Productivity constraints in residential housing operations: A case for enhancing management knowledge to mitigate founder-centrality and organizational inertia

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the College of Interdisciplinary Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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June 2020

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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Abstract

**Purpose.** Firm level case using action research (AR) to investigate constraints to productivity improvements leading to sustainability (social, economic, environmental) to help organizations and municipalities understand how firm behaviour slows adoption of action on social agendas, such as sustainability.

**Methodology.** Action research involved attending to a single organization for 12 months to observe two organization selected projects using multiple qualitative methods, observation, an interpretive reflection through cycles of action and evaluation. Methods where used as interventions to inform the action team and design further project interventions.

**Findings.** Research findings included limits to organizational capabilities regarding strategy and standards, objectives and measures, structure, and skills development, which were constrained by learning and inertia, knowledge, and founder created culture. This limited the organizational members to reacting to external market forces, internal dilemmas, or nonpecuniary whims of management.

**Originality.** This exploratory paper offers a specific case of organizational constraints led by a foreign founder in the senior living industry by using action research as an intervention. Originality is marked by the observation of constraints without directly inquiring into those constraints, as opposed to most other studies reviewed. I make specific recommendations for the business and municipal government to work towards reciprocal benefits. The paper also gives insight into the challenges of a doctoral study using action research, and the design and conduct of that research methodology as an organizational outsider.

**Paper type.** Qualitative multi-method action research case study

*Key words: productivity, sustainability, organizational culture, action research.*
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Chapter 1: Purpose and Context of the Study

It was a management theory that struck me the hardest; namely the old cliché that managers do things right, but leaders do the right things. I witnessed a world of overproduction and overconsumption. One where junk was flying, floating, railing, trucking, or simply moving about a vast and complex but thinly layered global network; like a fragile but persistent slick of oil across a pond.\(^1\) I kept asking myself if we, as a society, are doing the right things. In this reflection, I came across a paradox expressed by William Jevons (1865), an economist who investigated the consumption of coal described advancements in technology and processes, which did not conserve but exhausted resources faster than expected, concluding that,

The Social and political consequences to ourselves and to the world of a partial exhaustion of our mines are of an infinitely higher degree of uncertainty than the event itself, and cannot be made the subject of argument …. Are we wise in allowing the commerce of this country to rise beyond the point at which we can long maintain it? (p. 344)

Jevon’s ideology described a marginal utility theory in economics known as the rebound effect; whereby, as resource productivity improves, rather than extending resources it is more quickly consumed, because it became more accessible to consume, and thus risked scarcity. I was familiar with this phenomenon in the sense that every time I improved a process or system, we became more efficient in applying its application, like a learning curve.\(^2\) So, I was curious, if

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\(^1\) The most recent event in 2020 with the coronoavirus-19 was highlighted in a Harvard Business Review article by Linton and Vakil (March 5, 2020) titled Coronavirus is proving we need more resilient supply chains, where the number of suppliers of major industries are clustered in quarantined areas.

\(^2\) The more a task is repeated the better one becomes at doing it, where each subsequent task requires less labour to produce than the previous (Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p. 603).
we improved the productivity of the right things could we also create a rebound effect for those products and drive their consumption? The pendulum swings both ways, such as the increased adoption of electric vehicles (Seba, 2019). The big question was, what were the right things, and who should decide?

By 2015, I had started this doctoral journey to help provide a clue. I was sure that I could simply increase productivity in a process considering sustainability as a combination of social, economic, and environmental approaches and Presto!, we would know how to avert climate crisis because we could begin making the right things economically accessible and desirable. Assuming utility maximization, productivity means people try to get the most (efficiency) out of what they have (resource); I will describe productivity in more detail later. I had read Meadows, Meadows, Randers, and Behrens III’s (1972) book *The Limits to Growth* and recognized that the status quo model was *de facto*. This suggests that the higher powers of government are not actually in control of the problem; more likely the *invisible hand* of Adam Smith’s (1776) *The Wealth of Nations* ruled the day. In 2017, I heard Michael Enright’s CBC interview with world-renowned climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe (recently named the United Nations’ Champion of the Environment, 2019). Hayhoe (2017) discussed topics such as transitioning from horses to more affordable model-T Fords, as a result of the development of mass production. She also noted Texas was making wind power green, and according to Hayhoe:

> They mean the colour of money (13:16), how local farmers actions contrasted with the federal government efforts as “80 to 90% of the progress on climate change. . .happened below the federal level…It happened in industry…with individual cities deciding to build resilience into their planning…It happened in
I was inspired to look at how one could approach productivity through an organizational lens because change seemed to be a local endeavour of constituent parts.

It wasn’t until I studied the way the action of productivity was applied to sustainability that I realized my inexperience and naivety. Like a grade five math student, I wanted to skip past the formula and jump straight to a solution of ways to solve a wicked problem of adaptation. In hindsight, I ground my way to another answer that might be more useful, or at least realistic. This study highlights how the methodology, organizational culture, and complexity of the changing intervention and social interactions impacted my ability to study the benefits of organizational change from an AR process that included the pre-construction, construction, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages by diverting attention to constraints instead of evaluating the outcomes of the productivity improvements. Instead, I found reasons why businesses do not do more to change or do the right things. Ultimately, the aggregate of many businesses’ behaviours will impact the competitiveness and differentiation of the municipality and then the direction of society and the products or services we consume; looking across a bridge to see what is on the other side (driving force) instead of thinking only about the side where we started (status quo).

**Research and Historical Context**

Organizational behaviours impacting productivity is supported by scholars who focussed on national level data sets but argued for firm level (micro) research. For example, Drummond (2011) noted the failure of macro economic standards to impact national wellbeing saying,
‘A research agenda with a focus on firm behaviour from a micro approach is needed to obtain a deeper understanding of Canada’s terrible productivity record and to develop actions to boost productivity growth’. . . . and analyze how skills were being generated and whether they matched what the labour market required. (Drummond, 2015, p. 85)

If practical, my focus on productivity improvements would consider sustainability; an issue originally raised by the organizational partner and a contemporary concern commonly associated with the climate crisis. Although this study was not about climate change, it is about the ability for humans at the organizational level to improve outcomes.

There are arguments regarding productivity and its impact on sustainability (social, economic, environmental) that demonstrate overconsumption, such as Jevons’ paradox of resource efficiency. Efficiency, “denotes the ratio of physical inputs to physical outputs.” (Alcott, 2005, pp. 9–10). The economic label for the phenomena of Jevons’ paradox is the rebound effect, where efficiency has economic multipliers that improve “profitability, price, and demand” (authors emphasis, p. 13). As a theoretical frame, this was well expressed by William Jevons in 1871, cited by Alcott (2005), stressing that,

It is wholly a confusion of ideas to suppose that the economical use of fuel is equivalent to a diminished consumption. The very contrary is the truth…. Improvement of the engine, when effected, does but accelerate anew the consumption of coal. (authors emphasis, p.12)

---

3 Jevons’ paradox comes from William Jevons 1865/1965 who investigated the rationing of coal in the UK. His study found that innovation and technology created ‘efficiency’ in resource use but had a ‘rebound’ affect that only increases extraction and consumption instead of safeguarding the resource from scarcity. See Blake Alcott’s (2005) review of Jevons’ paradox.
Perhaps the best example came from Henry Ford’s mass production, where Ford was famous for remarking on his belief that every worker should be able to afford a car. The classic image in New York streets from 1900 to 1913 showed results indicating practically all the horse drawn carriages were replaced by Ford’s Model-T because the efficiency of mass production allowed increased consumption of that product.\(^4\) A logical thought test would ask, what if production focussed on electric vehicles? and we could improve the productivity of its production, such that within ten years fossil fuel driven products became obsolete. The rebound effect would then reflect a social good instead of an eco-economic conundrum and debate.

The theory of adopting social value, such as sustainability, to focus outputs was inspired by Porter and Kramer (2011) who made a compelling plea for the case of organizations to exploit social issues arguing,

> Capitalism is an unparalleled vehicle for meeting human needs, improving efficiency, creating jobs, and building wealth. But a narrow conception of capitalism has prevented business from harnessing its full potential to meet society’s broader challenges. The opportunities have been there all along but have been overlooked . . . . The purpose of the corporation must be redefined as creating shared value, not just profit per se. This will drive the next wave of innovation and productivity growth in the global economy. It will also reshape capitalism and its relationship to society. (p. 64)

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\(^4\) Tony Seba, author of *Clean Disruption*, gives a presentation in which he explained the disruption of horses by cars in a sigmoid curve of efficiency gains. The disruption occurs as the cost of the new product or service decreases (Seba, 2019).
Purpose and Context

I start Chapter 1 by touching on the concepts that framed my approach for this investigation and the emergent changes in direction that resulted due to my intervention and methodology. I set the purpose and context as an investigation into action around productivity at the organizational level (micro) and evaluation of the outputs of those efforts. What I ended up with was a lack of productive action and outputs around organizational constraints. Organizations are made up of humans like cities are made up of organizations each with an inverse influence due to social norms and histories, so the constraints are human led but the aggregation of these activities define an organizational output, which can be productive towards some purpose or not. I will discuss the constraints in this paper that were observed during the research intervention and are highlighted in the Chapter 2 Literature Review. I further discuss the problem inherent in the research through an open systems concept of input–throughput–output. This chapter also maps out the framework I followed, discusses the research problem in terms of its complexity, and then gives a description of the organizational partner. Chapter 2 reviews literature on three key emerging areas observed as constraints to action and evaluation: founder culture, management knowledge, and organizational learning. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approach, which guided the research and offered unique opportunities for learning and adaptation that may not have occurred with a less intervening approach. Chapter 4 starts with a timeline and chronologically lays out the observations and activities that occurred in the yearlong study. In Chapter 4, I attempt to describe the challenges I faced as a researcher and the implicit difficulties of the organizational members in navigating the culture and constraints of the organization. Chapter 5 discusses the key areas reviewed in Chapter 2 and explicates the
finding related to those concepts. Chapter 6 offers my conclusions, limits of the work, future areas of research, and my recommendations. I conclude each chapter with a summary.

I intended to systematically aid an organization in making improvements that effected sustainability, and then evaluate that effect in the context of the organizations local community, as a driver for social progress. Using a single case, this research explored the following question and objectives:

1. What are the organization’s barriers to productivity improvements as a driver for sustainability?

My objectives were:

a. Find opportunities to improve productivity for the organization.
b. Observe the organizational constraints that present during the attempt to make changes.

**Origin.** The original objective of this research was guided by economic (Alcott, 2005; Baumol, Blackman, & Wolff, 1992; Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, Scur, & Van Reenen, 2014; Daly, 2013; Drummond, 2015; Kerschner, 2010; Solow, 1994), eco-ecological (Burch et al., 2018; Blauwhof, 2012; Hepburn, Beinhocker, Farmer, & Teytelboym, 2014; Chapin III, et al., 2010; Meadows D., 2014; Porter, 1996a; Tura, et al., 2019; Wagner, Phu, Azomahou, & Wehrmeyer, 2002), and community development theory (Dale, Ling, & Newman, 2010; Eversole, 2003; Goldman Schuyler, et al., 2016; Lawryniuk, 2017; Martin & Simmie, 2008; Martin & Sunley, 2015; Opp & Saunders, 2012; Rittle & Webber, 1973). However, this was not fully achieved due to the scope and course of events that unfolded, but AR allows for such a redirection of efforts.

My initial goal was:

1. To find opportunities to improve productivity
2. To discover how deliberate productivity improvements can create sustainability
3. To expand this knowledge from one organization outward into the community where sustainability may be articulated as a shared value.
Twists and turns. As the study unfolded, I needed to adapt to the emerging outcomes of my interventions to fit with the organizational culture and stakeholders. What I started with was not where the research led me; twists and turns, and other interventions manifested into the “false paths, [and] the endless labors” (Guishard, 2009, p. 85), characteristic of an intervening methodology. Although I discovered opportunities for productivity improvements, I was not able to get past designing an intervention that would deliberately increase productivity or touch on the outside community or its values. Even though the turning of events was methodologically predictable, I was still caught off guard. As a result, the focus of this research necessarily became about observing and identifying the barriers to making deliberate and meaningful change.

Porter and Kramer’s (2011) argument that “narrow conception of capitalism has prevented business from harnessing its full potential to meet society’s broader challenges” (p. 64) offered a generous relief for businesses from being accountable by enlarging a business’ neoclassic economic problem of choice, utility, and information to the macro concept of ‘capitalism’; however, capitalism and its utility theory was not the problem I found in this single case. Despite understanding the difference, I was likely and unwittingly operating under the neoclassical assumption of “maximization of expected utility . . . [assuming] economic rationality” (Simon, 2000, p. 27) because I believe rational actors were motivated to improve. Adam Smith suggested that every individual might seek to guide production to “be of the greatest possible value” (1776, p. 168); despite this axiom, it did not materialize as a mechanism for me to leverage, even though I assumed it would.

On theory. “All theory depends on assumptions which are not quite true. That is what makes it theory” (Solow, 1956, p. 56). Although I began my study with a broader view of society and the impacts an organization can have on it that view changed. What I eventually observed
was related to the culture of the partner organization as it was growing from adhocracy and clan-like to hierarchal (Cameron & Quinn, 2011), particularly one led by a founder. Anfara and Mertz (2015) discussed the difficulty of observing truth, arguing for the use of theoretical models for researchers to understand social interventions (Anfara & Mertz, 2015, p. 13), yet inductively develop new concepts as they emerge. I use a critical realist ontology that posits an abductive approach to thinking and generating knowledge, observing the outcomes of change that would relate activities in an iterative or “revisiting” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 177) process. “Abductive analysis necessarily ends up providing a thematic story of empirical materials”. Such an approach valued a constructivist and interpretive epistemology for data collection (Creswell, 2003), where the data collected was abductively thought of as an objective construct of a normative state, “meaning goes beyond experiencing” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, “Research Paradigms”, para. 7). The approach intended to engage, stakeholders in the intervention, Drummond’s (2015) productivity problem relating to staff skills, the output of the change, develop capacity among the organizational members, and empower future improvements and innovations that might benefit the organization and its stakeholders by using theory to generate knowledge. Methods for collecting data were pragmatic and emergent, acceptable to the organization, and used multiple methods to accommodate learning opportunities and the dialogic process.

5 Induction is debated around Glaser and Strauss’ grounded theory where theory is generated by data alone (Glaser), or where theory is generated by starting with theory (Strauss) as in Baconian inductivism. Here, inductive research starts with theory of something and theory is inferred from the data as the questions and interventions create modifications or rejections of previous concepts.

6 Abduction is a kind of apagoge that is a rule-governed logic such that it follows a means of inference that comes from logically contrasting an outcome with an effect to find gaps that could be repeatable. The process adheres to constant discovery, checking, and inference until some conclusion is drawn and justified through elimination.
Embedded in the approach were my own initial ideas and logics. Anfara and Mertz (2015) discussed initial theories, noting that our “theoretical conceptions” (p. 13) help clarify the direction of the research. William James was quoted as saying, “You can’t pick up rocks in a field without a theory” (p. 13). James meant that some pre-existing belief or idea must exist in order to begin an investigation; even when the absence of initial theoretical framework was properly presented, such as in grounded theory. The scholars noted that the development of one’s theory relied on three components that move “from concrete experiences to a level of abstract description” (p. 2); concepts, constructs, and propositions. Concepts are the phenomena or the “sensations and experiences” (p. 2). In this case, my own experiences generated the concepts that productivity improvements can be used as a tool to benefit organizations and their stakeholders. A focus on improvement of a particular activity will promote the increased consumption and assimilation of that activity by making it more accessible to the stakeholders, such as in the economic theory of a rebound effect or Jevons’ paradox (Alcott, 2005, p. 10). One could think of such an abstraction simply, such as by using resources productively for constructs such as war or peace, old or new, sustainability or overconsumption. Eventually becoming a values proposition or deliberate choice about what it should be.

**Productivity is the right thing to do, right?** The axiom of expected utility is noted as early as Adam Smith’s (1776) address on the Wealth of Nations with the assumption that the marketeer will maximize to their own benefit but stimulate prosperity for others as a result. Neoclassical economics assumes profit maximization because of rational choice, utility, and assumptions about complete information; however, Porter and van der Linde’s (1995) sarcastically noted that economists never find ten-dollar bills on the ground because firms always maximize their resources. Meanwhile, the reality was that money is often left on the ground,
highlighting Simon’s (2000) argument—assuming utility theory—about the lack of economic rationality. So it would seem that despite the advantages of productivity, such as evidence associated with higher standards of living in societies (Hepburn, Beinhocker, Farmer, & Teytelboym, 2014, p. 77; OECD, 2001, p. 12) and the contemporary drop in living standards in the USA associated with a decline of multi-factor productivity (Baumol, Blackman, & Wolff, 1992), some mechanisms keep an organization from leveraging productive behaviours. But if productivity can improve the situation for ourselves and others, then what is productivity?

Productivity is ubiquitous with the term efficiency because of its formula, and as an artifact of the (assumed) economic utility function mentioned above, increased output or improved yield. Assumptions must be considered. As an example, efficiency does not ensure effective use of a resource, but it may imply increased exhaustion or scarcity due to rebound effects, such as in Jevons’ paradox described earlier. The term unproductive can be semantically arguable as being inefficient and closely juxtaposes the term productive by lower outputs and yields; paradoxically, unproductive activities could lead to productive outcomes due to buffers that creates robustness, redundancy, or resilience. An unproductive organization that uses more human labour than technology could potentially contribute to a more productive local community because of economic multipliers and wealth distribution. However, in its simplest form the term productivity is the ratio of the output of an activity and its input (e.g., \( x = \frac{\text{OUTPUT}}{\text{INPUT}} \)) with no further meaning being attributed. The interpretation of productivity measures can be important such as gross domestic product (GDP) in Canada versus gross national happiness (GNH) in Bhutan. The point being it depends on what one cares to measure that is important.

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and how that becomes useful to creating outputs. Productivity was important to mention early in this paper because it can be applied liberally and assumed to be simpler than it is. As an example, connecting it to a standard of living because of increased outputs, which may only end up badly if alternate constructs such as atmosphere, water, population, land, pollution, etc., are added.

A good example of research conducted on construction companies that highlighted productivity constraints showed gaps in values around productivity improvements. The researchers concluded there was an “assimilation gap” (Wafai & Aouad, 2004, p. 3), regarding technology as social and requiring deliberate or “strategic utilization” (p. 4) as a way to improve business outputs. Wafai and Aouad (2004) considered the ontological and epistemological stances of a business (deliberateness) from a critical humanist lens, applying soft systems methodology to address slow progress of change and technology assimilation. Ultimately, the authors found that rapid adoption of new tools were “almost impossible to implement” (p. 14) due to organizational development issues, not the tools or technologies themselves.

**On sustainability.** Since no direct action was taken regarding sustainability, I will only cover sustainability as a concept that includes social, environmental, and economic considerations without a fuller discussion or conclusions on the topic. Sustainability and productivity are closely linked because of the effectiveness in productive output and the efficiency of the input, of any form of capital. The contemporary definition of *sustainability* came to prominence from the Brundtland Report (Brundtland, 1987), commonly defined as using resources effectively to meet today’s needs without being at risk of resource scarcity in future generations (Chapin III, et al., 2010; Ding, 2008; Opp & Saunders, 2012; Russell, Taylor III, Castillo, & Vidyarthi, 2014). In Meadows, Meadows, Randers, and Behrens III’s (1972) discussion they never used the term sustainability, instead discussing *capital equilibrium* to
describe the balance required to be sustainable for future generations (pp. 172–173) therefore the term was a more recent addition to the lexicon. The argument made by Meadows et al. (1972) was if the population and economic growth continued then resource collapse would ensue. However, the modern capitalist economy has continued its unsustainable behaviour without finding a solution to the problem of overconsumption and overproduction. This failure is both “a tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968, p. 246) and a “wicked problem” (Rittle & Webber, 1973, p. 155) yet to be resolved. The claim of maintaining the status quo towards resource collapse has been argued to be consistent over the decades by those who consulted with the original 1972 Limits to Growth findings years later (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens III, 1972; Mills & Emmi, 2006; Turner, 2012). Since the 1970s not much has changed except the idea of capital equilibrium as sustainability and a growing population. Thus far, the term sustainability has broadly evaded clarity in definition and outcomes.

**On resilience.** It is worth having some mention of local community and resilience because of its important connection to larger societal change and the context of a partner organization that is directly involved in municipal communities and the social class of older-adults, even if only by an invisible hand. Martin and Sunley (2015) noted how business scholars applied resilience to strategic implementation and adaptable practices to “survive and prosper in an increasingly changeable global market place” (p. 2), but without a particular theory. However, the thinking of local economic resilience follows Berkes and Ross’s (2013) argument that “businesses that have many options and strategies provide a more diverse and hence resilient local economy” (p. 15). Berkes and Ross’s theory would propose that strengthening many small units within the local setting would make the aggregated unit more resilient to shocks, allowing for adaptation or rebounding. The diversity of activities in a community and the control over
those activities were described well by Dale, Ling, and Newman (2010), noting that broad efforts (macro), as well as individual efforts (micro)—those without “regularly interacting systems and networks” (p.216)—have failed to make a significant change (a contextual issue for this case). One reason for failure to change was related to institutional inertia, which is developed by macro-level, path-dependant rigidities (Martin & Sunley, 2015, p. 24; Meehan & Bryde, 2011, p. 102), contrasted by continuous micro-level adaption (Weick & Quinn, 1999, pp. 1–2). The micro-level or organizational-level adaptation was described as an evolution of convergent inertia, punctuated by reorientation due to poor performance (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). This naturally led to the Dale et al. (2010) assertion that management and planning influences occurs best at the community or meso-level (p. 216) by reasoning that the idea of ecological scale would confer with social activity.

The authors argued firmly that the solution to improved outcomes, at a broad level, were set in the geographically located community scale of intervention and in the aggregation of micro level activities in those communities as a part of a systems network (Dale et al., 2010). Earlier work by Eversole (2003), supports the idea of community level controls but found that municipalities often misunderstand the diverse nature of the individual constituents when expecting the micro-level, or grassroots, to solve meso level problems. Therefore, fine tuning at the micro level coordinated at the meso level could lead to adoption of macro level improvements, e.g., sustainability, for society (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2016). Assuming that an organization does not have the interrelated systems and networks to scale sustainability, I conducted my research at the organization level (micro) believing that those findings, if brought up to the municipal level (meso), could be scaled for effect. This could allow the municipal
governments (meso) to inform and support it’s constituent businesses on how to adopt sustainability best practices, at scale.

**Researcher’s Framework**

In a single case, “bounded by time and activity. . . using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15), I followed a framework described in Figure 1. Researcher’s Framework.

The framework depicts the application of the research methodology that shows the process of activities and information that guide the research and indicates the methodological approach of research, exploration, and evaluation as retroductive or revisiting. Figure 1 shows McArdle’s (2008) term for pre-constructing or starting an action research project as “getting in” (p. 605–606). Getting in or embedding into an organization as a part of the research process is an ongoing negotiation and political process that can induce an emotional response from potential stakeholders due to the ambiguity of possible outcomes, such as, exposing uncomfortable truths. Direction arrows show the flow of the work and information, and *framing the problem* was considered throughout the research as new information emerged. I intended to start with gathering salient data, from an action team made up of organizational members, that would indicate the kind of investigations that should occur. Formal and informal interviews would be intended as a primary tool to inform further method design needs. Implicit in the framework was the internal and external knowledge base of the researcher that impacted every step of the research, such as personal experience and perceptions, and literature reviews (as in Chapter 2 and throughout the study), organizational documents, observations as a participant in meetings and organizational life, and other external sources of information. I also started a parallel process of
reflection that I used to understand my own learning and research process, collect data, and check-in on the proposed design.

![Diagram of Researcher's Framework]

Figure 1. Researcher’s Framework.

The framework depicts the application of the research methodology.

The *researching the problem* box (Figure 1) implies methodological considerations such as collaboration with the partnering organization around defining and describing the proposed problem and methods to collect and analyze data. The partnering organization is described in more detail a little later in the Case Description section and was instrumental for identifying, acting, and evaluating the problems presented. Here, the methodology has the researcher consult the stakeholders for direction and salience on topics such as investigating program offerings or procurement processes. McArdle (2008) noted that the sharing and passing of responsibilities to the stakeholders creates “baggage” (p. 607) raising the question of the researcher’s role and how it might change. The *problem exploration* is the investigation and interpretation into the problems defined by the stakeholder group (e.g., procurement processes) and the *problem evaluation* is the reflection on the action and solution taken by the stakeholders (e.g., resistance...
to act). This was cyclical where the organizational participants are critical to interpretation, planning, and action. As McArdle described, at some point the researcher’s role changes from trying to do things to observing and reflect on things, allowing the stakeholders to take the next steps (p. 607).

In a cyclical process like this, after an intervention an outcome occurs which informs the proposed research question and creates further actions and evaluation. As a parallel process, the reflective practice and researcher’s participant observations inform the evaluation of action and outcomes as well and the process and outcomes of writing up the final report for dissemination, which led back to the internal and external knowledge acquired by the researcher.

**Research Problem**

So far, the research question, framework, and the problem described follow a model of inputs, throughput, and outputs commonly understood in business systems process, (Lysons and Farrington, 2006). Figure 2 shows this concept with relationships between its constructs and the proposition, showing what goes in is transformed and then comes out with value added, with each construct informing the previous of the effects. The inputs I engaged the organizational partner with to improve performance included a process (i.e., procurement) and a program (i.e., health). The throughput was intended to be where the action took place and the output would observe the effects and check for validity. In my mind, this was a somewhat linear formula and had a lower level of complexity, which I now regret as I operated under the assumption of a closed system instead of an open system.

Although out of the scope of this paper, and frankly missed, it is worth mentioning general systems theory, so the simplicity of Figure 2 is not misinterpreted in the complexity of the research problem. General systems theory (GST) was first proposed post World War II as an
interdisciplinary approach to disciplinary silos and included nine constructs by Boulding (1956/2004), the proposition included the shift from simplest to most complex systems, and each level of complexity integrated the previous level. Compared to Boulding’s hierarchal scale of nine levels of complexity, Figure 2 in this intervention is high at a level 8 complex open system, noting the practical difficulty of separating the individual from the organizational systems and included the socially constructed importance that symbolism plays (p. 205). This is important to recognize because as we find later the transition between some framework or thermostatic type operation may not be entirely clear as an output, such as satisfaction, nonpecuniary benefits, or ideas of quality.

![Figure 2. Basic operational process and its relationship to sustainability constructs.](image)

The problem I attempted to address with this research was essentially the connection between business inputs and outputs as a means to speed change and assimilation of what is being consumed, not just the speed of consumption (e.g., yields). The theoretical argument follows the economic rebound effect or Jevons Paradox, which contends that as a resource is more productively used its consumption increases (Alcott, 2005). The concept has three key constructs: profitability, price, and demand. In the event that the paradox is engaged profitability
will can come from value added services that increase the selling price or by the reduction in fixed or variable costs to improve the margin, demand will be understood by increased revenues or sales. For context, my thoughts on this were aided by the grow or die versus profit or die debate between Richard Smith and Phillip Lawn, as cited in by Blauwhof (2012). Other research on the advantages of profitability over growth (Industry Canada, 2012; Lafrance, 2012) and varying views on economic prosperity other than infinite growth (Blauwhof, 2012; Daly, 2013; Galor, 2004; Kerschner, 2010; Lawn, 2011; Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens III, 1972; Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010; Solow, 1994), contributed to my siding with the profit or die camp and confirming my own thinking about the use of input effectiveness (what) instead of output efficiency (how much). Further to Richard Smith’s arguments that erroneously criticized Daly’s notion of a steady-state economy as capitalist (Blauwhof, 2012, p. 255), a suggestion that improvements are only effective where competition does not exist, so a capitalist regime will fail to stop overconsumption (Blauwhof, 2012, p. 255). Blauwhof (2012) noted that Lawn disagreed with Smith by arguing entropic effects and “limits to economies of scale” (p. 256) but also cited Lawn who said degrowth could occur through more efficiency production, directly contrasting the economic theory of the rebound effect or Jevons’ paradox (Alcott, 2005).4 Two problems for the research now became apparent. The first was the social complexity of the effort to improve an activity in an open system the second was the perceived value of any proposed improvement.

The Venn diagram in Figure 2 shows a classic model of production, where the inputs are chosen (e.g., coal products), when some necessary action was taken to improve the productivity of the input of coal in the throughput stage (e.g., efficient engines or mining techniques), then a more efficient result of increased production and consumption occurred (e.g., reduced energy
loss). The second law of thermal dynamics helps us understand this through entropy, or the increasing efficiency of energy distribution towards an equilibrium in an open system. My own Darwinian view tells me that improvements or evolution are always possible in this process to create scarcity of a resource through efficiency. This implies that an open system becomes more efficient in consumption as the resource is exhausted and the remaining energy is insufficient to support the system. Collapse and the assimilation or transition to new technologies by adaptation seemed natural in terms of scaling laws, which tended to increase sub linearly at about three-quarters power on the doubling of production and populations (Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p. 605; West, 2018). Doubling the output of a new process or program that would avoid scarcity or collapse should be the focus of a productivity improvement in order to speed assimilation of new inputs. Seemed simple enough.

The main problem was to determine what barriers were faced by the organization to make deliberate improvements. The first challenge I faced was finding an organization that was interested in making some improvements and having it impact some particular output, such as sustainability. Sustainability has a large scope but as a concept I will define by its most common understanding as economic, environmental, and social stewardship. Practically, it can be measured in terms of this research as its impact on profitability (dovetailing with the rebound effect), a decrease in wasted resources such as water, and an increase in quality of life or social justice, etc. It is the interlinking of the three that is important, although that can be difficult to do sometimes. Tura, et al. (2019) asked questions regarding the barriers to introducing new business into a circular economy (e.g., similar concept to sustainability) by accessing interviews across four cases, from seven indicators, in an exploratory and qualitative study. The key constraints were social, where “low customer interest was observed” (p. 94). Local institutional regulation
was a barrier, as was, poor management of information or evidence of benefits, supply chain transparency and cooperation, and a lack of strategy at the organization level (pp. 95–96). The authors concluded that introducing concepts of a circular economy into the business was “highly context-specific” (p. 97). The focus of this research will illuminate the context-specific constraints as opposed to Tura, et al.’s (2019) seven general categories. The following section will describe the partner organization interested in improving productivity of its health program and its procurement processes, and to become more sustainable as a result.

**Case Description**

Earlier, I noted Dale, Ling, and Newman’s (2010) notion of ecological scale and the importance of meso level management and planning (e.g., municipal), impacted by aggregated micro level improvements (e.g., organizations). Without micro level activity, no meso or macro changes can occur even when planned. Other scholars investigating the challenges to implementing sustainability development in small and medium sized businesses argued that the “slow implementation pace happens due to the existence of factors that affect small and medium enterprises’ (SMEs) sustainability” (Jaramillo, Sossa, & Mendoza, 2018, p. 512). The need for micro level research was also supported by institutions and scholars alike. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) noted a lack of firm-level data to analyze (OECD, 2015), while economist Drummond (2015) praised the OECD for recognizing the need for firm-level research, noting the problem of low firm-level productivity due to an impediment of innovation and knowledge diffusion throughout the economy, e.g. transfer of learning from micro to meso. The issue was that the macro level research, such as that conducted by the OECD, was not explaining what was going on inside organizations. This study was conducted in collaboration with a medium sized business (by employee number, Statistics
Canada, 2016, p. v) and operator of residential retirement housing in British Columbia, specifically the greater Vancouver region (GVR) and soon the Vancouver Island capital regional district (CRD). To be sensitive to the partnering organization’s brand and employees, and allow for a franker discussion, I have chosen to anonymize the organization by replacing any references to the organization with “Company” and replaced the name of the founder with “[founder]”. Individuals were anonymized using a reference matrix by location and data collection type, such “(1a1)” and some quotes may be shortened to avoid easily identifying an individual by their use of language.

**Market growth.** To get an idea of community scope, the Capital Regional District (CRD) had over 53,000 new dwellings forecast to be built in the next 20 years. The main constraint for expansion was land availability, and also impacted by both high employment and population growth (Urban Futures, 2014). Growth is important for the company because it presents opportunities but also challenges. Challenges such as high employment rates, labour shortages, and migration to urban centres creating housing cost increases can be partially mitigated through improvements such as wage increases and housing densification. For example, improving labour productivity to reduce demand for employees, support higher pay, and creating multi-unit dwellings to increase housing stock, lower prices, and scale efficiencies of infrastructure and sustainable activities.

The CRD had a combined population of approximately 380,000 (CRD, 2015), with over 25,000 seniors; the GVR had over 2,000,000 people and about 130,000 seniors (Statistics Canada, 2017). Rao and Li (2013) compared Canadian and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (COECD) panel data on industries finding that increasing labour productivity counteracts poor overall performance. Rao and Li said,
Between now and 2020 the labour force is projected to increase at an average rate of 0.5 per cent per year and could register a small negative growth thereafter. This means that the predominant source of economic growth and real income improvements in the future will be labour productivity growth. (p. 5)

Therefore, the market demand for services exists, however, pressure to staff, compensate, and improve productivity was an important business problem.

The current shift in demographics brings the challenge of growth, competition, and societal changes and needs, such as in-home care. Vancouver had a demographic of seniors over 65 years at 6.5% of the population (an increase of 15.7% since 2011 – 2016), the City of Victoria was over 6.7% of the population with a more rapid growth at 21.1% over the same period, 4% higher than the national average (Statistics Canada, 2017). Other challenges come from multitude of community expectations, for example, the municipality of Vancouver had an environmental membership in the C40 for greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction program, noting that their number one target for GHG reductions was “buildings” (C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, 2017). These targets eventually turn into regulations or social expectations. White (2015) argued for the adoption of sustainability reporting noting that by 2014, 99 of the major countries had already passed “804 climate change laws. . . these laws [had] doubled every five years” (p. 19). So, looming regulation will eventually force organizations to act. However, some of the espoused values of the organization, such as reduction of wastes, social inclusion, community engagement, and continuous improvement, directly relate to sustainability. Setting the study in residential building operations was with thanks to the organizational partner, whose

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8 The company website described values, sustainability, services, and products but has been anonymized.
work was related to green building construction, health and housing, and had a value proposition that favoured a closer connection to the local communities they operated within.

**Mittelstand.** The organization is a family owned business with the founder, board chair, and CEO as one person from a traditional Germany (Swiss-German) patrilineal society where the male lineage inherits the business. The owner is the oldest son in a second-generation German family business, defined as a *primogeniture*, but took on the business very early and has significantly transformed the European business by adopting non-family management (Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, Scur, & Van Reenen, 2014, p. 38). Later founding the Canadian business that was the focus of this study. *Mittelstand* is translated from German as a small or medium sized enterprise (SME) up to about $50,000,000 in revenues and less than 500 employees. There is a great deal of research on family businesses because they make up a large portion of national productivity and total number of businesses (Daily & Thompson, 1994). As the oldest inheriting son, the owner displayed traits more appropriate to a founder than a primogeniture, which become relevant in the literature section of Chapter 2. Although historical cultural axioms also impact the societal role of the family patriarch (Hendrix, 1995), such a maintaining financial control (Klein, 2000). Industry Canada statistics showed of the approximate 1,160,000 SMEs in Canada, about 6% or more were owned and managed by a founder (Industry Canada, 2016; Industry Canada, 2012b) or over 73,000 founders.

Eddleston (2008) discussed the impact of the founder on firm culture as transformational leaders, which was descriptive in this case saying:

> A family firm culture is inextricably tied to the founder because he or she makes the initial decisions regarding the firm’s mission, goals, strategies, and structure as well as
the day-to-day operating decisions that influence the firm as it grows and evolves. (p. 1056)

The founder tends to use, what Eddleston (2008) noted as four foundational characteristics of transformational leadership: “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (p. 1056–1057). An idealized sense of community exists, and the founder articulates his vision through powerful storytelling as inspirational motivation and philanthropy; often telling the story of how he started the business. Intellectual stimulation comes from the founder’s entrepreneurial position and strategic challenges levied on the staff to produce innovative and quality services, while the founder’s deep concern for people adds to the individualized identification and considerations.

**Purpose of the firm.** The theory of the firm as Adam Smith or Milton Friedman might have it is to maximize shareholder value, somewhat simplistic and a bit sociopathic in practice. However, the purpose of the organization is more complex, tangled in a web of life experiences, human interaction, power, and intrinsic values. This organization’s stated purpose was to build specialty buildings for seniors in central urban areas. Once built they would operate those buildings as independent living communities, noting they have “2 companies in one” (Founder, personal communication, October 5, 2017), that of builder and of operator. The founder’s story was central to the purpose of the organization, driven by seeing his mother in a poor-quality retirement home, typical at the time. The story was often presented at the start of orientations for new staff and for community prospects and seen as a great hook. The organization does not engage in a continuum of care, meaning that all residents are independent and not needing continued medical assistance. Few other organizations currently offer this kind of product, making it a niche player in a growing market. The organization’s value proposition is to improve
the healthy living of older adults through increased social interactions, physical activities, mental stimulation, and better nutrition in a centrally located community familiar to them. This helps seniors to live better by reducing some of the known negative impacts of an aging demographic such as social isolation, poor nutrition, and a lack of mental stimulation. The senior’s market is growing as a result of a demographic shift (Baby Boom), where the number of people turning 65-years old has outpaced 0 to 14-year-old children (Statistics Canada, 2015). This phenomenon is a first in human history.

**Challenges and opportunities.** Other important factors often included the sale of the senior’s home unlocking pent up equity back into the economy, increasing the supply stock of housing helping young families find homes, and creating densification for more efficient use of infrastructure and resources, including reduced resource consumption. If the housing market slumps, a reliance on high home prices may also work against the organization for those financing their retirement on the sale of a house.

