quite happy with their decision to be a life time senior manager and they [are] very good at what they do, but I [do not] think they [would] ever want to be a partner” (ICA2). Thus, a barrier to advancement to partnership was a lack of self-awareness or innate desire to become a partner.

Lack of self advocacy

It appeared that a barrier to partnership for some was a lack the confidence to advocate for their desired partnership spot. “As accountants, we tend to be . . . kind of passive . . . [We are] very detailed, analytical . . . a lot of us [do not possess] that personality to say, that’s what I want” (ISM1). “I think some people are more quiet and . . . they [are] not about to speak out
if that [is] what they want. It takes a lot to let people know that [partnership] is what they [are] aiming for” (ICA1). “The big thing that prevents me from pursuing [partnership] is a thing from within. [It is] having the confidence” (ISM3). In summary, some prospective partnership candidates were deterred from pursuing partnership due to their inability to promote themselves due to a lack of self-confidence.

**Partnership dynamics**

Another reason Chartered Accountants were discouraged from pursuing partnership was the perceived dynamics amongst partners. S16 wrote “Collins Barrow currently acts like 13 sole practitioners sharing office space.” Another stated, “partners are not team-focused . . . they function independently and that is not attractive to me” (S20).

I think the largest barrier . . . is the perception that the current partners struggle to agree on firm and team policies. It is very evident that team 1, team 2 and tax operate as separate business units and in my opinion [that] makes it difficult for the partners to operate effectively . . . I think the partnership needs to do a better job of ensuring the firm operates as one firm rather than three businesses co-existing. (S13)

Thus there appeared to be a misalignment between the values of some Chartered Accountants and the current operating style of the existing partnership group. This theme also appeared in the survey results as indicated in Table 22 whereby personal values not in alignment with the partnership was ranked number three out of 15 possible options that discourage pursuit of partnership.
Table 22  
*Barriers to Partnership: Partner Dynamics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal values not in alignment with the partnership</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ISM3 also clarified, “it doesn’t make it attractive to us as CA’s when we see all the partners are operating on their own page.” Alternatively, “I guess one of the other barriers might be that the [partners] are content with what they have” (ICA1). Thus the present operating style of the existing partnership group was a deterrent to some who might otherwise pursue partnership opportunities.

*Theme Five: Proposed solutions*

The final theme that emerged encompassed proposed strategies to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership as offered by research participants. Sub-themes that emerged included: training, mentoring, partner initiated pursuit of partnership prospects, recognizing the need for diversity at the partnership level, and, communication of the benefits of partnership. These sub-themes are explored in the ensuing pages.

*Train people to become partners*

Research participants asserted that people need training to prepare them to assume future partnership responsibilities. ISM4 declared “there doesn’t seem to be any real firm leadership training . . . if candidates are being thought of for partner then perhaps they need to do some external training . . . or even have an internal workshop.” ICA1 concurred and said “effective leadership training might be . . . helpful [and it] would be helpful at the management
level too.” S2 echoed these statements suggesting the firm provide “more training and leadership opportunities.” Similarly “it might be helpful if some senior managers or some managers were enticed to . . . take on a couple of their own clients . . . and . . . deal with them directly . . . to see what [it is] like to manage your own client base and have an idea of that first level of communication” (ICA2). ISM3 reinforced this idea by suggesting Chartered Accountants be provided with experiences “like a [law enforcement] ride-a-long.” Another way to describe this is first hand on-the-job training. Thus research participants recommended that to attract more Chartered Accountants to partnership the firm must equip Chartered Accountants with sufficient leadership skills and provide them with opportunities to apply these skills in practice.

Mentoring

The second strategy offered for attracting Chartered Accountants to business ownership included mentorship and coaching of partnership prospects. S12 suggested “[putting] in place partner mentor/coaching for regular monitoring [and] partner development” and S8 advocated offering “better mentoring for new partners.” People needed partners to explain “things that you should do . . . that would help [them] fit whatever their [partnership] criteria is” (IMGR2) and people needed to hear “this is where you would have to grow” (ISM1) to become a partner. This strategy was recommended despite the fact that Collins Barrow already has “a mentorship program . . . Some of the partners [are not] as involved as others . . . or [they are] too busy to really put that much effort into it” (ICA1). It was also suggested that this strategy required “more candidates wanting to be a Partner and being willing to be mentored on how to achieve the goal” (S17). Therefore improving upon the existing mentoring program was a strategy
recommended by project participants but it required personal investment from all stakeholders to be successful.

*Partnership initiated pursuit of candidates*

Research participants suggested that becoming a partner was not the sole responsibility of the individual. As a result, partners were encouraged to initiate pursuit of partnership prospects. For example, ISM4 states “if the partnership group is making the decision to promote then maybe the partnership group should also say . . . we see the potential.” Other respondents recommended “[communicating] with your staff that it [is] there . . . do you [want to] be a partner? What can we do for you to become a partner?” (IMGR2). Partners need to recognize that when “no one [has] ever said, have you ever thought [of] being a partner” [this means] “they [are] not interested, they [have] never said anything” (ISM1). Similarly, “Managers should be informed more promptly if they are not headed towards partnership and not in the partners’ future partnership plans” (S22).

Timing of conversations was also identified as key in attracting partner prospects to the firm. Respondents advised “[having] conversations early – really, really early . . . [and] . . . partners jobs have to be to foster and empower employees from day one” (ISM3). ICA2 believed it was important to “[communicate] at an earlier stage whether or not they see partnership potential with you.” “If I had known some of [this] stuff before I even became a manager, [partnership] would have been even more enticing” (IGMR1).

Therefore one succession planning strategy to attract partners to Collins Barrow that was proposed included partner initiated conversations that happen as early as possible in a Chartered Accountant’s career.
Recognize and seek diversity of skill sets at the partnership level

Research participants offered that one size does not fit all partnership needs. “[Collins Barrow needs] different types of partners at [the] firm to . . make it successful” (ICA2).

“[Let] people know that [it is] okay not to be perfect. There’s no perfect partner . . . [because they are] not all the same. I know that just [by] looking at them” (ISM3). “What is needed are core skills useful to the partnership, which do not need to be in the same areas for each partner” (S8). “Partners need to look at individuals strengths and what each individual would bring to the partnership” (S16). It was also suggested that “[not having] all partners contribute equally / similarly to the partnership – focus on the individual partner strengths in specific areas – marketing / rainmaker, technical / chargeable hour worker, interpersonal mentor coach . . .” (S12). Participants advised adopting a strategy or vision whereby the firm seeks diverse skill sets amongst its partners to enhance the attractiveness of the partnership opportunity.

Communicate benefits of partnership

The final succession planning strategy recommended by research included communicating the benefits of partnership to a wider audience. S8 advocated “better [communication of] the benefits of partnership to potential candidates.” ISM4 also supported “[showing] people that [it is] worth the . . . good sides.”

Explain it to people . . . [it is] a grind and getting your CA is a tough grind but [here is] what it can look like after you get your CA . . . if they [do not] have the opportunity to look and see that, wow, partner actually looks not too bad . . . [they are] just [going to] end up leaving . . they [do not] see the light in public practice. (ISM3)

Thus sharing reasons why individuals should consider staying in public practice in pursuit of partnership is a succession planning strategy recommended by Collins Barrow Chartered Accountants.
Study Conclusions

This study aimed to uncover what succession planning strategies accounting professional services firms can adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership. Emerging from the data are five conclusions synthesized from academic literature on relevant topics and the research findings. These conclusions serve to inform our understanding of existing professional service firm practices and practices as seen through the lens of Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow. Given the plethora of data collected these conclusions also represent a “staggering potential of collaborative learning . . . collectively, we can be more insightful, more intelligent than we can possibly be individually” (Senge, 2006, p. 221).

Conclusion One: The role of partner is unclear

The roles and responsibilities of partners are unclear to Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow. In fact, 87% of research participants admitted to not knowing what is expected of partners. This is not unusual according to Stumpf (2002) who said

The role of a partner-leader in a PSF is not well understood, particularly by those below the partner level. PSF’s take pride in keeping the role a mystery. As a result, people inaccurately assume that the work they do . . . will be basically the same once they become a partner-leader, with the client contacts (and lifestyle) at a significantly higher level. Little could be further from the truth. (pp. 115-116)

Yet, both the literature on this topic and individual respondents suggest that there are some commonly held views about what constitutes the partner role.

Areas of disagreement

The research findings unearth controversy surrounding what participants observe partners doing and questions about what happens behind closed doors. In addition, a myriad of perceptions exist as to what constitutes the role and responsibilities of partners. Research
participants cited oversight and administration, business development, people development and management, technical duties, client service and practice management as elements of the partner job description. Yet Stumpf (2002) argues that partner roles are more like “that of a trustee . . . selected for their abilities to place the values and needs of the [firm] above their personal needs, to consider the long term health of the [firm], and to give of themselves unselfishly . . . (p. 120). Wheatley (2006) also argues that “in this relational world, it is foolish to think we can define any person solely in terms of isolated tasks and accountabilities” (chpt 4, para 37). Thus despite the consensus that the role of partners is unclear, Chartered Accountants maintain varied perspectives as to what constitutes the day-to-day activities and responsibilities of partners.