The threat of growth is as real for business as are the opportunities. In this case, the organization was going through several very critical challenges that required change. Some of the more obvious issues were: growth and scaling of inefficiencies, competition and new entrants, leadership and founder succession, changing demographics, organizational cultural change, organizational evolution, labour supply, outside investors, strategic direction, owner subsidies, and more. The ability of any organization to mitigate such problems is critical. For example, an organization’s profitability (return on assets) degrades with growth (Lafrance, 2012). This partially occurs due to scaling inefficiencies, a result of entropy in any organism or organization (West, 2018). Contrarily, focusing on efficiencies and profitability increase growth (Industry Canada, 2012). The danger of inefficiencies and entropy was made apparent by the
current half-life of corporations today. At 10-years the demise of organizations was primarily due to inefficiency in the operation’s resulting in mergers and acquisitions (Daepp, Hamilton, West, & Bettencourt, 2015). So, the danger was compounded by multiple sites, lower labour performance, and lack of standardization.

The organization had several operational sites in the GRV and was planning a construction project in the CRD. As a builder and operator of independent retirement housing, the company employs a variety of professional skills and labour from the community. The building architecture was designed to fit and enhance the local community and intends to enrich and support the local community through its location, partnerships, and amenities. Community connection was a distinctive feature that the organization used to increase the social impact for their clients’ satisfaction by sponsoring many organizations that are of interest to seniors, such as music schools and theatres. The organization also demonstrated concern for the environment in terms of building standards, such as green buildings at a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold standard. The organization had received many awards to highlight their sustainability efforts, such as Stewardship Awards and Business Community Spirit Awards, among others.

The founder expressed interest in improving their sustainability as well as their operational performance and strengthening the organization’s relationship with communities that surround their operations by engaging with local groups such as theatre, music, etc., as well as with the municipality. These issues of sustainability and community groups are important in the dual business expressed by the founder earlier, which relates to the municipality because a municipality must like and approve of the building design in addition to its intended operations. A key concern for the organization’s health, as discussed in preliminary management meetings,
was the organization’s expected growth due to the demographic shifts. The organization was expected to grow significantly through the demographic shift, putting a strain on its resources and capabilities. The problem was expressed as a decentralized or non-standardized nature of the operation that created inefficiencies, which were being accelerated by growth. Another problem of growth was the issue of finding skilled employees in a wage competitive market (4d2, personal communication, November 6, 2017).

This research could also aid the organization because it was expected to “face exceptional growth over the next four years” (4d2, personal communication, November 6, 2017), this was due to the significant demographic trend of people who were retiring, as noted earlier. The demographic shift is a huge opportunity if the control exists, but it was felt the organization was not managed efficiently enough to scale safely (Founder, personal communication, December 10, 2017). These issues were complicated by changes in society, an ethical need for sustainability and growing regulations, e.g., sustainable development goals (SDG), and more competition, thereby creating a less clear future. Internally, the ability to take action was a concern because the founder’s personal energy and resources were being spread thin as the business was growing, and there was some concern for organizational stagnation or status quo as “people are not progressive enough” (4d2, personal communication, February 6, 2018). The Founder/Chair/CEO found himself spread thin, taking on increased responsibilities and more stressful and complex organizational issues. The organizational structure was a concern early on and throughout the investigation for two reasons: for the size of the organization it seemed to have a lot of senior managers, many with no subordinates, and confusing line and functional authorities. I noted a conversation with one manager that the structure was heavy at the top and not completely clear about effectiveness (4d2, personal communication, February 6, 2018). Later, confirmation would
come that the founder was looking to relieve some of his management responsibilities associated with the organization so that he could focus more efforts on key “strategic projects in development or within the board” (4d2, personal communication, November 21, 2018). At the time, I believed a clearer picture of the way in which the organization was operating was of interest to the founder.

Projects. Projects which were important to the founder and the management team included procurement systems and the organization’s client health program. These were specifically selected by the founder, and by the management team through a selection process described later. Procurement was seen as a high cost area that needed standardization and a strategic approach that would create a model for other organizational functions. The health program was the main client value proposition and was central to what the organizations members thought of as differentiation. These will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a description of a research and included the twist and turns, “false paths, [and] the endless labors” (Guishard, 2009, p. 85) I faced personally, as I tried to navigate a complex situation. Noted were productivity and sustainability as elements in the research that gave me some direction but did not end up as a primary focus. I addressed the research problem, question, and objectives, which will be discussed later. Finally, I described the case of a partnering organization led by a founder who made efforts to grow and improve the community as part of a value proposition around quality of life for older adults. Having described the concepts that started this journey I will review the literature in Chapter 2 regarding the concepts that emerged from the investigation as key constraints to evaluating the link between action and outcome.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Initially, the research started with a review of interdisciplinary literature that was sourced from journals relating to production and operations management, sustainability and ecology or ecological economics, and urban or community development. This set the starting tone for an investigation that resulted in emergent themes which required new reviews of literature as the research progressed. The following literature review was a result of those emerging themes that encompassed organizational learning, management knowledge and founder culture. Although discussed separately, these themes are intimately intertwined and overlapping as a part of the culture of the organization. The founder culture and the organizational culture are similar although the founder culture (described later) is more specific to the impact of the founder on the organization versus a general description of organizational culture. Cummings and Worley (2009) described organizational culture as a “pattern of values, beliefs, and expectations shared by the organization members…. Shared assumptions… how employee relate to one another and to significant others, such as suppliers” (pp. 747–748).

I primarily sourced the literature through the Royal Roads University portals and library, assessing the knowledge for practical use regarding business management concepts, and individual and organizational psychology. This was appropriate for the methodological approach.

In terms of the literature review, the methodology was constructivist and interpreted from the lens of the researcher (Creswell, 2003); “Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpostivism [sic]), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning” (p. 9). Additional references, occurring outside the literature review was also used for informing specific “facts” (Stringer, 2007, p. 80) as supplementary information for the use of the partnering organization, learning support, and reader’s interest. Cox’s model (Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p.
226) describing vendor contract relationships was critical for learning in the organization to counter “people’s ‘common sense’—the taken-for-granted knowledge that has accumulated through their personal history of experience” (Stringer, 2007, p. 80), but not theoretically important; the important part of noting literature that informs knowledge generation was that it elucidated the theories that became important, such as organizational learning or management knowledge.

Stringer (2007) established the literature review in Action Research (AR) as a method to establish the “veracity or validity of statements that are often presented to us as ‘facts’” (p. 80). Stinger argued that the personal experiences of people’s history and beliefs amount to their own common sense and may need to be informed by established bodies of knowledge that follow rigorous and “systematic investigations” (p. 80) to determine facts. The case surrounding this research needed fact checking, since innovations and technologies were often misunderstood or unknown to the practitioners in the field requiring additional support from external bodies of knowledge.

**Theory in Action**

The literature review here covers concepts that emerged from the trials and tribulations experienced during the active research intervention and how actions were taken or not. Stringer (2007) argued from a methodological stance, described later, that the “research is based on localized studies that focus on the need to understand how things are happening, rather than merely on what is happening” (author’s emphasis, Stringer, 2007, p. 19). Although the actual application of the research in a live setting was challenging, the truth was that the organizational members’ kindness provided a great environment for the research, but this did not preclude personal challenges or discomfort in the situation. The experience was resonant of the challenges
faced by many change agents or those who might appear to be implementers of change. As
Machiavelli reminded us four centuries ago:

And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things, because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. (Machiavelli, trans. 1908/2012)

Written during his struggles with the Medici family in the early 1500s, Machiavelli noted that the real challenge with change was the introduction of new methods and strategies into old structures, which Bolman and Deal (2008) would have agreed, cautioning not to get “mired in it” (p. 377) as resources are diverted to defending old symbols and structures instead of new ones. The methodology intended to co-create new knowledge around specific and salient projects (e.g., health program and procurement) as selected by the organization’s team. However, inductive knowledge co-created by observing and exploring outcomes with others (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) was generated by the resistance and attempts to intervene into process and programs which led to the current themes of organizational learning, management knowledge, and founder-centrality. Of course, the conditions were not as dramatic as Machiavelli’s, but the outcomes were unforeseen and not what I had anticipated.

**Sufficiency of themes for theory**

Theory, as Albert Einstein said, “theory should point the way to a more comprehensive theory in which it lives on, as a limiting case” (cited by Popper, 1962, p. 42), and Corely and Gioia (2011) described theory as, “is a statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs” (p. 12).
The themes of organizational learning, management knowledge, and founder-centrality that emerged as a result of my first-person reflection and second-person investigations were principle to understanding the constraints against improvements. They were contrary to economic assumptions such as maximum utility and produced nothing in terms of the margin rebound theory. “First-person research practice brings inquiry into more and more of our moments of action—not as outside researchers but in the whole range of everyday activities” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 6). In this way, my reflection and participant observations serve as an instrument to gather another layer of research data. Whereas, “second-person action research/practice addresses our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 6), such as efficient processes and projects. The themes below are most notable in the first-person reflections but also thread through the entire project, as they were continuously emerging.

Karl Popper’s (1962) treatment of induction acknowledged Hume’s challenge of scientific theory but argues that if induction is invalid—the leap from an observation to a theory—then no hypothesis is possible, so the theories need testing to demarcate its boundaries. (Popper, 1962, p. 19); this is known as Poppers falsification. So, a theoretical contribution is a debateable subject, and so we ask what is a sufficient contribution? I was unable to find a clear or unambiguous answer to this question whereas plenty of debate exists around sufficient theoretical contribution (Corely & Gioia, 2011). Considering this is an applied interdisciplinary program, I found some thoughts on this topic.

Sufficiency comes from contribution that the work creates in this interdisciplinary program, this is different than novelty, which is also a debateable idea. In terms of theory, there are two potential parts, new theory or a continuation of an existing theory. This is done by
synthesising knowledge, creating an original technique, testing a theory in a new way, and being useful or validated by application. Anfara and Mertz (2015) described qualitative research, saying “We see the role of theory in qualitative research as basic, central, and foundational, although it may not be consciously recognized or even identified” (p. 227). The nature of the qualitative research is informed by theory as a way of seeing instead of doing.

What theory did I add or subtract from? First, to avoid a reductionist or “ideological hegemony”, Anfara and Mertz (2015, p. 234) argued the need to leverage multiple frameworks. My approach did not test marginal or maximal economic theory although that helped me start the investigation, as Schwandt (1993) noted it allows the researcher to “enter the field with a theoretical language and attitude” (as cited by Anfara & Mertz, 2015, p. 234). Both marginal and maximal economic utility failed to have a result as I might have expected, which led to the emergent themes described.

The three emergent theories fit the application because they were derived by revisiting the data from different times and spaces because it is a natural a priori to watch for patterns and repetition (Popper, 1962, p. 12), as they emerge through induction (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This signals to other investigators that some combination of organizational cultural, inertia, and knowledge are responsible for the lack of productivity in an organization due to inaction, and that the marginal and maximal economic utility theories are not useful as a result.

Specifically, management knowledge was dealt with as a possible cause for poor productivity in generalizable research (Seens, 2013), whereas the founder and organizational culture are dealt with as unrelated phenomenon (e.g., Wasserman, 2008). The combination of the three concepts informs organizational performance that would be otherwise obscured by the underlying complexity in each case, Corely and Gioia (2011) called this “prescience” (p. 23) and
argued that the most useful contributions may be the “incipient organizational, managerial, and societal issues” (p. 23). So, the contribution of three concepts that are interlinked to constrain organizational and managerial action is a valid inference, to be further tested for falsification.

**Emerging themes.** The three themes described in this chapter as organizational learning, management knowledge, and founder culture form an integrated and robust combination of observations that together create a scenario of constraints to explain inaction. Organizational learning was reviewed through a lens of individual and organizational behaviour, where individual adopt new information and productivity is improved as a result. Learning extended into management knowledge, where individuals either had human, technical, or conceptual knowledge or not, and was followed by founder culture as a possible cause of maintaining the status quo. Participant observations would inform the difference between what the management was espousing but not being practicing and mixed messages could be identified among the founder and management (Argyris, 1995; Argyris, 1986). Comments and discussions around priorities seemed to focus on founder decisions; specifically, observable staff behaviours being dismissive of the founder’s activities, this led to the topic of founder-centrality and the culture that was related to Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) model. Themes emerged from scholarly pundits such as Chris Argyris, Peter Senge, and Herbert Simon. Their expertise on organizational development, systems theory, and rational choice in economics respectively, were used as key word searches to start the literature review.

Sustainability was a functional target intended for the organizational projects but was never fully addressable in this study. Despite that, more recent literature review research regarding sustainability by Jaramillo, Sossa, and Mendoza (2018) found 82 published articles on the topic of barriers to implementing sustainability in business operations, of which only 46 were
relevant from 2013 to 2017. The authors found 175 barriers to sustainability adoption for SMEs, most frequently concerning a lack of resources (13 papers), initial capital costs (11 papers), and lack of knowledge (nine papers) (p. 522). Although my research also considered the constraints or barriers to implementing sustainability, it is the only one I am aware of that observed the constraints over a 12 month period of active interventions versus directly questioning managers opinions on barriers or analyzing documents articulated about the barriers.

**Organizational learning.** An organization learns through the aggregation of the individuals learning; like a group of constructs clustered under one overlapping proposition creates a theory of something. Organizational learning can be seen as the ability of an organization’s member to generate new information internally, or take in external information, and put it into action. The evidence of this would be found in the documenting the change in process, the application and engagement of the process stakeholders, and the analysis of the outcome.

Inertia juxtaposes learning in the same way action juxtaposed inquiry, but all are intimately related. One can image how acting based only on bounded knowledge would produce little new learning and only repetition, and inquiry without acting would produce little learning. Learning in organizations can be seen as a combination of planning then doing, where new information is enacted and involves groups, strategy, and operational effectiveness (Argyris & Schön, 1996, pp. 936–937). Argyris and Schön (1996) also noted the effects of learning in social theory, systems theory, values theory, and organizational culture (pp. 937–939). However, I will touch on the topic on inertia as a mechanism that has a deleterious effect on organizational learning and therefore build context under the guidance of the late Nobel laureate H. Simon and others; which will then lead into management knowledge, and finally founder centrality. Martin
and Sunley (2015) regard path-dependent rigidities as regional (macro) systems and business level (micro) as responding behaviours that are impacted by but can impact the system larger system. Inertia can be said to create macro-level path-dependent rigidities (locked-in), e.g., government regulation, contrasted by micro-level adaptation that are punctuated by the reorientation of the organization because of some shock to the status quo (Martin & Sunley, 2015, p. 24; Meehan & Bryde, 2011, p. 102; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985; Weick & Quinn, 1999, pp. 1–2) that challenges resilience. These conditions of inertia, convergence, and adaptation occur at the business level and are impacted by the organization’s management knowledge.

Simon (1991), presented descriptive concepts of bounded rationality in terms of organizational learning. Simon argued that organizations do not learn because “all learning takes place inside individual human heads” (p. 125), and “assuming that individuals are the only proper subject of learning” (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p. 942) and positing the aggregation of interacting individuals as organizational knowledge or memory (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p. 944; Simon, 1991, p. 125). Choi and Ruona (2011) argued that it was the culmination of individual readiness that changed organizations, noting that without the capacity for organizational learning, change would not occur (p. 61). Highlighted by Argyris’ (1995) article were two models on how theories of action are developed as a reasonable means of conducting oneself that may not align with theories of use (p. 20). Argyris argued that the conditions for individuals learning required “propositions that are generalizable, disconfirmable, and actionable” (p. 25). Argyris’ mechanisms can be confirmed by action, which he argued was often difficult because the status quo is often protected by righteous social norms (p. 26) as exposed by Machiavelli (trans. 1908/2012) in the introduction. So, it can be difficult to describe mechanisms unless new
information is introduced that risks exposing them, and new information may need new knowledge.

For this, Simon (1991) described two ways that knowledge becomes available in an organization; “(a) by the learning of its members, or (b) by ingesting new members who have knowledge the organization didn’t previously have” (p. 125). This notion expressed by Simon inferred that the existing (bounded) knowledge in the organization can create inertia or path dependent rigidities around rational but suboptimal decisions that do not have the benefit of new information. However, these rigidities make “organizational memory less vulnerable to personnel turnover” (p. 129) and the associated costs, such as training or lost historical knowledge. We might see this emerge as key historical players that know too much for the organization to risk losing. So, the issue of inertia or organizational memory becomes important when inducting people into the norms and procedures of an organizational culture, e.g., fit. Additionally, “the experiential lessons of history are captured by routines in a way that makes the lessons, but not the history, accessible to organizations and organizational members who have not themselves experienced the history” (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 320). This was described by Simon as two different networking effects or the spoke and wheel, where the “erosion of memory with time has, of course, both its advantages and disadvantages” (Simon, 1991, p. 128). Such erosions of memory could appear as patterns of normative behaviour in the face of ambiguity, sometimes related to the common statement observed by consultants from their

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9 The two network effects in Simon’s description mirrors the impact of new people learning cultural norms often described by a fictional story of five monkeys, used by organizational consultants to describe the negative outcome of organizational inertia. Although fictional, the story likely comes from several sources, such as Stephenson’s (1967) work titled “Cultural acquisition of a specific learned response among rhesus monkeys”, cited in Maestripieri (2012).
business partners as, *That’s Not How We Do It Here!* (Kotter & Rathgeber, 2016), or another common quip when asked why something is done a particular way is, because that’s how we’ve always done it.

The phenomena of rationalized management decisions are observable in an organization as outputs and outcomes, but such rational “consequences and phenomena arise from the fact that human rationality is very approximate in the face of the complexities of everyday organizational life?” (Simon, 1991, p. 126). Simon was admitting that actual mechanisms producing the results from individual learning may be obscured, but the aggregate outcome can be telling, as the organization has a set of “interrelated roles” (p. 126) that balance interactions within its own hierarchy. The structure of the organization is then critical to achieving the objectives of the organization and must either facilitate incoming individual inclusion or a new organizational structure must be adapted to the new representation of the problem with a modified “role system” (p. 132).

However, Senge (2006) discussed the structure of an organization that supports only functional silos saying, “when people in organizations focus only on their position, they have little sense of responsibility for the results produced when all positions interreact when results are disappointing, it can be difficult to know why” (p. 19). People are programmed to have a “fixation on events” (p. 21), which tends to blame people instead of processes, the danger being a slow degrade in quality and accumulation of small threats, or the “boiled frog” (p. 24). Robert Quinn noted that leaders are often trained to think of people as being problematic and so create that reality in the organization (Goldman Schuyler, et al., 2016, p. 67). And Peter Senge pinned organizational learning and the capacity to learn on leaders arguing that leadership and organizational learning are just two ways of observing the same outcomes (p. 67). Although
Goldman Schuyler, et al. (2016) noted ways leaders create learning in an organization through small groups, one review of their volume noted that “the authors did not explicitly recognize limits to human capacity in collective action for the good of the whole” (Dominguez, 2019, p. 291), suggesting that other constraints to were still missing. The events or limits to action that can be associated with individuals’ activities also tell a story about other mechanisms that hinder learning.

Simon (1991) suggested other similar ideas regarding the way in which organizations learn and provided examples of outcomes that reveal some underlying mechanisms of a phenomenon and which Argyris and Schön (1996) called “valid inference and effective action” (p. 951). Kelly and Amburgey (1991) empirically tested Hannan and Freeman’s theory of structural inertia against significant environmental change finding that external shocks did not predict the creation of organizational change initiatives or impact organizational survival.

Environment was referred to as external “threats and opportunities” (p. 592). This could be accounted for by Martin and Simmie’s (2008) recognition that *absorptive capacity* “depends on the organization’s ability to share knowledge and communicate internally” (p. 191). But Martin and Simmie’s paper argued that these evolutionary path-dependant change initiatives come from the external local environment, this might suggest that the local system may limit potential knowledge consumption in an organization if no new deliberate environmental stimulus is provided, outside of a shock. Levitt and March (1988) called it a learning ecosystem, noting that “an ecology of learners complicates the systematic comprehension and modeling of learning processes. Environments change endogenously, and even relatively simple conceptions of learning become complex” (p. 331). This might root the learning process into a reliance on routine.
The theory of inertia, as Kelly and Amburgey (1991) noted, agreed with Simon’s (1991) ideas of organizational memory, such that individuals collectively repeat past patterns when confronted with “environmental change” (Kelly & Amburgey, 1991, p. 609). The authors called this repetition of previous energy spent “momentum” (p. 609) to highlight the historical context of knowledge as a resource. Finally, they noted that the previous changes—or modified role system—inform the next change and “a true shift in orientation requires historical perspective, and a series of incremental changes” (p. 610). Learning in the organization can then be systemized by looking at a combination of constructs that build systems or routines around targets.

Similar to Simon’s (1991) argument, but from the scale of the organization versus the individual, Levitt and March (1988) reviewed the literature on organizational learning and found that organizations learning was “routine-based, history-oriented, and target-oriented” (p. 319). The authors reviewed organization learning based on three known behaviours, “routines…. interpretations of the past …. [and] targets” (p. 320). In contrast to Simon (1991), Levitt and March (1988) approached the learning topic on a broader meso and macro scale of organizational learning as “organizational decision-making …. and population level theories of organizational change” (p. 320). From the routines of the organization, Levitt and March noted that modifying the history to create new knowledge can be done by introducing “hypothetical histories” (p. 334). Other means are suggested as “organizational slack” (p. 334) that allowed for experimentation but may trigger resistance if success created too much variation or low measurability in the known failure rate. In this case, complexity was highlighted because of the problems it posed. For example, the authors noted small changes applied to important strategic issues limited learning but contrasted that with advantages of ongoing learning that was “slow and somewhat
imprecise” (p. 335). So, it would seem frame breaking change creates learning but also resistance, while slow continuous change limits learning but reduces resistance.

Interpersonal conflict created by change is often due to a perception of losing historical privileges. Again, Machiavelli’s (trans. 1908/2012) example warned us, this is a common phenomenon during change initiatives we now term resistance because,

Change is an experience of loss and that the level of resistance a person demonstrates in response to change is proportional to the degree of psychological importance he or she places on what is left behind or lost in the change. (Burke, Lake, & Paine, 2009, p. 335)

Watson (1967) described homeostasis as a stabilizing force that seeks to maintain control of the internal condition and was influenced by the satisfying feeling of competency or the local efficiencies of habit (pp. 365–366). In this case, where activities are historically practiced and seen a preferable, they are termed “functional autonomy” (p. 366), describing acts that are important or satisfying to the user and may cause resistance if changed. These are important points to consider because they parallel inertia and bounded knowledge already established. Watson noted four stages of organizational behaviour that impact the ability to change describing “direct conflict…. [and] decisive battles” (pp. 364–365) as disregard and division, mobilized resistance and success or failure, emergent leaders and counterattacks, and finally submission and acceptance of the new order (p.364–365). Such an evolution of an organization depends on its ability to absorb new knowledge, particularly during times of change and transformation. “A snug fit of external opportunity, company strategy, and internal structure is a hallmark of successful companies. The real test of executive leadership, however, is maintaining this alignment in the face of changing competitive conditions” (Tushman, Newman, & Romanelli,
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1986, p. 583). A feeling of politicking or alliance building might emerge to gather resistance in the face of potential power struggles or external threats instead of adopting a new direction.

In their descriptive paper, Tushman, Newman, and Romanelli (1986) considered various cases of organizations whose executives failed to reorient as the market changed, making “only incremental changes” (p. 583) that led to poor performance and failure (p. 590). The authors looked at the “differences imposed by frame-breaking change” (p. 585) and explored the role of managers in guiding the organization through change. However, the authors cautioned that organizational inertia had created historical successes that “breeds reluctance to change” (p. 592). “Discontinuous or ‘frame-breaking’ change involves simultaneous and sharp shifts in strategy, power, structure, and controls” (Tushman, et al., 1986, p. 585). The authors noted that very few firms initiate a reorientation prior to suffering “performance declines” (p. 583). The low number of firms addressing reorientation may be related to the difficulty of the organizational inertia or culture noting that reorientation or “frame-breaking change is abrupt, painful to participants, and often resisted by the old guard” because “forging these new strategy-structure-people-process... calls for distinctive skills” (p. 585), arguing that “most successful firms evolve through long periods of convergence punctuated by frame-breaking change” (p. 585). This leaves executives with the risky choice of making small cautious changes or larger more impactful change, so the learning outcome is precise.

Levitt and March (1988) supported the frame-breaking idea by noting the problem of sample sizes as a constraint to organizational learning, arguing that the more frequent and smaller the changes the less of a sample can be collected to analyze successful outcomes. “Since frequent changes accentuate the sample size problem by modifying a situation before it can be comprehended, such behaviour is likely to lead to random drift rather than improvement” (p.
However, changes may be avoided as Tushman, Newman, and Romanelli (1986) noted, two resistance responses occur in organizational momentum, the first was being blind or ignorant to an external threat and the second was defending the status quo as “how we work here” (p. 587) because it historically worked or “That’s not how we do it here!” (Kotter & Rathgeber, 2016). The implication here is great, executives need to confront the reality of the situation and make changes to address it, or flounder trying to patch together a failing situation with old techniques. Beyond the ability of the organization to learn is the aggregation of the individuals who drive the organization’s ability to learn.

**Management knowledge.** As noted previously, organizations can learn when their members learn, adapt the routines of inertia and memory, and absorb outside knowledge, but what about the individual management skills to affect that knowledge? The concept of management knowledge has three related constructs that are observable (Katz, 1986): conceptual skills, human skills, and technical skills. Conceptual skills such as seeing outside of local optimums or departmental silos. For example, where a department manager’s process produces excessive invoices to allow them greater flexibility, it puts a deal of distress on the accounting department who has to then buy and implement a costly software package to help with invoicing. Human skills, which are emotional skills can be determined by observing how leaders interact with others to elevate performance, delegate, empower, and coordinate effective work. Technical skills are observable as an “understanding of, and proficiency in, a specific kind of activity” (Katz, 1986, p. 91). For example, an accountant knowing how to use a contribution margin to understand a product costing model or the department manger knowing how to apply the budget to improving scheduling performance.
Industry Canada has a keen interest in productivity growth, which directs research on business performance. Seens’ (2013) quantitative investigations comparing actual versus affordable growth in small and medium enterprises.\textsuperscript{10} Seens analyzed 12-year financial data of 850,000 Canadian businesses following the “Higgins Sustainable Growth Model” (pp. 4, 8) and found that a large portion of Canadian businesses could have grown safely during a fixed period but chose not to. The argument for the choice not to grow was identified by the lack of correlation between actual growth and affordable growth (p. 17). One of the first productivity constraints identified by Seens’ study on growth was that “management lacked the knowledge and skills needed to exploit new growth opportunities” (p. 18). Seens also noted that risk aversion might explain failure to respond to growth opportunities, even though the economic conditions were stable (p. 19). Seens concluded that models such as the Higgins Sustainable Growth Model did not help to understand why organizations choose or are incapable of growing, despite having the means (p. 26). It could be that incompetence or bounded knowledge could drive individual fear furthering more incompetence and avoidance of skill building that managers need to capitalize on growth opportunities.

Skills for managers have been an issue in the literature for some time. Katz (1986) addressed this in his very popular 1955 Harvard article, \textit{Skills of an Effective Administrator}, trying to capture the attention of industry from its obsession with what a good leader’s characteristics are versus what managers actually do. Katz defined \textit{skill} as, “an ability which can be developed, not necessarily inborn, and which is manifested in performance, not merely in potential” (p. 91). Katz’s descriptive argument, based on his previous empirical study of

\textsuperscript{10} Seens prefers the term sustainable growth in his report, which can be easily confused with similar terms such as sustainable development commonly used to describe business efforts to adopt social or environmental innovations.
executives (Author’s note), suggested skills that were important for successful executives as, “technical, human, and conceptual” (p. 91). These skills can be compared to the findings of other authors below in terms of intelligence, empathy, and tolerance for ambiguity (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996; Mintzberg, 2013; Kotter, 2011). Katz noted that the three skills are intertwined and best used for analysis, giving several examples from low-level to top-level employees, and executive development and selection (pp. 94–97). As noted previously, fear of incompetence would be a social phenomenon, where the social group may be the best location for developing these skills.

In retrospect of the 1955 article, Katz (1986) added that executives require group and intergroup skills as a key human relations competency (p. 101). Katz also seemed to think that conceptual skills are “innate” (p. 101) from youth, requiring abstraction and a tolerance for ambiguity and critical thinking. The author challenged his earlier notion that managers can transition without having great technical knowledge; now arguing that it was only possible where executive strategy skills are transferable in very large organizations. In smaller companies, the CEO must have technical ability to “know the right questions to ask his subordinates; he also needs enough industry background to know how to evaluate the answers” (p. 102). This means gaps occur in a manager’s ability to lead or supervise activities, particularly across divergent functions.

Scholars generally agree that weak management or “lack of management skill” (Gill & Biger, 2012, p. 657) results in poor performance. Leadership theory offers benefits to speeding up performance in terms of manager transitions, such as the human skill of managing-up the boss by taking “100 percent responsibility for making the relationship work” (Watkins, 2003, p. 107). However, this may be less important than motivation theory, which “affects choice of behaviour,
the longevity of the behaviour, and the level of effort” (Delmar & Wiklund, 2008, p. 438). The managers then become accustomed to behaviours that favour what they feel they are good at or what temporarily spares them, rather than the ambiguity and doubt of unmeasured performance.

In a longitudinal study, Delmar and Wiklund (2008) discussed how motivation for growth, the motivation that could increase performance was likely derived from the skills or knowledge of how performance is improved. This could result in an attitude of wanting to help but not believing that more can be done. An analogy offered by Porter (1996) of external benchmarking highlights this effect where the bounded knowledge of the way in which a competitor performs leads to the negative consequence of performance limits due to “competitive convergence…. The more benchmarking companies do, the more they look alike” (p. 4). A previous study by Wiklund, Davidsson, and Delmar (2003) described manager’s fear around organizational culture and motivation to grow pointing out that, “The small business manager may have a very real reason to be concerned about the atmosphere of the small firm” (p. 26) because the comfort and attractiveness of the small firm was appealing to employees. The manager worries about the impact of the organization on the staff, but also fears their own discomfort, if things get difficult.

Rational choice theory aids in our understanding of “humans as self-interested, short-term maximizers (Ostrom, 1998, p. 2). Ostrom (1998) presented theoretical models, predictions, and empirical evidence on resolving micro social dilemmas through collective action from a political economic lens. Ostrom noted accepted theoretical predictitons saying that the choice to improve the collective position was less about contributing and more about “how much to contribute” (p. 3). In laboratory experiments, Ostrom noted that “once an experiment is repeated, cooperation levels in public-good experiments tend to decline” (p. 5) suggesting that as the individuals learn
they become less inclined or instrumentally motivated to contribute, related to free-riding and social loafing (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979; Sheperd & Taylor, 1999). As an affect of instrumentality, Sheperd and Taylor (1999) said, “the typical finding is that people exert greater efforts when they perceive their individual efforts as indispensable yet loaf when they perceive their efforts as dispensable” (p. 1148). Heckathorn (2001) noted sociological ration choice as bounded knowledge, adding that increased contribution in social cooperations was due to “normative regulation…. including resolution of the free-rider problem” (pp. 278–279) as a collective public good. So, free-rider or social loafing issues can challenge collective action of groups to make changes when the emotional or economic cost, or additional knowledge might be taken up by others unless some mechanism exists to change the behaviour.

Expectations of management skills, knowledge, and behaviours tend to emerge when change is needed, this becomes evident when assessing environmental risk, fears, or internally obsolete routines of day-to-day activities. Tushman and O’Reilly (1996) used two descriptive cases of notable organizations that failed when confronting change. They looked at historical performance and norms, confounded by technological change, and assessed the executive’s decisions. At the past, high-tech company RCA, the authors noted how change impacted the firm saying, “in the absence of a clear strategy and the cultural differences required to compete in both markets, RCA failed” (p. 10). Likewise, in their sample of historical businesses only a few survived with the rest failing because they were unable to adapt, primarily because “senior managers in these firms fell victim to their previous success and their inability to play two games simultaneously. New firms. . . [e.g., Motorola] were not saddled with this internal conflict and inertia” (p. 10). The authors argued that the leadership skill required was in reorientation of the “strategy, structure, culture, and processes, while simultaneously preparing for the inevitable
revolutions required by discontinuous environmental change” (p. 11). Significant changes, such as technological change and growth, test the executive’s skills to adapt; which, if successful emerges as improved performance.

In his landmark paper on change and transformations, Kotter (2011) described the 70% failure rate of change transformations in organizations. Kotter argued that 50% of the failures occur up front when management does not find urgency, or a burning bridge to motivate and drive action (Kotter, “Error 1”, para.1). Kotter also argued that “paralyzed senior management often comes from having too many managers and not enough leaders” (para. 3), which means new leadership is required at the level of activity being undertaken, but transformation under comfortable conditions can be difficult to do because there is no impetus or burning bridge as a motivator (para. 4). The threat here was subtle, if the actions are not pursued with vigor then the parable of the slowly boiled frog is likely evoked, “and the long-term future of the organization is put in jeopardy” (para. 9). Kotter details eight steps to guide transformations that can help lead organizations through change and growth (Kotter, 2011). But needed change is evolutionary, often stimulated by difficult events or poor performance.

Organizational growth was discussed as evolution, as was the case of Apple’s exemplar rise from focussed production of personal computers to diversified markets. Apple’s now famous Steve Jobs, who thought corporate managers were not useful at the time, was eventually replaced to allow the organization to evolve and grow because “new structures and procedures were required for efficiency and control” (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996, p. 13). Jobs eventually returned to Apple, but management first needed the skills for growth, “Jobs’ approach was fine for a smaller, more focussed firm” (p. 14) but failed to reorient the structure with the strategy. In the case of Apple, Tushman and O’Reilly (1996) showed how Apple succeeded by aligning
management with “strategies, structures, cultures, and leadership skills” (p. 15) each time a punctuated or revolutionary change was required to upset “organizational complacency and arrogance” (p. 18). However, the authors balanced the punctuation of change with the need for cultural inertia within a stable environment, where only small and short-term changes can improve the business model, unless the management is complacent.

Following Henry Mintzberg’s (1973) study on *The Nature of Managerial Work*, Kurke and Aldrich (1983) tested Mintzberg’s conclusions, finding that the original study was valid. Their methods closely resembled that original work with some controllable differences resulting in an “amazing degree of similarity” (p. 977), finding that “Mintzberg’s tentative generalizations from his original study are surprisingly robust” (p. 977). They used Choran’s (1969) study of smaller businesses to compare against their own study of medium businesses and Mintzberg’s findings (Kurke & Aldrich, 1983, p. 977). All studies confirmed the fragmentation and ambiguity of the managerial work, confounded by persistent interruptions, and little control over the activities that managers need to perform.

Mintzberg’s (2013) more recent book, a more provocative version of his original 1973 work, called “Simply Managing . . . address[es] the same topic, 40 years apart” (Mintzberg, 2015, p. 186). In his book, Mintzberg mostly sympathized with the follies, failures, juxtapositions, and conundrums of the manager, and was critical of the idea of the professional manager, but not critical of management techniques. Mintzberg said that management “is a job of paradoxes, dilemmas, and mysteries that cannot be resolved” (Chapter 1, “Managing’s Not Changing”), later challenging how in terms of effectiveness, “managers are not effective; matches are effective” (Mintzberg, Chapter 6, “Assessing”). He noted how management was very temporal and specific, being measured at the organization’s level of performance and
requiring a high degree of tolerance for the ambiguous. Discussing fit for particular jobs, he
highlighted the difficulty managers faced in confronting their own skillsets, where “competent,
balanced managers in doable jobs, just not the jobs for them .... become unbalanced and therefore
incompetent .... There is also the Peter Principle, about managers rising to their level of
incompetence” (Chapter 6, “Fit”). Mintzberg noted the high degree of ambiguity and variation in
activities managers face day-to-day, but also noted that “hubris sets into the management”
(Chapter 6, “Success”) when they are successful, and it can undue them, like the trap of routines
and inertia discussed earlier.

Unlike earlier ideas about organizational inertia and the need for rapid structural change
to overcome it, Mintzberg (2013) noted the importance of managers systematically changing or
chunking changes into smaller portions to help control emergent situations, understanding that
some problems are too big to tackle at once (Mintzberg, 2013, Chapter 5, “Chunking”). The
incremental learning by doing was argued as a necessity for managers to also be effective at
strategy, but it was important to know what projects to be involved in and what level of input
they should contribute (Chapter 3, “Managing Action”). Mintzberg commented on the role of the
middle manager whose task was to maintain the equilibrium of the operation, “facilitates the
downward flow of strategies and transmits performance back up the hierarchy” (Chapter 4,
“Managing the Middle”). Ultimately, Mintzberg argued against the dichotomy of the leader-
manager, saying that with “‘knowledge work,' the manager has to help bring out the best in other
people, so that they can know better, decide better, and act better” (Chapter 1, “Nor a
 Profession”) by employing art, science, and craft in management. This assumed that managers
are acting on ambiguity to keep things working, using systematic evidence (science), practical
CONSTRAINTS TO PRODUCTIVITY

learning (craft), and vision (art) to conduct their jobs (Chapter 1). Such skills can become conflicting with the boundaries or normative patterns of organizational inertia.

An organization has knowledge embedded in it that creates inertia, managers have individual knowledge and will respond rationally within bounded patterns, but occasionally irrational behaviours arise where the art, science, and craft of management is not practiced. Noted organizational theorist Chris Argyris described in his paper a case of managers attending a two-day workshop to help develop communication and organizational performance at the senior management level (Argyris, 1986). At the apex of this discussion was Argyris’s (1986) notion of “skilled incompetence” (p. 74). Although a somewhat ugly way to describe the observation of capable and well-intended people, it can be rooted in the defense of learning curves or the Peter Principle,¹¹ where people are using yesterday’s skills to accomplish tomorrow’s tasks. Argyris’s reference to the term skilled helped highlight that “managers use practiced routine behaviour (skill) to produce what they do not intend (incompetence)” (p. 74). The author noted that defensive routines are used to prevent embarrassment or exposing a failure for investigation, these routines can be found in mixed messages from the managers (p. 76). Argyris offered several examples, such as ambiguity when asking for risk-taking while warning against failure and not acknowledging, exposing, or discussing the contradiction (p.76). Another example by Gallo (2012) noted a survey of 332 companies that examined delegation skills, finding them low (p. 1). Gallo stated that managers mitigate risk to themselves by taking on projects instead of

¹¹ Peter’s Principle, a business management book written as a parody by Peter and Hull (1969) regarding the promotion of employees to their level of incompetence. Although the book was written as a parody on the follies of business performance by the hierarchical elevation of management incompetence, the principle theory put forth by
investing in building up their employees, because they think it is easier to do it themselves (or cover it up), then to become overwhelmed or too busy to lead (pp. 1–2).

Managers use what they are good at to protect themselves from what they are not good at. This limits organizational learning and occurs as a single loop learning. Argyris (1994) argued that managers will fix a problem if it occurs but will not investigate the problem because it will expose their involvement in the problem’s tenure. The manager or employee does not want to uncover such behaviour because it will open a “Pandora’s box” (p. 79) of issues that need hard attention. This is an “anti-learning” (p. 80) behaviour. In his book, Jim Collins (2001) reported extensive studies on “great companies” and found “something quite distinctive about their process. . . . The good-to-great companies displayed two distinctive forms of disciplined thought. The first . . . is that they infused the entire process with the brutal facts of reality” (p. 69). The second was a frame of reference, e.g., vision-mission, and the hedgehog concept (p. 118). Argyris (1994) also discussed the social and psychological challenges managers have with “putting people on the spot” (p. 79). Argyris (1994) maintained that the defense of inaction through reasoning “serves no purpose except self-protection” (p. 80). For Argyris, this defensive mechanism was a “theory-in-use” (p. 81) that commonly occurs regardless of demographics.

Further to Levitt and March’s (1988) review on learning, the authors explored what they called a “competency trap” (p. 321) reporting that experience builds capacity as a function of learning, where trial-and-error was used to adopt successful iterations and failures are dropped (p. 322). However, competency traps are created by efficient routines that persist even when they are far from optimal (p. 323). In this case, Levitt and March argued the difficulty of personal interpretations, saying that “stories, paradigms, and beliefs are conserved in the face of considerable potential disconfirmation” (p. 324).
For example, leaders of organizations are inclined to accept paradigms that attribute organizational successes to their own actions and organizational failures to the actions of others or to external forces, but opposition groups in an organization are likely to have the converse principle for attributing causality. (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 324)

The problem of disconfirmation results in conflict and failure to act on espoused theories which can emerge from a leadership structure grounded in organizational evolution. But how does this become the normative condition?

**Founder-centered culture.** Culture emerges based on the founder’s unique attributes. Founder culture is described as three constructs that impact the culture of the organization: centrality, dilemma, and syndrome. The centrality of the founder is observed by the referent focus on the founder’s presence and decision making. For example, when managers with authority and responsibility refer to the founder to make otherwise simply decisions, the centrality of the founder is apparent. The dilemma is the challenge that the founder experiences and is observable when the founder communicates mixed messages, such as saving a small percentage then spending twice as much on nonpecuniary purchases. The syndrome is observed as the founder’s paternalism regarding the organization, where only the founder knows what is best or exercises authority over all decision making.

The cultural value framework (CVF) discussed in Chapter 5 was based on a cultural diagnosis model developed by Cameron and Quinn (2011). The intervention found that significant change would impact the organization as it moved from adhocracy (e.g., owner-entrepreneur) and clan (e.g., group social norms) to more standardization and hierarchal controls (operations management). The differing phases of evolution of the organization allow for growth but management may not question the past phases, thereby losing sight of how to approach
future phases and creating a conflict among past and future (Greiner, 1989, p. 1), which must be resolved prior to evolution. As the organization grows it goes through phases of evolution or revolution, Greiner (1989) noted the first revolutionary phase of creativity, led by the founder/owner, and pointed to some typical behaviours. Founders are usually focussed on building and selling the products or service and “generally disdain management activities” (p. 5). Generally, authors agree that professional management practices are not followed by founders (Bennett, Lawrence, & Sadun, 2015; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Greiner, 1989; Kelly, Athanassiou, & Critenden, 2000; Muriithi & Wachira, 2016; Wasserman, 2008). The skills we start with are not always the skills we need under new conditions.

Entrepreneurialism, creativity, product focus, and motivation no longer suffice in the absence of specific management knowledge and “the company’s founders find themselves burdened with unwanted management responsibilities” (Greiner, 1989, p. 6). The following phase included direction, structure, and centralization, which can upset the autonomy that has been created due to a lack of prior direction and delegation (also as Cameron & Quinn, 2011, noted in clan formation), called a “crisis of control” (Author’s emphasis, Greiner, 1989, pp. 7–8). Coordination and collaboration are the final phases of revolution, which have well surpassed the typical founder’s management competency and may cause conflict with the founder’s needs or identity. Bennett, Lawrence, and Sadun (2015) support the CEO skill constraint saying, “the skills needed to create a new venture may not necessarily coincide with the capabilities needed to lead the firm through more advanced phases of growth and expansion” (pp. 153–154). The authors also concluded that the founder CEO will probably not engage in effective management practices (p. 179). This would likely translate into a model of behaviour that influences how subordinate managers come to make decisions.
The influence of the founder on the management team can be significant in creating behaviours, identity, vision and culture, motives, attitudes, etc. within the organization and towards the external environment (Athanassiou, Crittenden, Kelly, & Marquez, 2002; Kelly, Athanassiou, & Crittenden, 2000; Schein, 1983). In Athanassiou et al.’s (2002) study of social networks, the authors tested the impacts of the founder on strategic behaviour and management commitment and cohesion (p. 140) using a survey questionnaire of 40 participant companies from two perspective, founders and senior managers. The authors found that the founder impacts top management cohesiveness, strategic intent and performance, and the image of the firm’s culture but not management commitment to goals, describing “vision as being central to the strategy process and as being a key variable that top management can influence directly” (p. 147). Kelly, Athanassiou, and Crittenden’s (2000) descriptive review of how central (betweenness, closeness, connectivity) the founder was to the firm, established that the founders influence was observable at current, post, and legacy positions in areas such as strategic behaviour that impacts performance (pp. 39–40). The highly central founder was predicted to rely less on good management practices and processes until a transition occurred, typically an “initial public offering, impose more formal reporting requirements” (p. 38) but the family firms that supports a “strategic planning model were more successful than the non-planning firms” (p. 38).

Organizational culture “is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed” (Schein, 1983, p. 14) to adapt to internal and external pressures. Schein (1983) explained that these assumptions are embedded in the organization to the extent that they are considered “valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members” (p. 14) and become the social operating norm. The impact is perceptible and when changes occur due to
outside management professionals, resistance is likely to emerge owing to the fear of losing “some of the ‘key’ values” (p. 24) enjoyed by the organization’s members. Schein described how a culture evolved through hybridization, using the case of a founder who looked for external managers, particularly coming out of manufacturing, because as the cost of decentralization increased the outside managers “operated in a more disciplined, centralized manner. . . . “ (p. 27). Schein concluded that the vexing problem for the founder-manager would ultimately be in the transition between the founder’s culture and the demand of a new environment.

Where the firm’s CEO was also a founder/owner, special terms are used to describe a focus on the hierarchy of the position and behavioural patterns that culturally emerge; such as founder-centrality, founder’s-dilemma, and more cynically, the founder-syndrome. The founder’s syndrome, or a set of systemic behaviours that negatively impact the organization, are a result of a founder’s unique strengths, beliefs, care, paternalism, and personal motivations that unintentionally come into conflict with good management practices. The term was used for ease and over-simplification of the important behavioural characteristics of a founder. Muriithi and Wachira (2016) described the syndrome as an unproductive behaviour that “disregards other stakeholders as less important to successful operations of the organization” (p. 3). Originally, critical skills needed to build a business from scratch can become obstacles over time. To overcome the founder’s unique challenges, Muriithi and Wachira recommended that “dialogue must clearly define member’s authority, power and responsibility of different players and specific role required to steer their organizations to the future” (p. 10). This implies that the founder gives up some power and decision making and help to build the unique talents of others, while continuing to focus on creative strengths. The key components offered by the authors for overcoming the negative effects of the founder’s behaviour are discussed in the categories of
leadership, involvement, delegation, work structures, decision making, capacity building, succession planning, and professionalism (pp. 7–9). Each component, on reflection by the founder, can aid in building trust and capacity in the organization and the founder’s vision, giving the founder greater satisfaction for those accomplishments.

More appropriately, founder’s dilemma was discussed by Wasserman (2008) as the challenges faced by founders, instead of their organizational stakeholders. In a Harvard Business Review article, Wasserman described previous research on the challenges faced by founders due to their unique position and behaviours. In transitioning the company from start-up to viability, only 40% were still in control by year four (p. 1). Despite that large number, the author indicated that four out of five founders are eventually “forced to step down from the CEO’s post” (p. 1). A dramatic departure of the founder as CEO can be difficult for a firm to transition smoothly through unless “at the outset, founders are honest about their motives for getting into business” (p. 1). Wasserman (2008) concluded that founders have two fundamental choices to make; amass wealth or rule an empire—but not both (p. 11). The trouble that founders face in making these distinctions are described in Bennett, Lawrence, and Sadun’s (2015) conclusion of two of their three hypotheses, arguing that the “founders do not perceive their firms to have a management gap” and “nonpecuniary benefits from control counterbalance the lost rents from those worse practices” (p. 179). Wasserman (2008) discussed previous studies where the founders felt they created the baby, so tend to think they are the only ones that know how to raise it, overconfidence in their own abilities was a critical characteristic at start-up phase but became problematic as the organization evolved (p. 2–3). Wasserman (2008) cautioned that “success makes founders less qualified to lead the company and changes the power structure so they are
more vulnerable” (p. 4). This can be found where leveraging finances is required, and new investors are introduced as power brokers that upset the founder’s dynamics.

Regarding the economics of management, Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, Scur and Van Reenen’s (2014) working paper discussion expressed a high degree of “ignorance in simply knowing how well managed a firm is” (p. 39). More interesting was the footnote added about the founder’s own finances and owned assets being leveraged, obscuring poor management practices saying, “family firms can continue to generate positive cash flow while generating economic losses because their family owners are subsidizing them through cheap capital” (p. 39). Logic suggests that if the founder’s organization begins to grow by leveraging financing or external investors, under such circumstances the result is collapse or CEO termination. The inefficiencies resulting in firm failure are related to management skills, overlapping from the previous section. Bennett, Lawrence, and Sadun (2015) used a double-blind survey-style methodology of 18 open-ended questions regarding management practices to collect data on 13,435 SMEs, of which 2459 were founder-CEO firms. The authors found that when the CEO was replaced by outside management the management performance improved (p. 164). They demonstrated the transitional performance by triangulating data by return on assets (p. 169). The authors asked why a founder might ignore performance, expressing that non-financial and private benefits may outweigh organizational productivity (p. 169). It is the founder’s baby after all, they may not have started the company with profits as their first motivator, so they may not run it that way either.

**Chapter Summary**

Regarding concepts that emerged from the action, knowledge can become embedded in an organization to frustrate internal learning and exclude integration of outside knowledge (inertia). Management knowledge was addressed finding that it was often bounded, feeding into
the status quo and protectionist behaviours. Finally, many businesses are lead by an owner or founder, whose behaviours are particular to the evolution and success of a business. Founder-centrality adds to the challenge of better management knowledge because they have motivations other than rational economic utility or other nonpecuniary benefits, may not perceive performance gaps (Bennett, Lawrence, & Sadun, 2015), and may be a significant aspect of what Seens (2013) puzzled about with regard to why 60% of Canadian businesses choose not to grow even when the resources were available (pp.18–19). This notion aligns with statements from Simon, Porter, and others regarding rational humans and leaving money on the ground as being non-rational. In order to investigate these ideas, I will take a organization-level approach informed by action in the next section on methodology and describe action research.
Chapter 3: Action Research Methodology

The section will start with my positionality in relation to the participants and my ontological perspective of critical realism (CR), noting a *retroductive* approach to thinking and learning through a constructivist epistemology for data collection, typical of the methodology. Retroduction is described as:

Processes of logical inference in real research are in fact quite messy. Ideas for research will come partially from the researcher's conceptual knowledge, partially from their personal experiences and perhaps partially from intuition. There will be false starts and backtracking. Proposed hypothetical explanations will be modified in the light of preliminary results or discussion, perhaps leading to the collection of further data. The writing-up of the research for presentation or publication, rather than a true depiction of the process of logical inference that took place during the research, can be seen more accurately as a specialised account. (Miller, 2011)

I will then discuss the methodology of action research, its inductive model of construct-plan-implement-evaluate (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) and why it will be useful for investigating this case level project. I will follow with a description of the contextual and perceptive information about the project participants, the action team, and the qualitative instruments used for data collection. Finally, I will cover ethics and a dissemination plan.

**Positionality**

One of the major goals of this research as a student was self-reflexivity and the personal learning journey, which were impacted by the researcher’s position within the organization as an outsider. Rowe (2014) described the researcher’s position,
The position adopted by a researcher affects every phase of the research process, from the way the question or problem is initially constructed, designed and conducted to how others are invited to participate, the ways in which knowledge is constructed and acted on and, finally, the ways in which outcomes are disseminated and published. (p. 628)

As an experienced business operation professional from the manufacturing and supply chain industry, I was coming into a different industry as a research intern. Regardless of the approach I might take to the research, my world view is the paradigm I use to understand it (Glesne, 2011, p. 14). I joined the company as an outsider introduced by the founder without much attention to the insiders and their processes or social norms. My own *modus operandi* in the manufacturing world was to investigate a process that was problematic or not, related it to the whole organization, leverage the people in the system by gathering data with them and about it, check the known theories and models to inform us, invent or expose improvement opportunities, plan with the team what to do, support the effort, check to see if it was useful, and repeat. The goal is generally to create more profitability because of a general belief that profitability is preferable to growth as a certain point. This becomes my explicit bias, of which I relate to both action research as an epistemological approach and critical realism as an ontological approach. This also identifies my assumptions, where I expect that the projects will have opportunities to improve even if they are not problematic and the teams will be willing to participate or must participate in their own processes, and assumes that action is taken.

The research was positioned to intervene on two key organizational projects, as noted in the Chapter 1 case description. One project, which I had no previous expertise in, was specific to the industry. I held some knowledge to leverage in aid of the organization and its stakeholders in the other project. I positioned myself in the research as a process consultant, despite bringing
expected knowledge and experience, world views, relationships, and unavoidable etic biases to the understanding of the project.\textsuperscript{12} I preferred a capability building approach to help drive improvements, assuming all the necessary capacities to resolve problems existed within the organization already (appreciative), looking to advance and leverage human capital. Although deficits rise to the surface in any improvement activity, capability building intends to “counterbalance the perceived predominant deficit… [of] organizational performance” (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008, p. 191), deficits are exposed as an outcome of unseen mechanisms. My expectations and experiences informed my thinking in that there are always opportunities to improve a local situation and that people will be inclined to do so when empowered. However, Rowe (2014) cautioned that conflicting dimensions of fit can occur with the insiders saying, “These disparities can create conflict, changing the process and outcomes of the study” (p. 628). I would attempt to mitigate these issues by communicating clearly and regularly.

The research was impacted by my intentions and perspectives. My intention was simple. By finding motivators for business owners/managers and other stakeholders, I could facilitate the application of values through action-oriented research and application of the theory and findings. Although, I was external to the partnering organization and have no benefit of insider access, I also believed I had less political concerns than an insider (Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). I recognised my bias (tendency, inclination, or unreasoned position) in attempting to hook the business through productivity gains through value propositions, using tangible gains and contemporary terms such as productivity, sustainability, and resilience. My bias mitigation strategy was to build trust with the insiders by demonstrating a helpful and proactive approach. I

\textsuperscript{12} Etic bias in the social sciences is opposed by emic bias—outside versus inside perspectives—and describes the researcher’s unique cultural and language that is imposed on the observed organization.
would also reaffirm throughout the research that benefits and tangible gains are the product of the organizational members and not the student. I hoped to instill confidence in the members by allowing the organizational members to lead the action and research direction. My intentions were by no means deceptive since the organization, institutions, groups, and individual people within them can be said to be motivated by rational choice and self-interest (Heckathorn, 2001; Klamer, 1989; Olson, 1971). Such self-interest could be used to build internal organizational capacity using the methodology described in this chapter instead of my own interest in creating tangible results; however, these seemed compatible to me.

**Ontological View**

As a mechanism, the sub reality of self-interest fits with the historical context of critical realism (CR) when an outcome is observed. Additionally, Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) pressed the importance of recognizing two different project contexts within one AR study. The first was the organization’s research expectations and the second was my own. For example, the organization partner expected to gain knowledge of operational improvements as outcomes, while my research questions looked specifically for aspects related to the constraints to those outcomes. My assumption here was that the organization was interested in maximizing its economic utility, which coloured my view of what improvements were important or possible.

Linking CR to the research, Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) offered Kant’s eloquent retroduction question, “What must be the case for events to occur as they do?” (p. 221). Retroduction, related to abduction, indicates the inference of structures and mechanisms from the observation of change, noted earlier. Discussing methods in social sciences, Sayer (2002) described retroduction as the “mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them” (p. 107). Hall (2007) noted
that sociohistorical reality is created with structures and mechanisms measured by “the study of their effects” (p. 84), much like the action research methodology suggested. Mechanistic effects can be defined as a process that uses several opportunities to influence stakeholders’ choices (Ram, Edwards, Jones, Kiselinchev, & Muchenje, 2015, p. 464). Ram et al. (2015) applied critical realism to action research to understand new businesses, starting with outcomes to identify mechanisms. Wilson and McCormick (2006) added, the “empirical characteristic of critical realism focuses on causation surveillance, where realists are primarily concerned with analysing the causal mechanisms within the environment” (p. 47). This meant that attention was to be paid to outcomes in order to understand the causal mechanism for which choices are made during the action.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted an approach by Johnson and Duberley as, “critical realism incorporating pragmatic action. Critical realism aligns with my concept and understanding of action research. This approach follows a subjectivist epistemology similar to the hermeneutic tradition, but with an objectivist ontology like the positivists.” (“research paradigms” para. 6). Reflecting on Kant’s earlier question, CR observes causation by considering the “ontological whats and the epistemological hows” (McLachlan & Garcia, 2015, p. 200). Similarly, Ison (2008) described the ‘what’ and ‘how’ as demonstrating “purposive behaviour” (Ison, 2008, pp. 154–155) in systems thinking. In this way, CR related to the observed change in the research intervention and helped delve into the mechanisms at work in the changes being investigated and evaluated.

The kind of science being discussed here is abductive, which contradicts the typical format of an academic paper. This distinction was described nicely by Timmermans and Tavory (2012) who noted work on “theory construction . . . [and] abductive analysis” (p. 176); for
example, abductive analysis suggests that experience is not a one-time phenomena that, once passed, becomes set in stone. Instead, “the phenomena always overflows our initial perception of it . . . . we re-experience it in different ways” (p. 176). Critical realism follows that an underlying structure or mechanisms exist whether we are aware of them or not and can be experienced through its outputs, by abduction. Timmermans and Tavory’s example of a viewer re-experiencing a painting as they walk through the gallery comparing it to other paintings and realizing that the similarities or techniques used during the painting’s time period begins to stand out. This output of standing out is evidence of an underlying mechanism at play in the experience, which existed regardless of our ability to notice it. Thus a methodology that would have us observe a set of paintings, notice something, and then specifically compare the paintings, code the comparisons, and textualize them, would help us to abduct some hypotheses for further examination to build.

**Research Methodology: Action Research (AR)**

In a brilliantly honest exposition of participatory action research, I was somehow relieved that Guishard (2009) shared the almost arcane puzzle of trying to navigate an action research project on critical consciousness with an economically challenged population. As a novice researcher, I really appreciated the candor of the author in establishing the imperfect path to producing results; helping me to appreciate the academic rigour needed and accept the inconsistencies of research in action. Guishard quoted Buraway et al. (1991) who described AR as something akin to fitting a square peg in a round hole and the consequences that implied.

In the social sciences the lore of objectivity relies on the separation of the intellectual product from its process of production. The false paths, the endless labors, the turns now this way and now that, the theories abandoned, and that data collected but never
presented—all lie concealed behind the finished product. The article, the book, the text, is evaluated on its own merits, independent of how it emerged. We are taught not to confound the process of discovery with the process of justification. (Guishard, 2009, p. 85)

Given this recognition, my own experience was full of misadventures, intrigue, and ambiguity; particularly in my efforts to try to tightly control the process so that I could polish and justify the results. This caused much internal debate and self-reflection, adjustments, play with structure, and methodological review and expectations. Ison (2008), discussing systemic practice in AR, cited Checkland (1985) saying that there was a “danger in treating methodologies as reified entities—things in the world—rather than as a practice that arises from what is done in a given situation.” (p. 155). Ison (2008) preferred to think of methodology as fit, the intertwining of theory and practice. Despite the duality of AR, I kept struggling as a novice with, am I following theory or practice? Do I allow the complexity of the action to drag me off my proposed course or is that what is supposed to happen? My preference was for a stricter protocol as I was there for the reasons I had originally proposed. . . but I found that elusive because each well intended attempt to get participation, reflection, and support on action seemed to lead me further from it and into a cultural paradigm of reactivity.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted the interesting difference between northern and southern hemisphere AR, maintaining the south typically deals with community-level participation and the north deals with organizational relations and the democratic process (“experiential paradigms” para. 1). This helped me to rationalize an organization level AR project. As I noted earlier, another motivation for the business partner to participate in research was the promise of actions that intended a positive outcome or a return on their investment for
the stakeholders, also a methodological imperative. However, as McArdle (2008) pointed out, there was a level of risk for any partner organization doing research because AR “cannot be ‘sold in’ on guarantees of outcome” (p. 604). Unlike other methodologies that observe, but attempt not to intervene, this study required intervention to understand the mechanisms involved through observing or evaluating outcomes. For example, the problem of low productivity being addressed through the iterative cycle of AR was likely to reveal persistent structures and systems preventing systemic improvements.

Although outcomes such as waste reduction and productivity improvements are naturally quantitative measures, their analysis was qualitative because the focus of this study was not looking for frequency but characteristics in data (Glesne, 2011). Within the concept of expected utility, it was important to understand what constrained a change in productivity from occurring related to an ideal such as sustainability. For example, the ideology that a company will always rationally pursue productivity improvements or “profitable innovations” (Porter & van der Linde, 1995, p. 98). But this was not the reality of aggregate business performance today, as noted by Simon’s (2000) argument for inconsistant human decision making (p. 26) or Drummon’s (2015) review of Canada’s productivity performance saying, “This is one of the poorer performances among OECD countries” (p. 87). So, I needed a way to systemically engage in active interventions into productivity at the organizational level. The methodology chosen to accomplish the intervention, the action, and the analysis was possible with AR.

**Action research.** “Action research engages the researcher in an explicit program to develop new solutions that alter existing practice and then test the feasibility and properties of the innovation” (Kaplan, 1997, p. 89). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) cited Gummesson (2000) who argued that AR was “the most demanding and far-reaching method of doing a case study
research” (as cited in Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, Chapter 3, “Foundations”, para. 7) also citing Lippitt (1979) who described one of the less pure types of AR processes as collecting data for presentation of the analysis to the stakeholders as an intervention, to simply inform versus actively helping those in the system (Chapter 3, “Foundations”, para. 5). As cited by Coghlan and Brannick (2010), Lippitt (1979) believed the best form of AR was having participants gather data and generate knowledge about themselves and for themselves in order to act. This was reinforced by Stringer’s (2007) alternate dissertation format that gives a voice to the participants by placing the methodology section in the appendices and a literature review after the participants’ accounts have been collected, just to add validity to the accounts. Adding to the already demanding nature of AR, Stringer began work with colleagues where the literature review section was eliminated altogether and only introduced “in counterpoint to the major findings” (pp. 183–185). However, my application leaned towards Lippitt’s (1979) data collection, analysis, intervention as action, and support.

The praxis of AR was founded on the principle of engaging the people most impacted by an issue through an iterative process of co-creating knowledge towards action as a normative-re-educative strategy to build organizational capacity (Choi & Ruona, 2011, p. 58). Knowledge as the product of social interactions follows a constructionist epistemology that relies on unique relationships to define situational truths (Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p. 161). Such uses of AR can be carried out within the setting of a single private organization and help the “innovativeness and creativity of a company” (Kocher, Kaudela-Baum, & Wolf, 2011). Nogeste (2008) focussed specifically on individual projects using AR to describe the application of the methodology and the iteration process follows a model with cycles of observation, reflection, and action that may be preferable for work in operations (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002). Other action researchers
used cycles described as look-think-act (Stringer, 2007) or constructing-planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Ideally, in AR these cycles of learning create internal capacity for change and practical improvements for the participants that are helpful in the conduct of their lives (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4). During such a cooperative inquiry, the “inquiry group as co-researchers and co-subjects” (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, Chapter 3, “cooperative inquiry”, para. 1) act in these cycles. Ram, Edwards, Jones, Kiselinchev, and Muchenje (2015) give an excellent example of using five different methods as cycles, observing the outcomes to establish the mechanisms that impact the participants behaviours and activities. Additionally, a parallel cycle of first-person reflection distinguishes AR from other models, as seen in Appendix A.

In other words, at the same time as you are engaging in the project or core action research cycles, you need to be constructing, planning, taking action, and evaluating around how the action research project itself is going and what you are learning. (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, “Meta learning”, para. 1)

Describing the use of first, second, and third person reflective practice, Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 6) expressed an evolving thought process around using such typologies “as a helpful way of describing the diversity of action research practices” (p. 6). The first-person practice aids us in understanding our own action and a way to “monitor the impact of our behaviour” (p. 6). Using reflective practice in AR can help to frame the observations and separate the emergent group knowledge from the researcher own experiences. Additionally, it is a way of “articulating what you have learned, not about the system you have been working to change, but about yourself as an action researcher” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, “Self-reflection”, para. 1). Ed Schein (as cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2008) discussed the trouble of
articulating the two paradigms of AR, the academic and the organization, saying “we are still uncertain whether we should 1) be more scientific and rigorous, allying ourselves with our academic colleagues who are concerned with knowledge production or 2) be helpful, allying ourselves with our clients... learning and change” (p. 697).

Rooted in the AR methodology is an appreciative position that seeks to leverage the strengths of the participants to solve organizational problems wherever possible (Ludema & Fry, 2008; Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008), implying that the people involved have enough capacity to produce some results. This does not preclude critical assessment; with regard to critical assessment I also observed components of action science, such as espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris, 1995; Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985) that recognized the gap between what actors think they do and what they actually do. Among other elements of the methodology, such as problem identification, capacity building is important to facilitate change to help individuals cope with the change process (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Choi & Ruona, 2011). In this way, AR methodologically works to understand “how things are happening” (Stringer, 2007, p. 19) by investigating people’s experiences (phenomenology), interpretations, and methodology for understanding (hermeneutics) (p. 19), and involving them in (action) experiential learning (Ison, 2008, p. 151).

AR is broadly defined because it defies a singular description and being both pragmatic and flexible it has been argued that one has to remain open for an explanation (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The openness of definition ensures relevance to the local situation, something Argyris and Schön (1989) contend must necessarily conflict with traditional ideals of scientific rigour (p. 612). Consider Bill Torbert (as cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2008) who said, “Action research can reach its
potential only when it is recognized and practiced as a far more challenging and inclusive art and science than modernist empirical research” (p. 697). Altrichter et al. (2002) clarified the process of AR saying it was a “collective, self-reflective inquiry that participants in social situations undertaken to improve” (p. 125). These social situations imply conditions and social norms for how people interact, such as within an organization and within a community.

Data collected during action research comes from a variety of methods, which are discussed in the part on data collection methods and supported in a pragmatic and retroductive mix of methods and analysis (Feilzer, 2010). However, it is worth acknowledging that a variety of data was appropriate due to the emergent nature of AR because as cycles of investigation progress the need for data collection methods change (Stringer, 2007, p. 68). Stringer (2007) noted, “primary data in action research are derived from interviews with primary and key stakeholders” (p. 68). Other common data sources include: focus group, participant observation, questionnaires, document analysis, reports, surveys, and research literature (p. 68). Also, as mentioned in the positionality section, the project participants needed motivation to engage in the research. To maintain the relationships necessary for engagement, I needed to be “playing by the rules of a given community” (Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p. 162), such as return on investment. The economic paradigm of productivity growth indicates one of those rules. AR allows me to maintain the relationship as long as action is taken towards productive outcomes. Another palpable rule was argued by Gergen and Gergen (2011) in the use of action research saying, “the purpose of the research is very clearly to improve the lot of the people participating in the research and their surrounding community” (p. 167). These rules of conduct intend to ensure that at least some sense of security exists in the research intervention that things can improve and not degrade.
It is important to note the original intent of this AR project was different than what might have been more effective for this case, in hindsight. Other methodologies such as participatory action research (PAR), soft systems methodology (SSM) and case study can be mistaken for AR because of similarities but do not fit the approach I was seeking. For example, PAR is “emphasizing participant collaboration” (Avison, Lau, Myers, & Nielsen, 1999, pp. 95–96) with community groups for social change. This is different than AR, which focuses on practice and reflection (p. 95), more commonly found in the context of organizational development (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Although short time frames for PAR are possible, I have a concern that the time it might take to develop the requisite relationships for community development, to accomplish a PAR project, would be extensive in that context (Kocker, 2012, p. 154). Guhathakurta (2008) demonstrated the use of community groups (marginalized groups) effectively with PAR, creating social changes for Bangladesh theatre and community. But this took place over many years with a larger scope than I intend in this project.

**Four phases of AR cycles.** I briefly describe the general conduct of each phase of the AR cycles as I intervened with methods. Both projects selected would follow separate streams of activity.

**Construction.** In the construction phase, the action team decided on the relevance of the topic areas as noted later and agreed on the action to be taken, in terms of productivity improvements. The founder noted that productivity improvements were important part of the research, as an indicator of value and return on investment. The action team selected an organizational program for improvement, as a starting point for understanding how to make improvements, then agreed to pick a leader for the project team. In this phase, the team identified the appropriate stakeholders that would be influenced by the practice and relevant topics to
investigate and authorized the design and collection of data (as discussed in Chapter 4, The Design). The data was transcribed, analysed, and anonymized before presenting to the action team for further interpretation and development of findings for the planning phase.

**Plan action.** Once the analysis was understood, a planning phase began where I shifted perspective to observing rather than doing, to facilitate and guide capacity development and to observe the change (McArdle, 2008, pp. 607–608). A project plan was initiated, training, and resources were requested at this phase. This was also where much went wrong, as the task requirement of doing something related to the research was met with delays and avoidance (as described in Chapter 4). Check-ins with the action team, whom I describe later in this section, for the specific projects were developed for monitoring and control of the project, and for evaluation (Stringer, 2007, p. 140). This left me in a position to try to take action that was agreeable to the action team.

**Taking action.** The taking action phase was where change occurred in the mechanisms under investigation. The outcome statement or future maps we attempted to develop aided in the alignment with the original concept of the initiative. However, even though the action team was required to take some action and begin executing the planned strategies for improvements (Stringer, 2007, p. 128), there was political stalling and fear of upsetting the status quo. Gathering of data and summaries of progress was collected in this phase to support the next phase of evaluating outcomes. The data ended up being related more to inaction rather than action and was reflected in the evaluation.

I was conflicted with my need and desire as a doctoral candidate to stay focussed on the academic lens of the research versus the political organizational issues I was facing; a struggle I believe is common for novice researchers. Levin (2008) discussed the writing of a PhD thesis in
his chapter on educating action researchers saying, “one mode of writing is to organize the thesis to communicate the gradual learning that takes place in an action research process” (p. 679). This respite by Levin reassured me that, painful as it seemed, the gradual learning and explanation of the research is normal and not likely the pretty picture I had first conceived.

_Evaluating action_. The outcome is the final phase of each method. In this phase, the outcome statement or future map would direct the evaluation of the objectives. The goal was to support the reflective process and lessons learned from the action team. A singular outcome did not always emerge in a short period, but lessons learned from findings would inform the next set of actions. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) suggested evaluation should check whether, “the original construction fitted… if the actions taken matched the construction… If the action was taken in an appropriate manner… what feeds into the next cycle of constructing, planning and action” (Chapter 1, “planning action”, para. 1). Coghlan and Brannick assumed the process of actions matching the construction to be positive and the gap between original construction and actual result would be instructive.

_Participant selection_. The organization had several operational buildings with over 200 staff in the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA) and over 500 resident clients. Participants were purposefully selected during the construction phase in each cycle based on the strength of impact the selected issues have on their agency, with reference to the effect the action will have on them or the affect they may have on the project directly (Stringer, 2007, p. 43). Stringer (2007) also called these participants “opinion leaders or Gatekeepers” (p. 46). As the research situation changed and because of the multiple methods used, it was impossible to predict who became critical, until a data collection method was selected, so purposeful participant selection was detailed for each method. For example, for the procurement project those managers responsible
for buying products were interviewed, for the health program the manager’s providing the services were involved in logic model development and clients were participants of the narrative métissage method. Individuals were anonymized using a reference matrix by location and data collection type, which might appear as “(1a1)”. The selection of participants manifested in natural ways as methods emerged and they were called on to participate or were recommended by others. Interviews included clients, management, and operational staff in the head office or from procurement, accounting, sales, and facilities personnel. The variety of data gathered from participants was also impacted by a constructionist paradigm, co-creating knowledge through the intervention itself (McLachlan & Garcia, 2015, p. 203; Rowley, 2012, p. 27). However, there were no expected exclusion criteria since the methodology was pragmatic regarding the changes that occur throughout the study and the possible recommendations (e.g., snowballing) for other relevant interviewees, such as city staff and suppliers were exploited (p. 265). Considering adaptability, ethics approvals were readdressed for each method to manage risk and create rigour in the study.

Action team. An inquiry or action team, also known by other names such as “action inquiry groups” (Mead, 2008, p. 631) and “core project team . . . [or] organizational project group” (Coghlan & Brannick, “Implementing the change”, 2010, para. 3) or is a group of “relevant others” (“Main steps”, para. 1) closely connected or impacted by the system being investigated. Considered to be decision makers and action takers that guide the research, the action team was selected by an executive who would facilitate the research. The action team consisted of five executives and senior management, “this group is an organizational project group which contains both technical competence and hierarchal status to manage the project” (Chapter 5, “Assessing the present”, para. 6). In this case, managers selected from functional
departments included special projects, operations, human resources, and site supervision. An action team consent form can be found in Appendix B.

**Data collection methods.** Methods must adapt to follow the methodological process because the initial cycles are more exploratory than later cycles (Nogeste, 2008). Ideally, multiple or mixed methods overlap to aid validity (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). For this reason, Stringer (2007) suggested the need to start by having “interviews with primary and key stakeholders” (p. 68). Stringer also argued that as the study becomes more focussed other methods become relevant for collecting data. Different interview types, focus groups, participant observations, questionnaires, documents and reports, surveys, literature reviews, and statistical information are some examples (p. 68). Other organizing data such as organizational diagnosis (Burke, Lake, & Paine, 2009, p. 255; Stringer, 2007, p. 110), process mapping, productivity measures, benchmarking, and personal accounts are collected to support the study by measuring and comparing pre-improvement performance with post-improvement performance. This is useful in an open system, described as input-throughput-output (Burke, Lake, & Paine, 2009, p. 110; Stringer, 2007, pp. 128–130; Weisbord, 2012, p. 270). I will expand on the methods that emerged as a result of the action team’s areas of interest for the study and the original proposal, starting with the participant observation.

**Participant observer.** Many invisible mechanisms work themselves into the outputs of every activity. One way to identify these mechanisms as they happen is by observation. For example, a common leadership cliché regarding core values explains that core values are not created they are observed. Participant observation (PO), made by the researcher, is conducted through the observation of people in a community, typically using active or post event field notes, and acting as a participant in community (Angrosino, 2007), e.g., formal and informal
meetings, watercooler conversations, etc. At this point, the role of a researcher acts as an instrument of data collection. The observations followed the tradition of ethnography, describing and interpreting people and their patterns of behaviour in groups (Angrosino, 2007, pp. 1, 16; Glesne, 2011, p. 17). Additionally, “in participant observation, the people of the study agree to the presence of the researcher among them as a neighbour and friend who also happens to be a researcher” (p. 16), implying that my conduct and function was appropriate in the work setting to allow for observation. Stringer (2007) detailed the kind of observations such as: places, people, objects, acts, activities, events, purposes, timings, and feelings (p. 76), that should be recorded.

In all cases, consent was understood by the announcement or recognition of the researcher’s presence as the immediacy, emergence, or spontaneity of observations that were otherwise impractical or impossible to confirm prior to an event. The ethics governing the implementation of this method follow the “respect for person, concern for welfare, and justice” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, December 2010, p. 8) and are covered in the section on ethics, but allow for the research to use good judgement in caring for the ongoing consent of the participants.

As a part of the AR methodology, observations were included in a parallel process described by Coghlan and Brannick (2010) as a first-person reflection. The first-person reflective observation was considered a “sense making . . . . reflective pause” (“Stories and outcomes”, para. 6). For the sake of pragmatism, I used “informal conversations” (Stringer, 2007, p. 69), such as informal meetings or casual conversations during observation that tended to be topical but unstructured (p. 70). These reflections help the reader to understanding my thought process as the project unfolded and hopefully illuminate how I conducted the study as I experienced it. In addition, I followed the what Coghlan and Brannick (2010) described as “journal keeping…”
focuses on that goes on inside your head and how it affects your covert behaviour” (Chapter 2, “Reflection”, para. 11) to structure my reflections and observations for my own learning journey, through the process of observation, reflection, judgement, and intervention (ORJI).