**Conclusion Two: The path to partnership is ambiguous**

Both election criteria and the new partner election process is unclear to Chartered Accountants. This research affirms Kumra and Vinnicombe’s (2008) assertion that partner election criteria “has been alluded to but not fully articulated, as empirical studies of promotion processes within professional service firms . . . are rare . . .” (p. S67). Adding to the confusions is research participant concerns that different partners may provide different counsel to Chartered Accountants on how to achieve election to partnership. This is not surprising given Maister’s (1993) position that “every partner has an opinion on how the firm’s affairs should be conducted and believes that no decision should be made without his or her input” (p. 291). This contributes to the confusion faced by Chartered Accountants as they attempt to unravel the mysterious criteria and undefined processes that surrounds the partnership selection process.
Areas of disagreement

“In the pure partnership model . . . the career path [to partner] is fairly structured . . . Through apprenticing on-the-job development, PSP’s [professional service professionals] learn key craft skills, then team leadership skills and then client relationship building skills, and finally firm leadership skills. The system is ‘up or out . . .’” (Stumpf, 2007, p. 483). Yet this research finds that “other criteria beyond objective measures of technical competence become important” (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008, p. S67). For instance, Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow postulated that five diverse election criteria exist. These included: technical skills, the imperative to be self-directed, business development ability, interpersonal skills and commitment. These criteria mirror some of Stumpf’s (2007) findings that indicated “high potential principals are those that are able to simultaneously develop high-quality client relationships, book significant new business, lead larger or more engagement teams and develop associates and senior associates so that they are promoted” (p. 483). Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) also found “the career development process . . . requires individuals to be proactive . . . and self motivated” (p. S71). Thus, a lack of clarity surrounds the election criteria and the election process.

In addition, this study uncovered a need for more open-mindedness in relation to partnership selection criteria. Specifically, research participants believe that existing partners continue to seek the perfect partner. They argue the path to partnership is flawed because existing partners maintain “deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit [them] to familiar ways of thinking and acting” (Senge, 2006, p. 163). Partners need to
change their “mentality” (ISM2) and “seek different types of partners” (ICA2) to ensure success.

**Conclusion Three: Autonomy, compensation and established infrastructure are enticing**

Partnership attracts those who aspire to three things. These include the ability to exercise individual control over engagements and personal time, lucrative compensation and pre-existing firm infrastructure.

One of the most salient psychological characteristics of those who choose professional careers is a strong need for autonomy. People choose professions because the work is not routine or rigidly structured. Thus, the professions have more than their share of people with an aversion to taking directions. (Maister, 1993, p. 291)

In addition, many people are attracted by the potential earnings associated with being an owner in a professional services firm. According to Stumpf, (2002), “the entry partner compensation package is rarely below $500,000” (p. 115). “As partnership is usually offered to candidates in their early thirties, this reward may provide the rights to a profit stream for over 25 years” (Morris & Pinnington, 1998, p. 6). Lastly, research participants cited existing firm resources such as collegial support, pre-existing policies and procedures and established marketplace position as being attractants to partnership.

**Areas of disagreement**

Despite the clarity surrounding attractants to partnership, what did not emerge in this study was a focus on prestige or status associated with being a partner. Perhaps this is because “most studies, including the only three using a time-lag method to separate generational from age/career stage differences, consistently find that GenX, and especially GenMe [Generation & / Millenials], express a weaker work ethic, believe that work is less central to their lives, value
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

leisure, and seek more freedom and work-life balance than their Boomer counterparts” (Twenge, 2010, p. 204). Hence, the status and prestige historically associated with advancement to partnership may no longer be as enticing as it once was.

**Conclusion Four: Barriers to advancement may be imposed by self or the firm**

Barriers to the pursuit or election to partnership can be categorized in two ways. First, Chartered Accountants can impose self-administered barriers that will impede their pursuit of and/or election to partnership. These include maintenance of self limiting beliefs such as the perception of personal sacrifice required by partners; the perception that partnership requires a long term commitment; unwarranted fear of liability risk; lack of self awareness and an unwillingness to advocate for self. At the heart of these self-imposed barriers may be “defensive reasoning [which] protects us from learning about the validity of our reasoning. For most of us, exposing our reasoning is threatening because we are afraid that people will find errors in it” (Senge, 2006, p. 233). Further, Twenge’s (2010) findings that generation X and generation Y may be less focused on work may also conspire to reinforce self-imposed barriers to advancement as defined by Chartered Accountant partnership prospects.

The firm also controls the application of barriers to advancement of Chartered Accountants to partnership. These include failure to provide opportunities for advancement to partnership; failure to sufficiently support or cultivate essential talent in prospective partners and complacency around partnership dynamics that fail to entice prospective partners to the ownership circle. Given the structure and process-oriented culture of Collins Barrow as a professional accounting firm, it could be argued that there is too much focus on management and too little focus on leadership. After all, “an overly managerial environment hinders
innovation. It routinizes operations and closes the door to new ideas and fresh approaches” (Toor & Ofori, 2008, p. 68). Given commentary citing lack of partnership opportunities as evidenced by stagnation of partnership numbers and descriptions of partners operating as sole practitioners rather than unified under a one-firm focus it appears as though the firm may be failing to demonstrate nimbleness, and commitment to the adoption of cutting edge practices and firm growth. This in turn may be a barrier to attracting Chartered Accountants to partnership.

**Gender is not a barrier to advancement to partnership**

Contrary to the Stefanac’s (2012) article *Women at Work*, published in CA Magazine, “data [which] showed that males in public practice are more than three times more likely than women to be partners or sole practitioners (44% versus 14%)” (p. 22), gender does not appear to be a barrier to advancement at Collins Barrow. Despite Almer, Lightbody and Single’s (2011) findings that female “under-representation is viewed as being the result of both women leaving the firms at a greater rate than men and women failing to progress through the ranks at the same pace as men” (p. 122), female Chartered Accountants below partner at Collins Barrow total 17, surpassing men below partner by 3. In addition, only two comments amidst all the open-ended responses, cited gender as a possible barrier to advancement. Given the lack of comprehensive data offered by participants, it has been concluded that gender is not a barrier to partnership advancement at Collins Barrow.

**Conclusion Five: Talent development of prospective partners is essential**

Existing talent development strategies, although in use at Collins Barrow are insufficient. Research participants cite the need for leadership development and enhanced
mentoring and coaching of partner potentials. Weiss and Molinaro (2005) acknowledged that “current approaches to building leadership capacity are failing to hit the mark” (p. 3). Leskiw and Singh (2007) also asserted that successful talent development strategies require “shared accountability, the acceptance of feedback must be incorporated into the culture to encourage continuous improvement . . . [and] tools such as 360-degree feedback procedures, ongoing performance discussions [and] coach relationships . . . should be incorporated into the learning system”. Therefore talent development of partner potentials is critical to the advancement of Chartered Accountants to partnership.

**Scope and Limitations of the Research**

Although this inquiry sought to add to the body of knowledge pertaining to succession planning strategies professional services firm can adopt to attract partners, the scope of this research was limited to survey data and in-depth interview content from only 22 survey respondents and 8 interview participants. Guest et al (2006) argued "if the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief or behaviour among a relatively homogeneous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient" (p. 76). Given that this study did not meet minimum sample size recommendations, it would be advisable to deploy the research again with a larger sample size to determine if the same conclusions emerged.

This study also lacked comprehensive contributions from all generational groups. For example, baby boomer input, which may be more representational of existing partners, was noticeably absent in this study, as partners were restricted from participating in the research interviews. Therefore it would be beneficial to know if adding more data from amongst a larger cross section of demographic groups produces different results.
Similarly, the possibility also exists that as a result of the small sample size, only those that were interested in the topic participated in the research and that the conclusions are biased as a result of this interest. It would also be useful to examine if Senior Manager perspectives unfairly influenced the results given that they comprised 50 percent of interview participants.

Lastly, further data gathering is required to more adequately understand perspectives surrounding partner selection criteria as targeted questions on this topic were not embedded in the survey questions.
CHAPTER 5: INQUIRY IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION, RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

It must be realized that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more uncertain of success, or more dangerous to manage than the establishment of a new order of things; for he who introduces change makes enemies of all those who derived advantage from the old order and finds but lukewarm defenders among those who stand to gain from the new one. (Machiavelli as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 387)

This chapter is about change. It is comprised of three sections including research study recommendations, organizational implications, and future research opportunities. Recommendation content is derived from research study findings, study conclusions and relevant academic literature. Organizational implications examine the merits and pitfalls of implementing organizational change and future research opportunities provide ideas for future directions in related research.

This research study aimed to answer the question: What succession planning strategies can accounting professional service firms adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership? Sub questions included:

(1) What is the role of a partner at Collins Barrow?
(2) What do Chartered Accountants understand about the partnership selection process?
(3) What are the attractants to partnership at Collins Barrow?
(4) What are the barriers to advancement to partnership at Collins Barrow? and,
(5) What implications do the findings have for the accounting professional services sector?
Study Recommendations

As a result of this research study, three strategic recommendations are provided. They focus on the development of a comprehensive and collaborative vision for the partnership, communicating attractants and barriers and creating a formalized development program for future partners. These recommendations aim to engage minds and hearts because “too many change initiatives fail because they rely too much on data gathering, analysis, report writing, and presentations instead of a more creative approach aimed at grabbing the feelings that motivate useful action” (Bolman & Deal, 2008 p. 394). That is because leadership at its core is both an art and a science. Palus (2005) defined science as careful observation in the course of forming and testing of ideas, subject to a questioning community. Art [he defines] as the modification of things by human skill to achieve form, function, and meaning. Although specialization often requires high levels of expertise . . . these general definitions have the potential to embrace the activities of all sorts of people in organizations, including leaders. (p. 20)

By embracing the different ways that people think and feel, these recommendations will have more chance of success. Also, given that organizational change can be transformative in nature, all recommendations are adaptable by employing ongoing action research cycles involving repeated data gathering, strategy development, implementation and evaluation. This is suitable for Collins Barrow given the firm’s knowledge-intensive learning environment.

**Recommendation one: Create a compelling vision for the partnership**

The accounting profession is becoming ever more regulated and to some extent mechanistic. Therefore, it is critical for Collins Barrow and professional services firms in general to create a compelling vision that unites partners and is exciting to employees.
When [partners] envision the future [they] want for [themselves] and others, and when [they] feel passionate about the legacy [they] want to leave, then [they] are much more likely to take that first step forward. If [they] don’t have the slightest clue about [their] hopes, dreams, and aspirations, then the chance that [they’ll] take the lead is nil. In fact, [they] may not even see the opportunity that’s right in front of [them]. (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 105)

As leaders in the firm, partners need to possess a clear understanding of their own personal aspirations, beliefs and willingness to commit to and communicate the direction of the firm to Chartered Accountants. Visioning enables transformational leaders to "engage the emotional involvement of their followers to build higher levels of [self and shared] identification, commitment . . . and his or her mission" (Jung & Avolio, 2000, p. 950).

Visioning is a crucial first step because the research findings showed that Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow are uncertain as to the future direction of the firm, the prospect of future partnership opportunities and the role of partners. This lack of focused vision negatively impacts the ability of the firm to attract future partners.

Partners have to be clear on their own aspirations before contributing to the firm-wide visioning process because a “prerequisite to enlisting others in a shared vision is genuineness. The first place to look before talking to others about the vision of the future is in your heart” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 151). Weisbord (2012) suggested asking “what sort of system do you want three, five, ten years from now? In terms of Purposes, Structure, Relationships, Rewards, Helpful Mechanisms and Leadership” (p. 339). Thus partner homework is required before a vision is crafted.

In creating a compelling vision, there is also a need for effective collaboration and dialogue leading to partnership consensus on a variety of topics including the firm’s vision for the present and future, partners’ roles and governance structure and future growth objectives.
To attract and inspire more Chartered Accountants to partnership it is imperative that partners become clearer about their position on these topics to the extent that they are willing to communicate these ideas in a transparent manner and support their assertions with action.

**Compelling visions evolve**

The partnership must continuously evolve their vision to suit business requirements. “A hallmark of the [visioning] process is that it may change shape over time, even unexpectedly, as [partners] focus and refocus their understanding about what is happening and what is important” (Davis, 2007, p. 189). “We're learning that to be successful, businesses need to become [places] where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. And, how they can change it" (Senge, 2006, p.12). As an approved Chartered Accounting firm training office, Collins Barrow partners needs to model active visioning and marketplace responsiveness for their people. In so doing partners will not only model the skills of astute entrepreneurs; they will also instil “a shared vision [that is] . . . a force in people’s hearts, a force of impressive power . . . [Chartered Accountants will] begin to see it as if it exists. Few, if any, forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision” (Senge, 2006, p. 192). In so doing the vision must permeate through the entire organization as a vital influence on the behavior of all employees. And we would feel genuinely threatened by incongruous acts because we would understand their disintegrating effects on what we dream to accomplish. [Collins Barrow] would become an organization of integrity, where our words would be seen and not just heard. (Wheatley, 2006, ch.3, para. 20)

Thus this recommendation involves recognizing that the partners at Collins Barrow need a continuously evolving and compelling vision behind which partners and Chartered Accountants may rally. This vision must also breed excitement about the future of the firm and
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

instil clarity around the role of partners as entrepreneurs navigating the firm through the tumultuous marketplace.

**Collaboration is key**

As Collins Barrow is owned and operated by multiple stakeholders, partnership collaboration fuels decision-making and supports success. Collaboration amongst the partnership group “requires listening, understanding, and accepting” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 404) the perspectives of colleagues including fellow partners and Chartered Accountants. Collaboration also involves dialogue and it is through “dialogue [that] people become observers of their own thinking” (Senge, 2006, p. 224). Dialogue, a skill set which hones critical thinking skills, “is grounded in reflection and inquiry skill is likely to be more reliable and less dependent on particulars of circumstance” (Senge, 2006, p. 232). Thus the practice of dialogue may improve the efficacy of all partners. This collaboration may also permit Collins Barrow partners to “wrestle with decisions about partner candidates who may not meet all the criteria for elevation to premier status yet represent assets to the firm” (Maister, 1993, p. 185). By “[getting partners] together in the workplace, [involving] people in the control of their own lives, work, and destinies . . . [there is] no higher form of leadership” (Weisbord, 2012, p. 371). Thus, the partners at Collins Barrow need to practice and model collaboration and unity around their objectives and vision for the firm and its people. This clarity and unity will also support a one-firm philosophy whereby all partners are heading in a similar direction. And, from the findings, this is deemed an attractant by Chartered Accountants considering pursuit of partnership.
**Partner roles and governance structure**

During the visioning process, partnership dynamics and governance practices should be reviewed to clarify the responsibilities of individual partners. Although the Managing Partner position exists this leadership role wields limited power to effect change in the firm. As part of the visioning process, partners need to become clear about their plans for governance, firm growth and willingness to make sacrifices that may accompany such growth. They also need to empower a leader or a committee to execute the vision and hold partners accountable for adherence to the vision. This is advisable because Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow presently view the firm as stagnant given that partnership numbers have remained relatively unchanged over the last few years. Without a clear vision and a commitment to the creation of future growth as well as an execution plan, interest in partnership opportunities may continue to be lackluster because Chartered Accountants perceive partnership opportunities to be limited and unappealing. Commitment to entrepreneurial dynamism on the part of partners is also required.

Chartered Accountants have also indicated that little clarity exists as to the specific role of partners as well as the role individual partners play in the election of new partners. This negatively impacts pursuit of partnership. Therefore the firm is advised to address this issue in their vision by committing to defining partner responsibilities and assigning a partner to champion partnership prospect attraction, identification and development. The champion will also need a support a network of fellow partners and human resources representatives to make this a reality. By appointing a champion to lead this defined role and by assigning fellow partners and human resources to play a supporting role, Chartered Accountants may perceive
the firm’s commitment to fostering opportunities for future partners thus correcting a previously undefined process that was not conducive to attracting the best and brightest future partners.

**Recommendation Two: Communicate attractants and barriers to advancement**

Partners need to be unified and transparent about the benefits and barriers to partnership because communicating such information is a strategy firms can adopt to attract partnership prospects. Honesty and transparency of this information is vitally important because “in almost every survey [Kouzes & Posner (2007)] conducted, honesty [was] selected more often than any other leadership characteristic; overall, it [emerged] as the single most important factor in the leader-constituent relationship” (p. 32). Thus partners are encouraged to adopt “transformational [behaviour] called ‘inspirational motivation’ which includes communicating an appealing vision” (Bass & Avolio as cited in Yukl, 2010, p. 276) of the benefits of partnership. Based on the research conclusions, Chartered Accountants need to hear more about compensation, autonomy and the merits of having an existing firm infrastructure as those were highly rated attractants to partnership. However, barriers to partnership also exist and Chartered Accountants, in their development as trusted business advisors, need to become knowledgeable about these too. Partners are encouraged to be open about self-imposed barriers that can impede advancement to partnership as well as those barriers to partnership which are firm crafted.

**Need for a champion and supporting committee**

Collins Barrow is advised to appoint a partner and support staff such as human resources to introduce the merits of partnership, perceived opportunities and common barriers
to election to partnership. This approach will ensure that Chartered Accountants receive consistent messages reflective of the partners’ vision. A champion and his or her support staff can also act as “creative change agents [using] ideas to stimulate thinking and spur imagination as they develop an approach that fits local circumstances” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 396) and changing demographics. After all, “in future . . . more attention could also usefully be paid to the preferences of aspiring partners . . . In a period where more portable careers are said to be desired firms have to adapt accordingly” (Morris & Pinnington, 1998, p. 21). Thus the appointment of dedicated individuals to support communication of attractants and barriers to partnership to prospective Chartered Accountants will ensure clarity and consistency of messaging and nimbleness as attractants and barriers change over time depending upon the target audience.