**Organizational cultural diagnosis.** Every organization has a culture, and the culture should be investigated to give insight into the behaviours of its constituents. Stringer (2007) recommended options to review the whole organization, starting with vision and mission, using models founded in management literature (p. 107). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted that organizational diagnosis was useful for “providing a construction for conversation and mechanisms for collaborative sense making and joint action planning and action” (“Organizational diagnosis”, para. 2). The CVF is an organizational diagnosis or cultural assessment developed by Cameron and Quinn (2011), also known as an organizational cultural assessment instrument (OCAI), see Appendix C for the consent and Appendix D for a protocol. This assessment model allowed for informing stakeholders about changes and data collection with regard to the organization’s context for planning action. Cameron and Quinn’s model focussed on organizational effectiveness around three underlying dimensions with the last being embedded in the first two: internal or external focus; stability or flexibility; and characteristics or outcomes (Yu & Wu, 2009, p. 37). These dimensions have their theoretical foundation in anthropology and sociology and represent collective assumptions and behaviours (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). For example, internal and external focus, such as whether the organization benchmarks internally or externally, demonstrates a characteristic that could be tested. The stability or flexibility could be seen in the organization’s reliance on standard procedures or conversely the loose implementation of clever ideas. These behavioural examples are based on collective assumptions about how to operate the organization. Regardless of any debate about the
most effective form of action to be taken by a cultural group (Yu & Wu, 2009, p. 37), the intent for using this model was to help understand where the organization was in its lifecycle and how it might react to change.

The goals of the organization will be achieved through implementation processes. As Yu and Wu (2009) asserted, “coalitional structures and the dominant perceptions” (p. 38) dictated the meaning of success and thus the operational strategy. This was a paradigm of constructivism, noted by Anfara and Mertz (2015) as “the belief that our versions of the world are socially, culturally, and historically constructed and situated” (p. 172). In the case where perceptions are internally focussed, perceptions coupled with a dominant direction, such as a changing market demand, may not align with external pressures. This naturally conflicts with an external focus that favours adaptation but could leave the organizational stakeholders unsure of their future direction or how to create efficiencies. The polarity between the dominant perspectives of the stakeholders can be seen in the four key definitions in the model.

The four definitions common to Cameron and Quinn’s model are described nicely by Yu and Wu (2009) as clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, market. Clan can be described as “collectivity . . . empowerment and employee evolvement”; Adhocracy, “temporary institution . . . reloaded rapidly whenever new tasks emerge”; Market, “focuses on the transactions with the environment . . . [where] the goal is to earn profits”; Hierarchy, “clear organizational structure, standardized rules and procedures, strict control, and well-defined responsibilities” (p. 38). These definitions are all necessary characteristics for an organization to function but will likely lean toward a dominant preference. The polarity—opposing values—such as the control mechanisms of internally focussed hierarchy versus the flexibility and externally focussed adhocracy in the
model is recognized by balancing forces and feedback loops with changing perspectives
(Johnson B., 1993; Senge, 2006).

In addition to the challenges of change, presented by dominant internal forces, the
evolution of an organization can be reviewed through the lens of the CVF to identify its lifecycle
stage, which is appropriate for a company in a growth phase. For example, Cameron and Quinn
(2011) explained that young companies start in the adhocracy quadrant with a “single, powerful,
visionary leader” (p. 33) then begin to develop clan characteristics, fostering a sense of
belonging and family to compensate for unclear measures and procedures. Challenges arise when
the organization grows enough that internal efficiencies and economies are insufficiently robust
to support continuation and may result in the demise of the organization with shrinking profit
margins, as part of an organization’s lifecycle (Daepp, Hamilton, West, & Bettencourt, 2015;
Lafrance, 2012). However, the need to move towards increased hierarchy can make
“organization members feel that the organization has lost the friendly” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011,
p. 33) culture it once had. Eventually, as the authors noted, the market quadrant will begin to
supplement the hierarchy so that the polarity of internal control is balanced with a changing
external environment (p. 33). An example of how an organization, such as Apple, changes and
matures over time see Figure 3. Note that the first cultural profile is highly entrepreneurial or ad
hoc, the second cultural profile is more clan-like in social structures and norms, the third profile
begins adopting process systems and structures in place of social norms to gain efficiency and
scale, and the final profile starts adapting to the external market for growth opportunities.
Based on work from Cameron and Quinn (2011), demonstrating the changing culture due to time, growth, and organizational maturity.

**Interviews.** The interview participants were purposefully selected under the direction of the inquiry team (see Procurement interviews in Chapter 4) and a consent form and guide were developed (see Appendix E and Appendix F, respectively). The geographically dispersed participants included two general managers, four chefs, and two maintenance managers who all participate in the purchasing of materials for the organization. The questions were piloted through the action team, where they were approved after adding question seven. As noted earlier, Stringer (2007) called for interviewing of key informants to establish understanding and context. Rowley (2012) recommended conducting six to eight one-hour interviews or up to 12 interviews that are 30 minutes in length to cover a particular topic (p. 263). Fugard and Potts (2015) described sample sizes for thematic analysis noting that sampling can terminate when theoretical
saturation occurs. Eight participants were chosen for one-hour interviews. Interviews can be conducted in several ways, from structured to semi-structured to unstructured (Knox & Burkard, 2009, p. 567; Rowley, 2012, p. 262). Stringer (2007) concluded that interviews are a guided reflection to allow the experiences of the individual to be related to the researcher (p. 68).

The interviews started with semi-structured questions and prompts related to the primary topics and then moved to less structured interviews by using what is called a narrative or grand tour interview, where the participant tells a story of their experience regarding the topic being addressed (Kocher, Kaudela-Baum, & Wolf, 2011; Stringer, 2007). These interviews are often unstructured and have the dual role of creating knowledge for the participant through active reflection.

Asking someone a question or a series of questions is a data generating intervention. Interviewing in action research tends to be open-ended and unstructured, focussing on what the interviewee has to say rather than confirming any hypothesis the action researchers might have. (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 1673).

Open-ended and narrative interview styles such as this illuminate an espoused theory (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, Action science: Concepts, methods, and skills for research and intervention, 1985) and generally leads to further data collection opportunities by exposing processes that the participant has experienced.

**Document research.** Triangulating and finding evidence within the organizations own data archives is relevant and useful. Documents can be viewed in two forms, private and public, and documents can include “letters, diaries, autobiographies, newspaper, magazines, and photographs” (Bryman, 2012, p. 543). There are a great variety of documents that are useful for analysis; particularly triangulation, such as “advertisements; agendas, attendance registers, and
minutes of meetings; background papers; books and brochures; diaries and journals; event programs; letters and memoranda; maps and charts; . . . summaries; . . . organizational or institutional reports; survey data . . .” (Bowen, 2009, pp. 27–28). Other scholars offer a variety of data sources for documents as well (Altheide, 2011, p. 24; Olsen, 2014a, p. 79; White & Marsh, 2006, pp. 24–26) but all should be interpretable, not produced specifically for the research, appropriately stored and available for analysis, and relevant (Bryman, 2012, p. 543).

Personal documents that are created through reflective writing by individual participants about their personal experience, such as journaling, are considered a “primary source of data collection” (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012, p. 27). This kind of data collection offers two purposes in an action-oriented research. The first purpose is to offer the first-person data of the participant to “bridge the gap between practitioners and researchers” (Holbrook, 1995, p. 750) so the direct experience and AR context can be understood by patterns that emerge in a person’s problem solving routines (Sims, 1983). The second purpose is the learning cycle in action research, which is important for skills development to empower employees for the changes they face. Hayman, Wilkes, and Jackson (2012) expressed the need of frequency and focus as being key to keeping the participant “on track” (p. 30) as well as having smaller and more frequent journaling opportunities that aid in making thematic analysis much more salient.

Document analysis occurs because documents are a fundamental form of communication in business, representing historical “text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher’s intervention” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). However, as Bryman (2012) pointed out the “unobtrusive” effect of documents means there is little physical “reaction” to their inquiry but that “considerable interpretative skills is required to ascertain the meaning of the materials” (p. 543). Organizational documents are “used in combination with other qualitative research
methods as a means of triangulation . . . particularly applicable to qualitative case studies” (Bowen, 2009, pp. 28–29), as in the case of this research. Documents are very useful for helping to understand historical context and are best used to support other primary and secondary data collection.

To interpret documents that are selected, Bryman (2012) noted how the researcher should clarify the authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning of the documents (p. 544). Additionally, Bryman (2012) recommended the definition and use of qualitative (e.g., researcher iterative coding and theming; ethnographic), semiotic (symbolic or underlying intent), and hermeneutic (e.g., authors original intent) analysis for interpreting documents, when content analysis is not applied (2012, pp. 556–560).

**Narrative Métissage.** In order to improve a program that involved abstraction around senior’s health, such as the meaning of purpose, and arts-based method was used based on previous work done by (Bishop, Etmanski, Page, Dominguez, & Heykoop, 2019). An arts-based method was appropriate for older adults because it engages social interactions, memory and recall of life stories. Weigler (2016) noted how engaging participants with a common bond, such as age, through a “creative expression” (p. 8) can develop greater self-understanding and agency (p. 8). Narrative Métissage is an art-based method, the meaning coming from Latin (*mixtus*) as in the weaving or mixing of cloths, with *metis* as the Greek homonym of art and intellect (Chambers, et al., 2012, p. 141). “Metis, the wife of Zeus, was gifted with powers of transformation. Thus, métissage carries the ability to transform, and through its properties of mixing opposes transparency and has the power to undo logic and the clarity of concepts” (p. 141). In this way, Métissage conceives that homogenization of thinking is resisted, yet language among diverse actors can be subsumed and overlapped in meaning and connection, a
heteroglossic and dialogic experience (p. 142), different but the same. The praxis of the method “respects the historical interrelatedness of traditions, collective contexts, and individual circumstances” (p. 142). The value in this method then was in writing, hearing, and discussing the various realities of reimagined autobiographic experience and how the prompt would emerge and be interpreted by the participant actors. The consent and guide for the method can be found in Appendix G.

**Subcase analysis.** As an inductive study, new theory can be explored as a result of data collected through subcases or multiple qualitative methods, including participant team meetings. Eisenhardt (1989) drew on several exemplars of studies that used case analysis to develop robust theory as a methodology, e.g., citing Mintzberg and McHugh (1985) who analyzed a series of methods within a single organization. Eisenhardt said the task is “highly complementary to incremental theory building from a normal science research” (p. 32) and “can employ an embedded design, that is multiple levels of analysis with a single study” (p. 9) that combines various data collection methods. This technique was used as the last method in this research, therefore does not appear in Chapter 4. Subcases are selected from various sources detailed in the protocol and were pragmatically chosen as a result of the twisting and changing of the studies focus to round-out the study conclusions. The protocol can be found in Appendix H.

**Data analysis.** Data analysis should be done as close to the completion of the data collection as possible to leverage the near-term experience of the intervention during interpretation. Thematic analysis was typically used for interpreting the data collected and as the basis for research in social sciences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 86). Thematic analysis was described by Rowley (2012) as having “no universal recipe” (p. 267) and “little guidance regarding its organization or techniques” (Massey, 2011, p. 22). Ryan and Bernard (2003)
described the identification of themes as being an observable expression of the topic under research. Rowley (2012) added some common alignments in the analysis process including sorting data, standardizing or coding, interpreting and documenting (p. 268) and Massey (2011) argued for an emphasis on latent data (p. 24). Fortunately, Saldaña’s (2016) treatise on qualitative coding offered some clarity and various approaches for different coding tasks using a thematic analysis. As well, the coding and theming process had eight defined strategies to consider during the process, explicated by Ryan and Bernard (2003), those are: theory-related materials, missing data, linguistic connectors, similarities and differences, transitions, metaphors and analogies, indigenous typologies, and repetitions (pp. 89–94). All techniques are useful, individually or in combination, for narrative data (p. 103). Other data is also useful for informing participants and stakeholders that do not require thorough analysis.

In regard to data produced by the various methods and actual improvement, the data will be interesting for demonstrating to the stakeholders that their efforts have benefits, but the improvements will not specifically be the subject of the analysis. Instead, the analysis will occur based on the relationship of the improvements, regardless of the empirical value they have on the participants, e.g., 20% reduction in project delivery time. The approach was helpful for understanding validity in terms of the shared goals that were salient for the participants. The conduct and analysis of methods that emerged pragmatically will be discussed in Chapter 4 (“what happened”) and detailed in the Chapter 5 findings.

**Operation.** The textual data collected was sorted into its relevant categories of inquiry related to the particular topic being addressed, and then coded by using the strategies above while keeping the key topics of the interview or observation in mind. Rowely (2012) called this “getting acquainted with the data” (p. 268) and recommended limiting the number of categories
to less than 10. For example, statements that repeat, are metaphoric, or comparable to the rest of the text were highlighted and annotated (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once the text had been completely reviewed and coded the themes were then related to existing theories to draw conclusions and check for validity. To check for rigour, four elements of trustworthiness were noted by Stringer (2007, p. 178):

**Credibility.** Prolonged engagement such as continued meetings, persistent observation, ORJI and making notes “over a period of time” (Stringer, 2007, p. 57). Triangulation, using multiple sources of information to check assumptions and inferences. Glesne (2011) reminded us that triangulation is useful not just for the more positivist view of validity but also for the interpretivist view where “inconsistencies can help to reveal the complexity of a situation” (p. 47). Member checking, when participants have input into their own data. Member checking occurred when I returned to ask available participants with statements or ideas in the report to check if I had captured the context of their statements appropriately, or when checking to see if they were comfortable with direct quotes, even though they had been anonymized.

**Transferability.** “Detailed description of the context(s), activities, and events” (Stringer, 2007, p. 59) so that others could use the information within their own unique context. Detailed description occurs in Chapter 4 and attached appendices, such as the selection processes, or coding schemes to aid transferability.

**Dependability.** “Provides a detailed description of the procedures that have been followed” (Stringer, 2007, p. 59). Such as in Chapter 4 and appendices, where the process was supported by descriptions from other scholars.

**Confirmability.** “An audit trail enables an observer to view the data collected” (Stringer, 2007, p. 59). Journal records and dates, scans of consent, internal/external document records,
emails, and audio files and transcripts. I secured raw data in files and on analysis software or digital journal entries, including consent forms and emails copied and saved for reference.

*Reliability and validity.* Although Ryan and Bernard (2003) argued there was no ultimate check for validity of themes, they also noted that a clear process for theming and coding allows for debate by those judging the validity and agreement becomes the test for validity (p. 104). If agreement exists among the inter-coders or participants as to the affect or logic of the coding, then the concepts generated are not just the researcher’s construction and should demonstrate some confidence in their validity. Determining validity was then an effort in gaining agreement or triangulating by involving member checking and multi-analysts (action team) review, with theory being used as the “outsiders” (p. 104) perspective.

**Ethical Considerations**

This proposal considers and abides by the ethical requirements described in the following statements. The protection of the participants’ rights was paramount and included,

the right to self-determination, right to privacy, right to autonomy and confidentiality, right to fair treatment and the right to protection from discomfort and harm. Informed consent needs to be obtained from the participants, as well as the research site and the relevant authorities. (Klopper, 2008, p. 71)

The tri-council policy statement (TCPS2) prescribed three core principles in Article 1.1: “respect for person, concern for welfare, justice” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, December 2010, p. 8). This implied respect for autonomy and the capacity for informed and continued consent. The welfare of participants was important; factors outside of the participants’ immediate understanding or impacts to their social network must be considered and raised as a result of the research. Finally,
justice is threatened by power imbalances and unfair or unequitable treatment, therefore every
effort must be undertaken to ensure those most vulnerable are protected from such issues (p. 10–11). Ethics are also required in the dissemination of knowledge so that privacy and
confidentiality of participants is maintained, while withholding dissemination would also be a burden if there were conflicting interests (p. 91). Though there were no actual conflicts of
interest, it is common to have close relationships inside organizations and may not be improbable
to develop relationships over time and with contact.

It is expected that action research projects required frequent updates to ethical review
boards regarding questions and methods, predicted by the methodology, and the pragmatic nature
of the changes that occur (Klocker, 2012, p. 153). Ethics approvals are integrated into each
cycle. It is also important to note that the nature of action research involves minimal risk
interventions into the conduct of people in organizations, which could influence benefits or
harms, depending on the individual’s choices. This was explained in section 23 of the ethics
application where the TCPS 2 was quoted saying,

‘Minimal risk’ research is defined as research in which the probability and magnitude of
possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those
encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the
research. (TCPS 2, 2010)

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13 The methodology of action research has, at its roots, change and unforeseen consequences that impact the
daily operations of the participants and their organization. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted, “ethics needs to be
integrated into each stage of the action research cycle” (No. 2858).
Dissemination Plan

The research is intended to be disseminated through a variety of means. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Social Sciences program, I will also be sharing my research findings with the organizational partner and assist the organization with topics relevant to this dissertation. Additionally, I will develop a method that includes other stakeholders from the greater community to help facilitate knowledge mobilization and dissemination after the report is completed; this may include the organization’s interest in presenting value to the municipal governments. The research findings may be adapted for publishing in journal articles, presented at conferences, and in a published book. This research will also be disseminated through the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, DSpace@RRU, Royal Road’s digital archive, and ProQuest/UMI.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the methodological framework applied to the research. I started with my own positionality to inform the reader of my unique relationships with the organization and its stakeholders and followed with ontological views that might help to explain my pursuit of underlying mechanisms. Once my experience and world views were addressed, I then explain action research, noting the complexities, crooked paths, and difficult interventions that are nearly assured to present themselves. Gergen and Gergen (2011) expresses this as a constructionist epistemology that relied on unique relationships to define situational truths (p. 161). Situational truth being the key to accepting the emergent properties of this methodology.

To maintain confidence in the face of situational truth, I described the phases of the methodology and showed the elements that add appropriate scientific rigour to qualitative research. Ethical considerations were reviewed, noting that ethical reviews do not end at the
proposal but are ongoing as new methods or instruments for intervention emerged.

Dissemination was discussed observing that continued knowledge building occurs even after the research project was finished. In the next chapter, I will cover what realistically happened in a chronological order and try to describe as Levin (2008) suggested in the aforementioned sidebar that the story could be demonstrated as a gradual learning process.
Chapter 4: Study Conduct

I found I was at the mercy of what was unfolding before me. The planning, care and control I had counted on all seemed powerless to the messiness of human interaction. As I progressed through the research, my myopia and desire to control the process twisted away from the original intent to identify productivity improvements and their connection to sustainability. Instead, the study became about the organization’s culture and the constraints that prevented taking action. I was blindsided by the strength of the emergent nature of the methodology and the organizational culture. I had not entered the organization to be a change agent, only to support operations I assumed were already at play and could be studied.

This chapter follows the chronological order of events that were often iterative, asymmetric, drawn out and overlapping, describing my observations and reflections, as well as the methods employed to accomplish the original goal and the observations those interventions stimulated. I have endeavoured to describe the conditions, situations, and decisions that influenced the course of this research. The AR approach for this project uses an inductive design with ongoing and pragmatic collection of various data that supports multiple methods allowing for better validation (Feilzer, 2010; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) and leveraged a “variety of types of information . . . that emerges as the investigation proceeds” (Stringer, 2007, p. 67). As noted in the Chapter 3, observations and first-person reflective pauses are used following Schein’s (1999) ORJI model (as cited in Coghlan and Brannick, “journaling”, 2010, para. 3) and will be denoted by a journal date stamp, i.e., (yyyy-mm-dd). Individuals were anonymized using a reference matrix by location and data collection type, which appears like “(1a1)”. This chapter covers the conduct of four key methods: first-person reflective practice and
participant observation woven through the narrative, interviews, organizational diagnosis, document analysis-interpretation of accounting data as a spend report, and an arts-based method.

The main headings of this chapter describe the research approach but the section context illuminates the actual outcomes, as shown briefly in the Figure 4. Figure 4 shows the proposed or imagined course of events compared to the actual course of events. While my time was constrained to 12 months, every two or three months should have ended with the completion of the construction, planning, action, and evaluation phases. As shown in the Chapter 5, two projects resulted in five methods being deployed but with no opportunity to enter the planning phase, action, or evaluation. I should have completed one set of four or five cycles under the original design. Instead, I was only able to do several sets of one or two cycles under the emerging process. The chapter ends with a summary.

Figure 4. Imagined and actual timeline.

This figure shows the proposed or imagined research process over 12 months versus the actual or emergent process. Note the imaged process expected several iterative cycles of construction, planning, action, and evaluation that ended outside the organization. The ‘actual’ process is what is described throughout Chapter 4 and does not reach the imagined evaluation stages.
Getting started in October 2017

After an agreement with the founder to conduct research was established (2017-10-5), the founder connected me with an executive or lead manager (LM) who would be responsible for supporting the research effort, support for the processes, activities, resources, and action team selection. Prior to initiating with the action team, I had an informal discussion about potential constraints to the research with another senior manager who expressed that the management team seemed to stall, disagree, or not find importance in the founder’s ideas (4d2, personal communication, 2018-11-6). I could not fully understand what that admission meant at the time. However, my first interaction with the LM included a rejection of the research, before I even described it, and I had to leverage my relationship with the founder to get agreement to continue (2017-12-7). I thought at the time I was simply not being clear and tried to clarify my role as supporting projects important to the organization, which I believed was eventually understood by the LM.

Stringer (2007) noted that when planning the research process, researchers often “fail to grasp that others may interpret the situation and/or the significance of the problem in ways different from their own or may have different agendas in their lives” (p. 39). Stringer continued to discuss how authority for a project does not mean success or participation. Adding that projects fail when diverse interpretations are not considered. Because of these initial misinterpretations, I felt an organizational diagnosis that helped to inform many organizational members would be useful for creating a picture of diverse thinking and formulate a collective understanding. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) articulated the importance of developing context in the organization, such as which forces drive the intervention or what cultural issues are present (“pre-step”, para. 1). I reflected on readiness for change as part of the knowledge building
process during pre-construction (Choi & Ruona, 2011). This reflection eventually emerged as a foreshadowing of future resistance from the action team, which I would struggle to understand and mitigate.

I discussed with the founder concerns regarding two areas of the operations related to procurement, food services, and head office roles and responsibilities. The founder stated there was a lack of standardization in food services and redundancy in other areas of the operation that were not being addressed (Founder, personal communication, January 1, 2018). One of the first things I did when entering the organization was to ask the LM for an organizational chart and any documents that discussed the vision, mission, and strategy. This reasoning was to help me build the context of the situation and to better understand what the organization’s purpose and mission was. I received some limited information but could not make out the organizational strategy was, and there was no apparent vision. This issue of lacking a clear vision and strategy would persist and became problematic as a structural and political constraint between the management and the founder. As the research progressed, the LM attempted to develop the topic of vision that I had brought up, but was unsuccessful; The LM used significant resources to develop a group vision to be improved by marketing so it was catchy, leveraging dozens of management in a vision building exercise, and discussing inappropriate techniques, in hopes of building a collective vision for the organization. This was directly counter to what I had cautioned against due to the founder/CEO’s position of deep disregard for a vision on the wall.

**Getting into the organization.** I was introduced as the research intern and explained my research to everyone in the head office. I was initially given a desk on a different floor away from the office staff, one used as overflow, but managed to quickly get an available desk in a
hallway alcove in the main office where I could easily observe most of the day-to-day activities occurring in the office environment.

**Action team readiness.** To fully inform the action team about the research, I conducted a kick-off presentation describing the research to the action team. I discussed the intended outcomes, had a discussion on ethics, consent, and power and reviewed the tangible benefits they might experience when building capacity and capabilities for the organization (2018-1-23). We also conducted a brainstorming session to select projects that were considered most important to the organization, which are detailed later. However, the benefits may not have been understood by the team, as McArdle (2008) argued, no such tangible returns could be assured and are really only speculation, arguing “beginnings are political” (p. 605). The action team signed the letter of understanding in this meeting. I also expressed the challenges the company was facing in terms of growth and my purpose was to support their efforts on the projects they were working on or considering starting. I noted that the team members were all senior level managers (director and above); however, finance and marketing were not present, and the team only represented two functional areas of the organization with the LM as superior to the two others. As noted in Chapter 3, the focus of this AR intervention was at the organizational level, and any use of subject matter experts (e.g., community members) would be as invited guests.

The purpose of the kickoff meeting was to help stimulate “beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. . . . creating the belief that change is needed” (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, pp. 2–3) to promote buy-in from the team. Understanding the need for this work was the first step toward individual readiness for organizational change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Choi & Ruona, 2011; Kotter, 2011). In the presentation, I explained demographic changes (The Canadian Press, 2017), its role in retirement living, and the
opportunity for the organization’s growth. I then demonstrated to the action team how the organization’s current profitability would likely degrade with growth (Lafrance, 2012), where efficiency will help growth through profitability (Industry Canada, 2012). In the Lafrance and Industry Canada examples the studies looked at the aggregation of individual businesses to explain that individual businesses can lose profitability as they grow.

The danger of scaling inefficiencies was supported by the current half-life of corporations today; at 10-years the demise of organizations was primarily due to mergers and acquisitions that seek to gain operational efficiencies (Daepp, Hamilton, West, & Bettencourt, 2015). Greiner’s (1989) argument supported changes in the company, “evolution is not an automatic affair; it is a contest for survival.” (p. 13). I then advocated for the way in which productivity improvements could help insulate the organization through competitive advantage by addressing social, environmental, and economic activities that benefit the communities they operate in.

My agenda for the research project was slightly different than the action team since I was investigating underlying mechanisms that may not have seemed meaningful to the participants. This was called a “diagnostic” (Stringer, 2007, p. 970) approach by Stringer (2007) because it used my interests (e.g., sustainability) as a researcher but was also useful for the organization, as Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) stated earlier. It was important that the proposal created “energy” (McArdle, 2008, p. 604) or interest for the key stakeholders to gain and keep their attention, “matching of language or behaviour” (p. 605) that resonated with the decision makers (e.g., return on investment, cost reduction, program performance, etc.). McArdle (2008) noted this was also the most difficult stage to manage due to political and contextual issues around “getting in” (p. 605). So, I attempted to be accommodating and helpful for the action team and had concerns that resistance would emerge. However, as Coghlan and Brannick (2011) warned,
“when a change agenda is first presented, people may deny its relevance. When denial is no longer sustainable it may be replaced by dodging, which is an effort at diverting the change” (Chapter 7, “change and learning”, para. 2).

At this point, I had already been cleared by my review of ethics board (REB) application to add a cultural values assessment (CVF) to the methods and began recruiting participants (2018-1-29), described later in this section. The LM gave me a list of the head office staff available for participant selection.

**Value for a vision.** Shortly after attending the organization’s head office, I was invited to a meeting with the founder and a few executives to discuss the founder’s vision (2018-1-31). This event was stimulated by my first intervention into organizational context, by way of asking for the written vision statement and codified structure of the organization. No recorded vision or strategy existed, and the LM took the opportunity to try to create a vision for the organization. In hindsight this information was revealing with regard to my role and the founder because the agenda of the LM was to work around the founder to get a vision established, as I will show later. I had prepared a protocol to help guide vision development and offered it to the LM (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Onsman, 2004). My intent was to support the action team who had informed me that there was no clear vision. However, in the meeting the founder expressed a low value for a “vision on the wall” (Founder, personal communication, January 31, 2018) and explained the purpose of the company from his lens. The founder remarked that some conflict or competition between the sites was problematic and added that he did not want to be dependent on financing to be sustainable. When I inquired further about the importance of the company he said that losing the business would mean that seniors would not have a quality place to live and retold a story about a client who moved to Ontario,
only to find a poor quality of living. It was important to the founder that the business be a “knowledge driven company” (Founder, personal communication, January 31, 2018) by collecting and using data effectively. The founder told inspirational stories that expressed his vision, as well as his core values. I took field notes which I would later use to extract key phrases. The process afterwards was to go over the notes and iterate a vision while continuing to work with the management team on the research projects until the founder was satisfied with a statement that he could support. Instead, it became a debate about who should create the company vision.

**A founder’s influence on organizational culture.** German-born, the founder might be expected to reflect some of the German management stereotypes; such as being technically sophisticated, organized, on-schedule and well planned, and to manage team members who “expect to be left to perform the task without undue interference or supervision. Thus, instructions need to be clear, precise and above all unambiguous” (World Business Culture, 2017). However, as a Christian patriarchal society and a primogeniture, there would have been presumptions evident regarding the role of the head of a family firm and household; and as such that a man “who could not rule his family was a man who could not exercise authority in the commonwealth” (Hendrix, 1995, p. 177). The founder told me in a conversation about the large number of family members and colleagues that he was personally responsible for and calling himself a gatherer of people which included his recollection of his duty to care for his family from a young age (2017-10-17). In a similar way, it was still common in German culture for the head of the family to control all the stock in the company, “in 79% the family owns all of the stock” (Klein, 2000, p. 164), often foregoing advisory boards (p. 167), suggesting a considerable need for the founder to maintain control. Chapter 2 elucidates that despite the stereotypes of
professional German management, Wasserman’s (2008) conclusions are evident that founders have two fundamental choices to make—amass wealth or rule the family—but not both (p. 11); this might result in ruling an empire as a heritage or legacy mechanism for a founder.

I was asked to join a new employee orientation meeting at which the founder gave a speech concerning the origins of the company. At one point he remarked how unimportant a *written vision* was to him, as he simultaneously proceeded to envision a future for the organization (2018-2-7). The storytelling was remarkable and aspirational; however, that small remark about the vision suddenly felt as though the lack of urgency I was already noticing from the action team may have its origins in the founder’s disregard for typical management practices such as this. Bennett et al. (2015) concluded that “founder CEOs are significantly less likely to implement basic management practices, even if these practices are associated with better performance” (p. 179). After the meeting I tried to inquire as to what the founder thought the impact of his statement might be but the founder, at that moment, did not seem concerned about my observation. I further considered the role of founder-centrality in the culture but was still focussed on my original proposal and not cultural issues. I made a note and then deprioritised it because vision and culture were not a part of my proposed topic.

**Misalignment of organizational energy.** Since the original meeting with the founder, the LM decided that the vision should be something unique and was uninterested in getting further responses from the founder. Instead saying, that the marketing team would develop something to “help our talent brand versus our product and services brand” (5d11). A group event would then be used to develop a vision for the company more broadly (2018-2-8). I was unsure how a vision could differ between business strategy and human resource strategy or how a company vision could be effective or supported without it being the founder/CEO’s privilege,
therefore I stepped back from the process to observe. In hindsight, I wish I had been aware that this situation represented a significant constraint and been able to adjust the research accordingly. I also wondered if the resistance to involving the founder was because of the founder’s disinterest in the topic, or if some other systemic norm kept the manager from pressing the topic directly.

As the days progressed, I reviewed the organization’s structure and strategy notes that I was given and still tried to get a better sense of the organizational context and the way social norms worked in the organization. The organizational chart seemed heavy at the top and I was puzzled about the structure, titles, and roles as there appeared to be some dysfunction or clarity issues (2018-2-12).

**Project selection, authority, and capabilities.** I ran the project selection meeting that we had started earlier, in which the procurement project was selected by the founder and the other was selected by the team (2018-2-13). I needed a way to elicit information from the group that they could agree on when selecting projects. It is not uncommon to use selection criteria such as financial measures (e.g., net present value, benefit-cost analysis, etc.) and length of time. Other weighted criteria is also common in a factor analysis such as “process effectiveness [and] employee satisfaction” (Stevenson, Hojati, & Cao, 2015, pp. 325, 673) to select or justify projects. I thought a weighted matrix with rankings would be sufficient for selection and the action team decided on which criteria would be used. The selection criteria are found in Appendix I.

The meeting was broken into two parts, where the team selected a project and the founder selected another. The highest ranked selections by the team were for a program called IL++; however, at one point the LM stopped the process to check-in with the group to see if they were
still comfortable continuing with the research. I initially thought the check-in was the LM being thorough, even if unnecessary for this group process; however, in reflection it was more likely a growing part of the resistance I was experiencing from day one (2018-2-13). In this meeting, we established who would lead as project managers (PM). Against my recommendation, the two most senior managers delegated themselves as PMs instead of project sponsors. This highlighted a competency trap that limits organizational learning (Argyris, 1986; Argyris, 1994; Gallo, 2012). The LM who had responsibility for all the functions of site procurement handed the project off to the other senior manager who then self-nominated as a PM instead of delegating the responsibility to subordinates.

Interestingly, I had spoken earlier to a subordinate manager that was in an appropriate position and authority, about stepping up to the challenge of leading the procurement project when I tabled it. My thinking was to help develop skills, build capacity, and promote that manager to accelerate in the organization because the manager had expressed an interest in taking on more senior roles. When the time came for the manager to take the role, the manager sat silently without making an offer. For a group of only five, this was highly puzzling for me and I felt it indicated some underlying norms were playing out than what was being presented on the surface.14

To learn and build capacity, I offered team and project charters to establish visions and structure as a first step in trying to continually develop team capacity; something they could use to progress through the projects on their own. I had a sense that standardization was needed—through conversations and observations of meetings that appeared ad hoc and without

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14 see Kayes, Kayes, and Kolb (2005) for a description of other team effectiveness constructs and Latané, Williams, and Harkins (1979) for predictors and theoretical importance why team members do not act to contribute to the team tasks.
boundaries. I posted the charters on the server so that each team member could contribute to the documents and review them for clarity at their leisure; however, contributions were not completed even after following up with the team members.

**Efficacy and discrepancy.** We ran out of time during the meeting, partially due to time spent debating the LM’s challenging whether the projects selected should be studied. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Stringer (2007) noted that researchers often fail to recognize the challenges other are facing (p. 39) This was an important dialectic process that I was misinterpreting because I was focussed on process constraints not socially constructed constraints. I was unsure why it needed debate as the projects seemed to be of the most importance to the organization, were a part of the strategic plans, and every other project they considered was far less important to the team. I invited the action team to work on a future state map of procurement but the team was not interested and thought they should first find out what was actually happening; subsequently, they authorized interviews of the key participants who were engaged in purchasing. The other project’s focus was around purpose, arts, and culture (2018-2-13).

I began looking into procurement, as I designed the consent and interview guide and requested some information from action team members, I was passed from the PM to another manager to search out information. It seemed that minimal attention was being paid to this project and the action team members were not engaging, leaving it up to me to complete the project alone (2018-2-14). I began thinking that I would need to reclarify my role as support, and that the learning and capacity would come from them engaging in their own work. I assumed at the time that I would help to deliver a tangible benefit (failing to mitigate my bias) for the founder as a part of the sponsorship. During my first-person reflective practice, I recalled the
challenge Stinger (2007) warned of, “My experience suggests that programs and projects begun on the basis of the decisions and definitions of authority figures [e.g., the founder] have a high probability of failure.” (p. 40). The project would have opened the door to opportunities to improve productivity of things like food services and their use of local foods as a driver of sustainability.

**Empowerment and delegation.** The reflective practice on the observations I was making led me to believe Stringer’s (2007) warning concerning the project failures and authority figures was true and I continued to investigate founder-centrality theory and issues of management competence and delegation (Argyris, 1986; Daily & Thompson, 1994; Gallo, 2012) in my journaling. Due to actions such as senior managers self-nomination to become project managers, management competence became of interest to illuminate underlaying issues. In addition, this would prompt me to use confrontive inquiry to record my observations and challenge the team’s assumptions, as well as my own (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, “second person skills”).

At this point, I was beginning to have concerns about the lack of action from the team regarding the two projects they had selected for the research. It was difficult to schedule time with the team and no work had been done on the project charters I had offered (2018-2-19), I needed to be adaptive. Kotter (2011) noted that if “some minimum mass is not achieved early in the effort, nothing much worthwhile happens” (“Error 2”, para. 1). I also believed that without a sense of urgency and the ability of the team to prioritise, communicate, and share a commitment to action, that eventually the “apparent progress” falters and “opposition gathers together and stops the change” (para. 7). This might look like de-prioritization of sacrosanct topics such as food, or similar statements to “it doesn’t fit our local condition” (Watson, 1967, pp. 372-373). Food, considered by managers as a sacrosanct topic, was a good example because it was
considered a key service that the client received and could be used to justify most behaviours or costs. I was noticing lukewarm efforts that led to little progress, lacking “enough local initiative” (p. 373). I was hopeful that data collection and analysis would stir a call to action by showing gaps in the way things were done.

I met with the IL+ project manager and we discussed the focus of the investigation for that project. Two topics surfaced for investigation (2018-2-20) and the PM’s decision was to investigate the one related to purpose. As I reflected on the approach to the topic, which I had no knowledge of, I realized that components of the data collection design could also be beneficial to the participants. I recalled an interesting method workshop that I assisted with, realizing that the combination of affects in the conduct of the method would be beneficial to the participants because of the group involvement, storytelling, and memory exercise nature of the method.

Because the LM had self-nominated as the PM, I was then left without a group to actually work with. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted that, the “second person task in this regard is to create a group of groups which you will be working on the projects” (Chapter 1, “pre-step”, para. 2). Instead, the managers did not delegate, expand roles, or empower others to take on the role and learn through the process, and resulted in conducting the work alone (2018-2-21). I provided a guide and information on logic models and explained to the LM that producing a logic model requires subject knowledge around the program they were running, and a project team would be best suited to the purpose (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). The LM / PM was not convinced, arguing that there were no current measures of the program’s success, so rejected taking action. This meant that the program could not be improved or proven effective. I suggested that an exercise developing a logic model would still be valuable for
creating capacity and insight into the program but offered that it was their choice, I would only make recommendations.

Management knowledge. Later that week I met with a supplier because the procurement history I was hoping to find did not exist in the organization, which was a concern for me. The organization cannot manage its resources if it does not control its own data or have the data accessible (2018-2-26). As I prepared for the meeting with the supplier the first thing I noticed was the contract. The contract was adversarial, created a decreasing return with volumes purchased, used a limiting reciprocal agreement, added unnecessary services, there were no cash discounts on the payment terms, and was signed by the three most senior managers in the organization, accepting a small volume discount. The conditions of the contract, lack of data control, transfer of accountability by senior managers of the client organization, and disregard for the project suggested a lack of management competence in this area. The productivity of the procurement process was low (specifically the contract), wasteful, and limited any strategic opportunities that might exist.

Productivity had been axiomatically concerned with the “maximization of expected utility . . . [assuming] economic rationality” (Simon, 2000, p. 27) and thus overlooked as a vehicle and driver of other values because such thinking assumed that nothing more needed to be done. The contract was a good example of a circumstance where a small discount was assuming a certain utility but did not account for other cost inputs, such as time, schedules, accounting, etc. Managers contribute to the problem by not measuring the total cost of their operations and are unaware of opportunities for improvements, i.e., “what percentage of inputs are wasted?” (Porter & van der Linde, 1995, p. 115). Porter and van der Linde (1995) discussed innovation in term of businesses that had the ability to continually improve (p. 98). Unfortunately, the contemporary
economic view of growth obscures business knowledge of innovations (p. 112), limiting strategic and competitive advantages for companies and their local economies by focusing on growth versus improvement.

Because I was struggling to get time with the action team and on the projects, I consulted the LM and was told that when the founder is around there is no time for other things (2018-2-27). This struck me as a conditioned response, so I paid attention to the behaviours of the office staff in relation to the founder. Surely, there was a sense of increased movement, or reaction, to the presence of the founder, and then a rapid decrease in activity once the founder was gone. I thought that this might explain a culture of shifting the burden (Senge, 2006, p. 109) and waiting for the founder to show up to make non-critical decisions.

Although I was trying to conduct data collection sequentially, e.g., organizational diagnosis, staff scheduling did not allow for it due to long delays and being too busy, instead the procurement interviews occurred first (2018-3-7 to 13), immediately followed by the CVF event at the head office (2018-3-13).

**Procurement Interviews**

**How it started.** The action team had decided earlier that the best approach to finding out what was happening with the purchasing process was to go out and ask those involved as part of the project (2018-2-13). However, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted that the future state needs to be imagined before the current state was determined (“Assessing the present”, para. 1). Yet the action team was unable to visualize how procurement would work in their organization so guided me to investigate the current state. A list of names and contacts were provided by a team member, which I used to privately contact participants, for anonymity. I will briefly describe the topic, the design of the method, the participants, and what happened in the following parts.
What it is. Procurement involves a system of processes that includes purchasing, buying, contracting, sourcing, and tendering. A procurement system seeks to acquire the best possible terms and agreements for externally sourced goods and services in support of the business activities and strategy, or the “process of obtaining goods or services by any means” (Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p. 9). Whereas, the purchasing cycle follows six steps, as outlined by Stevenson, Hojati, and Cao (2015), where “purchasing receives a purchase requisition; purchasing selects a product/supplier; purchasing decides how the good or service is purchased; monitoring orders; receiving shipments; [and] paying suppliers” (pp. 441–442). One obvious concern related to strategy was alignment, and can be viewed in terms of strategic drift, defined as “incrementally, perhaps imperceptibly, the organization drifts away from its established strategies, perhaps to everyone’s eventual regret” (Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p. 37). Because there was no procurement strategy per se, and the action team was not certain what was currently going on, I believed checking the current outputs of the procurement system would be helpful in generating knowledge about the perceived lack of standards.

The procurement project discussed by the action team focussed on understanding what procurement was and how it was conducted. Clearly, the organization was buying a lot of things, evidenced by the volume of invoices and annual spend in millions of dollars. However, it was not entirely clear what or how this was occurring in the system. The action team’s challenge to create a future state map, as part of the planning process, prompted the need for inquiry into understanding the current state. This incomprehension of procurement represented several simultaneous issues; the most apparent being management knowledge. In Chapter 2, Seens (2013) noted management knowledge was a primary reason for a lack of growth in organizational capacity and capabilities, causing a failure to respond to opportunities. Although I
tried to contribute to the new learning opportunity as an outsider—as one of two knowledge paths (Simon, 1990), bounded knowledge in the organization created inertia or path dependent rigidities around rational but suboptimal decisions that do not have the benefit of new information, such as not developing a strategy. But I thought this was out of scope, so I moved on with the interview method.

**The design.** An appropriate method would be to question key stakeholders in the system and inductively determine meaning and perspectives through a coding and theming schema. This made the semi-structured individual interview method particularly useful because I could expose a systems perspective by checking with multiple users of the system and their experience with it (Olsen, 2014; Rowley, 2012). The action team wanted to go straight to the interviews because they were unsure of what a procurement process should look like and no other resources were being committed. I designed an interview guide and had it approved by the REB and the action team, with one action team member adding an additional question. When considering the organization’s procurement system, I started with an adaptation of McCaughan and Palmer’s (1994) list of “systemic questioning” (cited in Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, “systems thinking and practice”, para. 3). The questioning involved cursory draft accounts of events in that system. The accounts were collected through a series of interviews with individuals involved in the procurement processes. The interviews were coded for anonymity and mostly paraphrased due to the ease of identification.

**Who they are.** Participants were selected based on their job responsibilities and purchasing authority. There were a small number of participants with diverse positions and I allowed them to dictate where the interview would take place and at what time. The interviews
would inform the action team about how the procurement system was experienced by the recruited participants. All participant names were coded for anonymity.

**What happened.** The participants were contacted and asked if they would be willing to participate in a one-hour interview. I established the conditions and then met them for the interview. When we met, I offered a consent form and followed the interview guide. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and a thematic schema was used for analysis that involved several iterations of coding and theming. Additional questions were asked that involved engagement and sustainability. To manage the variety of data, I used NVivo™ (NVivo) software by QSR International, a qualitative analysis software useful for assisting in the organization of coding, theming, and data analysis. Over seven hours of interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview process. I concluded at seven interviews out of a planned eight (Fugard & Potts, 2015, p. 671), because I felt I was hearing similar accounts regarding the purchasing processes and had likely reached some “theoretical saturation” (author’s emphasis, p. 671). The systemic questioning approach in the interviews involved several components adapted to understand how the system functions. These systemic questioning components included: circuitry, patterns, meaning, covert rules, and time dimensions (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, “systems thinking”, para. 3). A summary of responses to the questions are in Appendix J, Table 2. After I had finished writing up my analysis, I developed a presentation for the action team to get their interpretation and to start planning action.

**Competing Values Framework**

**How it started.** This data collection method was primarily used as a methodological device to better understand the organizational context, to help inform the stakeholders, and generate interest in the research. I also had some concerns about resistance as noted earlier and
scholarly reports suggested a diagnosis would be prudent (Burke, Lake, & Paine, 2009, p. 255; Stringer, 2007, p. 110). The action team suggested getting a general diagnosis of the organization would be useful for understanding how the projects would be affected by the growth of the company, and I recommended the CVF.

What it is. This organizational assessment model would allow for informing stakeholders in the organization about changes and collect data on the organization’s context for planning action. In development of their model, Cameron and Quinn (2011) focussed on organizational cultural effectiveness around three underlying dimensions with the last being embedded in the first two: internal or external focus; stability or flexibility; and characteristics or outcomes (Yu & Wu, 2009, p. 37). These dimensions have their theoretical foundation in anthropology and sociology and represent collective assumptions and behaviours (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The method was described in Chapter 3 and an example of the evolution of an organization was offered in Figure 3.

The design. I designed the CVF method based on Onsman’s (2004) description of Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) instrument and received approval through the REB. It was important to understand the context of the organization through its culture and simultaneously inform the majority of the office staff that change would occur because of the action research intervention. The analysis would compare the gaps between the current and future state. The participant statements would be repeatedly compared for validity against Cameron and Quinn’s theory of organizational culture to infer organizational characteristics. The design would bring together most of the HO staff into a group event that involved multiple discussions and current and future state maps (see Figure 5 as an example). The outputs of the maps, questions and summary answers are detailed in Appendix K. From the mapping exercise and discussions
several CVF constructs were evaluated: dominant organizational typology, largest discrepancy, cultural strength, congruence, industry comparison, and trends.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 5. Example of an average company CVF profile.

Based on the work from Cameron and Quinn (2011) who drew from over one thousand organizational profiles, all industries.

**Who they are.** Participants were purposefully selected and recruited from a list, supplied by the action team, of all head office staff. I used a convenience sample for those that were interested in the event and who responded to me directly. I had 16 participants agree to attend. I randomly removed five from the list and privately invited the rest to ensure some initial confidentiality. This number was approximately half the number of staff members in the head office. To ensure a voluntary nature of participation, it was unclear to the participants and management who was invited and who was not included until the event was scheduled. Each participant confirmed consent prior to the event, as noted earlier.

**What happened.** The method was conducted at the head office (HO) and included 11 participants; five others did not attend (2018-3-13). I facilitated the event using a whiteboard to
capture discussion data (see Table 3), an audio recording for later review, one participant to take minute notes and my own observations from the process were recorded later. Because I had my back to the participants when writing on the white board, I used the audio to confirm statements; however, I also recognized that audio in a large group was problematic when trying to identify participants.

The purpose of the event was to assess the HO culture and inform participants of the projects and changes about to occur. There was some debate among participants with regard to the entire company being assessed using this method. However, it was not necessary for the intent of my research as they would still benefit from the realization of a dominant cultural preferences or “elements typical of the entire organization” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 12). The event started with a description of the CVF model and followed the process presented by Onsman (2004). Once the model was described, the participants filled out the survey consisting of six categories with four questions per category. Each question corresponded to an area of the model that described a characteristic of the culture and questioned the participant’s perception of it. When completed, the participant then moved to the corner of the room representing the highest score on their survey. To reiterate, a participant who had a high score on the clan culture would then move to the corner with colleagues who also scored highly in that category. Once all the individual scores were aggregated, I presented them for discussion to the group before taking a short break.

After the break, we resumed a discussion about organizational change and the direction the organization was heading, how it related to the current culture, and what would be needed to move the organization forward. Participants then conceptualized the future and repeated the survey with that future in mind. Once done, participants moved to their new (conceptualized
future) corners to discuss among themselves the changes, similarities, and differences; giving me
time to aggregate their scores. This also allowed for a visual comparison between what they
experienced earlier and the newly intended direction by drawing the two outcomes on the white
board. We then entered a guided discussion about the results that involved recognition of change
in systems and behaviours. Later, the outputs of the discussion from the event were taken to the
action team for review and interpretation, which was consistent with Cameron and Quinn’s
(2011) recommendation for involving senior managers in the change process (p. 43) and
methodologically correct.

April Benchmark

By April, I should have completed the first round of data collection (construction) and
began observing the effect of action for evaluation (see Appendix A, Table 1), but the team was
still figuring out what programing should be looked at (construction). I was invited to observe
the first IL+ meeting arranged by the PM after almost two months (2018-4-3). The LM/PM had
worked on the logic model alone and told me that it was “obvious” (5d3) that no measures
existed so there was little point in reviewing the current state. I offered that it was best done by a
group or people who are the most impacted, and that tremendous value comes in mapping the
processes for development and evaluation. The LM argued that they should just work on the
improvements and not worry about what has not been done in the past. I submitted, recognizing
that I could not force the participants to assess what they currently have done. Afterwards, I was
unsure of the outcomes of the meeting and suggested to the LM that an inquiry start into the
programming areas of interest. There was agreement from the LM that developing an
understanding of purpose for the clients was important. I designed intervention using an arts-
based method of group interviewing called Narrative Métissage. I had arranged for two co-
facilitators to assist me in conducting the Narrative Métissage group event. The two co-facilitators were Active Living managers and ran various activities and programs with the clients regularly. As a result, they had good relationships and knowledge around client safety and organizational processes. They agreed to help, and we had a practice session together prior to the event to prepare the co-facilitators.

**Founder dilemmas.** I had another meeting with the founder to discuss the procurement project’s progress and I asked what the expected outcome should be. The founder said, “Whatever the outcome, the procurement strategy will need to align with the objectives of the organization to create quality products, services, and experiences while having efficient and cost-effective processes” (Founder, personal communication, April 9, 2018). This was a clear and useful directive from the founder, but may have been “idealized” (Eddleston, 2008, p. 1056). The next day we had another discussion about poor performance in the organization, where I was keenly aware of our two different approaches to the topic (2018-4-10). The founder seemed to describe performance issues by naming people and interpersonal conflict through anecdotal stories and “individualized consideration” (Eddleston, 2008, p. 1057); contrarily, I found myself considering systems and structures that impact people and the conflicts that arise as a result of dysfunction. These discussions made me think of the reactivity of the management team to the founder’s presence as an artifact of the culture because of the upsetting of autonomy, structure, and professional management practices (Greiner, 1989), noted in Chapter 2. I told the founder that I was disappointed that I had been unable gain any tangible benefits to report on the two projects as I had expected and he said “I have gotten a lot of value already from your work, it confirms many of the things I have been noticing but didn’t have support for” (Founder, personal communication, May 10, 2018). I understood that comment to mean a lack of standardization
and coordination among the sites because of organizational growing pains, which I reminded him was normal. I appreciated the positive feedback and assured him that better systems and processes will improve the performance he was concerned about and help to elevate the people he had issues with.

**Management knowledge and delegation.** I had presented the results of the procurement project and a summary of the interview findings at this point. Since I was aware that they may not know what to do next, I set up the presentation to include recommendations and next steps, (2018-4-16). However, there was no project team at the time, and the PM (a senior VP) suggested to the action team that I look into a further analysis with the support of a specific administrative assistant, which the team agreed to. The next day the administrative assistant left on scheduled holidays, as did the PM and several other key resources; which I was not made aware of at the time. It seemed to me there was little support or urgency for the project, which reminded me that the project was at risk of failure (Kotter, “Error 1”, para.1), creating my own internal conundrum and stress. I felt I was running out of time knowing it would take an additional month to get traction on this data collection if I waited. I was already past my proposed schedule of cycles with no tangible action to report. I decided to act by collecting a set of accounting data and satisfaction survey results from the organization. Some of the stress associated with timing was a result of my original conception of cycles, such that I was a third of the way through my research so I should have been nearing the end of a second cycle. I had not even completed the beginning of the first cycle, with no end in sight. With the help of my supervisor and committee I would later reimagine the structure of the cycles, but at the time I was struggling to make sense of the problem. So, I initiated a document analysis as a second cycle in the procurement project using a supply chain method of spend analysis to support the
additional information the action team was looking for and interpreted the data into a report for the action team (see Appendix L for the protocol).

Meanwhile, I attended a follow-up meeting with the LM to discuss the progress of the IL+ project team (2018-4-23). Although I could have envisioned the LM’s initiative to gather a group to be taken as action, I didn’t see it as such, thinking that I still needed to design an intervention. In this meeting, I was told by the LM that the group found the logic model exercise confusing and did not think it was worth their time to work on it saying that “it was not fun” (5d2, personal communication, April 23, 2018) and the organization’s values state that it must be fun. I argued that not all work is fun but that I can only recommend approaches, not prescribe them. The LM told me that they would not engage with the project teams or the logic models, instead the LM would have a group brainstorming session to generate new activities for the clients to engage in. I did not challenge the value of that approach even though a reliance on group brainstorming for activities was not the same as program development or evaluation, which was the action team’s intent. I also felt stuck; I was unsure how to gather a meaningful evaluation from a project that seemed to be falling apart right in front of me.

A twist in the tracks. I spent some time reflecting on the management’s resistance around action, such as taking the time to plan or involving the people closest to the work. I perceived from the action team, mostly in the form of inaction, indecisiveness or forms of incompetence, such as using complexity and ambiguity to justify inaction (Argyris, 1986; Mintzberg, 2015). For example, a manager told me about the idea of developing a vision for the founder using the “the 5-Why technique” (38d2, personal communication, May 5, 2018; 2018-5-7) with a larger group of company employees (noted later), this technique was mentioned a few days earlier by the LM; the technique sounds skillful to a layperson but was highly inappropriate
for such a task. I assumed that the level of inaction I was experiencing was a result of this kind of ambiguity or lack of knowledge, which would lead me to begin thinking about management knowledge as organizational learning, as bounded and constraining (Simon, 1991). I reflected on Ram, Edwards, Jones, Kiselinchev, and Muchenje (2015) and mechanisms underlying the outcomes of such (in)action. These choices taken by the managers are based on some mechanism. I was concerned that investigating them directly would lead to a radical twist in the tracks that would derail my initial proposal and intent, making it a failure. I had to rethink how I was approaching this research and how relevant the projects were to its success. This was a long and difficult pondering process for me as I dealt with my own frustrations and insecurities about the process.

The issue of the lack of a company vision came up again and the LM invited me to a group brainstorming event to determine the vision. I knew this would be a challenge for them because the founder was not likely to support it. My opinion was based on previous comments about not agreeing with a vision on the wall, and the LM’s thoughts of it as a marketing tool. The LM said that they would use the 5-Why technique to determine the vision. Later, as noted previously, a hallway conversation with one of the LM’s subordinates confirmed they would present the vision event to the managers that week, saying that they were going to use the 5-Why technique (2018-5-7). I assumed, at the time, that the LM had directed the subordinate to use that technique without fully understanding it. Referencing the use of this technique presented a problem of lacking management knowledge; The 5-Why technique is a quality management tool,
classically used to identify root causes of a problem and typical for use with other quality tools such as Ishikawa diagram or in six-sigma applications (Cartin, 1999, pp. 80, 170), of course a vision is not a problem to be solved. This fundamental misunderstanding of both vision and quality would lead me back to management knowledge in Chapter 2 and recognizing Mintzberg’s (2013) reprieve of managers dealing with ambiguity and Argyris’ (1986) confrontation of manager’s whose fear of incompetence has them using their skills to cover-up their deficiencies, which could manifest greater incompetence.

In the managers’ vision meeting, I was introduced as a researcher investigating improvements in the company and I verbally offered ongoing consent to the group (2018-5-9). The meeting proceeded with some group brainstorming techniques and a visualization process, which I would later praise the presenters for. However, the presenter admitted to the audience that they put the event together at the last minute and were not sure what the difference was between the mission and vision saying, “When we looked up the terms we were not really sure what the difference was” (38d2). They did not attempt to use

As I was reflecting on issues during a walk this morning, I was reminded that the culture of a company is created by the social norms that develop, and this behaviour is a part of that normality. The epiphany was that the developments around manager competency, quality programs and knowledge, and related issues are exactly how the cycles of action research occur. As we uncover new information, or ‘unpeel’ the layers of the onion things are revealed, such as what managers don’t know. This has a huge impact on the organization’s performance. As I considered this, I realized that this marked, somehow, an important understanding or milestone for me in the action research methodology. I realize that this shifting of problems or deepening of fundamental issues is the fruit of the AR process and its iterative nature. I was on the right track it was just not the one I had my eyes on. (2018-5-18)
the 5-Why technique at any point but did try to stimulate the group with a video discussing the why of an organization, presented by a popular leadership advocate named Simon Sinek.

A day prior, I was starting to introduce the value of sustainability with the action team. I tried to stimulate debate and challenges by asking the team to think about procurement and how it impacts sustainability (2018-5-8). This effort led to debate and a general rejection of the data I was presenting and had a misunderstanding of basic productivity ratio’s and the meaning of quality. This was concerning for me because I was looking for validity in the data collection through agreement from the action team. The arguments about the ratios elicited in the group were indication to me that the technical skills were not present for checking on validity in this case. As I was preparing my next presentation, I was also reflecting on the problematic debates the team seemed to be having on issues of quality and measurements (2018-5-16).

I was also investigating another contract for the procurement project, hoping to help the team get a small win. I felt that if they had something to report then they might start feeling as though they could impact change. According to Kotter (2011) and Collins (2001) small wins are critical to making change. My other investigation concerned natural gas. The results confirmed a previous finding that the organization should single-source a fixed rate to reduce costs and administration (2018-5-9). I reported this to the procurement PM and the founder. This would come up later as a missed opportunity and lead me back to thinking about management practices and founder-centrality, where the founder knew better than those involved.
In my next two-part meeting with the action team, because there seemed to be misconceptions on the topics of quality and productivity measurements, I introduced a discussion relevant to those subjects. I also demonstrated how perceptions depend on individual patterns and experiences. I challenged the team to reflect—in meeting—on what the topics might present for them in light of having different perceptions. To demonstrate how we rely on our own learned patterns, I started with what I termed a magic trick. The trick removed the audience’s ability to recognize a very common pattern, tested their cognitive capacity, and then revealed what was obvious but unrecognizable. My goal was to elicit debate within a group, who had so far been very passive, by getting them to think about what they do not know or perceive and to be more reflective in considering their projects and discussions. I did this by telling the team that I would steal a part of their brain and then presented nine symbols for one minute and asked them to focus on the symbols but not to write them down. I then removed the symbols and spent another minute discussing how we automatically compare our perceived world with our own bounded knowledge or patterns. After that short distraction I asked them to write—in order—the symbols they remembered on a notepad. We then scored how many of the nine symbols each had, noting that five or six would be exceptional. The highest was four but the rest got one or zero right. I then revealed the pattern that the aggregate symbols made, which was the pound (#) symbol. We then discussed how experiences and bounded knowledge may not allow us a full picture of an issue. I continued with the session trying to get healthy debate out of the energy generated by the ‘magic trick’.

Next, I gave each action team member a single page memo, describing quality and ideas around perspectives. The intent was to get the action team to challenge their own perceptions and address the issues of quality, because I felt action would never occur as long as they continued to
debate various meanings and reasons for inaction. In reflection, Argyris (1995) reminded me that “human beings are design beings. . . . These designs, or theories of action, are the key to understanding human behaviour” (p. 20). Although I hoped for some measured conflict or dissension from the senior managers during the meeting around the topic, the LM became disrespectful and dismissive, using insulting language (2018-5-16). I tried to mitigate this by refocusing the LM and the team to dig into the problem but was unable to, so I moved passed it asking others what the memo made them think of. Another team member responded beautifully to the exercise, noting how each person might view terms or ideas very differently than others and we need to reflect on our own understanding (6d8), a response I felt saved the meeting from being overly hostile. In the second half of the meeting, I presented the spend analysis and most of the group was unable to grasp the value of the figures and measures I offered. The data were based on the accounting documents and used single factor productivity ratios and satisfaction surveys, such as the quantity of meals served at each restaurant over the total cost of producing and serving those meals. They continually debated opinions unrelated to the measures, dismissing the reason for why one site

How did I get from interviews to spend analysis? I presented the interview analysis but only received feedback from [4d2]. I pressed the group to consider the ramifications of the data and think about the next steps in a face-to-face meeting. They were unsure and wanted more study, so I recommended a project team and support for analysis. [12d2] selected himself as project lead and one other to help out. [12d2] and the others left almost immediately for holidays, the only member tasked with an activity (which was completely unrelated to their role) left for the longest duration, was the most junior person, and I was asked to do work with her on the analysis even though she was on vacation. I asked [12d2] in his office if he could not task someone as the project manager and he said it was normal for him to lead it, I asked if he had the authority to do anything in operations and he said he did. (2018-5-15)
had significantly higher costs and lower satisfaction, arguing the clients were “just fussy” (13d8) and demanded higher quality (price) products and service. I argued the relationship between the sites as having similar structures, processes, equipment, etc., but that the higher cost center had a lower satisfaction rating (about 60%), so price and quality had little relationship in the comparison. Fussy and having a higher budget was the final *ex post facto* conclusion of the team and was where the conversation ended (2018-5-16).

**Storming.** I confronted the LM after the meeting with my concerns about the insulting conduct and my expectations and believed the problem was resolved (2018-5-18). I had noticed this behaviour previously in other meetings but only understood it better at this point as a form of resistance to other mechanisms (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) and as a group formation process. I reflected on the situation and noted two interesting points, first was that under Tuckman (1965) and later Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) model, the action team had *formed* but not yet *stormed* and was avoiding such discomfort. This brought the second point, which was the concern of the founder and another manager who described a tendency of the management to avoid difficult challenges. I wondered if the fear of storming was related to this normative behaviour or tendency due to the founder’s influence.

Later, the founder asked me to explain the procurement analysis and he understood both the utility and ambiguity of the productivity measures as a means for further inquiry. However, I asked him directly about the satisfaction levels and if 60% was good enough, he said, “yes, it’s enough, you can’t please everyone” (Founder, personal communication, May 16, 2018). I was unprepared for that response; I expected an answer that would not have supported what I heard in the meeting. This made me think again about hierarchy and the influence of the founder on the organizational culture. I wondered, if he had said 60% was not good enough, would the action
team have been less dismissive of taking action to improve those results? I also asked about the gas contract and the founder said he preferred variable rates (as in lending rates not commodity pricing), even though the evidence that I and others had collected pointed to single source, fixed rates as the best option (2018-5-16). The gas contract became relevant later when the procurement PM said that two contracts were produced, splitting between fixed and variable rates (2018-5-25) to see which would be best. I was surprised by this information given the conversation I had two weeks prior on the same subject. Despite the evidence and work done to determine the best course of action on this one small opportunity the PM, who had the authority to act, instead had the founder decide. This struck me as interesting. I was again made to consider the centrality of the founder because I had believed, in this case, the senior manager had all the competencies and authority required for these kinds of decisions but chose not to exercise them. Instead the accounting department, who was tasked with signing the agreement, was later blamed for the decision when the variable gas prices skyrocketed from single digit to double digit prices.

Today was another orientation day for new staff, it was typical for lunch to be provided and for the office staff to join the new staff for lunch and conversation, and I had been in a few already. I was busy working on a document but was approached separately by two people who were in the meeting where I was treated disrespectful. Both people said I was welcome to join the lunch and reconfirmed the invitation with such language and manner as to be reassuring, such as, “it’s okay, you can still join us”. I thought that was odd and reflected on it because I had not considered the impact on others in the team, just that lack of support would manifest generally. It made me think that something more than just a minor challenging discourse occurred in the meeting, possibly more conversation outside the meeting, etc. That is my assumption only because more than one person had that response. (2018-5-28)
I had a conversation with the procurement PM in the hallway about the gas contract. During the conversation, the PM noted that the founder “does not believe in fixed rates and there is some speculation on natural gas prices that needs to be considered” (12d3, personal communication, May 28, 2018). Although the evidence suggested that a fixed rate and single-source supplier would be more beneficial, and with no indication of what the speculation was outside possible increases, the contracts were made to host multiple suppliers with both fixed and variable rates. I did not imagine the cost difference would be significant, so such an experiment would not be wasteful if any learning came from it (2018-5-28). In the end, the decision had significant costs. However, this reinforced some founder-centrality and management leadership competency around the culture in the organization and its ability to adapt and learn from new information.

Narrative Métissage

How it started. I recommended the narrative métissage previously when the PM for the program agreed that a team could be put together to do something about the meaning of purpose (2018-2-18). Due to delays no data collection took place until four months later (2018-6-4). Since the LM refused to assess the current program, we would go straight into developing something new. The clients’ program could expect involvement in mental, physical, and nutritional health activities. Several ideas were discussed repeatedly by the team, including the arts, culture, community involvement, the need for socialization, exercising memory by storytelling, and having a sense of purpose. The organization was already involved in art, culture, and community projects so the idea of purpose remained an important and somewhat mysterious area that needed attention. I had been examining client satisfaction levels from recent
organizational surveys for a while and was considering the combination of the terms *purpose* and *satisfaction*.

To inform myself and the action team about the subject, I investigated two related terms to satisfaction, *hedonics* and *eudemonics*. The one that stood out most was eudemonics because it was more related to longer-term purpose than the temporary pleasure of hedonics. As I investigated aging and eudemonics, I found an article that suggested a decrease in death for seniors who experience eudemonic well-being (Steptoe, Deaton, & Stone, 2015). Although Steptoe et al. (2015) concluded that “the wellbeing of the elderly is an important objective for both economic and health policy” (p. 1), other factors may be relevant as well. An outcome of longer, healthier life and affective capacity would result in social (resilience) and local economic (productivity) benefits for the organization, clients, and community. Additionally, women in the later stages of life experience higher rates of affective and cognitive depression and “significantly lower well-being than men” (2014, p. 13), and most of the organization’s clients are women. I recognized that this area of research for improving productivity of the program could have direct implications for the three elements of sustainability.

**What it is.** I began thinking about a data collection design that would be most beneficial for the clients and could incorporate socialization, the arts, and memory recall exercises. I had recently been involved in an arts-based Narrative Métissage workshop with my academic supervisor and decided the method was a positive way to benefit the stakeholders as a part of the

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**15** Hedonic indicates a temporal phenomenon resulting in immediate feelings of pleasure or happiness and is impacted by near term experiences. A practical example, having a negative conversation with a spouse and then being asked if one enjoyed a fine meal will result in poorer results than first having a positive conversation with a spouse.

Eudemonics can be thought of as happiness but is not time bound as it is condition bound, meaning that the conditions of happiness are presents to satisfy living well, having well-being, and living with a sense of purpose and meaning in life.
intervention because of the socialization, memory work (storytelling), and arts. Narrative métissage is an art-based research method, this method seeks to explore meta-experience of well-being through qualitative analysis of storytelling and meaning derived from the dialogic process. The praxis followed on the work of Bishop, Etmanski, Page, Dominguez, and Heykoop (2019), which explained the method and its theoretical and practical underpinnings. Facilitators read a prepared example of woven stories, then engaged participants and debrief the experience and meaning with the participants through probing questions.

**The design.** The data collection design required a participant selection process, a co-facilitator who was familiar with the participants, and a comfortable setting. The participants were purposefully selected with the help of staff who work with them regularly and who shared a level of comfort and familiarity with them. The staff approached the participants, informed them of the event, what their participation would entail, and were given a consent form. The event would be held at the community they lived in and provided easy access, refreshments, and knowledgeable healthcare professionals for support. The participants who arrived at the event were asked to review the consent form again and sign their understanding, they were reminded that they did not have to participate or could withdraw their consent at any time. Although the participants are independent, they are also seniors, so having a trained member of the staff who can help conduct exercises in the building for safety and to be supportive was reassuring because métissage “may be difficult for some people, and strong emotions can be evoked” (Bishop et al., 2019, p. 12).

Although this research method was arts-based, the obvious conclusion was not to use a *dramaturgical* or *narrative* approach to coding, which would be more useful if the topic was intrapersonal or contentious, “as a cast of characters in conflict” (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 145, 154).
For example, such an approach would have been appropriate for a narrative métissage where common ground was being sought or a topic was in debate. However, I was not focussed on the dialectic phenomenological contradictions and interplays between the participants or within themselves. Instead, I focussed on the topic of “purpose” and its constructed and emergent meaning through participant reflection and engagement. For that reason, I would use a coding approach appropriate for the debrief notes and story types of data collected. I followed a splitter routine, common with grounded theory as a line-by-line assessment (p. 24). This initial procedure helped ensure a more clear and inductive view of the data because of the higher volume of codes produced with less of my own interpretation, or implied bias. The volume of code was handled using computer-automated qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), by NVivo. I would maintain the voice of the participants by coding in vivo (p. 105), directly from the text, and carefully apply simultaneous coding where repetition or overlapping occurred in text, or where codes fell under more than one primary code (p. 94). Additionally, researcher memos and annotations are included in the “data corpus” (p. 44) to enhance the reflective analysis and emergent theory (p. 55). This process would aid in inductively generating themes for further investigation.

Due to the demographic of participants 80+ years of age, some of the timings suggested by Bishop et al. (2019) were extended. This was found to be useful and appropriate when dealing with age related challenges, e.g., arthritis and ease of writing, cognitive speed, fatigue, sight, hearing, bio-breaks, etc. The length of time taken to conduct the narrative métissage was three hours.

**Who they are.** The participants were selected from one of the sites where they lived through an invitation from the co-researcher whom they all knew and were comfortable with.
The research was explained to them by the co-facilitator and a consent form was offered. Exclusions included non-residents or non-customers.

**What happened.** After some scheduling constraints with the staff, I was able to conduct the métissage workshop at one of the sites with seven participants and only one co-facilitator (2018-6-4). I had expected that by this time the current state map of the program would be complete and the data from the métissage method could be incorporated into program development. The method followed the protocol noted in Appendix G and offered an example and discussion for the benefit of the participants, played out by the co-facilitator and me. The idea of purpose as a prompt was offered and the participants began working in teams to develop and intertwine their stories. A reading ensued, followed by a discussion. I thanked the participants and collected all the notes and other data.

The closing process revealed positive experiences with various participants expressing thoughts such as, “grateful, participative, challenging, stimulating” (audio-unidentified) and making jokes about the novelty of having “to think” (audio-unidentified) at that age. The whole group stayed engaged, active, and participative the entire time, even as I noticed my own fatigue increase from the lengthy process; afterwards one of the action team members said, “I was surprised that you were able to keep them engaged for a full three hours, I’ve never seen that before with this group” (14d3, personal communication, June 4, 2018). Unfortunately, after this event occurred and I developed a 20-page report and analysis no further interest in pursuing the program development for the organizations was tolerated, so it was dropped.

**Action team evaluation.** After having conducted several data collection methods, I reached out to the action team to get their sense of the project progress, or gaps, regarding actions taken by the team (2018-6-16). Because it was difficult to schedule time together, and for
their convenience, I sent out a questionnaire. It was also easier to document the ideas shared with the action team then trying to recall meeting notes. I had adapted several close-ended questions based on Kotter’s (2011) original work and added some open-ended questions for more depth. I then wrote up a summary of the results for the team to reflect on, and to offer them an analysis as well. The purpose of this process was to check with the team on how the projects were progressing, reconfirm their roles, and challenge them to take action, since I had been experiencing a lack of urgency and interest. I was a little frustrated at this point due my inability to motivate action from the action team or get reflective responses. I began using memos to communicate issues to the action team because scheduling face-to-face time was very discouraged, I felt I needed to confront the team about the inattention to the research projects, see Appendix M for the results.

**Sustainability.** Although I was only halfway through my research term, I had already collected a lot of data and was expecting more cycles to emerge from actions taken by the team as we moved onto the topic of sustainability (2018-6-17). I used another informal team survey to educate the team on the topic of sustainability and elicit some responses. The team survey was modeled after “The Gate Survey” by Burch et al. (2018) as an opportunity to educate the team with regard to the author’s work (see Appendix N for the pre-meeting reading and survey). I had several follow up communications with the team to get them to respond to the survey. I asked one of the members how long it took to conduct the survey and was told “about 8 minutes” (6d3, personal communication, June 17, 2018), so I was assured that it was not too burdensome. I would continue to follow up for two weeks before preparing a presentation for the action team. Before the meeting, I tallied the team responses getting a 50% response rate. Despite that disappointment, I presented their responses in comparison to Burch et al.’s survey results of
other companies in the region. The Burch et al. survey offered an important insight for the management team regarding competitive advantage. Although companies in the study valued sustainability, few committed resources by designating a person or committee to the role. The implication was that a competitive advantage could be had by taking action on this topic.

**July Benchmark**

The next scheduled action team meeting would introduce sustainability and use the GATE survey provided a few weeks earlier to the action team as a baseline of understanding (2018-7-8). Sustainability was on my proposed timeline and I was keen to stick to that agenda, but in hindsight it may have been erroneous to address the topic, as deeper issues were emerging around organizational constraints. However, I presented information about sustainability and some of the competitive gaps and opportunities. In addition to the discussion of the survey, the team was presented with the United Nation’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and asked what SDGs were most relevant to the organization as a means of measurement; a list of SDGs and possible measures where described by the team using a Crawford Slip method for collecting data in a group (Cartin, 1999, p. 160). The process sought to
elicit opinions on sustainability from the action team, to compare their responses with examples from other surveys of business leaders regarding what SDGs were important for their organizations (PwC, 2017; United Nations, n.d.). The goal was to gather data on the team members thinking while I had their attention, as it was difficult to get them to respond on their own.

By the end of the meeting, I conducted a question blitz to elicit ideas instead of debate, recommended by Gregersen (2018) because ideas are actionable and debate stalls action. This was intended to gain feedback on sustainability and get direction for further data collection. The result from the blitz was to determine the value sustainability had for all the organization’s stakeholders. I suggested an organizational survey might work and I would send out a design for REB approval. I designed a survey and had it approved through the REB before sending it to the action team for any last adjustments and approval (2018-7-20). I followed up with the team but only received two assurances that it was okay (2018-7-23), with one member noting it would only take about 10 minutes to complete (13d3, personal communication, July 23, 2018). I had no further responses from the team, and I had to prepare for the next meeting, which was fast approaching.

**Founder’s syndrome.** During the next meeting on sustainability, I presented the team with information on the SDGs (2018-8-2). When the issue of an organizational survey came up, I asked how the team could be tasked to handle its distribution and collection and who would assist in analysis. The LM responded that the survey would not be done at all, arguing why it would not work, which I challenged with some confusion. At that point, I realized my misinterpretation of the LM’s question about the survey from a previous meeting. What I thought was a question asking if sustainability was important for the organization, was actually a
challenge about conducting any research. A debate broke out about asking the clients if they valued sustainability in the organization. The LM responded—possibly not noticing that the owner’s representative was in the room—and said, “we don’t care what the clients think” (5d2). When the owner’s representative interrupted to say that they actually do care (4d2), the LM corrected the statement to say that they care but it doesn’t matter because they just have to do what the founder wants regardless of the clients’ needs (2018-8-2). The debate went into overtime and I tried to mitigate the conflict by suggesting that the LM and I discuss what to do afterward, since it seemed that no decisions would take place in the meeting (2018-8-2).

The following discussion with the LM was not difficult and included the founder and owner’s representative. I still had a sense that everyone was uncomfortable at having disruption occur inside the normally passive group dynamics, and I was the outsider. I have had these uncomfortable experiences before, so I recognized it as a necessary part of breaking the status quo, even though I didn’t know if it would be successful (2018-8-2). I thought the normative behaviour of avoidance to address the deeper issues or fears of incompetence led the action team to the decision to conduct a document analysis instead of the company wide survey or other intervention that required participants. This required little responsibility from the organization, which appeased the LM. These events culminated in what seemed to be a masking of incompetence, or fear of performing tasks that the team was uncomfortable with, or something which might open a can of worms. As Argyris (1986) argued, “Managers who are skilled communicators may also be good at covering up real problems” (p. 79) and shifting the burden by blaming the founder; as can be found in Tuckman’s (1965) behavioural responses to tasks that “serve as resistance to group influence and task requirements” (p. 396) when the pressure of action is required.
Agents who focus on their personal responsibility are likely to act more competently and more justly than those who do not. Those who distance themselves from their personal responsibility are likely to create behavioural worlds in which valid information is not generated, choices are not recognized, and agents feel little internal commitment. While it is obvious that human beings often do blame others and do not recognize their own responsibility, they do this in the belief that they have good reasons for holding others responsible. (Argyris, 1995, p. 77)

The term incompetence was used by Argyris (1986) for behaviour “in the defense of inaction that serves no purpose except self-protection” (p. 80). I recognized that a tremendous learning opportunity was embedded in this disruptive meeting, but I would first have to deal with its immediate interpersonal consequences.