**Target audience and timing of communication**

The firm is advised to communicate partnership benefits and barriers to articling students who are preparing to write their Uniform Final Exam (UFE). As budding Chartered Accountants who have almost completed their professional studies, it is believed that this target audience will be well positioned to consider their future career path options. Invitations to participate in such a session should be sent prior to articling student summer study leave departures and the session should be held annually in November or December, after articling students typically return to work after writing their professional exams and taking extended holidays. These conversations should also continue on a quarterly basis and become more detailed as articling students become Chartered Accountants and are promoted to different levels in the firm. The committee responsible for this education should provide plenty of detail
delivered using relevant language, about the role of the partner and what the firm looks for in an elected partner. Ultimately, articling students and Chartered Accountants at the firm should be given a clear picture as to the benefits and barriers to partnership so that they can make an educated decision as to their future aspirations.

*Use different mediums to communicate attractants and barriers*

The means by which the firm communicates benefits and barriers can take many forms however it is advisable to inspire hearts and minds. The partner champion and supporting committee should incorporate different media to convey information about the attractiveness and the challenges of partnership. The firm may wish to provide statistical data to potential partner prospects and invite different partners, specializing in different industries or technical areas to share their personal stories, work experiences, work demands and interests outside of work to provide a comprehensive picture to prospective partners as to what the opportunity truly entails. One such approach may involve storytelling.

Keep in mind that the ‘memorability’ of stories is in direct proportion to their vividness.

> . . . It helps immensely if you can talk from a first-person perspective . . . Be sure to end your message or story with a conclusion that demonstrates concretely the intended message or lesson to be learned” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, pp. 97 – 98).

Recognize that these activities are designed to build the credibility of partners in the same way that partners build credibility with their clients thus creating mutual trust and furthering the bonds between prospective and existing partners as a means of inspiring interest in pursuit of partnership.

*Recommendation Three: Partner development*

“Leadership development is becoming an increasingly critical and strategic imperative for organizations in the current business environment” (Leskiw & Singh, 2007, p. 444). This
sentiment is echoed in the study findings and by Toor and Ofori (2008) who believed “leadership development should be made a part of organizational strategy because it is a source of competitive advantage” (p. 69). Therefore, to advance more Chartered Accountants to partnership, partners need to encourage Chartered Accountants to take personal responsibility for their own development while simultaneously investing in and providing a comprehensive partnership and leadership training program at the firm.

**Personal commitment**

This can be achieved by appointing a partner champion and the Director of Human Resources to jointly develop a program that meets a defined set of partnership competencies as determined by the partners themselves. Further, “integrating leadership development resource planning into the annual business management process [helps] to ensure its relevance and reinforce the mindset that individuals in leadership roles are accountable for developing their team members” (Pepe, 2007, p. 55). In so doing, the role of partners, the competencies of partners and the mechanism for acquiring these skills sets will be clearly defined and available to partnership prospects, thus addressing a research study conclusion which identifies the need for a partner development program.

**Facilitate learning on the job**

Senge (2006) said “organizations learn only through individuals who learn” (p. 129). Thus “developing the competence and confidence of their constituents (so that they might be more qualified, more capable, more effective leaders in their own right) is a personal and hands-on affair” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 261). Collins Barrow should “capitalize on the connection between leaders and learners. Require participants from each successively higher
level of leader development activity to share their experiences, knowledge, success and failures with their more junior colleagues” (Pepe, 2007, p. 53). In addition, partners are encouraged to bring Chartered Accountants to client meetings and convey the fun aspects of the role, delegating some of the most challenging responsibilities to junior staff while also assigning clients to Senior Managers to manage all but the final sign-off on a client file. “When people become more engaged in and committed to their work, they are usually willing to confront more difficult issues. They are willing to risk doing things beyond their comfort zone” (Senge, 2006, p. 282). In essence, partners need to prepare Chartered Accountants to assume the responsibilities of partners and in so doing they will demystify the role of partners and act as role models for future partners.

Organizational Implications

Implementing change within an organization may be welcomed or fraught with resistance and unintended consequences. “Change invariably creates conflict. It typically turns into a tug-of-war between innovators and traditionalists to determine winners and losers. Change almost always benefits some people while neglecting or harming others” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 385). The following section examines the merits and pitfalls of implementing the three recommendations offered.

Implications for creating a compelling vision

Visioning requires self-awareness, an investment of time and a willingness to engage yet it can pay dividends such as supporting the attraction of Chartered Accountants to partnership. An inherently positive exercise, creating a vision also requires “taking the time to hear people’s ideas and concerns” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 382). By engaging in dialogue
with Chartered Accountants and fellow partners, Collins Barrow’s owners will stay attuned to the aspirations and prevailing attitudes of the firm’s people. In addition, “if [partners] want a plan implemented . . . or many problems solved all at once, [it is advisable to] get as many key stakeholders as possible in one room and ask them to work on the task together” (Weisbord, 2012, p. 286). Thus the act of creating a firm-wide vision can enable partners to maintain a pulse on the organization and effectively use their time to achieve clarity around a variety of topics including but not limited to direction for the firm, now and in the future, the role of partners and the governance structure as well as current issues facing the firm. But impediments to creating a vision for the firm exist.

### Impediments to creating a compelling vision

There are many potential impediments and challenges to the successful development of a firm-wide vision. These may include complacency, ineffective collaboration, the risk of a limited or narrow vision, and partnership power dynamics. Each of these will be examined in more depth.

Complacency can be a huge impediment to the creation of an effective vision. Talking about an ephemeral vision is easy but drafting a vision that requires commitment and action is often more challenging. If partners say they want to develop a vision but fail to follow through, little will be accomplished. ‘If it ain’t broke don’t fix it’ is an accurate description of the firm’s culture, a vision may become more of an intellectual exercise rather than a call to action.

Collaboration and consensus or the lack thereof may also impede the design and implementation of a clear and compelling vision. “If all participants are not willing to live by the conditions of suspending assumptions and colleagueship, dialogue will not be possible”
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

(Senge, 2006, p. 229). Other pitfalls of the visioning process include the “identification of . . . deeper issues [which] may point to the need of inquiry in the fundamental assumptions which keep a problem recurring” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 55). For example, a collaborative approach may conflict with historical “alliances [which formed] because members [had] interests in common and [believed] that they [could] do more together than apart. To accomplish their aims, they [needed] power” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 201). Factions within a partnership group could indeed impact the ability of partners to achieve consensus around a vision for the firm.

The visioning exercise may also require partners to examine their personal prevailing beliefs. Despite the need for leverage, study participants describe some partners’ operating style as that of a “sole proprietor” (S16) rather than a member of one firm, committed to its success. This style runs counter to effective, transformational “leaders [who] accept and act on the paradox of power: you become more powerful when you give your own power away” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 251). To be more specific, partners need to be clear about whether or not they are willing “to make room for the right people even if it hurts their individual earnings” (W. Stripling, personal communication, Apr 10, 2013)? Thus, a challenge inherent in the visioning process is whether or not partners are willing to clearly articulate their vision of the firm, now and in the future, including planned growth and any sacrifices that are required to the extent that they are willing to share this with Chartered Accountants at the firm.

Another potential impediment to creating a compelling vision is that it will be limited in its design and scope. Senge (2006) cautioned
Equating a business’s purpose with the economic bottom line also dooms the enterprise to financial mediocrity, as countless studies of long-term business performance have shown. In a world where more people have more choices about where and how they work, it matters that an organization stand for something. A company that lacks a purpose worthy of commitment fails to foster commitment. It forces people to lead fragmented lives that can never tap the passion, imagination, willingness to take risks, patience, persistence, and desire for meaning that are the cornerstones of long-term financial success. (p. 263).

In addition, it is also important to note that a vision for the firm cannot be the work of an isolated partner in a partnership group. “No amount of charisma or rhetorical skills can sell a vision that reflects only the leader’s values and needs” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 370). Therefore a broad vision, reflective of the partnership can be difficult to achieve in an environment where multiple stakeholders have a say in the final product.

To create a vision, it is also important to define who, how and from where the energy will come to maintain and continuously refresh the vision. After all, in order to engage and inspire partners and Chartered Accountants alike, the vision needs to be relevant at all times. Similarly, partners need to identify and communicate the steps required to achieve the vision so that everyone can pull in the same direction. This can take time, energy and dedication that often get dropped when billable work is present. Thus visions need to be created in conjunction with a plan for their sustainability.

In crafting a vision for the future there may be payoffs and impediments to the process. A compelling vision that unites partners and intellectually and emotionally engages Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow can recognize the diversity of partner contributions, celebrate and reveal key details about partner roles and inspire excitement related to the prospect of pursuing partnership with other like-minded entrepreneurs yet multiple obstacles exist and must be overcome.
Implications for communicating attractants and barriers

There are merits and pitfalls to being transparent about the benefits and barriers to partnership. Being transparent about the opportunities, compensation, autonomy and resources available to partners can serve to inspire interest in partnership and reinforce trusting relationships within the firm. By “unbundling the mixture of rewards represented by partnership, it should, indeed, be possible to retain good people” (Maister, 1993, p. 188). Plus “options, latitude and accountability fuel people’s sense of power and control over their lives” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 260) and this may help to build enthusiasm and inspire pursuit of partnership. Yet it is important to keep in mind that “the evidence from [Kouzes and Posner’s (2007)] research, and from other studies by many others, is that if people are going to do their best, they must be internally motivated” (p. 173). Thus, attempts to engage and inspire Chartered Accountants to aspire to partnership can be supported by honest communication however the firm’s efforts are only one part of the equation and pitfalls abound with any communications campaign.

Unfortunately, “communications in organizations are rarely candid, open, or timely . . . Much of the time, events and processes are so intricate, scattered, and uncoordinated that no one can fully understand – let alone control the real truth” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 33). Further, disclosing information . . . can be risky. You can’t be certain that other people will like you, appreciate your candor, agree with your aspirations, buy into your plans or interpret your words and actions in the way you intend. But by demonstrating the willingness to take such risks, leaders encourage others to take a similar risk. (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 295)
It is also important to consider the medium by which attractants and barriers are communicated. Despite the analytical nature of the work performed by accountants, it is important to communicate heartfelt and tangible benefits and barriers to partnership. As Weisbord (2012) cautions “anybody who ever tried to influence skeptics with hard data knows how futile it is . . . you can assemble statistics to prove whatever you please” (p. 9). And ultimately communicating the benefits and barriers to election to partnership are about both education and cultivating trust through disclosure.

**Target audience and timing**

Despite this study’s findings that indicate talking to future prospective partners about partnership as soon as possible is critical, this may not be feasible or desirable given that articling students are typically focused on their professional studies while working full-time during their first few years at the firm. Some deem them too busy to focus on career planning at that time. Thus the recommendation of sending an invitation to articling students to participate in a partnership orientation session prior to writing their professional exams is a compromise and a strategy that may require further evaluation to determine its efficacy.

**Implications for partner development**

This study found that Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow believed improved partner and leadership development programs are required as one strategy to support the attraction of Chartered Accountants to partnership. This aligns with Hammett’s (2008) observation that
while some organizations have recognized the need to develop a pipeline of capable leaders with the skills, experience and competencies necessary to step up and lead the organization into the future; far too many companies have not seen the writing on the wall. (p. 4)

Thus in recommending that Collins Barrow implement a more comprehensive training program to develop future partners, the firm may develop a competitive advantage over other firms. This strategy may also serve to attract other Chartered Accountants to Collins Barrow from competitor firms. Yet, developing a robust partner and leadership development program is not an easy feat.

Weiss and Molinaro (2006) argued an “integrated solution [to leadership development] is intense. It requires serious commitment on the part of organizations, their senior leaders and from HR [human resources]” (p. 10). Hammett (2008) suggested that a foundation for any leadership development program requires clarity around “what leadership competencies are needed to enable your key business drivers” (Hammett, 2008, p. 8). A comprehensive talent development program also requires that

CEO’s and their senior management team members must go well beyond gratuitous support of leadership development by teaching courses and workshops . . . While human resource professionals play a critical role in developing the tools and processes for identifying, codifying, and developing leadership talent, managers at all levels must assume primary responsibility for building the organization’s leader pipeline. (Groves, 2007, p. 254)

It should also be noted that not all aspects of talent development programs are measureable or quantifiable. For instance, some components of leadership development are “‘soft,’ based in part on unquantifiable concepts such as intuition and personal vision. No one will ever be able to measure to three decimal places how much personal mastery contributes to productivity and the bottom line” (Senge, 2006, p. 135).
Further, partner and leadership development programs can be hindered by the culture of an organization. For instance, Kouzes and Posner (2007) asserted that "extraordinary achievements bloom more easily in climates in which performance is nurtured with a higher volume of appreciative comments" (p. 299). Given auditors’ responsibility to seek out and highlight error, the prevailing culture at Collins Barrow may be more focused on constructive criticism rather than appreciation of accuracy. Leadership development programs can also be hindered by those responsible for training prospective partners. In his work at the Centre for Creative Leadership, Hammett (2008) observed that senior executives reflected a low need for interpersonal contact that played out in being choosey about how, when and where they associate with others....They have a tendency to manage relationships at work with an “arms length” approach...This isolation can also inhibit senior executives ability to identify first hand individuals who might be in the up-and-coming next generation of leaders. (Hammett, 2008, p. 6)

Thus, commitment to the development and implementation of a robust partner development program can boost Collins Barrow’s prospective partner pipeline and provide a competitive advantage in the accounting marketplace and in the labour market. However, the time and financial investment required to create a program and staff an effective partner development program should not be underestimated as it is a sizeable undertaking.

Implications for Future Research

This research study targeted a small independently owned and operated mid-market firm in the Canadian marketplace where partners make all the decisions for the firm. It would be useful to determine if the same conclusions would prevail if the research was duplicated in a mid-market, regional or large, multi-national professional service firm.
The accounting profession is presently in transition in Canada. The existing three accounting designations, inclusive of Chartered Accountants (CA’s), Certified Management Accountants (CMA) and Certified General Accountants (CGA) are at various stages of merger across the country. In future, there will only be one accounting designation in Canada, the Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA). Already, limited numbers of future accountants may elect to article in industry or in a professional services firm. It is speculated that with the evolution of the CPA designation, the competition for talent, between industry and professional services firms will escalate. Thus future research should examine what impact unification of the accounting profession will have on the attraction of accountants to partnership in professional services firms.

Chapter Summary

The recommendations proposed in this chapter were drafted and then refined in collaboration with Collins Barrow, the sponsoring organization. This was done after providing the sponsor with the study findings and conclusions. The sponsor’s reaction to the findings and proposed recommendations was positive and they “provide a roadmap for future partners to follow” (W. Stripling, personal communication, April 10, 2013) in their aim to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership. Although the findings in this study are not slated to be a topic for the upcoming partner retreat in June 2013, given the retirement of the current Managing Partner, it may be provided to partners as retreat pre-reading to foster dialogue. The current managing partner will also recommend that this thesis form the basis of a separate partnership retreat to focus on this topic alone.
The biggest threat to the adoption of recommendations in this thesis and commitment to ongoing action research cycles at Collins Barrow may be the partners’ own desire to maintain the status quo and make no changes at the firm. Because the firm is independently owned and operated, this is the partners’ prerogative. It is possible that until a dearth of partner prospects threatens the partnership, study conclusions and recommendations may simply remain “interesting to know” (W. Stripling, personal communication, April 10, 2013).
CHAPTER 6: META-REFLECTIONS ON THE INQUIRY

This chapter focuses on over-arching observations pertaining to the research study as well as implications for both the accounting professional services field and academia specializing in leadership studies. Each of these topics will be examined in greater depth.

The Action Research Process

The organizational action research process employed in this study was co-created with the sponsor and “at its essence [was] the intent to change something, to solve some sort of problem, to take action” (Glesne, 2011, p. 15). Yet I worked primarily with one individual to champion this research and more peripherally with other leadership team members and partners at large. Upon reflection it is apparent that working with a larger steering committee would have been preferable.

A powerful guiding group has two characteristics. It is made up of the right people, and it demonstrates teamwork. By the ‘right people,’ we mean individuals with the appropriate skills, the leadership capacity, the organizational credibility, and the connections to handle a specific kind of organizational change. (Kotter, 2002, Step 8. Para. 18)

Were I to have involved a steering committee, it is possible partners at Collins Barrow might have more actively “[owned] the problem” and ”[learned] to see the problem for [themselves] by sharing in the diagnostic process and [being] actively involved in generating a remedy” (Schein, as cited in Burke, 1999, pp. 653-655). Despite my concerns that research recommendations may fail to be adopted I must remember “each step, no matter how small, contributes to understanding.” (Glesne, 2011, p. 274). And this was accomplished through this study.
Beyond this first action research cycle, I also expect my role to change. As Stringer (2007) suggested "the position of the researcher changes from one of controller, advocate, or activist to one of facilitator" (p. 213). Given that this thesis may be the subject of a future partnership retreat, in the ensuing months, I expect to advocate consideration of the findings, conclusions and recommendations emerging from this research and I anticipate being asked to facilitate the partnership retreat on this topic later in 2013.

**Implications for the Accounting Sector**

Accounting professional services firms may be described as complex learning organizations. They adapt practices and processes to meet changing economic and regulatory landscapes. Typically, they are also highly structured and hierarchical organizations. Bolman and Deal (2008) acknowledged “structural leadership often evokes images of petty tyrants and rigid bureaucrats who never met a command or rule they didn’t like . . . [yet] literature on structural leadership is sparse” (p. 356). Thus the question that must be asked is whether or not the existing structural framework of professional services firms is attractive to future partner prospects. Rietsema and Watkins (2012) suggested

> a holistic and all-encompassing approach to leadership remains elusive in many organizations. As long as leadership is regarded as something which is “done by” the top of the organization and “done to” subordinates and employees, the point is lost. Thus, most organizational charts are still depicted in pyramid-like format with the leadership at the apex. (p. 26)

This remains true for many accounting professional services firms.