Two weeks after the storming, I felt like the relationship with the LM was improving and more progressive as part of the group structure, which would be indicative of Tuckman’s (1965) norming process (p. 396). I felt like a breakthrough was just about to occur; however, the LM suddenly resigned without notice (2018-8-17). I had already collected enough data to complete my study, so was partially consoled by that, but felt there were still many loose ends that could have been cleaned up with the LM’s support. When I returned to the office after a week away, staff seemed relaxed and generally cheerful, despite the departure of the LM. I was not sure what to make of the situation or how it would impact my study (2018-8-27). I would end up reporting to the other senior manager on the team who would oversee the research projects and I was informed that a new manager was being brought in to replace the LM. I asked the senior manager what would happen to the projects and was told that another action team member would take over the program project because “the [program] project seems to be important to [founder]”
(12d3, personal communication, August 31, 2018). I felt like the senior manager didn’t agree with the projects, so I noted that the research projects don’t seem to be very important to the team and he agreed saying, “not really, but it’s really important to [founder] so therefore it’s important for us” (12d3, personal communication, August 31, 2018). I immediately recognized why so much disinterest and ambivalence had occurred from the team, since the two most senior managers on the action team were modelling a behaviour of disinterest (2018-8-31).

On reflection. There was a common theme among my first-person reflection, most of which I feel are my own limitations of knowledge and experience. However, I will note some challenges from those reflective practices that are worth recalling. I believe they will aid in the transferability of the information or processes used in this study. For example, the primary issue I had was trying to navigate the resistant behaviours from management towards taking action on the findings or establishing accountability around objectives, which was often passive-aggressive. That meant when the construction phase was complete and the planning phase should begin by appointing someone responsible or committing resources, the action team members would delay planning or want to revisit the construction phase where no single person needed to act. This made it a challenge to envision achieving the implementation and evaluation phases on schedule. This should have alerted me to the validity of topics they were having me investigate; such as improvements in procurement, programming, or sustainability. It would later become apparent that validity would depend on founder centrality, management knowledge, and the organizations capacity for learning, once I adjusted my own perspective.

The challenge of validity was not just in checking directly with participants. Glesne (2011) offered a reminder that triangulation is useful not just for the more positivist view of validity but also for the interpretivist view where “inconsistencies can help to reveal the
complexity of a situation” (p. 47); and contrasting that, Ryan and Bernard (2003) argued there was no ultimate check for validity of themes other than agreement among those involved in the process (p. 104). I did have inconsistencies and silence to work with, but not agreement.

The reader should understand that research activities and observations were ongoing and overlapping as I focussed on my own parallel process of investigation, observation, and reflection. While I was trying to cycle through the project activities, I got trapped in the quagmire of organizational culture, denial, and avoidance. I was thrown a life-line when one of my committee members helped me realize I was focussed on the organizational projects versus the research project and my academic supervisor illuminated a different way of seeing through the methodological complexity I was confounded by (2018-5-9; 2018-7-24). I tried several approaches with the action team to address ambiguity and validity around the data collection versus the actions required. A practical error in my approach may have been trying to avoid a purely organizational or leadership study around change management. Despite
my attempts and challenges to engage the action team, as noted earlier where disinterest or straight resistance occurred, they would not directly address the lack of action and ambiguity on the organization’s commitments.

Addressing the ambiguity by trying to bracket the struggles into first-person reflection and the rest of the study into second-person observation served me in making sense of the study. By the time I got to the narrative métissage method, I was fully aware that structural issues, management competence, founder influence, and other mechanisms were creating resistance to action with reactive and fear-based behaviours. An example was the rejection of both project charters, use of logic models for program evaluation and process mapping, and lack of delegation of responsibility, as noted in Chapter 2. The last cycle ended in little action from the team, yet I was able to proceed to collect enough information to draw some conclusions. The research effort overall presented an “ongoing series of revelations that flip back and forth, nurturing contradictory interpretations” (Weigler, 2016, p. 136) between the effects of the founder, the learning in the organization, and the knowledge of the management team.

Chapter Summary

This chapter started with two organizational projects, the organization’s brand value proposition about client health, i.e., ‘IL+’, and a procurement topic. These guided the intervention and intention of the study, which was to construct understanding around improvements and plan action that would be relevant to sustainable values, then implement those plans and evaluate the outcomes. Instead, the interventions themselves resulted in organizational cultural responses that were unintended.

The first intervention of data collection, which I placed as a part of the pre-construction phase of AR, helped me to define the context of the organization and inform its members of the
projects that the organization was embarking on by conducting an organizational assessment, the CVF. This method occurred just as I had finished the procurement interviews, due to scheduling constraints that gave some obscure clue of the resistance that was looming. The second intervention (procurement interviews) was analyzed at the same time as the CVF, due to timings. The interviews looked at the system of purchasing, investigating the process and experiences of those closest to the system through interviewing. The third method was a part of the health program project and was an art-based method, which intended to inform the programming of the organization’s value proposition using logic models, developed using a guide by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004). The fourth method (spend report) was a result of the action team asking for more data, an iteration on the second method. I noted this as a possible fascia for an underlaying structural issue through my first-person reflections. This fourth method delved deeper into the issues presented in the procurement interviews and clarified some of the direct challenges faced by the organization in terms of operational efficiencies, knowledge, and process effectiveness. The final method was the participant observer that included reflective journaling, informal meetings, hallway conversations, etc., and was woven throughout the research as I navigated the process.

In this chapter, I have tried to chronologically articulate the asymmetrical complications I experienced when conducting action research in this setting. The personal reflections and interpretations were a part of the learning journey, consistent with an action research methodology. Now, I will turn to the findings that this process generated.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the research. I have adapted an additional method of *subcase analysis*, described in Chapter 3, based on Eisenhardt’s (2002) description and exemplified by Mintzberg and McHugh (1985) study of the National Film Board of Canada, where various individual methods are aggregated to examine themes in the overall study. The findings should help remind the reader that I started with a different objective and was overwhelmed by emergent issues of organizational culture. The following findings are a result of a methodological intervention of the methods, rather than the methods themselves, and the participant observation that made up the bulk of the findings.

An important deviation from the intended research proposal occurred, as you have implicitly read, which took me off track. Not unlike the beneficial divergence of discovering that the theoretical premise under investigation was falsified, the goal to evaluate participants lived experiences through their own self reflection (second-person inquiry) and actions taken was lost to the constraints identified earlier. Two important factors are thus missed and resulted in research bias, as noted in the limitations section. The first was that the value or input from the action team was significantly less than optimal and became a point of observation and conflict. This was not untenable as ethnographic participant observation methodology has a “focus on shared meaning within a group while others focus on what one needs to know to behave appropriately in some context” (Glesne, 2011, p. 17). The second, was the lack of participant reflection on lived experience, since little feedback was accessible. I tried to mitigate this by inventing ways to engage the action team and I would approach staff informally to ask unstructured questions about activities they witness. In addition, because of the nature of negative reactivity and power I observed, there is data and fuller participant statements that are
truncated or paraphrased only, to protect the participants from being easily identified, such as the unfair blaming that occurred in chapter 4 sub-heading “storming”. As noted in the ethics section of chapter 3, justice is threatened by power imbalances and unfair or unequitable treatment, therefore every effort must be undertaken to ensure those most vulnerable are protected from such issues. This lack of data from an epistemological point of view meant that the researcher’s etic or perspective held a premium as a result.

In my role as an intern, I was also unwittingly the subject of political maneuvering and power hierarchy, having been brought in by the founder. As eluded to in my narrative, the management would react to me in a power structure as someone who would meet with the founder (Owner) one-on-one, even above the executives. As a part of that reaction of being an agent of the founder was filtering of information and disregard for the adhocracy that I represented. Although not the focus of the study, there were at least four other staff who reported directly to the founder outside of the traditional hierarchy that were similarly treated or isolated. One of the limitations I had as a researcher was being somewhat oblivious to this dynamic, in effect contributing to the dysfunction of inaction through my presence and interventions. However, since I did not address this problem directly and relied on my observation without understanding the complex social condition, I was left with making sense of the social implications of the theories that presented themselves and sought ways to interpret those findings.

I sorted and coded data using NVivo to help describe the findings, following the protocol in Appendix H: Sub Case Analysis Protocol. There were 161 references related to the broad themes of productivity, sustainability, and resilience versus the 697 references related to the narrower themes of organizational learning and inertia, management knowledge, and founder
culture. The idea of *broad* versus *narrow* themes were considered because the broader themes were fairly general while the narrow themes related directly to the case being studied. In this report, the narrow themes are central to findings and conclusions, recognizing that at some level the broad themes are intertwined. The bulk of the references characterized in the narrow themes went to inertia and organizational learning at 350 references versus management knowledge at 238, and founder created culture at 109. The subcases were derived from the methods employed, i.e., procurement interviews and reports, narrative métissage, document analysis, cultural diagnosis, and participant observation and first-person journaling. When I sorted the data into subcases, I found much of the data related to participant observations and the first-person reflective parallel process with 128 coded references. Procurement interviews were at the next highest with 35 references, and narrative métissage at zero.

The analysis of the subcases pointed towards a reliance on the participant observations, which was a limitation because it was not the original focus of the data collection and will be noted in the limitations section. However, what was interesting about the subcases was that métissage had no references and the rest of the data collection methods were low. This was because these other methods related more directly to the two projects intended to produce some output that the action team had avoided acting on, which I noted in my observations and journaling. Despite this challenge, by triangulating the observations with other data a compelling story of organization culture could be told as the methods became intervention points for evaluation versus the intended evaluation of the project outcomes.

I will discuss the findings of the themes that emerged around organizational learning, management knowledge, the founder created culture, and then close with a summary.
Organizational Learning and Inertia

Kelly and Amburgey (1991) called the repetition of previous acts as energy spent or “momentum” (p. 609) to highlight the historical context of knowledge as an inertial resource. Additionally, culture can be explained by founder-centrality, but it is insufficient to explain why action was resisted by senior staff when new information became available. Inertia and organizational learning contained the most references at 350; with 129 references coded as bounded knowledge, 102 coded as capacity and adaptation, and 97 coded as culture.

Levitt and March (1988) reviewed the literature on organizational learning and found that organizations learning was “routine-based, history-oriented, and target-oriented” (p. 319). To explain the phenomenon, I found evidence of inertia and constraints to organizational learning. For example, during the procurement interviews a participant noted that the budgets created very low accountability because budgets were lagging in both measures and timely action to variances saying, “it’s like there is nothing. How do you know that your [general managers] GMs actually know what the hell is going on in their building?” (16d1). The participant explained the invoice submission process to the head office, which implied batch processing and long lead times that would account for the delay of usable information, ‘history oriented’ and ‘routine-based’. An example of this operational constraints was also observed by Tura, et al. (2019) who cited it as an organizational barrier due to “incompatibility with existing (linear) operations and development targets” (p. 96). The constraint noted was triangulated in two ways, by the spend analysis and by observation.

First, the spend analysis found a high degree (about 35%) of variability in process and invoicing between the different sites based on volume. High variability will slow the system because of micro-level changeovers, like the problem of multitasking. Second, my observation of
the gas contract mentioned in the previous chapter, where the recommendation—one that was not followed—would have reduced the volume of invoices 800%. However, this had not been previously measured, so a larger volume of invoices created poor performance, higher transaction costs, and longer lead times in the accounting system.

A lack of measures can explain how improvement opportunities are missed due to a lack of data. In each interview, some statement was made that reflected an absence of evidence for the participant to rely on (15d1; 16d1; 17d1; 18d1; 20d1; 21d1); For example, “we are supposed to be a green company. I don’t know that we are” (15d1). Further to Levitt and March’s (1988) review on learning, the authors explored what they called a “competency trap” (p. 321) which implies that experience builds capacity as a function of learning, where trial-and-error is used to adopt successful iterations, while failures are dropped (p. 322). However, competency traps are created by efficient routines that persist even when they are far from optimal (p. 323). Reasons for this are expressed in beliefs and assumptions reflected in the feeling that standardization would reduce creativity or employee empowerment, instead of allowing employees to focus on more value-added activities critical to the customers experience (15d1; 22d1). Such beliefs are also noted to exist in technical areas being managed where the knowledge was bounded. An indication of this is when participants thought that increased revenues, through growth, would positively correlate to increased net profit margins (15d1; 16d1; 21d1). The opposite was true, as organizations likely face tighter profit margins as they grow (Lafrance, 2012), despite increased revenues. Further knowledge gaps and boundaries occurred in misunderstanding how data was analyzed or how activities are measured. An example is the assumption that one bulk delivery was always better than many smaller deliveries because of batching efficiencies (22d1), without considering demand requirements or holding costs.
Other examples of bounded knowledge are subtler, such as discussing the company’s vision with some senior managers. One manager paraphrased the founder saying that “they know their customer” (12d3) when talking about being industry experts and another manager added, “we are a hospitality company” (5d3). The founder picked up on that and added, “healthcare, hospitality, housing” (2018-1-31). The history of the company had been to provide older adults with healthy options and lifestyle but the idea of healthcare was emerging through competitive convergence (Porter, 1996, p. 4), and regular comparisons to competitors that provided medical assistance (healthcare) were made about the business. But healthcare as an abstract offering would take the organization into a completely different business model with legal and regulatory ramifications and lose touch with the purpose of the organization. “The experiential lessons of history are captured by routines in a way that makes the lessons, but not the history, accessible to organizations and organizational members who have not themselves experienced the history” (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 320). This was described by Simon (1991) as two different networking effects (e.g., spoke and wheel), where the “erosion of memory with time has, of course, both its advantages and disadvantages” (Simon, 1991, p. 128), such as competing in the healthcare industry. However, this finding demonstrated adhocracy, lacking the knowledge to construct direction and clarify the vision, adding to ambiguity.

There was an assumption about performance that was bounded due to past success and target orientation. As noted in Chapter 2, Ostrom (1998) said, “once an experiment is repeated, cooperation levels in public-good experiments tend to decline” (p. 5) suggesting that as the individuals learn they become less inclined to contribute to future changes. Mintzberg (2013) commented on the high degree of ambiguity and variation in activities managers face day-to-day, but also noted that “hubris sets into the management” (Chapter 6, “Success”) when they are
successful, which can undue them, like the trap of routines and inertia. One manager in the company claimed industry competition likes the classic system (efficiency and standardization) when times are good because they can “extract more revenues from it but when things are less than good, they want the [company] model because it doesn’t lose its quality” (12d3), indicating that the company does not sacrifice its perceived quality by tightening its belt because it has access to the owner’s cheap capital.

These observations tell us something about the impact of founder and management knowledge with the misperceived relationship to quality and cost that halts the need to investigate improvements or ‘belt tightening’ because was believed that it would only lower quality. Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, Scur and Van Reenen’s (2014) noted a high degree of “ignorance in simply knowing how well managed a firm is” (p. 39) with the founder’s own finances and owned assets being leveraged, obscuring poor management practices saying, “family firms can continue to generate positive cash flow while generating economic losses because their family owners are subsidizing them through cheap capital” (p. 39). The routine of success belies the arrangement of performance in the organization and is bounded by knowledge, routines, and histories that underlie the behaviour of management and cultural norms. Schoemaker (1982) said that the positivist economics ignored assumptions of expected behaviour because any prior assumption can have new assumptions “ex post facto” (p. 539) meaning that once an issue has occurred people can point a finger at an easy explanation and then ignore the original problem because they have now identified the culprit. It may well be that simply being ignorant of needed changes or improvements was also a key factor for this organization to contribute to greater sustainability, as a function of the organizational culture. The conclusion was then ex post facto,
or if the person who failed was identified then no further work must be done, as in Argyris’ (1995) single versus double loop learning.

**Culture.** Tushman and Romanelli (1985) noted that very few firms initiate a reorientation prior to suffering “performance declines” (p. 583). Low expectations of performance and accountability seemed normalized and justifiable in an adhocracy. I observed that managers did not consistently attend required meetings. Despite being aware of the project’s timeline, that it was already late, an introduction to a meeting for staff by a senior manager demonstrated the low priority tone for the invitees that contradicted our own research schedule,

> I understand this is the first morning back from the long weekend, but because of schedules it seems to be the only time that works. Due to how tired we all were last meeting, morning seems to be the best time. Please let me know if this time or date does not work for you and we will bump it to next month. (5d2, personal communication, April 30, 2018)

Meetings tended to be informational only and no consequences for attendance or task outcomes where typical. Prior to this particular meeting the LM decided to replace the logic model program evaluation the action team agreed on with brainstorming *fun activities*. The LM stated the staff already do the work, so it would be a waste of people’s time to work on evaluation or program improvements saying “that’s not a good fit for how we do things, it’s too much work and the values of [company] say to keep it fun”, and referring to the introduction to logic model development, “it was not fun” (5d3 personal communication, April 23, 2018). Tushman, Newman, and Romanelli (1986) recorded two resistance responses occur in organizational momentum which prevent addressing issues, the first was being blind to an external threat and the second was defending the status quo as “how we work here” (p. 587).
because it historically worked. I argued that the value was in the subject experts articulating the value of the program, the gaps that are presented, and the continuation and refreshment of the program’s objectives, but there was no tolerance for it, so I relented.

**Resistance.** Sustainability was addressed as important, throughout the research and scored highest in a selection process (see Appendix I). When I presented data from the GATE survey in contrast to the action team responses (see Appendix N) the understanding of the importance of naming someone or some group responsible for sustainability was rejected, even as a competitive advantage (2018-7-8). Baumgartner and Rauter (2016) argued that sustainability must be perceived by stakeholders as valuable (p. 87) and concluded that a “lack of strategic orientation in corporate sustainability management is one major reason for lack of progress in this field” (p. 89). This avoidance of responsibility was noted previously, so when I prepared a company-wide survey around sustainability for discussion and implementation there was significant conflict within the action team, led by the LM. When I started the discussion with the action team, I discovered that most of the team were unprepared for the meeting. They had not reviewed the agenda, or the information supplied, or answered the multiple requests for feedback on the survey method and questions. There was a misunderstanding with regard to the basic ratios I had explained and how they could help the team to make inquiries into their own operations and sustainability. When I explained the survey design and its origins from other scholarly work, based on the previous meeting’s directives by the action team, the LM made several challenges arguing that the survey would “create expectations from the clients” (5d8). I argued that the questions were cautious enough for that very reason and some expectations should be expected for projects central to the organizations value proposition.
Other managers began making suggestions for survey questions that would have actually created unnecessary client expectations and the LM said in frustration, “I can hire the survey group [company] to create better questions and distribute them” (5d8), but not to distribute them to the ownership or the clients, and only to the LM’s subordinates, which I realized had power-over issues and excluded the very people that we needed input from. I recognized this resistance, noted by Gallo (2012), when managers take on projects themselves instead of investing in building up their employees, because they think it’s easier to do it themselves (or cover it up), then become overwhelmed or too busy to lead (pp. 1–2). Additionally, Watson (1967) noted four stages of organizational behaviour that impact the ability to change, describing “direct conflict…. [and] decisive battles” (pp. 364–365) as disregard and division, mobilized resistance and success or failure, emergent leaders and counterattacks, and finally submission and acceptance of the new order (p. 364–365). I felt I was in a pitch battle to conduct the research with the LM who wanted it to end.

When support for the survey emerged from the action team through the meeting the LM retorted, “I will get [Founder] to decide if it was important first” (5d8), whereby I offered to bring the founder into the meeting at that moment. The LM looked concerned, sitting up straight and saying, “No, [manager] and I should meet first and then talk to [Founder]” (5d8). Another manager said they didn’t “see the problem” (4d2) and the LM said it would take too many resources and there was no time for it. When another manager (4d2) challenged the scope of the effort being reasonable the LM threatened “to talk to [Founder] to see which other projects would be dropped because of this” (5d8). Another manager mitigated the conflict with avoidance by offering that the data already captured in the meeting could be used for the study (12d8), e.g., document analysis. Afterward, I spoke with a manager familiar with surveying clients who said
that it was “unclear what the difficulty was around disseminating a survey to the clients or how it would be excess work?” (30d2) noting that the discussion was good until taking action on the survey was brought up and then “everything went sideways” (30d2). Argyris (1994) contended that defensive routines are used to prevent embarrassment or exposing a failure to be investigated, these routines can be found in mixed messages from the managers (p. 76). Argyris offered several examples, such as ambiguity when asking for risk-taking while warning against failure and not acknowledging, exposing, or discussing the contradiction (p. 76). Resistance shows up as a lack of interest or curiosity by managers to improve what can be done and limits organizational learning. This is partly due to a normative response to the culture and working conditions, is limited by inertia, and was the result of a collective of individual managers and the bounds of their knowledge.

Management Knowledge

Management knowledge had 238 references, which described different elements of management knowledge, while competency had 142 references, and ambiguity had 96 references. Competency was described as management skills by Katz (1986) as “an ability which can be developed, not necessarily inborn, and which is manifested in performance, not merely in potential” (p. 91). Katz’s descriptive argument, based on his previous empirical study of executives (Author’s note), suggested “three basic developable skills” (p. 91) important among successful executives, “technical, human, and conceptual” (p.91). For example, as a technical and conceptual skill the following excerpt illuminates the perception of price being related to quality but is then misinterpreted at the operational level to protect a righteous social norm (Argyris, 1995, p. 26).
You can always drive your food cost down by serving wieners and beans, and really not
the quality our residents expect. They’ve never had wieners and beans here for example,
some residents would love it, but I’m sure it’s never happened, because again, there is
that trade off, we want that quality, so we want skilled people who can source valued
items as well to keep the quality up and the costs in control. (15d1)

Use of the term quality, i.e., ‘not the quality our residents expect’, as a metaphor for
higher price occurred in several discussions (15d1, 16d1, 22d1); the brand was also considered to
have quality, which was a topic from building design and components purchased to products and
services (16d1; 20d1). Terms often have assumed meanings and are commonly used in
conversation without proper definition with each member having some alternate perception of
the meaning.

Metaphors occur in depictions of individual language within a culture and are interesting
because of an assumption by the speaker about a common understanding of the topic (Ryan &
Bernard, 2003, p. 90). A good example might be the term just-in-time, which is often confused
with an asynchronous delivery literally showing up just as its needed by the receiver, leaving to
chance the immense planning and resources required for such a feat to be consistent. Total
quality management (TQM) programs are described as having three dimensions: function,
aesthetics, and accuracy (Arnold & Chapman, 2004, pp. 434–435). Quality gurus such as Crosby
referred to quality as “conformity to requirements not goodness” and Juran called it “fitness for
use” (as cited in Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p. 266). Other authors found internal expertise
lacking requiring outside knowledge and managers having incomplete information or perceptions
were problematic (Ghazilla, et al., 2015; Hasan, 2016). The misinterpretation of the term allows
the status quo to be maintained as a defense of the manager’s bounded knowledge. I confirmed
when chatting with the founder’s European colleague, that a mixed message of quality was coming from the founder, per se. The subsequent remark was, “[Founder] does not want cheap but quality products” (39d2, personal communication, July 17, 2018), which by itself creates a misinterpretation. However, when asked the colleague easily described a matrix of cost, aesthetics, and function using granite and quartz countertops as an example, noting that the cheaper quartz provided better quality. So, the mixed messaging from the founder revealed a gap in knowledge from the other managers to know the difference.

Humans have a predisposition to mixed messages and skillful incompetence in the defense of inaction. An example occurred when a participant suggested that improving processes was important making the exception that “we would lose the thing we do well or end up in a bad state, like the competition” (15d1). The evidence for this claim to stay ahead of the competition was unclear as the competitors described by the participant had a significantly different business model but the context related to changing a process to make it more efficient; Argyris (1986; 1994) noted this as a skillful or superficial way to avoid action, and Senge (2006) as a likely way to *shift the burden* from having to make change. One pointed example of a skillfully crafted message to shift a burden, that was proved erroneous, occurred regarding a contract, “there is some speculation on natural gas pricing that needs to be considered” (12d2, personal communication, May 28, 2018). In this example, speculation sounds as though some evidence might be investigated but there was none. Other messages, such as the founder’s story to the management team about the virtue of not being profit driven when an associate of his was a self-interested profiteer running an unethical business (Founder, personal communication, January 31, 2018). Such a mixed message can authorize self-interested virtuousness instead of economically rationality, minimizing good fiscal management. The consequences of such a story
becomes apparent when profits are not important, as in previous examples where ‘tightening the belt’ leads to poor quality instead of less waste.

Management skills can exist but in the wrong places, as can be seen in the following personal communication describing a policy that was both outdated and ambiguous. The manager excused their own responsibility for years of inaction on a topic that was theirs to develop regardless of previous work:

The policy attached is new to me … no one provided it to me when I took on the [job several years ago]. I haven’t seen a purchasing policy. >>> I will confirm with [Founder] if this is still what he wants. He provided guidance on multi year contracts recently that isn’t captured here. (5d2, personal communication, August 14, 2018)

Discussing fit for particular jobs, Mintzberg (2013) highlighted the difficulty managers face in confronting their own skillsets, where “competent, balanced managers in doable jobs, just not the jobs for them. . . . become unbalanced and therefore incompetent. . . . There is also the Peter Principle, about managers rising to their level of incompetence” (Chapter 6, “Fit”). Several issues are illuminated by this statement. First, the manager’s role was responsible for a policy that was not accessible or was not developed over a significant time period. The manager waits to be informed by the founder before acting, does not act, correct—or know how to correct—the deficiencies in the policy, and shifts the burden to the founder when it’s the manager’s operational responsibility.

A similar event occurred with services programming, “Should we review the model? I don’t really understand next steps or how this will all fit together. As far as I can tell, this shows what I already know, we aren’t measuring the outcomes of our current program.” (5d2, personal communication, April 11, 2018), *ex post facto*, we have not done anything so there is nothing
more to do. In this case the manager refused to evaluate the performance of the program.

Another example implicated the top three managers, all of whom had signed a contract, of suspect quality, that any one of them could have handled alone but only one was responsible for. The trouble was that two of the three senior managers had no apparent reason to sign for it because they had no authority, subject knowledge, or responsibility for the contract area, had no legal reason for signing, and never indicated any critique to support the decision to engage the vendor (2018-2-26). This was a skilled sharing of the burden where managers may have been leveraging accountability because they were individually unsure of the consequences. Mintzberg (2013) argued that incremental learning by doing was a necessity for managers to also be effective at strategy because it was important to know what projects to be involved in and what level of input they contribute (Chapter 3, “Managing Action”). This could have been a benefit or deficit because appropriate skills did not show the managers improving the contract, only diluting the responsibility.

When managing action, human skillsets were mentioned as an issue in failing to take rational economic measures. For example, a manager’s decision regarding a staff member returning from maternity leave stated that, “instead of giving a position back to a manager on maternity leave, she was just promoted to keep the replacing manager” ([Founder], personal communication, October 12, 2017). The replacing manager just happened to be performing poorly but was left to fail, and the returning manager was put into a structurally dysfunctional position. When I spoke to the replacing manager about performance issues, I was told about the staff that were not performing, the head office people who did not come to help, and the hope that poorly performing staff would just choose to leave on their own (2018-2-12). When I asked if others knew about the problem the manager was clear that the senior supervisors were all
aware, this indicated to me some normative behaviour was being exercised. Argyris (1994) discussed the social and psychological challenges managers have with “putting people on the spot” (p. 79) because it is likely to expose one’s own failures. Argyris also noted how blaming others comes from a supervisor’s lack of reflexivity where “they have learned this procedure carefully over time, supported at each step by defensive organizational rationalizations like ‘caring’ and ‘thoughtfulness.’” (p. 80). Both examples found that when performance was poor or expectations were not met, no one was put on the spot and/or coached for performance, so poor performance accumulated over time which could lead to sudden termination.

Poor performance was the result of not acting on new information, adapting the system, transferring information, and reduced learning opportunities. Mintzberg (2013) said that management’s obligation was to maintain the equilibrium of the operation and, “facilitates the downward flow of strategies and transmits performance back up the hierarchy” (Chapter 4, “Managing the Middle”). Argyris (1994) argued that managers will fix a problem if it occurs but will not investigate the problem because it will expose their involvement in the problem’s tenure. However, the manager or employee does not want to expose behaviour because it will open a “Pandora’s box” (p. 79) of issue that need hard attention and so avoids confronting the issue and anticipated blame; this is an “anti-learning” (p. 80) behaviour. Some examples include words used by participants that suggested a lack of clarity or doubt in the system, such as: “who, probably, could be a disconnect, not sure, should be operationally efficient, we don’t measure that” (15d1; 16d1; 17d1; 20d1; 21d1; 22d1), yet the statement’s authors made no attempt to remedy or investigate root causes into their queries. The participants described a need for standards and measures, versus starting over each time, “getting more central coordination of things like contracts . . . . it would just save us time” (15d1) and having “a disconnect with
contracts” (16d1), where there was a need to single-source contracts for better pricing and service relationships (18d1; 20d1). Poor processes cause delays and increases costs (16d1), yet no planned actions were forthcoming.

**Failing to Drive Sustainability.** As a business concept, sustainability deserves some mention because the company promotes it in various ways, e.g., LEED buildings, etc., and staff have good intentions about the subject; yet, no measures are used to determine the value, progress, or impact of sustainability in the organization’s operations. I noted earlier that I kept trying to focus on sustainability as a part of the organization’s goals (see appendix N), yet action was elusive and some staff though sustainability was only an environmental issue. The act of intervening with the topic of sustainability had more currency than actually trying to improve sustainability. I had expressed sustainability in two ways with the action team, as a combination of social, economic, and environmental continuation and as being exemplified by SDG indicators. This showed me that sustainability was talked about, but its definition was not articulated or pursued as an example of management knowledge or the ability of the organization to learn. As predicted by Argyris’ (1994) and Argyris, Putnam, and Smith’s (1985) anti-learning argument and espoused theory posit maintenance of status quo despite espousing different behaviours. That does not mean outcomes do not intrinsically exist! The organization, like many, contribute to the social welfare through economic stimulation such as jobs and fair wages. For example, they build LEED certified green buildings and create density for a senior demographic that intends to reduce resource consumption through consolidation of services in an area, such as, moving from large underutilized single-family homes to smaller more efficiently designed apartment dwellings.
Another imperative for management to understand is the steady pace of regulations that business must face or ignore at their peril because of the constraints regulations produce or because of competitors outperforming them in their industry. Porter (1996a) argued, using Germany as an example of leading exporters of environmental technologies, that environmental regulations would create competitive advantage through pressure for innovation. “Tough standards trigger innovation and upgrading” (Porter (1996a, p. 33). More recently, Ambec, Cohen, Elgie, and Lanoie (2013) followed that theory known as the “Porter Hypothesis” (p. 16), which posited the benefits of waste reduction for business from a lens of innovation and competitiveness. An example came from Tura, et al.’s (2019) case study, where they noted the “banning and decommissioning of landfills increased the demand for solutions for utilizing waste, thus creating new business opportunities” (p. 93). This was contrasted by Wagner, Phu, Azomahou, & Wehrmeyer’s (2002) earlier study on the paper-producing industry generally showed economics and the environment had a negative relationship. The authors reviewed several factors including managerial behaviour, market powers and first-mover advantage, asymmetric information stimulating reasons to buy green, the variability of research and development returns, and reduction of organizational failures (pp. 6–9). However, the porter hypothesis does support the notion that industries that are essentially dirty will not see benefits from environmental practises and will likely become obsolete.

Ambec et al. (2013) found that the last 20 years of debate concluded that the Porter Hypothesis generally holds true and regulation does stimulate increased business performance and ecological benefits (p. 16). Others have confirmed the Porter Hypothesis, but also found that productivity declined in industries that were the most polluting (Lanoie, Patry, & Lajeunesse,
Managers received the message that they need to develop capacity or suffer from stagnation and decline.

When asked for any document that showed any sustainability contributions one participant said,

I think we’re doing strongly, but I’m not sure if there’s a formalized paper for that. [Others] would have a budget overview on community engagement contributions, for starters. Beneficiaries are local artists and business communities, seniors [sic] associations, and other organizations that fit within our [program] strategies (such as the Sarah McLachlan School of Music and the Victoria Conservatory of Music). (14d2, personal communications, October 1, 2018)

**Espoused Sustainability.** When I asked a group of managers if sustainability was important to the organization 100% agreed that it was important and had utility. The founder said, “sustainability for future generations. . . . We are convinced that in business everyone can win” ([Founder], personal communication, February 2, 2018). One manager said they were “putting together some information on sustainability for the municipality and upcoming candidates to consider” (12d2, personal communication, July 10, 2018). I asked a well-informed staff member what sustainability meant and was told “sustainability is about the environment” (2018-7-24) and gave examples of attempts to save electricity and water, with no mention of social or economic issues. Another manager lamented at not having any data for presentations to municipal governments saying, “[Founder] has repeatedly asked for more data to present around sustainability and other values” (2018-8-2). Despite the espoused importance of sustainability and evidence that it is a competitive advantage, no data has been consolidated nor measures implemented. Dale, Ling, and Newman (2010), noting that wider efforts (macro), as well as
individual efforts (micro), have failed to make a significant change. When I submitted a survey to the group to stimulate a discussion (2018-7-4) the response from the team was that all thought sustainability was important (also originally confirmed in the project selection phase), but none thought it was worth making a person or team responsible for developing it, which for me confirmed Dale, Ling, and Newman’s (2010) argument.

The following quote originated from a staff member who wrote in meeting minutes that I had made a recommendation to do a sustainability survey in answer to the action team’s questions, which turned into a conflict and avoidance. Several members are summarized in the minutes to argue for the use of the data, then a rejection saying that they already support sustainability (espoused), using ‘higher priorities’ to excuse inaction. As noted earlier, Argyris (1986) said such ambiguity occurs when asking for risk-taking yet warning against failure and not directly acknowledging, exposing, or discussing the contradiction (p.76). Argyris (1994) noted that the defense of inaction through reasoning “serves no purpose except self-protection” (p. 80). The meeting minutes said,

[Researcher] proposes surveying staff and residents to determine what SDGs are important to [company’s] stakeholders. Important to use this opportunity for PR…. Is survey valuable considering [company] is already committed to sustainability? Risk not taking action on results due to higher priorities and lack of resources. This will result in unmet expectations for residents, staff, and public…. Could be more value in promotion of what [company] currently does instead and therefore begin measuring SDGs to help promotion. (33d2, personal communication, September 1, 2018)

Unfortunately, the topic of sustainability was never embraced as a priority or as a competitive advantage in the context of the study and only espoused as an organizational value;
barring any environmentalism, I was surprised that the social importance of the market and the economic benefits that would result was not eagerly pursued, i.e., expected utility. Every time I tried to intervene with sustainability it was espoused as conceptually important but without the need to take action, the topic was abandoned. The result was that despite espousing values for sustainability the organization created no formal policy, or contributed no organizational resources to coordinating or improving the performance around sustainability, even to better report on the ‘value in promotion of what [company] currently does’.

**Culture of the Founder’s Organization**

At the start of the research period the founder was noted as highly regarded, not just by friends, staff, and clients but also by the larger community for the quality products and services his organization provides and for his extensive personal and business philanthropy. The founder’s purpose for his company was to provide a high level of quality for senior independent living. One that was centrally located, not just some facility on the edge of town. This had to do with personal experiences with his own aging mother. Of course, the influence of the founder on the management team can be significant in creating behaviours, identity, vision and culture, motives, attitudes, etc. within the organization and towards the external environment (Athanassiou, Crittenden, Kelly, & Marquez, 2002; Kelly, Athanassiou, & Crittenden, 2000; Schein E. H., 1983). In spite of its profound impact the founder theme had 109 references, having only a third of inertia and learning references and half as many references for management knowledge. However, the weight of the founder theme should not be misjudged due to the impact the founder has on the culture of the organization. As I noted earlier, of the three parts the founder theme considered, *founder-centrality* had the most references at 46 with *founder-syndrome* at 31 and *founder-dilemma* at 12.
As described in the Chapter 3 methods, the culture of an organization can be defined by Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) typology as Entrepreneurial, Clan, Hierarchal, or Market. The cultural model has four constructs that include an internal or external perspective and a flexible or static characteristic. The model proposed a lifecycle progression similar to birth, growth, maturity, and—failing a return to entrepreneurism—decline. The progression through these stages would imply that a change occurs at each phase in the organization’s evolution; however, normative behaviours created by the founder exist that may resist change. As the organization grows, it goes through phases of evolution. Greiner (1989) noted the first revolutionary phase of creativity is led by the founder/owner and pointed to some typical behaviours. Founders are usually entrepreneurial and focussed on building and selling products or services and “generally disdain management activities” (p. 5). Bennett, Lawrence, and Sadun (2015) expressed, “the skills needed to create a new venture may not necessarily coincide with the capabilities needed to lead the firm through more advanced phases of growth and expansion” (pp. 153–154). The disregard for professional management then results in poor management activities or performance.

A lack of professional management activities showed up in the procurement interviews as maverick buying and the absence of policy that would be apparent in a more hierarchal or professionally managed firm. For example, maverick conduct was demonstrated by the leadership, where “although, some of the small ones [contracts] don’t have any written agreements per se as they are more relationship based with [founder] so they only send us invoices” (41d2, personal communication, August 8, 2018). In the procurement interviews there was a belief that the best price or service could be gained by going direct to a source, (16d1; 17d1; 20d1; 21d1; 22d1). This was made evident by comments such as, “companies are going to
be more willing to give us preferred price” (15d1) and “then you know the prices are going to be good and they never try to gouge you” (20d1). These instances are contextualized by maverick buying, where each participant individually uses their subjective discretion on price, quality perspectives, or relationships to determine the criteria for a buy and losing an opportunity for economies of scale through coordination. According to one participant, this was systemic in terms of having no centralizing resource to set or qualify such criteria (15d1).

Ambiguity can become the norm and problematic when roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, particularly as a company tries to grow out of an adhocracy, management will make their own clan rules (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). For example, the founder of the organization justified the complexity of interactions of the organization being experienced, describing the organization as having “2 companies in one. . . . like being a landscape gardening company and at the same time being a butcher who is a vegetarian” (Founder, personal communication, October 5, 2017). Another manager thought the founder believed executives should wear many hats, as the founder does (4d2, personal communication, April 16, 2018). Muriithi and Wachira (2016) challenged such adhocracy by recommending that “dialogue must clearly define member’s authority, power and responsibility of different players and specific role required to steer their organizations to the future” (p. 10). One CVF participant illustrated the many hats theory by expressing a superior perspective to others saying, “my role interacts with everybody” (12d5). This was reminiscent of Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) unstructured entrepreneur who operates in an adhocracy with a lack of division of labour that would not typically be endorsed by professional management (Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985). These types of statements seemed to allow for adhoc behaviours and decision making.
Historical practices are normative in this case, where the practice of sourcing was concerned the organization had, “always left it to the . . . manager to let them decide” (20d1). Yet the logic was absent, “the experiential lessons of history are captured by routines in a way that makes the lessons, but not the history, accessible to organizations and organizational members who have not themselves experienced the history” (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 320).

Unfortunately, the unstructured-decentralized approach meant that managers were assuming economic rationality (Simon, 2000, p. 27) while suffering from Porter & van der Linde’s (1995) money on the ground analogy by locally optimizing their actions while negatively impacting the whole organization. An organizational barrier to new initiatives noted by Tura, et al. (2019) reflected such adhocracy, noting that resources were constrained because different managers dealt with risks differently and “strategy, risk-aversion, and strong dependence on traditional (linear) operations” (p. 96) prevented change.

Maybe I was feeling sorry for myself this morning as I walked into [company]. The morning is lovely, but I couldn't help but think that there is a lack of interest in the two projects. I understand that people may not be interested in my research but I’m not sure I understand why there is a ‘sit and wait’ approach to their own projects. I try not to be the center of the action but if I don’t push it, it doesn’t grow legs and I am half way through without gaining much ground. Even though I offer approaches I guess I shouldn’t expect that they take them, for example, the team and project charters. These charters build capacity and understanding around structure and deliverables. Although there is a general malaise about how things are done at [company] are random, due to [founder’s] approach, this complaint/ recognition is not managed or improved through development of structures and mechanisms such as charters. As I reflect on this situation I am reminded of some cultural norm that seems persistent that I didn't note previously because I wasn't paying attention, I've already heard [5d2; 12d2; 13d2; 14d2; 30d2; 32d2; 36d2; 38d2] and others refer to lack of structure or arbitrary plans, schedules, hiring, etc. as "that's just [founder] or it a [founder] thing". (2018-5-1)
Additionally, the founder comes up with many ideas and expects them to be done; however, the management team tends to stall, disagree, or not find the importance of the ideas (4d2, personal communication, November 6, 2017). The LM noted that when the founder is around “there is no time for anything else” (5d1) and another senior manager said, “this is how it is at [company]” (13d8), referring to repeated changes that leave people unsure of what to do (2018-2-6). I also noted a normative phenomenon when the founder was in the head office; the physical and attendance of staff picked up notably until he was gone. Another common statement that explained an abrupt or arbitrary change of plans (2018-5-1), schedules, projects, or hiring that was usually proceeded by some normalization of eye rolling or assumptions of understanding by organizational members who speak the phrases, in normal tones, “it’s a [founder] thing” or “that’s just [founder]” (5d2; 12d2; 13d2; 14d2; 30d2; 32d2; 36d2; 38d2). I heard the phrase repeated enough to believe it was normal and noted a casual assumption by the speakers about the common understanding of the topic (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 90). Schein (1983) explained that such behaviours are embedded in the organization to the extent that they are considered “valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members” (p. 14), such as myself, becoming the social operating norm and an expectation of understanding for the new people.

Ambiguity created a need for social norms as rules, predicted by Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) model of transition from an adhocracy to a clan type organization and the exemplified statements from a senior manager who noted the absence of a clear vision,

For clarifying the vision, this is a bit difficult as ultimately the vision is up to [Founder] for the company at any given moment in time. The values and mission were created prior to my arrival with the company … The values were created by the employees at the time. I’m not aware of the history of where the mission came from, I assume it was done at the
same time. The Mission/Vision statements you pulled are probably more marketing-esque than an actual reflection of [Founder’s] Vision. (5d2, personal communication, January 2, 2018)

The above communication shows that there was a lack of clarity around the vision and mission as the perceptions can change at ‘any given moment’ and the mission was just a marketing tool, which implied it may be taken without serious consideration. Confirming the earlier narrative in Chapter 4, the founder thought that the use of a vision was just a management gimmick to put on a wall.

The centrality of the founder influences the management team significantly within the organization and towards the external environment (Athanassiou, Crittenden, Kelly, & Marquez, 2002; Kelly, Athanassiou, & Crittenden, 2000; Schein E. H., 1983). Cultural attitudes and behaviours were evident in a meeting where the subject of client satisfaction was being discussed (2018-5-16). When challenged about a low client satisfaction rating a senior manager told the group that the clients were “just fussy” (13d8) and again later when the subject of client opinion came up (2018-8-3), another manager said with some sarcasm, “we don’t care what the client thinks. . . . if [Founder] wants to do something then we do it whether the clients want it or not” (5d8). I had asked the founder directly that same day if a 60% client satisfaction rate was acceptable. I considered this a low rating because of the common perspective of offering a high quality and comparable work sites were much higher. I was expecting some confirmation that the organization could and should try to do better than 60%.

However, the founder pragmatically said “60% would be acceptable” because “you can’t please everyone” (Founder, personal communication, May 16, 2018). Levitt and March (1988) explained, “the experiential lessons of history are captured by routines” (p. 320), where routine
behaviours become evident in opinions and perspectives of organizational performance and client satisfaction. The mechanism causing the behaviour seemed to come from the founder’s casual communication. Kelly, Athanassiou, and Crittenden’s (2000) descriptive review of how central (betweenness, closeness, connectivity) the founder was to the firm, finding that the founders influence was observable at current, post, and legacy positions in areas such as strategic behaviour that impacts performance (pp. 39–40). Finally, leadership theory further informs us that “a leader’s behaviour explains the vast majority of constituents’ engagement” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 25). Routines and normalization of some behaviours becomes accepted by the culture of the organization.

The lack of organizing structure creates social norms or clan rules to compensate. Organizational culture “is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed” (Schein, 1983, p. 14) to adapt to internal and external pressures. Cameron and Quinn (2011) argued that clan rules form to mitigate the lack of structure due to the ambiguity of adhocracy (p. 33). A senior manager noted that the management team has developed a low priority for the founder’s ideas (4d2, personal communication, November 6, 2017). Where the founder changed his mind frequently, effectively disregarding the hard work of his staff (Muriithi & Wachira, 2016, p. 3), a disregard for the founder’s decisions, also existed as a modelled response (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), or an ambiguity mitigation strategy (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). For example, I found resistance in the pre-construction of the research when the LM originally tried to reject the research, before I could explain it fully (2017-10-5). The initial rejection may also be related to Stringer’s (2007) experience, which “suggests that programs and projects begun on the basis of the decisions and definitions of authority figures [e.g., the founder]
have a high probability of failure.” (p. 40). Although I immediately thought the rejection was my failure to clarify, I later realized that some historical mechanism was creating the behaviour.

Additionally, mixed messages inform the culture and reactivity towards the founder. For example, “We need to talk gas procurement but I would NOT fix anything! Who is handling this file? [sic]” (Founder, personal communication, May 3, 2018). Here we see a mixed message and role ambiguity, where it was not clear who was to manage the procurement contract even though there was only one person with structural authority, where ‘fix’ refers to a fixed rate versus a variable rate—contrary to evidence provided to management—later resulting in an unfavourable contract arrangement and blaming a lower member of management for the failure, instead of discussing the role the senior managers played in the incident because it would cause the founder to become embarrassed, so the problem was simply disregarded. Argyris (1986) called this defensive routine “undiscussable” (p. 76) to avoid upsetting heads of the organization. However, these accountabilities are left unaddressed; during a meeting, a manager seemed to obsequiously say that “when a manager fails to deliver, they feel bad for letting [Founder] down” (12d2, personal communication, January 31, 2018), causing the founder to say he didn’t want to be seen that way and then leaving the room. Despite such flattery, I noted how the founder’s name was evoked by management when things went wrong, and different manager’s names are evoked by the founder when things don’t get done (2018-2-12). Senge (2010) explained that “shifting the burden structures tend to produce periodic crises, when the symptoms of stress surface” (p. 116). This showed up as risk intolerance from the managers because blame could easily be assigned if something did not work out.

In the cultural diagnosis the discussion on the future of the organization found that there was little new innovation due to risk intolerance that created some protection of the status quo.
“The idea of innovation and what people classify as innovation is very different. I think we have always said we are an innovative company, but we are not really [general agreement can be heard from the room and nodding heads]” (13d5). “We are scared a little bit that it will impact the seniors and how” (30d5); “I think that we are a bit slower to adopt and to take that risk” (14d5). This was thought to reduce the organization’s ability to lead the market and industry by being reactive instead of proactive. This included vision and mission for clarity of purpose, “if we know what our vision is and our goals, then we can go from the current state to the needed state” (14d5). These discussion around the competitive priorities were noted and indicated a lack of clarity of vision and the ability act.

I tried to work with the team and the founder to generate a usable vision that was acceptable to the founder, who was not fond of a “vision on the wall” (Founder, personal communication, January 31, 2018). Later, during a new staff orientation the founder remarked that he did not agree with some generic company vision on the wall (2018-2-7). I challenged the founder in private afterward, asking what he thought the impact of his disregard for a vision meant for the new staff who would try to align with the goals and values of the company, and he became defensive. I made a note of the defensiveness, considering that the LM’s behaviour to avoid involving the founder in vision formulation might be an unfortunate side-effect of Founder’s Syndrome. Founder’s Syndrome, or a set of systemic negative behaviours that impact the organization, is a result of a founder’s unique strengths, beliefs, care, paternalism, and motivation that come into conflict with good management practices. Muriithi and Wachira (2016) described the syndrome as an unproductive behaviour that “disregards other stakeholders as less important to successful operations of the organization” (p. 3). Wasserman (2008) discussed previous studies where the founders felt they created the baby (business), so tend to
think they are the only ones that know how to raise it, overconfidence in their own abilities was fundamental at start-up phase but became problematic as the organization evolved (p. 2–3).

The previous example using a gas contract is worth recalling because it demonstrates the syndrome of the founder. Work had been done by multiple people on a gas contract, the findings were clear: adopt a fixed-rate single-source supply to decrease material and administration costs (2018-5-9). Later, I mentioned the findings of the commodity contract to the founder who said he “prefers variable rates”, referring to financial markets. I remarked that the commodities forecast was different in this case but noted the founder’s preference despite the evidence. In related conversations with the founder, he noted a concern for management performance and decision making, where his team would wait for him to make all the decisions (2017-12-10; 2018-3-13). So, when the senior manager responsible for the gas contract told me that he asked the founder and was directed to a variable multi-source contract, despite the evidence, I recalled the founder’s complaint that managers were referring to him to make basic decisions as a systemic result of the founder’s central authority. Such mixed messages can make it impossible for managers to define what decisions they are responsible for and which are the founder’s privilege. This may lead the organization’s individual members to forego learning and just normalize responding to the founder, making it difficult or impossible for the organization to learn and adapt to new knowledge.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed the outcomes of the data collection and sorted them into subcases. There was evidence that, despite the natural connection the organization has to its community, no deliberate efforts to influence sustainability were possible due to internal barriers and capabilities, such as management knowledge and organizational inertia. I found examples of
founder centrality, that set up a culture of behaviour that inhibited action and increased risk intolerance because of the whims of the founder. The organization had been very successful under its historical efforts and consisted of many strengths that were now limiting their capacity for growth and learning, such as site autonomy and local optimums. One of the limits identified was in management knowledge and resistance to change, indicated by inaction and self-protection around technical, human, and conceptual skills. For example, the reduction of individual food items was a business process improvement that creates less waste in the system through efficiency but does not directly improve local food systems and security and may even undermine those systems if the products chosen are not local.

The impact of the founder on the culture that created poor performance, the inertia of previous constructs around social norms and performance embedded in the organization, and the lack of management knowledge that created resistance to change all contributed to an inability of the organization and its members to deliberately drive sustainability through operational improvements.
Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limits, Future Works, and Recommendations

The value of the research came somewhat serendipitously from my effort to drive improvements into activities that affected sustainability. It clarified a weakness or indirectness in the link between action and outcome where profitable economic success assumes greater impacts on living standards if actions are taken. That does not necessarily make those outcomes deliberate; to restate Porter and Kramer (2011), “the purpose of the corporation must be redefined as creating shared value, not just profit per se. This will drive the next wave of innovation and productivity growth in the global economy” (p. 64). I found that links from the organization to the community, such as living wages, can be identified; although too many constraints exist within the organization to systematically and intentionally affect sustainability. An example would be not having an inclusiveness policy for living wage recipients and targeting specific groups who would most benefit from a living wage.

The importance of this finding was that the organization’s perceived role to create the innovations and adaptations necessary for sustainability was likely overrated. This was due primarily to internal organizational inertia and management knowledge deficits even if external opportunities exist, e.g., LEED or industrial clusters. For example, Porter (1998) noted that when a municipality creates an innovation cluster it “does not guarantee prosperity if firms are unproductive” (p. 9). If the organizational members do not have a vision and intention, the ability to learn and apply new knowledge organizationally and the management skills to action opportunities, then there will only be the status quo.

I had approached this research with a theoretical framework that productivity could be used for speeding the uptake of sustainability activities in an organization—via Jevons’ paradox or the rebound effect described in Chapter 1—and the constraints would be illuminated through
the improvement efforts that involved investigating operational processes. Action research was useful for creating change and knowledge at the local level. I argued that a micro level case was reasonable in scope for the research to deal with unique context and for action-oriented application, although I initially envisioned some community investigation as well. By approaching the research in this way, I could investigate the company’s mechanisms for improvements related to sustainability. Personally, I hope this project represents the beginning of future studies furthering this area of knowledge and to help society speed transition of resource-use in the newest epoch of resource-scarcity. At the least, I hope for a productivity-driven conservation and local resilience.

Through the use of a single case, this research explored the question and these objectives:

1. What are the organization’s barriers to productivity improvements as a driver for sustainability?

The objectives were:

a. find opportunities to improve productivity in the organization,

b. observe the organizational constraints that present during the attempt to make changes.

Conclusions

To answer the guiding question, I had to consider some assumptions, such as the value of sustainability as a societal proposition versus an organizational one. One can assume the neoclassical economic axiom that the invisible hand will naturally incline its market agents to better society is true—despite their own greed—through mutual gain for the “greatest possible value” (Smith, 1776, p. 168). If the “maximization of expected utility” (Simon, 2000, p. 27) theory is true then the answer to driving sustainability in organizations will not be found within a
typical organization like this one. This is because sustainability will only occur as a market choice once external forces are applied, such as scarcity, shocks, regulation, competition or maybe the nonpecuniary whimsy of management.

The contemporary trend appears to leave improvements up to the market, such that few people are trend setters and risk the high cost of being among the first. This aligns with change management scholars regarding the need for a burning bridge or sense of urgency (Kotter, 2011) before there is enough pressure to act. However, economic rationality favours growth output, job creation, revenue distribution (but not equity), and profit maximization to benefit society (Hepburn, Beinhocker, Farmer, & Teytelboym, 2014, p. 77; OECD, 2001, p. 12) but at a cost of overconsumption. Economic theory considers the distribution of resources, such as constant resource capacity and abstract ideas of value, based on calculated assumptions and including increased GDP by “rapidly exhausting renewable resources such as fish stocks” (Hepburn, Beinhocker, Farmer, & Teytelboym, 2014, p. 78). But, steady state or even de-growth economics challenges the devastation wrought by continuous and unrelenting growth of outputs. Productivity improvements, or the lack of improvements in some cases may directly impact the value held for sustainability by effecting the choice of inputs from organizational activities, such as procurement choices and senior’s health programs outcomes in this case.

The effect could be seen in both my organizational projects. For example, buying Ocean-wise™ products and supporting a living wage, which should create a beneficial sustainability relationship because of its inputs, and reduces sensitive ocean catches or improves distribution of wealth; an example of the invisible hand. However, the organization’s capabilities were insufficient to deliberately impact sustainability as an intentional strategy. This was because the intent or purpose of the organization did not provide goal clarity or the process for achieving it,
due to the nonpecuniary benefits or assumed rational behaviours (Argyris, 1986; Bennett, Lawrence, & Sadun, 2015; Simon, 2000). Using the procurement project as an example where food was the single largest buying activity and cost, less than two percent of the annual spend on fish products alone was used to support or drive sustainable fisheries, i.e., Ocean-wise™, in spite of advertising the use of sustainable fisheries. The Living Wage Certification was used to attract or compete for employees in a low unemployment environment and to create a sense of satisfaction with clients that their service staff were well paid. However, the organization lacked any inclusive hiring policy that would make such an economic distribution of wealth effective through targeting known low income neighbourhoods, specific ethnic or immigrant populations, women or people of colour, or other disadvantaged groups. Inability to act due to organizational culture, inertia and learning, and management skills and knowledge was, in part, due to unclear strategy and organizational centricity; this may be the most fundamental conclusion as a consolidation of the concepts.

The concepts stated in Chapter 2 emerged as a result of research intervention, focussed on the constraints experienced in the organization that would limit improving operations. The following conclusions will be separated into two key categories, organizational function and organizational development, which follow a what and how concept. This approach was chosen because the themes discussed in Chapter 5 are interrelated and emerged through triangulation of various methods and observations and across time. It is the combination of the themes that was the output of the investigation. For example, in a founder created culture or reactivity, where a professional manager had greater knowledge, instead of pacification of the central figure a noticeable conflict would have likely occurred in relation to the founder and inertia of the organization; much like my own conflict with the LM and action teams disregard or the gas
contract. So, the conclusions consider a combination of all these concepts under the two headings. I will follow with some limitations, future works, contributions to methodology and field of work, and make some recommendations before closing.

**Organizational function.** The findings section told a story about productivity, when concerned for maximum utilization (Simon, 2000), which was not attended to by organizational members due to individual and organizational behaviours and capabilities, even though capacity existed. The organization was intended to be responsible for serving customers, the creation of jobs (e.g., economic expansion), were stewards of the environment (e.g., LEED building certification), and supported community groups (e.g., school of music). However, three conclusions were found from the study findings that constrained acting to improve. These three conclusions are more functional or hard in nature, as in creating strategy, measuring performance, and organizing structures and skills.

**Conclusion 1: Strategy and standardization.** The first conclusion was that deliberate intent, or strategy did not result in economic rationality and was indeed assumed. Purchasing individual units of materials at the lowest price while forgoing larger aggregate discounts on volume buys was irrational and left money on the ground, as Porter and van der Linde (1995) remarked. This kind of behaviour, which I noted as maverick in Chapter 5, showed a lack of strategic intentions and standardization. For example, participants noted that the budget process was ineffective, contracts were not centralized, and other areas lacked enough measures to know what was happening, e.g., sustainability. These deficits were argued by participants throughout the data collection in the CVF, procurement interviews, procurement analysis method, observations, and were found absent in the strategic plan regarding sustainability and growth.
Sustainability was left out of the picture due to the lack of standards and strategy. For example, sustainable Ocean-Wise™ products were not a part of a strategic policy, though marketed as choice for clients. Measures relating to sustainability were not noted, so that the amount of greenhouse gases reduced or the percentage of fresh produce from local farms was not known. Measures and strategy for procurement emerged as a gap, such as supplier selection criteria. As well, recognition that standards were needed for improving operations were voiced, but no action was taken by the management due to an unsurety of what to do and bounded knowledge. This directly limits the deliberate impact that an organization can have on concepts like sustainability.

Another example could be seen in the Living Wage Certification. The certification was implemented, possibly altruistically, as a strategy for mitigating the labour shortage issues currently face by all companies and competitors. However, an inclusion statement marketed to job seekers was routine and historically normalized but there was no further action to impact the local community, such as hiring from disadvantaged neighbourhoods or having inclusivity policy, which would have a direct and localized impact. Here the historical experience was target-oriented, such that people got hired regardless of actual inclusiveness but addressing this could expose a façade or social rhetoric about inclusion and equity.

The research followed two organizational projects that were in the written strategy that the organization supplied when I started. The organizational strategy was not clear, lacked robustness and internal and external assessments, nor had enough clarity to inform an operational strategy with objectives, targets, and timelines. The vision of the company was regularly brought up as missing. The issue of vision and strategy—although approached throughout the study—was never resolved as it related to the culture and founder centrality. This suggested that
professional management practices were lacking as a result of the founder’s perspective or characteristic. As an impact, the reaction to the projects, the researcher, and several others brought in by the founder resulted in resistance, avoidance, or disregard from the clan. The impact of the founder was not to be ignored, as noted in the literature. Founders tend to have contempt for professional management practice and the founder scorned the idea of a written vision for clarity and consistency, despite a significant ability to tell inspiring stories and having visionary characteristics. Such disregard by the founder resulted in similarly disregarding statement by the staff, a modeling of behaviour.

**Conclusion 2: Performance measures.** The second conclusion was that of resource consumption, specifically the identification and measures of it. Companies contribute to the problem of wasted resources by neglecting to measure the total cost of their operations and are therefore unaware of opportunities for improvements, i.e., “what percentage of inputs are wasted?” (Porter & van der Linde, 1995, p. 115). A simple example of absent measures was food waste as each site had different food costs per unit and different per unit weights for organic waste. The organization builds to high environmental standards but was not in control over the operational performance of those standards, e.g., LEED standards versus operational performance. For example, in the document on LEED certification a 30% improvement in water recovery was predicted for one of the sites. Contrarily, interviews told a story of a water recovery system that never worked. Triangulating such data from different sources tells the story of operational capabilities, such that the loss of water recovery can be assumed to be 30% higher than intended. The problem manifested from the lack of standards, systems, and measures, such as not having a human resource with clear responsibility for such processes (Burch et al., 2018). This would mean someone would question, “does our LEED certification still meet the criteria it
intended?”. Examples of this were given in Chapter 5 and indicated procurement interviewees suggested measures do not exist that help make decisions. This was an issue of bounded management knowledge, as well as inertia from organization’s culture, where managers talk about the problem, do not address it, and do not investigate the root cause as undiscussable, which might uncomfortably lead back to the founder’s leadership.

Limited by a culture that has grown to look to the founder for direction, management skills are still required but not learned, even for basic responsibilities. In addition, the founder was responsible for not creating a clear vision and strategy and holding the executive accountable for implementation. In the absence of such goal clarity, it became evident that management skills are difficult to develop when the measures of performance are not clear. Evaluations from the action team regarding projects and comments in the organizational diagnosis noted the need for management training. However, the strategy must be clear to create a procurement and organizational strategy, and the operational plans to achieve those goals. Without this primary structure, then maverick, ad hoc, and clan-like social norms will prevail as inertia limits efficient and effective growth and learning and adaptation do not prosper within the organization.

Conclusion 3: Structure and capabilities development. The third conclusion relates to measuring sustainability, noting that many of the SDG indicators, such as poverty reduction (living wage), were relevant. No deliberate management capabilities existed to contribute systemically. As a consequential result of Smith’s (1776) invisible hand, action would be left to those that would have greater benefit and shocks that would destabilize and reorient behaviour (Dale, Ling, & Newman, 2010; Martin & Sunley, 2015). This finding seemed to fit community development literature that supports the agency of community stakeholders to act but lacks direct
support from the community, e.g., “top-down planning processes look to bottom-up community efforts to provide solutions” (Eversole, 2003, p. 83). The problem presented in the literature as the bottom-up approach of top-down planning was exemplified by industrial clusters and their inability to improve the individual businesses, as noted by (Porter M. E., 1998). For example, in the case of the organization under study, I could argue that because such a business is centrally located it is clustered due to the synergies of the services that surround it, e.g., restaurants, health care, grocery, competitors, etc. Although the benefits of clustering are well established, the aforementioned conclusions are evidence that the internal performance remained unchanged.

The result was related to the structures of the organization. My research followed two projects in the organization; both of which were under the authority and responsibility of the LM. The LM passed the procurement file but not the structural authority to another senior manager. Both the LM and senior manager nominated themselves as project managers which created a situation where learning could not occur. This very act of failing to delegate suggested issues such as self-protection, avoidance or disinterest in producing results, which constrained related action. It reduced empowerment, job expansion, coaching and mentoring opportunities, economic improvements, skills development and learning and the accountability of others to work. This was dialectically challenged within the action team but was mostly ignored, and conflict eventually occurred around it. The PM for the program development lacked the skills necessary to evaluate and develop the program, refusing to act, and the PM for the procurement project did not have the structural authority to act, referring to less significant topics and the founder for decisions. In any case, the inclusion of SDG indicators would have helped guide the efforts but would not develop the skills to implement the indicators.
Organizational improvements. The findings showed that limited development and productivity improvements—outputs and impact on the community’s social, environmental, and economic sustainability occurred due to: organizational learning, management knowledge and structure, and leaders and strategy. These conclusions drew on the finding from chapter 5 to consider behaviour.

Conclusion 4: Organizational learning. The first conclusion related to the growing organization and the inertia and historically bounded knowledge it had learned to date. Constructs from organizational knowledge, such as having autonomy in procurement or concepts concerning who the customer is, surrounded routines, histories, and goals (Levitt & March, 1988). These conditions lead to resistance and possibly a fear of loss but certainly what Watson (1967) called “homeostasis” (p. 365), or a battle to maintain the status quo. The status quo is not without merit. It had created a great success to date, but this success “breeds reluctance to change” (Tushman, Newman, & Romanelli, 1986, p. 592) and became a crucible for resistance, as became evident when core values were evoked to avoid work that was not fun. The inability to learn in the organization was limited because the protection of the systemic status quo was superior. For example, the accountability for the site manager’s budget was reduced due to lagging and long lead times to receive information. The accounting department would return budget data too late so that nothing could practically be done about discrepancies. A laissez-faire behaviour emerged as a natural response to the system. The organization became locked in the tradition of practice, although they might have investigated software implementations to try to speed transactions or ease burdens. As a result, they have not taken an active role in learning about the problem through investigation, accountability, or review.
Such a review of processes can strike fear into the management for what it might expose or what the management might perceive to lose in terms of autonomy, status, or locus of control. The threat to learning occurred because of the efficiency of bounded knowledge and autonomous silos already created. The organizational diagnosis noted that these norms of behaviour were clan-like, developed through a lack of previous structures, and competencies were then built around each silo. It also resulted in believing that the organization was superior to its competitors due to differentiation, ironically, creating competitive convergence (i.e., reduced differentiation) by trying to benchmark against competitors with different businesses models in a similar industry.

**Conclusion 5: Management knowledge and structure.** Because of the difficulties in organizational learning and inertia and the gaps I observed in knowledge, the second theme of management knowledge was considered. At this juncture, I found subversion and avoidance in taking action due to a lack of competence; Competence is being able to identify the relevant action required to produce the required results. Argyris (1986) called skilled incompetence using ones known competence to cover their incompetence, but with a strategy lacking and hence structure to support it, the ambiguity was significant. Mintzberg’s (2013) defense of managers suggested that the “paradoxes, dilemmas, and mysteries” (Chapter 1, “Managing’s Not Changing”) may be too great to solve. However, structural issues and low accountability were persistent and undermined the ability of the action team to act. An example of dysfunctional structure could be seen in a sales director with no authority to direct the sales team. Instead, the sales team took their direction from a site operations manager.

Management skill development is paramount. Considering the pace of technological change managers might do well to be continuously learning. The inability to learn in the
organization coupled with a lack of a guiding strategy and clarity of vision becomes problematic. A corollary of impeded learning and skills development would suggest suffering an external shock to the equilibrium of the organization. The need for training and staff guidance requires more than just an educational allowance. It requires direction, mentoring and coaching, performance measures and responsibility, accountable structures, and management controls (financial) that all align with the strategy. However, exposing any incompetency is first needed to identify what kind of support to offer managers. Professional management practices are espoused but not demonstrated in practice and mixed message from organizational leaders were abundant.

**Conclusion 6: The Founder, Leaders and strategy.** I was led to the third theme of founder-centrality because of the deep impact the founder has on the behaviour, activities, and attitudes of the management. The organization’s lifecycle was clearly defined in the organizational diagnosis, which identified the founder as ad hoc, entrepreneurial, and externally focussed, with a clan forming around dysfunctional structures to mitigate ambiguity. There was some confirmation that management practices tended to be weak when founders are CEOs and that external skillsets need to be brought in to mitigate weaknesses (Schein, 1983). With blame being common practice, leaders were hesitant to act and often did not have authority to act.

The research followed two key projects identified by the senior management of the organization, but no action was taken due to organizational culture and management knowledge, with blame being placed on the subordinates. It is as easy for a subordinate to blame the founder or CEO for creating a culture that is reactive, risk averse, or protectionist; as it is for a leader to blame their subordinates for failure or poor performance. Despite the founder led culture, strategy is still under the influence of management, so accountability also falls on managers to
develop and drive strategy at their own level and fail to do so, instead seeking self-preservation at the expense of others. In any case, direction from the organizational stakeholders could also supplement skillsets where founders or owners do not have the ability to develop relevant strategy and a wish to extract the capacity from the human capital available to them (founder syndrome/dilemma).

To summarize the conclusions, the organization has the capacity to improve its productivity around sustainability but does not have the capabilities to do so. The internal pressure to adopt or improve practices are constrained by mechanisms that do not relate to an externally valued concept, such as sustainability. External pressure, via a shock or collapse or regulation, may be necessary to create urgency to innovate (Kotter, 2011; Porter, 1996a) or a change in internal organizational pressure, such as a sudden departure of the founder. Otherwise a lack of management knowledge, organizational inertia, and the cultural norms that support inaction, will prevail. Without external guidance and collaboration from the society that values sustainability and generates a market force, it is highly unlikely that the small and medium-sized company studied could have an early impact outside of shocks and reorientations. This has important implications for government policy because it suggests that efforts that do not directly intervene in the knowledge and systems capabilities of individual organizations will not likely speed results.

**Limitations**

The first limitation of this case study is typical, in that it investigated a single organization, with a closed-system perspective, and the interpretations of the researcher and nature of the conditions are subjective. My outsider positionality and power structure of the owner in relationship to the organizational members was a limiting factor that was never
overcome, moving from insider to outsider. This led to politics and social norms that I was not fully aware of but impacted the dependability of the study in terms of reliability. For example, getting support from the action team, or even responses for confirmability, was challenging and I had to resort to other means to elicit information from them. Organizational members were either not available or non-responsive, e.g., using inter-rater reliability checking did not occur for themes.

Another limitation of the study was the resistance to change I experienced and my own inability to effectively mitigate it. While this limitation became an interesting study finding it prevented the observation and evaluation of the effects that knowledge generation could have had when evaluating processes. Such as, centralizing purchased goods with an impact on sustainability that would have aided in establishing validity in this case, which a longer-term study may have experienced because there was some interest growing at the line level of management. Stringer (2007) discussed building momentum (p. 20) with those that are most impacted by the research, but I was prevented from accessing those resources directly. Previously, all reviewers of the proposal noticed the challenge of the short time frame and large scope, as I had wholeheartedly experienced. I had committed to a proposed approach and felt I was sidetracked by adapting to the emergent issues of resistance. This was demonstrated by my reliance on observation and reflective practice for data, which was not incorrect, but I felt I would have preferred to be more prescriptive in the effort had I known how central it would become to the research. The research design could instead have had participant observation with follow-up interviews as the sole method and interventions as the catalyst for observation.

Additionally, I considered the process to be sequential in design of data collection, making the research broader instead of deeper, e.g., first investigate productivity and then
investigate sustainability. From my current view, this was a fundamental flaw to which I had committed from inception, but I was oblivious to the effects as a novice action researcher. Although the exercise as a research student was valuable the problem can be seen in the effort to link diverse methods to a changing plan. For example, the Narrative Métissage method was still valid for the organization’s programming but has little relevance to the research other than it could not be evaluated due to resistance and inaction. In effect, it was more useful as an intervention to observe constraints than a method to evaluate improvements towards sustainability. However, a different approach may not have mitigated resistance or the promised resources for action, but that process alternative taunted me throughout the study.

Low team engagement meant that the study lacked some of the depth of action expected and the team’s own reflections, that were not forthcoming. I found this informative but disappointing, as I am sure the action team would have been motivated if the richness of their contribution had been fully realized. The first-person data of the participant helps “bridge the gap between practitioners and researchers” (Holbrook, 1995, p. 750) so the direct experience can be understood. However, I was able to capture many of the outward reflections of the team while facilitating or attending meetings or interpreting their absence. Upon reflection, I feel the more intrinsic insights were not available and would have contributed to a fuller methodological contribution and validity of the findings. This would have allowed me to interpret the learning patterns that come up in the individual’s problem-solving routine and identify mechanisms of unproductive behaviour when structured as a learning cycle (Sims, 1983). Structural issues, founder centrality, and knowledge constructs may have been more clearly revealed.

The case was missing the inclusion of the municipalities in the data collection through follow-up interviews due to time and scope issues. Municipal involvement would have helped to
more precisely establish what community resilience meant for each municipality and the relationship to a business in an open system. However, the effort to understand community resilience was too broad a topic to fully tackle for the dissertation and will need to be established in a future work. Measuring the community’s level of engagement and innovation was not undertaken. An additional cycle of measurement would have been preferred to assess the capacity of the municipality to innovate, to better understand the ability of the organization and the community to influence each other. I would have seen this as a nice bowtie to wrap things up, instead it left the research hanging without showing some relationship to organizational outcomes.

In hindsight, I now believe as a novice action researcher in a doctoral program that this research should have been conducted with a primary data collection focus on participant observation to mitigate the lack of various skills (e.g., facilitation, change management, etc.) and first-person reflective practice to encourage the learning journey, other methods are situationally pragmatic. Additionally, senior management sponsorship was important but creating a senior management action team brought its own baggage that added significant challenges that were not the focus of the research (e.g., power-structures, politics, etc.). Until support for a team concerned with a salient topic is generated, I believe conducting solo research would have been a more useful approach for intervention within the same methodology. I mentioned these points as limitations because the issues created additional chaos and wasted energy in my research effort, and the results I was comfortable with producing.

**Future Works**

There are three areas that are still deeply interesting to me that need attention. First, when the constraints of an organization are surpassed can they use their operations to drive a new
approach, such as sustainability, and what impact does that have on their community? Community could be the local municipality or their industry. Secondly, determining the shared values between organizations and their local municipalities. A study that is representative and develops a model for defining common values would inform both business and government on how to support progress toward change or society level goals, starting at the local level. Thirdly, sparse research was available regarding how the government programs, particularly at municipal levels, can influence particular operational performance in an organization, with some scholars suggesting soft regulations such as training and education as preferable. As Seens (2013) noted in a larger population study, most SMEs have capacity to grow but choose not to. What would the impact of coordination at the municipal level mean for improving performance in individual organizations, assuming that individual organizations do not have the capabilities to improve themselves prior to a social, economic, or environmental shock? I will also detail a few other opportunities that occurred to me throughout this journey.

Continuing AR cycles that investigate the municipality’s engagement with its community, resiliency, and reciprocal benefits would help illuminate opportunities for innovation and collaboration with local business and industry. Additionally, using SDGs as a benchmark for shared values helps to focus coordination of business and community through common language and will increasingly come under regulation over the next decade. This area of research is already well-imagined for non-profits, as noted in a recent impact study by Tremblay, Smith, and McRae (2018). However, even in Trembley et al.’s study a sampling of the value of indicators to a particular community needs to be identified.

A generalizable study to determine which shared values are common between businesses and communities, would help researchers focus efforts on benchmarking for applying indicators
broadly. The study should also define if relevant management knowledge is generally present in organizations and if they have the capabilities to start impacting shared values. The value of such work would be to highlight reasonable expectations from the outputs of local businesses, or, if the community must take a lead role in guiding local organization in developing skills and systems to improve community resilience. This approach could also create a model for benchmarking local businesses as to their impact on the community values for policy development, incentives, and burdens. In addition, developing criteria around a salient topic such as equity, inclusion, sustainability, etc., in each theme of organizational culture, leadership knowledge, and organizational learning as a benchmark and then testing the ability to drive improvements would be a direct use of this study.

Other important and timely areas of study stimulated by this report (narrative métissage) are the impacts of eudemonics on the growing senior demographic (baby boom) and how to improve the quality of life through the reduction of severe age-related disability and death in that population. This could have profound impacts on society, such as private and public health care burdens, ageism and inclusion, workforce engagement, and other social issues. What role could this demographic play in sharing wisdom and experience, volunteerism, and innovation if fully engaged in productive life purpose after retirement?

There was clearly a need for more action-oriented studies that impact the supply side of local food systems, which is vitally important for risk mitigation, social wellbeing, economic multipliers, and environmental impacts and awareness. This area of research is emerging as critical for sustainable development but faces many challenges, therefore much work is still needed here. For my research, it was not at all clear how local food systems are sustainably approached without central coordination outside of the business (management knowledge).
Despite sustainable development goals focusing on hunger, the risk of local food security is troubling with only a few days of food available at any moment in our region and an older population with more care requirements. Quality of food and foodservices for older adults is a particular industry niche as empirical evidence finds satisfaction with food-related life (SWFL) and satisfaction with life (SWL) for this demographic are correlated. I am currently working on an organization led investigation on this topic which includes food source, food-related life satisfaction, preparation and delivery, and quality of life impact.