The accounting professional services sector may benefit from examining its existing structure to determine if the prevailing governance model is attractive to future partners. It is possible that “leadership as a concept may simply have outlived its usefulness in its various
implicit messages of hierarchy, selective application and linearity” (p. 29). Accounting firms need to “challenge the myth that leadership is about position and power” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 338). As Pascale (1999) concluded, “for an entity to qualify as a complex adaptive system . . . it must be comprised of many agents acting in parallel. It is not hierarchically controlled” (p. 84). Thus, accounting professional services firms might consider their practices surrounding transparency of roles and paths to partnership and seek to enhance their understanding of what attracts designated Accountants to ownership lest the profession fail to become a complex adaptive system characterized as “distributed leadership . . . where the activities or functions of leadership are no longer the purview of the select, but rather the responsibility of many” (Rietsema & Watkins, 2012, p. 27).

Implications for Leadership Research and Practice

“True research does not end. Instead it points the way for yet another search” (Glesne, 2011, p. 275). Although this thesis uncovered strategies that could be employed to make traditional leadership positions attractive within an accounting context, the research findings highlight that “leaders aren’t just representing themselves. They speak and act on behalf of a larger organization” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 15). Therefore academicians focused on leadership studies may consider examining the overarching aims of leadership research and its impact on how leaders attract future leaders as well as applications for the time effective design and delivery of customizable leadership development programs.

Kaiser et al. (2008) argued “leadership is a solution to the problem of collective effort – the problem of bringing people together and combining their efforts to promote success and
survival” (p. 96). Yet, given the importance and perceived need of businesses to develop better leaders, and

given continuing research and study in the fields of leadership and organizational development, why are we not seeing convergence of theory and practice? . . . It is puzzling that at a time when professionals across the spectrum of human endeavor are subject to endless barrages of leadership material, in the form of suggestions, guidance and models, the organizations and projects they lead are increasingly subject to failure and the very self-confidence they require to lead is on the wane. (Rietsema & Watkins, 2012, p. 23)

Thus it is important to determine what is or are the missing links that prevent leadership theory and application from coalescing within organizations. If the most cutting edge research is not being implemented, it cannot be embraced by current leaders to inspire future leaders.

Given that “the future of any company [also] depends on the engagement of the entire workforce” (Edwards, 2010, p. 37), leadership research also needs to focus on design and delivery of effective and efficient leadership development programs. Given the rapid pace of change further research is needed to address ways and means of delivering leadership development to individuals at all stages of their career, in a timely manner

otherwise, [organizations] won’t be able to push urgency up fast enough, form the right guiding teams at various levels in the organization, or communicate the vision widely yet quickly. As the rate of change increases still more, so does the need for more change sophisticated people. (Kotter, 2002, Conclusion, Para. 10)

For example,

technical applications ameliorate several common concerns with regard to traditional development approaches, such as lengthy developmental timeframes, challenges inherent in attempting to get people together for face-to-face interaction, and the lack of tailoring to meet specific, individual needs. (Antes & Schuelke, 2011, p. 337)

Thus one implication emerging from this research is the need for more leadership and partnership development tools and / or strategies to enhance pre-existing approaches.
Conclusion

This study highlighted that while leadership and partnership development programs already existed, they failed to meet the needs of Chartered Accountants. Given that effective talent development programs were deemed both an attractant by research participants and a necessity, academia might be well advised to provide research and applications that will enable accounting professional service firms to close this gap in their arsenal of tools to attract and retain the best and brightest.
REFERENCES


Nielsen, K., & Cleal, B. (2011). Under which conditions do middle managers exhibit transformational leadership behaviors? — an experience sampling method study on the...


APPENDIX A: INQUIRY TEAM MEMBER LETTER OF AGREEMENT

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Roberta Turton (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry research study at Collins Barrow Calgary LLP to answer the inquiry question what succession planning strategies can accounting professional services firms adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership? The Student’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Program Head, MA Leadership (Classic), at [telephone number].

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: distributing an electronic survey, receiving and recording the time of receipt of expressions of interest in participating in a research interview; scheduling interviews, conducting interviews, recording your reflections during interviews and transcribing interviews while simultaneously removing all personal identifiers from the transcriptions and member checking. Your efforts will assist the Student and Collins Barrow Calgary LLP with the organizational change process while simultaneously contributing to the body of knowledge in the accounting professional service firm sector. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information, personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

Bridging Student’s Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict

As a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, you may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this any potential or actual conflict of interest in this study. Such requests may include asking the you to: send out the letter of invitation to potential participants, receive letters/emails of interest in participation from potential participants, independently make a selection of received participant requests based on criteria you and the Student will have worked out previously, formalize the logistics for the data-gathering method, including contacting the participants about the time and location of the interview, conduct the interviews with the selected participants (without the Student’s presence or knowledge of which participants were chosen) using the protocol and
questions worked out previously with the Student, and producing written transcripts of the interviews with all personal identifiers removed before the transcripts are brought back to the Student for the data analysis phase of the study.

This strategy means that potential participants can confidentially turn down the participation request from the Student, as this process conceals from the Student which potential participants chose not to participate or simply were not selected by you, the third party, because they were out of the selection criteria range. You are asked to take on such third party duties in this study and will work under the direction of the Student. You will be fully briefed by the Student as to how this process will work, including specific expectations, and the methods to be employed in conducting the elements of the inquiry. You will also be given every support possible by the Student, except where such support would reveal the identities of the actual participants.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor. If you are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential please verify this with Roberta Turton, the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:
I have read and understand this agreement.

________________________ _________________________ _____________
Name (Please Print)   Signature    Date
As you may or may not be aware, Roberta is currently enrolled in a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies program at Royal Roads University. Her research seeks to uncover succession-planning strategies that professional services firms may employ to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership. It’s her objective to elicit the perspectives of Chartered Accountants using a survey and interviews. The study also involves a review of literature to better understand the role of partners in limited liability partnership’s, employee engagement, talent development and leadership development.

Roberta is presently awaiting final approval to proceed with her research from the University’s ethics review board. Once that approval has been received, Chartered Accountants at all levels will be invited to participate in the study. Participation is 100% voluntary and the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous throughout the study. In fact, Roberta will not even know who participates in this study as she is engaging external research assistants to aid in data collection.

Collins Barrow whole heartedly supports this research endeavour. Should you choose to participate, we ask that you please code your time to admin.

Ultimately, it is our hope that these research findings be published in 2013. If you have any questions about this research, please speak with Roberta directly.

Wes Stripling, CA
Managing Partner
Collins Barrow Calgary LLP
[telephone number]
APPENDIX C: COMMUNICATION TO SURVEY PILOT RECIPIENTS

Thank you for agreeing to be part of the survey pilot for this action research project. I welcome any questions or comments you might have on the introduction below and the survey itself. Also, should you choose to respond to the survey questions themselves, please know that your responses will not form part of the formal data gathering process.

In your opinion, do you think that the questions in the survey aid in answering the objectives identified in paragraph 2 of the research informed consent content below? Is there anything you feel I should be asking that is presently lacking? Any and all input is appreciated.

The deadline for feedback is Monday October 29, 2012.

If you have any questions about this research, or if you'd prefer to talk in person, I can be reached at [telephone number]. Thank you again for your help and insight.

Warm regards,

Roberta Turton
APPENDIX D: ELECTRONIC INVITATION FOR SURVEY

Dear [Name],

My name is Roberta Turton, and this research project, Succession Planning Strategies to Attract Partners at Professional Services Firms, is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Program Head, MA-Leadership, School of Leadership Studies, at [telephone number].

RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT

This research project has received approval by Royal Roads University’s Research Ethics Board.

The research survey may consist of a number of open or closed-ended questions and I estimate it will take fifteen minutes to complete. The foreseen questions will aim to uncover your understanding and perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of partners; the partnership selection process; the attractiveness of partnership; and, barriers to your pursuit of and achievement of election to partnership. If you are interested in extending your participation in this study, beyond the survey, you will have an opportunity to express your interest in participating in follow-up interviews that will occur after the survey response deadline has passed. Interview participants will be selected on a first-to-express-interest basis and a limited number of interviews will be conducted for each the following levels: Chartered Accountant, Manager and Senior Manager.

In addition to submitting my thesis to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment of a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies degree, I will also be sharing my research findings with Collins Barrow Calgary LLP. As this research will also be published, a copy of this thesis is expected to reside in Library and Archives Canada, accessed through the Thesis Canada Portal, and the ProQuest/UMI database.

This survey has been designed so that survey respondents are anonymous. Information will be recorded as an electronic survey and will be summarized in anonymous format in the body of the final report. Any information provided will also be kept strictly private and confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Because SurveyMonkey is the survey instrument being used, your survey response is processed and stored in the United States. Please be advised that the U.S. government, courts, or law enforcement and regulatory agencies may be able to obtain disclosure of the data through the laws of the United States.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project by completing this survey. If you do choose to participate, simply complete and submit the survey. If you have any further
questions pertaining to this research study, please do not hesitate to contact Roberta Turton at [telephone number].

By clicking on the following survey monkey link, the individual gives their free and informed consent to participate in this project.
APPENDIX E: SURVEY INVITATION FIRST REMINDER

Thank you to all those who have already completed the survey distributed to you to explore succession planning strategies to attract partners in professional services firms.

For those who have not yet completed the survey, this is a gentle reminder that your voluntary and anonymous participation would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to refresh your memory on the purpose of the survey, please see the attached information previously sent to you when the initial invitation was distributed. By clicking on the SurveyMonkey link below and completing and returning the anonymous survey, you are giving your free and informed consent to participate in this project. It is expected that this survey will not require more than 15 minutes of your time.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8PS9RJB

A second and equally vital aspect of my project involves confidential interviews with CA's at the Chartered Accountant, Manager and Senior Manager level at Collins Barrow. If you are willing to participate in a confidential interview on the subject of attracting partners in professional services firms, please advise Jen Stefura of your interest by emailing her at [email address]. Interviews will be conducted in a private meeting room at Collins Barrow's office at a mutually convenient time by an external interviewer who will not make known to Collins Barrow or Roberta Turton, the identities of those who were interviewed.

If you have any further questions pertaining to this research study, please do not hesitate to contact Roberta Turton at [telephone number].
APPENDIX F: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. By consenting to participate in this research study by completing and submitting this survey, you understand and acknowledge: (1) you have read the introduction to this survey, (2) that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw from this research study at any time simply by not submitting your survey; (3) the survey is anonymous; and, (4) that results will be published.
   a. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research study
   b. I do not consent to participate in this research study

2. In what period were you born?
   a. Before 1946
   b. 1946 – 1964
   c. 1965 – 1980
   d. 1981 – 2000

3. Please indicate your gender
   a. Male
   b. Female

4. Please rank partner roles and responsibilities based on what you believe to be the most important part of their role. 1 indicates most important and 10 reflects least important. Please include any role or responsibility you believe is missed in the “other” comment box below with an assigned rank.
   a. Generating business for the firm
   b. Practice management
   c. Ensuring compliance with any and all accounting, audit and tax regulations
   d. Recruiting staff to the firm
   e. Developing and training staff
   f. Mentoring staff
   g. Approving all practice specific billings
   h. Contributing to the successful operation of the firm
   i. Contributing to the development of appropriate policies, practices and procedures used by the firm
   j. Protecting the interests of the firm and its people
   k. Other – open ended

5. In your opinion, what currently constitutes new partner selection criteria? Please rank your top 5 criteria with 1 being most important and 5 being least important.
   a. Demonstration of technical skill
   b. Commitment to the firm
   c. Revenue generation track record
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

d. Size of personal network
e. Ability to train and develop staff
f. Community connections
g. Rapport with other partners
h. Rapport with staff
i. Other

6. Please select and rank 5 items from the list below to indicate what you find attractive about becoming a partner, with 1 being most attractive and 5 being least attractive.

a. Income earning potential
b. Autonomy
c. Prestige
d. Entrepreneurial opportunity
e. Ability to manage own time
f. Membership in a partnership that shares similar values
g. Membership in a partnership of other like minded entrepreneurs
h. Ability to align my practice with my interests
i. Reputation of the firm
j. Time off
k. Longevity of the role
l. Flexibility, please explain
m. Other – open ended box

7. Please rank your top 5 reasons that discourage you from pursuing partnership, with 1 being what most discourages you and 5 being what least discourages you.

a. Not enough partnership spots available
b. Requirement to do business development
c. Having to be responsible to other partners for practice metrics
d. Perception of the technical skills, or lack thereof of existing partners
e. Regulatory requirements related to the role of partner
f. Liability risk
g. The responsibility associated with serving clients
h. Potential time commitment to the firm related to fulfilling client responsibilities
i. The responsibility and challenges related to a workplace filled with multiple generations
j. Poor rapport with existing partners
k. Lack of familiarity with existing partners
l. Personal values not in alignment with the partnership
m. Age of partners
n. Don’t enjoy the work
8. Please rank what you perceive are the top 5 barriers to being elected to partnership with 1 reflecting the biggest barrier and 5 being the smallest barrier.
   a. Lack of established practice to inherit
   b. Failure to build a sufficient size practice prior to be appointed to partnership
   c. Current profitability of the partnership
   d. Lack of urgency to elect or admit a new partner
   e. Personal rapport with existing partners
   f. Insufficient technical skills
   g. Insufficient interpersonal skills
   h. Other? (open-ended)
9. Is there anything else that you feel we should know about your perceptions of partnership, its attractiveness or barriers to admission?
10. If you could change 2 to 3 things about the roles and responsibilities of partners; partnership selection criteria; and/or partnership development, what would those be?

Conclusion:
Thank you very much for your input. Your feedback will remain anonymous.

Please code time spent participating in this survey to "admin" and leave the explanation blank.

If you are interested in continuing to be involved in this research study, by participating in a comprehensive and confidential interview on this subject, please email Jennifer (Jen) Stefura at [email address] by no later than November 15, 2012. Jen is an approved and impartial research assistant assisting Roberta Turton with this research study. Jen, along with Joel Matthews, will be coordinating, conducting and transcribing interviews so that your identity throughout this study remains anonymous. Roberta has willingly removed herself from this part of the research process to ensure that, as a result of her position at the firm, your identity and comments are safeguarded. Roberta will be involved with the data analysis only after it has been stripped of any personal identifiers by Jen and Joel.

Interviews are estimated to last one hour. A maximum of nine (9) interviews will be conducted. This investment of time has been pre-approved by the firm, should you elect to confidentially participate.
APPENDIX G: ELECTRONIC INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

Dear [Name],

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in an interview for the research project entitled *Succession Planning Strategies to Attract Partners at Professional Services Firms*. Your name was selected because this research is only targeted at Chartered Accountants at Collins Barrow Calgary LLP, a group for which you are a member, and, because you were one of the first individuals at your level to express an interest in participating in a face-to-face interview.

Here are the proposed interview details:

- **Date:**
- **Time:**
- **Location:** Collins Barrow meeting room [X]

If this time is not convenient for you, please feel free to suggest an alternate time and place. Also, please remember, you are under no obligation to participate in this interview and you may voluntarily withdraw from this research study at any time.

We have also attached a copy of the interview questions so that these can be reviewed in advance.

Please advise me of your willingness and/or availability to participate in this interview by responding to this email.

Thank you again for your interest in this study.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Stefura, Research Assistant

[Email address]
APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

This research is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. Roberta Turton’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by by calling Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Program Head, MA-Leadership, School of Leadership Studies, at [telephone number].

This research will consist of an interview aimed at uncovering your understanding and perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of partners; the partnership selection process; the attractiveness of partnership and barriers to your pursuit of and achievement of election to partnership. We estimate that this interview will take a maximum of one hour to complete.

Jennifer Stefura or Joel Matthews will conduct the interview and interviews will be recorded for the purposes of information capture. The interviewer will also take notes. Following the interview, the interviewer will also record their personal observation and reflections of the interview proceedings and the interview recordings will be transcribed. Jennifer and Joel have been engaged to protect your identity and the confidentiality of the your responses.

Within one week of the completion of your interview, you will receive a transcription of the audio recording from Jennifer or Joel. It is requested that research participants review and provide comment on interview transcripts by no later than noon, MST on Thursday December 11, 2012. It will be understood that no reply affirms accuracy of your transcript.

In addition to submitting her thesis to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment of a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies degree, Roberta Turton will also be sharing research findings with Collins Barrow Calgary LLP. As this research will also be published, a copy of this thesis is expected to reside in Library and Archives Canada, accessed through the Thesis Canada Portal, and the ProQuest/ UMI database.

Any information you provide will be kept strictly private and confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

The information you provide will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

All data collected during this research study will be encrypted and password protected. Data specific to any research participant will be destroyed within three days of withdrawal from the research study. Raw data pertaining to this research will be retained until December 31, 2013. Effective January 1, 2014, all raw data will be destroyed.
You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

Two copies of this research informed consent information will await you when you arrive for your interview. The information will be reviewed with you again, at that time. You will also be required to sign a copy of this document prior to participating in the interview. You will also receive a copy of this document for your personal records.

If you have any further questions pertaining to this research study, please do not hesitate to contact Roberta Turton at [telephone number].

By signing this form, the individual gives their free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print):

Signed:

Date:
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW PROCEDURE AND QUESTIONS

• Welcome -----. Thank you for joining me and for choosing to participate. Please make yourself comfortable.

• May I get you a glass of water?

• Have you had a chance to review the informed consent document?

• Review informed consent and execute document paragraph by paragraph.

• Research participant signs informed consent document.

• Do you have any further questions about this research study before we get started?

• I’m just going to test the recording device. (Press play, speak, stop, playback).

• Let’s proceed.

START RECORDING

1. What do you believe are the key responsibilities of partners?

2. What do you perceive is the difference between the role of a Senior Manager and that of a partner?

3. From your perspective, how does a person become a partner at Collins Barrow?

4. What do you believe is the partnership election criteria?

5. In your opinion, what contributes to someone’s likelihood of becoming a partner?

6. What about partnership is attractive:
   a. To you?
   b. To others?

7. What, if anything, prevents you from pursuing partnership?
8. Based on your experience, what prevents others from pursuing partnership?

9. What does partnership offer that self-employment or being an employee here or elsewhere does not provide?

10. What, if anything, can the firm do to make partnership more attractive to Chartered Accountants?

11. What, if any, obstacles or barriers should the firm remove to make election to partnership more attractive?

12. Is there anything else that you would like to share on this topic?

CLOSE

• Thank you. That concludes all of the questions that we have for you today.

• Going forward, I will be transcribing today’s recording and will send you a copy of your comments for your review. Please review these notes and email me any corrections by the date noted in the email. If you don’t respond, then the transcriptions will be interpreted as correct.

• Do you have any further questions about this research project?

• Thank you again for participating.

INTERVIEWER WRAP-UP

• Jot down any notes or observations you haven’t already noted down during the course of the interview.
APPENDIX J: ELECTRONIC DATA CHECKING COMMUNICATION

Dear,

Thank you for your participation in the research study interview aimed at answering: what succession planning strategies professional service firms can adopt to attract Chartered Accountants to partnership. Your input is greatly appreciated.

As mentioned at the interview, we have attached a transcription of the audio recording from the [date]’s interview. Please review and provide comment on interview transcripts by no later than noon, MST on [date]. It will be understood that no reply affirms accuracy of your transcript.

Thank you again for your participation.

Once the final report is finalized and published, you will be notified should you elect to read the final report.

Sincerely,

Joel Matthews or Jennifer Stefura
APPENDIX K: SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 1: By consenting to participate in this research study by completing and submitting this survey, you understand and acknowledge: (1) you have read the introduction to this survey, (2) your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw from this research study at any time simply by not submitting your survey; (3) the survey is anonymous; and, (4) that results will be published.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I voluntarily consent to participate in this research study</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not consent to participate in this research study</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 2: In what period were you born?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1946</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946 – 1964</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965 – 1980</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981 – 2000</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 3: Please indicate your gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 4: Please rank partner roles and responsibilities based on what you believe to be the most important part of their role. 1 indicates most important and 11 reflects least important. Please include any role or responsibility you believe is missed in the “other” comment box below with an assigned rank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generating business for the firm</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice management</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to the successful operation of the firm.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring compliance with any and all accounting, audit and tax regulations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Protection the interests of the firm and its people.  
Modelling ethical and behavioural norms and expectations.  
Developing and training staff  
Mentoring staff  
Recruiting staff to the firm  
Contributing to the development of appropriate policies, practices and procedures used by the firm  
Approving all practice specific billings  
Other, please specify

No comments were provided.

Question 5: In your opinion, what currently constitutes new partner selection criteria? Please rank you top 5 criteria with 1 being most important and 5 being least important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to foster and maintain client respect and loyalty</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the firm</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of personal network</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of technical skill</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport with other partners</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community connections</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue generation track record</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to train and develop staff</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport with staff</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open Ended Comment:

1. Personality/demeanor that the other partners would like to have sitting around the boardroom table next to them sharing in the decision making -

Question 6: Please select and rank 5 items from the list below to indicate what you find attractive about becoming a partner, with 1 being most attractive and 5 being least attractive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to align my practice with my interests</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income earning potential</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Average Rating</td>
<td>Response Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to manage own time</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of the firm</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge associated with managing own practice</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial opportunity</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to realize personal potential</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in a partnership that shares similar values</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in a partnership of other like-minded entrepreneurs</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to mentor and develop other like-minded individuals</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to be a leader in the firm</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to focus on business development</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity of the role</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time off</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life; flexibility; and, other</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open-Ended Comment:

1. The number one reason is the opportunity to work with clients in fulfilling their needs in the areas of service that we provide. Perhaps that is entrepreneurial opportunity.

Question 7: Please rank your top 5 reasons that discourage you from pursuing partnership, with 1 being what most discourages you and 5 being what least discourages you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requirement to do business development</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential time commitment to the firm related to fulfilling client responsibilities</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal values not in alignment with the partnership</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory requirements related to the role of partner</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the technical skills, or lack thereof of existing partners</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t enjoy the work</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, open ended</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liability risk</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to be responsible to other partners for</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Metrics</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not enough partnership spots available</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The responsibility associated with serving clients</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The responsibility and challenges related to a workplace filled with multiple generations</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor rapport with existing partners</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of familiarity with existing partners</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of partners</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open-Ended Comments:
1. The idea that you would be locked into a long-term partnership commitment and you may find being a partner is not what you want to do.
2. No life - comparing partners to CFO clients; partners put in far more hours.
3. The long term commitment. To want to be partner you have to look at potentially being here for the rest of your career. Once you are in the partnership it's not that easy to get out.
4. Having to bring in new clients

Question 8: Please rank what you perceive are the top 5 barriers to being elected to partnership with 1 reflecting the biggest barrier and 5 being the smallest barrier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient interpersonal skills</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient technical skills</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of urgency to elect or admit a new partner</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal rapport with existing partners</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient recognition of my skills and abilities</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of established practice to inherit</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to build a sufficient size practice prior to [being] appointed to partnership</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current profitability of the partnership</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open-Ended Comments:
1. I don't feel there are any barriers
2. There are not a lot of barriers right now to those with the right skill set and attitude - we need partners.
3. Fit with partners and managerial philosophy
Question 9: Is there anything else you feel we should know about your perceptions of partnership, its attractiveness or barriers to admission?

| 1. | perception is that as a partner you have to know all aspects of all types of accounting and all industries |
| 2. | Partners are not team-focused as the setting for a manager group. They function independently and that is not attractive to me |
| 3. | I enjoy public practice, in my opinion the work is the most important thing. If you enjoy what you do the rest is secondary. Once I realized this is what I wanted to do it was easy to see CB was where I wanted to do it. |
| 4. | Potential candidates need to want to be a Partner and have a fire in their belly to be committed in the role. |
| 5. | I think the largest barrier to admission to the current partnership is the perception that the current partners struggle to agree on firm and team policies. It is very evident that Team 1, Team 2 and Tax operate as separate business units and in my opinion makes it difficult for the partners to operate effectively. |
| 6. | Having worked for partners on both teams I've been able to observe the benefits and pitfalls of both teams. I think the Partnership needs to do a better job of ensuring the firm operates as one firm rather than three businesses co-existing. |
| 7. | Newer generating has much different views on what work-life balance looks like and values outside of work much more importantly than running a successful, growing, demanding business. |
| 8. | There are not a lot of barriers right now to those with the right skill set and attitude - we need partners. What is needed are: 1) core skills useful to the partnership, which do not need to be in the same areas for each partner, and 2) willingness to commit to the partnership and the common values held by the existing partners. |
| 9. | To me partnership is not that attractive. You have to be able to work the existing partners and you have to look at who else behind you can potentially be a partner one day and decide if you would want to work with these people for the next 20-30 years. I think to want to be a partner you have to look at it for the long term. |
| 10. | Overall, the current partners do a great job at communicating the attractiveness of partnership and do what they can to limit any barriers. This is especially the case for those who communicate an interest to move into this role. |

Question 10: If you could change 2 to 3 things about the roles and responsibilities of partners; partnership selection criteria; and/or partnership development, what would those be?

| 1. | Managers should be informed more promptly if they are not headed towards partnership and not in the partners' future partnership plans.  
2) Partners should be more engaged in ensuring the overall happiness of their staff. It should not be left to HR and managers to boost employee morale and provide suggestions for improvement. Partners will have ideas as well. |
<p>| 2. | Partners need to trust managers more and listen to their views on staffing and recruiting, |</p>
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<th>Succession Planning Strategies To Attract Partners</th>
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<td>3. More candidates wanting to be a Partner and being willing to be mentored on how to achieve the goal. Perception that women need to give up too much life balance to be a Partner.</td>
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<td>4. The ideal 360 degree partner does not exist. Partners need to look at individuals strengths and what each individual would bring to the partnership. CB currently acts like 13 sole practitioners sharing office space. They need to look at it more globally and see 13 strong individuals contributing certain strengths to one partnership.</td>
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<td>5. Don't have all partners contribute equally/similarly to the partnership - focus on individual partner strengths in specific areas - marketing/rain-maker, technical/chargeable hour worker, interpersonal mentor/coach, etc. - put in place partner mentor/coaching for regular monitoring, partner development</td>
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<td>6. Better mentoring for new partners, better communication (largely via mentoring) of the benefits of partnership to potential candidates.</td>
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<td>7. I don't think any one of us really knows what the partner role really entails. No one really talks to us about opportunities to be a partner or really how to get there. I know I have been told that if I want to be a partner I just need to let them know and I could be put on the partner track. I have no idea what being on the partner track really means. I don't know what criterias need to be met to be a partner.</td>
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<td>8. The one tough aspect of the current system is that it is a unanimous decision to promote new partners. This is tough because the barriers of truly getting to know partners cross-team is limited due to the varying types of work. This could lead to potential candidates not being promoted simply due to some partners not knowing that person very well even though there is a majority push to promote.</td>
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<td>9. Less time commitment, more training and leadership opportunities</td>
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