**Contribution**

Corely and Gioia (2011) describe theoretical contribution by their originality and by their usefulness and noted that theory is typically generalized or specific, with a problematic preference for generality. The dimension of originality occurs in two sub realms that are revelatory or incremental (p. 15). The problem they note is that generalize theory are not well regarded in practice and argue that theoretical contrbitions occur in “dimensions of utility” (Corely & Gioia, 2011, p. 20), being scientific usefulness or practical usefulness. This is important because schools of management are akin to law and medicine, they argue, unlike economics and sociology so are more practical than theoretical. Yet, they are more heavily judged as theoretical papers than their contribution to practice. So conducting an applied program in a business with the management attempts to stretch contribution across two planes and two dimensions, weighted by practial utility but more heavily scrutinized by scientific utility, and being revelatory or incremental.

*Scientifically useful and incrementally original.* The emergent themes became relevant and contribute as a theoretical base because of empirical support in broader literature, gaps in the literature, and the process of gathering data. For example, I noted that other studies support the
findings in areas of management knowledge or bounded knowledge, founders, and organizational learning. Gaps in the literature occur regrading these themes as they relate to the organization because of the process of collecting data. Studies that ask the question about constraints to action find managers will point toward knowledge or resources when confronted by a question but not challenge their founder’s unique characteristics, or their own inability to alter the path-dependant rigidities of the organizational system and its ability to learn (inertia).

So, the theories presented here form a useful addition to the other empirical knowledge that may be left out of traditional investigations regarding constraints. The ability of these theories to form prediction of actions or inactions furthers the field of organizational development because it addressed the inadequacy of other established theories, such a maximum utilization, the rebound effect of marginal utility, or perfect knowledge in economics.

The methodological approach contributes to the social research field by highlighting, specifically for the student, the challenge and complexity of organizational research, noting that the design may have been more successfully applied by not starting with an action team or project selection at the start of the investigation as Stringer (2007) suggested, thus mitigating political and power constraints on the researcher and highlighting the organizational constraints instead.

The methodology also contributes to other scholarly works because it highlights the difficulty of accessing information from social interactions that can be reactive to hierarchy, and answers the requests of economic scholars for more organizational level research because of obtuse micro level behaviours and confounding variables in macro level studies (Drummond, 2015; Seens, 2013). Additionally, the research design was not typical of the broader review of literature (such as Tura, et al., 2019); where managers are often surveyed directly about their
perceived constraints and quantitative methods are used versus observing constraints during interactions, without triangulating through time and multiple methods. The key difference in the observation was noting the touchy or risky subject of the founder-manager’s influence on the culture, management’s incompetence, and an inability for the organization to learn. This presents a risk problem when directly asking a limited management cohort about their even smaller cohort of bosses’ behaviour.

The thesis offers an extensive reflection, discussion, and use of theory put into the application of AR to attempt to influence change that is uncommon and significant. Using retrodution in research is also uncommon and offers some insight into its use and the inherent challenges of rigour for an inferential method, which would be impactful for the AR community. Additionally, the research offers a look into a simple change process, with a complex approach which can be disseminated to impact change processes.

Practical usefulness and incremental originality. The combination of foreign ownership and the influence of a founder-manager in this study is peculiar when combined with the methodology and context of a Canadian operation. The study sought to speed consumption of a beneficial product or service related to values and may help lead other scholars to investigate and navigate more precisely similar cases (over 70,000 founder-run businesses in Canada) using an action-oriented methodology. The study highlighted the organization’s constraints to change. The topic addressed adds to the body of knowledge and literature around organization development and performance, and macro economic analysis of enterprises by developing an integrated set of concepts that form to hinder deliberate action towards productivity and sustainability that can be used by other organizations or municipalities to assess the adaptability or opportunity for organizational action.
Finally, the importance of the research in general can be reflected by the need for action, adaptation, and values-based production. For example, the contemporary climate child advocate Greta Thunberg strongly chastises governments, institutions, and adults for espousing values regarding sustainability but failing to actually act. And in reference to the scientific advocates of the landmark book *Limits to Growth* (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens III, 1972), where the status quo model of collapse is still relevant 40 years later, Meadows (2014) explained how to subvert the climate crisis and then addressing the audience and interviewer saying, “will you choose to do that? I don’t see any reason to think that you will…. The leaders of [industry] are … maintaining the current situation…. So that means that you won’t avoid the collapse” (43:51). How is this work important then? In an epoch of climate disaster, due to overconsumption, which humanities deliberate choice of productive action plays a pinnacle role, no shortage of attempts and approaches to knowledge generation and application should be set aside in the search for adaptation, resilience, and ecological balance of economic, social, and environmental justice. There may not be a greater need to address the what and how of our societies productivity than there is today.

**Recommendations**

The first set of recommendations are intended to support the stakeholders of the organization in developing improved performance. The second set of recommendations use this study as a backdrop to inform local government, even though the scope of the project did not manage intervention at the municipal level. I offer these two general recommendations based on the study findings and conclusions, each with several components. The recommendations are intended to be transferable and help guide an organization experiencing similar context and challenges. As well as municipal planners who engage economic sectors and the intersections
with social and environmental elements to build community resilience through business prosperity and aligned goals. The following two recommendations with subparts follow.

**Recommendation 1: The growing organization can take the opportunity to develop its future direction and strategy to be inclusive of sustainable development goals.** There are four parts to this recommendation that include vision and strategic development, structural design, human capital development, and business process improvements. The significance and difficulty of implementation should not be underestimated for these topics, as they are always in a state of transition and never fully completed.

**Part one.** I shared a brief guide on developing a vision when discussions about the founder’s vision occurred early in the research (see Appendix O). An important but often overlooked aspect of the visioning process is the indication of a sub-vision for subordinate departments. A sub-vision is useful for department managers to articulate where they will take their team and decide how they will get there, which will affect their own performance and their supervisor’s ability to help them succeed. It would be inefficient and possibly ineffective if this was done without being aligned to an organizational vision. As a management practice, the founder or CEO will need to lead the vision development, or direct the development of a vision by the executive team, or the entire organization. The founder can drive the vision or make a personal choice to give the authority to others; as Wasserman (2008) concluded, founders have two fundamental choices to make, amass wealth or rule an empire—but not both (p. 11). This decision by the founder is fundamental to allow buy-in to align strategic objectives and targets.

**Part two.** Structural change can be difficult but necessary and it always follows strategy because the purpose of the structure is to accomplish the operational plans set out by the strategy. There are two constructs used in change practice that play a role here, incremental and frame-
breaking actions. Incremental change is okay for subtle redirection and learning without risk, but frame-breaking is required during reorientation and high growth.\(^{16}\) The organization can change the structure without a strategy but the question that must be asked is, for what purpose, if not to support the strategy. Structure leads to two key constructs that need attention: roles and skills. The roles of the people need to be adapted to meet the strategy, this is an opportunity for growth and professional development but may require skills development, internal promotion, and external hiring. The skills of the people need to be upgraded and supported to address the reorientation challenges and goal alignment.

**Part three.** Human capital development is key to any organization these days, particularly since skilled labour shortages will continue to plague the effectiveness of organizations. For managers and companies in a reorientation there are two threats as they change roles and align to new requirements: manager transitions and skills training. Managers who are changing roles to tackle new challenges or who are brought in take many months to show a return (Watkins, 2003), which costs the organization and has a cascading effect on staff. More dramatically, when a manager fails or lacks the necessary knowledge the costs can be substantial. For this reason, a facilitated manager transition can be adopted to improve the probability of success and return on investment during the transition. Skills have been described earlier as technical, human, and cognitive and were identified as key points of resistance and anti-learning. Management knowledge and identification of skills and competencies can be conducted through assessments, such as the Management Skills Assessment Instrument (MSAI), and aligning the management

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\(^{16}\) High growth is defined as an annual increase of 20 percent or more in return on assets over a fixed period (Industry Canada, 2012). The acknowledgment of this category is important for appreciating the opportunities and threats of high growth. In addition, the competing values framework by Cameron and Quinn demonstrated that the organization was in a reorientation, so even if it was not a high growth situation the organization still faces significant risk.
selection with the cultural needs of the organization, as noted in the CVF report. Peer coaching, mentoring programs, and teams are useful for building capacity and require practice, implying programs are institutionalized and become a part of the motivational process and leadership development to ensure that managers do not avoid participating under the guise of having more important things to do. Skill development takes time and support, includes establishing a genuine desire to advance human capital, not just in words but in thought and intention, and should be accomplished through systematic program development and evaluation using logic models.

**Part four.** Business process improvements are not automatic, in fact, as we have experienced in this report trying to improve two key strategic projects was unsuccessful due to a lack of measures, key indicators and priorities, project skills, understanding of quality, and team development. Skills development should occur around four fundamental concepts in operations management: performance measurement, project management, quality management, and teamwork. Performance measures require reduction in variation, data collection, and analysis, as well as an understanding of the purpose of the measure and their possible consequences. Project management allows controlled and carefully managed ideas to come to life through the appreciation of time, scope, and cost making it a most valuable tool for management. Quality management uses easily learned technical skills such as Shewhart’s classic plan-do-check-act (PDCA), quality tools such as root cause analysis (e.g., 5-Why, Ishikawa, etc.) and diagnostic tools such as control charts or scatter plots (*Cartin, 1999*). Teamwork was another skill taken for granted that needed to be developed because it also does not occur automatically and should not be used exclusively yet has tremendous potential. Teamwork like other skills needs to be institutionalized as a process for tackling complex tasks that require emergent human capital.
Team processes can be developed and exercised in various ways that allow for learning, group development, and assessment of competencies.

**Recommendation 2: The municipality can determine what, who, and how constituent businesses drive outcomes important to the community.** This recommendation will cover the three components of what, who, and how municipal agents could impact local business and the community considering the lack of capabilities in individual businesses such as the one under investigation.

**What.** Defining a common language, in this case I have mentioned the SDGs to represent a framework for sustainability. The first problem I faced in the research was not having someone to approach, someone with knowledge and responsibility for the concept of sustainability. During the research, I found that designation of title and responsibility was a recommendation from other agencies, such as the UN Compact on sustainable development prior to developing or implementing SDG indicators. Other research, such as the GATE survey mentioned in the final report, established that title and responsibility was lacking, for organizations adopting this it is a competitive advantage but for the municipality it would be critical to focus efforts. Without the common language the municipality will struggle to coordinate resources and communicate efforts around a concept such as sustainability. Establishing a person or team in the institution and then determining the measures and indicators that are critical to the municipality based on current priorities will be critical to inviting others to contribute to the goals and resilience of the community.

**Who.** Business constituents are those businesses that make up the economic network in a municipality. The municipality could prioritize, and categorize, its investigation based on a Pareto analysis of the businesses or sectors that have the greatest impact or influence on the local
economic system,\textsuperscript{17} e.g., economic multipliers, competitive advantage, resource niche, social themes, future development, etc. When setting the criteria for the analysis it will be important to recall resilience and the fact that single large businesses can be a significant threat to community resilience. Therefore, criteria should follow a strategic understanding of the sectors, communities, or prototype groups that the institution wants to strengthen or test for outcomes.

\textit{How}. The first thing for a municipality to consider, and measure, are resources and how those are being engaged in the community. This will begin to illuminate the capabilities of the institution and what resources it can leverage for policy and programming opportunities. Two principle approaches are available, but one is often superior, those are soft and hard policy. Hard policy can be considered incentives and burdens with soft policy as educating, coaching, and coordinating efforts, for an example see Lawryniuk (2017). Hard policy changes behaviour through coercion and conformance to specification but requires enforcement and good marketing yet cannot ensure best practices in an organization. Soft policy is more collaborative and appropriate for communicating, community development, and capacity building that improves resilience and best practices.

Based on the research, there are two key areas that the municipality should consider: the ownership and size of the business, and the skills or lack of management knowledge in the organization; these two components are closely related, requiring different kinds of attention.\textsuperscript{18} Programs helping organizations to establish a strategy with shared values embedded, using a

\textsuperscript{17} Pareto analysis comes from the principle developed by Vilfredo Pareto using power-law probability distributions to suggest that 80\% of problems originate from 20\% of the causes, i.e., the 80-20 rule. It is often used to compare options and set priorities to the highest value or most impactful variable in a problem.

\textsuperscript{18} Business characteristics goes beyond the scope of this research but is well established in the scholarly literature regarding business associations and memberships.
common language, metrics, and systems of monitoring, will allow the business and the municipality to understand the unique contribution to the local community.

The municipality can establish a collaborative process, to investigate emerging innovations and opportunities for coordinating supply chains and scaling. For example, a small business could rationalize a living wage if it could lower the cost of its inventories, e.g., a municipality notes that 30 other local businesses have similar inventory issues, so it is self-checking its own resources and invites the businesses to form a facilitated design group to innovate a solution and leverage scaling opportunities. The example of the City of Medicine Hat offered earlier could be a good case to review.

Final Thoughts: “The Bridge”

The political theatre I saw didn’t impress me with its easy satire performed for sympathetic audiences, and so I grew to believe that one had to choose either to be a theatre professional or to work toward progressive social change. I could not see a way to merge the two until I came upon that single word that changed everything. (Weigler, 2016, p. xi)

Throughout this journey, I was faced with well-intended efforts and complex social situations within a single business environment that impeded my own desire for solutions. This led me to the apex word of how to bridge the gap between current and future consumption activities. I should add that, despite my critique of the organization and its members, that I do not believe there was a single person in this case who came to work wanting to feel incompetent. Not even one who thought to slowly degrade the clan they joined or to do harm to the organization, yet here we are with money on the ground. Like the metaphor of a slowly cooked frog in a pot, I reflected on and discussed in this paper some of the intrinsic axioms of our
collective behaviour and beliefs that prevent us from acting on what might seem like very reasonable endeavours. But we become constrained by the evolution of entropy, by fear and ambiguity that keeps us in doubt, and by what we already know or believe we are creating or want versus what we have actually created, and by the short sightedness of accepting our own theatre. Constrained by a system in which we qualitatively all perform the same. I speak for my own incompetence as much as for what I believe I presented in this paper; and should it be any other way?

Our industries provide us with some level of purpose or identity, producing for each other, not for the collective but for our own security, as the Oslonian theory goes. But can we do more? Can we shorten the cycle of overproduction and overconsumption and adapt new behaviours before we’ve gone a little too far? Katharine Hayhoe said in her CBC interview that continuing to invest in “coal today is like investing in horse farms when Henry Ford has already got his assembly line turning out Model-T Fords” (CBC Radio, 2017), it is a matter of production. I want to say with hope that yes, we can adapt faster, but humanity has not really proved it. I want to blame myself for my incompetence for not unraveling this problem, yet I am not alone in this. I wanted to show that we can close the gap, save the whales, use a cleaner fuel immediately, deliberately change to what-we-know-at-this-moment to be more right, but I cannot.

So, I close this paper with the ask, as the founder had asked of me; to help bridge the gap, to work towards a way to move quickly between the recent past and a balanced future, creating a new paradigm where the qualitative performance of the players is led by community values and the individual businesses that express those values, in whatever place we live.
The founder that sponsored this research left me reflecting on the difference between organizational-centrality and customer-centrality saying, “If you get on a bridge, you’re facing more the end of the bridge that you want to reach instead of the side where you got on” (Founder, personal communication, April 7, 2019). So, what we started out doing may need to be re-evaluated as we move along. As customers and community members on the other side of the equation, we can choose and direct what gets produced, we can deliberately scale up the inputs we need for a more balanced future, maybe we can still bridge the gap.
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CONSTRAINTS TO PRODUCTIVITY


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 CONSTRAINTS TO PRODUCTIVITY


## Appendix A: Action Research Cycles

The AR cycle consists of multiple iterations of construction, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). There are two parallel cycles displayed in the table. The core cycle considers the issue addressed by the organization and the reflection cycle on the research’s question and process of research.

### Table 1. Action research cycles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1- core (First and Second-person)</th>
<th>Construction (intention)</th>
<th>Planning Action (planning)</th>
<th>Taking Action (action)</th>
<th>Evaluating Action (outcomes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploration of issues, practical and theoretical base, collect data, etc.</td>
<td>Document current state and plan how to take action.</td>
<td>Execute action plan and observe effects</td>
<td>Determine alignment with construction, conduct of action, and findings for next cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1 reflection (First-person)</th>
<th>Identify the content, process, and premise of each element in the cycle as a parallel process. Determine the empirical, causal, and actual mechanisms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q. “What impact do productivity improvements created by organizational stakeholders have on the value of sustainability? And, is there a perceived relationship between productivity improvements created by organizational stakeholders and community resilience?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 2 core</th>
<th>Explore new issues or build new ideas around the previous cycle</th>
<th>Document current state and plan how to take action.</th>
<th>Execute action plan and observe effects</th>
<th>Determine alignment with construction, conduct of action, and findings for next cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2 reflection</td>
<td>Identify the content, process, and premise of each element in the cycle as a parallel process. Determine the empirical, causal, and actual mechanisms. Relate to the project questions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Cycle 3 core | Review previous cycle and construct new concepts | Document current state and plan how to take action. | Execute action plan and observe effects | Determine alignment with construction, conduct of action, and findings for next cycle |


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 3 reflection</th>
<th>Identify the content, process, and premise of each element in the cycle as a parallel process. Determine the empirical, causal, and actual mechanisms. Relate to the project questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle 4 core</strong></td>
<td>Review previous cycle and construct new concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle 4 reflection</strong></td>
<td>Identify the content, process, and premise of each element in the cycle as a parallel process. Determine the empirical, causal, and actual mechanisms. Relate to the project questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: A Team Member Letter of Agreement

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Doctor of Social Sciences Degree at Royal Roads University, Brian Mendoza Dominguez (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry research study in collaboration with [company], to explore how community values can be leveraged to drive productivity. Brian’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Matthew Heinz, Dean of the College of Interdisciplinary Studies, at [Royal Roads] or emailing him at [Royal Roads].

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, or reviewing analysis of data, to assist the Student and the partnering organization’s research process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data and have an ethical duty not to disclose such 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 advisors 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.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.

This consent can be confirmed via email by stating:

“I have read and understood the ‘Letter of Agreement’ and its conditions and I am willing to participate in lieu of physically signing it.”

Alternatively, you can electronically sign, or manually print, sign, scan, and e-mail it to the researcher, Brian Mendoza Dominguez, at:

_________________________ ___________________________ ___________________________
Name (Please Print) Signature Date
Appendix C: CVF-Consent

Consent to participate in the assessment

My name is Brian Mendoza Dominguez, and this research projects short title, *Constraints to Productivity*, is part of the requirement for the Doctor of Social Sciences (DSocSci) program at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Matthew Heinz, Dean of the College of Interdisciplinary Studies, at [Royal Roads] or emailing him at: [Royal Roads]

The purpose of my research project is to discover how to leverage community values to drive local business productivity. The expectation is that community values best represent a market demand and can support the development of local competitive advantage by stimulating productivity.

The information provided here will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before participating.

Your invitation to this group event will be maintained in privacy and questions will relate to the cultural assessment model being used and [company]. You have been purposefully selected as a result of your work at [company]. Some pictures will be taken of the data gathered on the whiteboard only. The researcher may also take field notes. As a result, your identity will remain confidential by coding and your comments as a part of the group will then be anonymous. However, by choosing to participate, you understand that the nature of a group event is not anonymous and that your participation constitutes an agreement to respect the confidentiality of other participants by not sharing any information from the session. Only the researcher, designated co-researcher, and university auditors will have access to raw data. All transcripts and field notes will be destroyed at the end of the study, and dissemination period of December 2020, once the project is accepted by the University.

The group event is estimated to take about two hours to complete. All raw data received will be kept confidential. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for Doctor of Social Science program, I will also be sharing my research findings with the partnering organization. The research findings may be published in journal articles or conferences. This research will be disseminated through the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, and ProQuest/UMI.

As the principal investigator (researcher) I have to disclose that the sponsor, with the support of Mitacs funding, has offered financial support for this research project. No other known conflicts of interest exist in this research, in its dissemination, or its implementation.

Raw data from the group event will be password protected and stored on an external-hard drive in a vault in the researcher’s home. If identifiable comments are made, they will be removed/anonymized by the researcher prior to analysis. Once the raw data is submitted and anonymized it cannot be removed from the data set because individuals will be unidentifiable, likewise the nature of a group event does not allow for removal of comments from the group. All raw data received will be marked for destruction by the closing of this project and completion of the DSocSci requirements around December 2020. If you wish to withdraw from the study after
the interview, please contact the researcher via the email below. Please also be aware that online activities are routed through U.S. servers and are subject to subpoena under the Patriot Act.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice or consequence up to the point that the raw data has been anonymized and added to the data set, at which point it will be impossible to identify. Your choice not to be interviewed will also be maintained in confidence.

Please contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. Participation in the focus group assumes free and informed consent.

Email:

Telephone:

________________________________________

Participant signature:

____________________

Date:
Appendix D: CVF Protocol

The protocol describes the CVF event, which covered the description of the research and organizational projects as an information session, a description of the framework and how it is used and contains the survey and discussion guide. The event followed the 10 points below.

1. Record the event.
2. Facilitate the discussion.
3. Graphically display the outcomes on the whiteboard.
4. A description of the research and related projects.
5. A description of competing values framework.
6. Survey and musical chairs.
7. Discussion.
8. Brainstorming future state.
9. Survey and musical chairs.
10. Closing discussion and brainstorming.

After describing the research, projects, and competing values framework the survey is administered. As the results are tallied the participants move to a designated corner of the room based on their scoring and we begin a discussion, led by the facilitator.

Post the findings and ask the first two discussion questions (capture notes on whiteboard):

1. What does each quadrant do for us?
2. Discuss what characteristics will drive change to get us to where we need to be?
   a. (prompt) What is it, better controls? More understanding of the customer, the market?

Talk to the group about the future of the organization, have them reflect on what it would look like and let them take a break. After the break have the group reflect on the future again, thinking about what needs to be different, and then fill out the survey’s “needed” column (see Onsman, 2004). Repeat collecting the data and having participants move to an appropriate corner for discussion. Ask the following four discussion questions.

Discussion questions three to six (capture notes on whiteboard):

3. What is different about the future state map?
   a. What does it mean or not mean?
   b. What are the implications of making this change?
4. What analysis of actions need to be taken for adaptation?
   a. What behaviour should we adopt as leaders?
   b. What systems should be adjusted?

Close the discussion, collect all the data (surveys, whiteboard, notes, audio), Thank the participants for being involved and offer to answer question now or in the future if they have any, leave contact information.
Appendix E: Interview Consent Letter

My name is Brian Mendoza Dominguez, and this research project's short title, *Constraints to Productivity* is part of the requirement for the Doctor of Social Sciences (DSocSci) program at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Matthew Heinz, Dean of the College of Interdisciplinary Studies, at [Royal Roads] or emailing him at [Royal Roads].

The purpose of my research project is to discover how to leverage community values to drive local business productivity. The expectation is that community values best represent a market demand and can support the development of local competitive advantage by stimulating productivity.

Your invitation to this interview will be maintained in privacy and questions will relate to productivity in the industry and community-based values of sustainability. You have been selected as a result of your direct knowledge of the area of research and by recommendation. Interviews will be audio or video recorded to ensure we capture all of your ideas and opinions. The recordings will then be transcribed, made anonymous, and analyzed. The researcher may also take field notes. As a result, your identity will remain confidential by coding and your comments in the interview will be anonymous. Only the researcher, designated co-researcher, and university auditors will have access to raw data. All transcripts and field notes will be destroyed at the end of the study once the project is accepted by the University.

The interview is estimated to take about one hour to complete. All raw data received will be kept confidential. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for Doctor of Social Sciences program, I will also be sharing my research findings with the partnering organization. The research findings may be published in journal articles or conferences. This research will be disseminated through the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, and ProQuest/UMI.

As the principal investigator (researcher) I have to disclose that the partner organization, with the support of Mitacs government funding, is offering financial support for this project. No other known conflicts of interest exist in this research, in its dissemination, or its implementation.

Raw data from the interview will be password protected and stored on an external-hard drive in the researcher's home. If identifiable comments are made, they will be removed/anonymized by the researcher prior to analysis. Once the raw data is submitted and anonymized it cannot be removed from the data set because individuals will be unidentifiable. All raw data received will be marked for destruction by the closing of this project and completion of the DSocSci requirements around December 2020. If you wish to withdraw from the study after the interview please contact the researcher via the email below, to find out if the information can still be identified and removed. Every effort will be made to remove the data from the set. Please be aware that online activities routed through U.S. servers and are subject to subpoena under the Patriot Act.

The information provided here will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before participating.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice or consequence up to the point that the raw
data has been anonymized and added to the data set, at which point it will be impossible to identify. Your choice not to be interviewed will also be maintained in confidence.

Please contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. By participating in the interview, you agree to give free and informed consent.

Email:

Telephone:

__________________________________________
Participant signature:

_________________
Date:
Appendix F: Interview Guide and Questions

Part 1.

Instructions:

Thank you for participating in this research interview. The purpose of this interview is to better understand your opinions on productivity in the organization regarding sustainability. I will begin by asking you questions about your ideas and experiences regarding productivity, sustainability and resilience in the community. There are no right or wrong, better or worse, answers just your honest input. We should be chatting for about one hour, is that okay with you?

Recording:

I would like to audio record this interview. The purpose of the audio recording is so I can capture the details of the conversation while having an attentive conversation. I can assure you that the recorded conversation will remain confidential and the research report created will not reflect any identifying information.

Preamble and consent:

Before we start, I need you to take a few minutes to read and sign the consent form. (Turn on the recording only after the consent form is signed.)

Part 2.

Interview questions:

1. (Circuitry) Can you describe what happens when you place a purchase order (PO)? How do you follow-up on it?
2. (Patterns) What issues seem to creep up regularly?
3. (Commonality) Why do you think this is happening or not happening?
4. (Covert rules) Why is that activity or outcome important?
5. (Time) What is the most time-consuming aspect of the current process and what impact does it have on the system?
6. (Shared value) How do you think the current system contributes to the organization’s value for sustainability?
7. (Engagement) What aspect of the system or process do you think could be improved?
8. (Grand tour) Can you give me a tour of the process you described?

Part 3.

Field notes and reflections:

After the participant has gone, make notes on your reactions and observations about the interview.
1. Interviewers name:
2. Demographics (etc.)

Respondent ID:

Date of interview:

Field notes:

1. Describe the participant’s attitude towards the interview and you:
2. Note any circumstances such as interruptions, difficulty hearing or understanding language, etc.:
3. Note anything else that might impact the study:
4. Other observations or thoughts:

**Part 4.**

Interviewer probes:

1. Paraphrase for clarity.
2. Probe only incomplete answers in non-directing ways (Floyd, 2009).

Please feel free to contact the primary investigator for any question you might have about this interview or the research outcomes at:
Appendix G: Métissage Consent and Guide-Addendum

Part 1.

Invitation and Recruitment Process:
Recruitment will take place by putting the event in a residency schedule, face-to-face recruitment by local staff, and posting it in the building common area, so participants can sign up for the event. The note will explain the reason for the event and required consent. To manage the method a maximum of 30 participants will be accepted on a first-come-first-serve basis.

Participant Selection:
Participant selection is by convenience on a first-come-first-serve basis and is for the residences of the community (facility) it is held in, e.g., SML Retirement Community, with the only exclusions being non-residents of the community. Exclusions are important so that the data collected is most relevant to the residents that programming will be developed to support. Although these participants are seniors, they are “independent”, not requiring guardianship, power of attorney, cognitive aid, or financial oversight, and therefore are considered low risk of harm.

Consent Process:
Consent is given when the participant reads the consent form, signs up for the event, and by their attendance at the event. Below is the information in the consent form and signup sheet. Métissage organizers and facilitators will make sure participants understand the information in the consent form by answering question and confirming consent during the event.

Co-Facilitators:
Two co-facilitators will work with me to conduct the métissage event. These facilitators work for the organization and with the clients on a regular basis and are trained in health and client care.

Sign-up and consent form:

My name is Brian Mendoza Dominguez, and this research projects short title, Constraints to Productivity, is part of the requirement for the Doctor of Social Sciences (DSocSci) program at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting dr. matthew heinz, Dean of the College of Interdisciplinary Studies, at [Royal Roads] or emailing him at [Royal Roads].

The purpose of my research project is to discover how to leverage community values to drive local business productivity. The residents of this community are being invited to participate in an arts-based research method called Narrative Métissage. The event will be facilitated in the events room (multi-purpose) of the building, so will not be private; however, the raw data collected from the event will be kept confidential by the researcher, university auditors, and co-researchers. Once the raw data is transcribed and analyzed is will be made anonymous through coding and the elimination of identifiable individual contributions within the data set. All
transcripts, other documents you provide, audio recordings, and field notes will be destroyed at the end of the study once the project is accepted by the University.

The métissage event is estimated to take about three hours to complete. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for Doctor of Social Sciences program, I will also be sharing my research findings with the partnering organization. The research findings may be published in journal articles or conferences. This research will be disseminated through the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, and ProQuest/UMI.

As the principal investigator (researcher) I must disclose that the partner organization, with the support of Mitacs government funding, is offering financial support for this project. No other known conflicts of interest exist in this research, in its dissemination, or its implementation.

Raw data will be password protected and stored on an external-hard drive in the researcher’s home. All raw data received will be marked for destruction by the closing of this project and completion of the DSocSci requirements around December 2020. If you wish to withdraw from the study after the event please contact the researcher via the email below, to find out if the information can still be identified and removed. Every effort will be made to remove the data from the set. The information provided here will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether you wish to participate. Please review this information before participating.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice or consequence up to the point that the raw data has been anonymized and added to the data set, at which point it will be impossible to identify. Your choice not to participate will also be maintained in confidence. As this is a group event and anonymity are impossible to create, please maintain the privacy of your fellow participants after the event.

Please contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. By signing-up for the event and participating in the event, you agree to free and informed consent.

Brian Dominguez

Sign-up form:
1. Name:_________________________
2. Name:_________________________
3. ...
30. Name:_________________________

Métissage Instructions: (adapted from Bishop, Etmanski, Page, Dominguez, & Heykoop, 2019)
Thank you for participating in this research activity. This event uses an arts-based method of research that we use to learn about different experiences from many perspectives. Today it will help us to learn about the theme or prompt of “having purpose or creating purpose”. We will begin by:
1. Introducing the facilitators.
2. Reiterate continued and informed consent.
3. Touch on Métissage.
4. Three deep breathes to set the stage for listening and learning.
5. Demonstrating métissage and debriefing the experience.
6. Asking you to participate in the story writing.
7. Collaborating with others to weave your stories together.
8. Present participant stories and then debrief the experience.
9. Closing the event with a final word and thanks.
10. Collect all the written stories for the research.

**Part 2.**

**Setup:**
- Prepare the seating to host 3-5 per table.
- Position notepads and pens at each seat with water available.
- Check the audio device can record from any location.

**Explanation of the process:**
1. *Introduce the Facilitators:*
   - *Brian, [staff], [staff]*
2. *Informed Consent and activity:*
   - Do not have to participate and can withdraw at any time.
   - Are pleased to contribute a story but can choose to just contribute to the discussion.
   - The raw data will be kept private and then anonymized, but the group is open so please respect the privacy of those in the room.
   - If you have any concerns or questions, please contact me at any time.
   - We will also use written notes and recording to best capture the ideas generated in the event.
   - The event will last up to three hours. Feel free to leave if you need to. The bathroom and exits are located (describe).
   - It will involve participants writing stories, collaborating with neighbours, reading stories aloud, and discussing the meaning and experiences.
   - Help yourself to the refreshments provided.
   - We will start and end the event by taking three deep breathes together
3. *Métissage:*
   - Métissage is an arts-based method with the name coming from the Latin word *Mixtus*. It describes the weaving of cloth and the interconnectedness of our experiences. In this narrative method we mix stories together to help us transform our understanding of different perspective, learn about others, and explore or thinking.
• Do not be too concerned how accurate or valid a story is, only that we hear it and appreciate that it takes bravery and courage to share our stories.
• It is a reminder that this is an invitation to share and that together we co-create knowledge.
• The facilitators will lead the event with a demonstration using our stories (juxtapose with sharp contrasts), then a debrief with some questions.
• The facilitators will be taking notes and recording the event, so we can actively capture the information we create with the participants.

4. **Set the stage:**
   • Explain the process the facilitators went through to tell a story about purpose.
   • Tell the group that we will set the stage for listening by taking three deep breaths together prior to the first demonstration reading and once more at the group reading.

5. **Facilitators read there métissage: (time to read and discuss?)**
   • Once the reading is done take a quiet pause to reflect and notice the energy in the room.
   • Start the debriefing, use the questions supplied in “Debrief Questions” below.
   • When the participants feel they have explored the concepts then we can move on to their practice.

**Debrief Questions (see Figure 1 of Bishop et al., 2019, p. 10)**

**For the protocol:** [https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/esj/article/view/68331](https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/esj/article/view/68331)

• Start with the prompt “having purpose and creating purpose”.
• Each person writes about 300 words maximum to ensure we don’t run out of time.
• Be as creative as you like.
• Prior to the group weaving edit the story so your comfortable sharing it.

6. **Collaborate in groups to weave the stories: (20 minutes)**
   • Work in your groups of three to five by first reading your story and finding natural breaks.
   • Then decide how to weave each story with others. Choose who goes first, second, third, etc. in the rotation.

7. **Participant stories then debrief:**
   • Remind participants that this is an invitation to share and each story is unique and takes courage to share.
   • Set the stage for listening with three deep group breathes.
   • Remind participants that stories can be difficult or breathtaking, so we will respectfully hold applause until all stories in the room have been told.
   • After the whole group has completed the métissage we took a pause to reflect and then debrief again using the debrief questions above.

8. **Close the session:**
   • Get each person to offer a word to describe how they feel about the métissage event.
   • Thank them for participating.
9. Collect all the stories.
   Part 3.
   Materials and supplies for focus groups:
   Consent forms (signup)
   Pads & Pens at each seat
   Métissage guide for the facilitator
   Recording device, plus backup and power charger
   Notebook for note-taking
   Refreshments
Appendix H: Sub Case Analysis Protocol

1. **Introduction.** The protocol was used pragmatically to analyze each of the methods, or sub cases as Eisenhardt (2002) described them, for their relationship to theory and to inform the findings. The analysis abductively follows Eisenhardt’s synthesis of qualitative methods “for building theories from case study” (p. 6) and uses the “continuous comparison of data and theory beginning with data collection” (p. 7). Eisenhardt concluded that “this type of work is highly complementary to incremental theory building from normal science research” (p. 32). Although Eisenhardt was referring to positivist epistemologies this would also work with the other traditions referenced in Eisenhardt’s article.

2. **Getting started.** Eisenhardt (2002) noted this approach saying, “case studies can employ an embedded design, that is multiple levels of analysis within a single study....[combining] data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations” (p. 9).

3. **A priori of codes.** For example, productivity, sustainability, resilience. This could be compared or inferred in each method. Eisenhardt noted original research design that was trumped by emergent characteristics that caused the researchers to change their focus (p. 11).

4. **Selecting cases.** Defining the case is important to avoid extraneous variables. The most appropriate example was in Mintzberg and McHugh’s (1985) observation of one organization using multiple methods and observation to develop theory (see Mintzberg, “Strategy Formation in an Adhocracy”, 1985). Select among the various data collection methods for coding and theming. Eisenhardt suggested using team members that did not go to the field as a “devil’s advocate” (p. 8), for a multi-perspective view draw information from their perspective.

5. **Entering the field.** Eisenhardt (2002) noted the use of field notes, reflection, and team feedback to create overlap, suggesting a useful process of recording impressions (p. 15). For reflection, I typically relied on the ORJI technique noted by Coghlan and Brannick (2010).

6. “Team meeting, in which investigators share their thoughts and emergent ideas, are also useful devices for overlapping data collection and analysis” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 16). Use of additional instruments to take advantage of emergent themes and opportunities was suggested (p. 16). The author argued that it was appropriate to “alter or add data collection methods during a study” (p.16) to go as deep as possible and “take advantage of... New themes to improve resultant theory” (p. 17).

8. **Search for Cross-case patterns.** The authors argued that confirming biases can be mitigated by analyzing the data from different perspectives (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 18), noting Bourgeois and Eisenhardt (1988) categories of “founder-run vs. Professional management, high vs. Low performance” (p. 18), suggesting a 2 x 2 cell to compare categories (p. 18). Additionally, the author recommends exploiting different data sources that “exploits the unique insights possible from different types of data collection” (p.19).

9. **Shaping Hypotheses.** The researcher is encouraged to “constantly compare theory and data--iterating toward a theory which closely fits the data” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 20). The research needs to define the constructs and develop evidence to “measure the construct” (p. 20) achieved through constant comparison. Each set of data is used independently to prove or disprove the hypotheses, but unlike testing aggregate data for statistical validity (p. 21). For validity, Eisenhardt noted that across data sets, “when the relationship is supported, the qualitative data often provide a good understanding of the dynamics underlying the relationship, that is, the ‘why’ of what is happening” (p.22).

10. **Enfolding literature.** Contradicting and confirming literature are important for defining the limits of the theory and exposing its insights, and to increase validity (Eisenhardt, 2002, pp. 24-26).

11. **Reaching Closure.** “Stop adding cases when theoretical saturation is reached” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 26) as well as when the data and theory comparison becomes saturated or has a minimal return on effort.
### Appendix I: Pre-Construction Project Selection Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic and research weighing</th>
<th>Sustainability</th>
<th>ROI</th>
<th>Resident quality of life</th>
<th>Org. values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>0.9 0.8 0.8 1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8 0.9 1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0</td>
<td>0.7 0.8 0.8 0.9 1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Resilience</td>
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<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL 2.0</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Living</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual employees</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for B-Corp</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3 5 2 2 2 2</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Incusivity</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbundling services</td>
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<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralization of Product Package</td>
<td>3 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Team</td>
<td>a b c d e a b c d e a b c d e a b c d e</td>
<td>a b c d e</td>
<td>a b c d e</td>
<td>a b c d e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>41 49 43 47 49 42 46 44 46 42</td>
<td>38 41 40 45 44</td>
<td>39 38 39 45 43</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>41.2 40.5 41.6 33.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic and Research value</th>
<th>0.8 0.7 0.7 0.6 0.8 0.8 0.7 0.6 0.8 0.7 0.8 0.9 0.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>Public perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Resilience</td>
<td>3 2 3 2 2 3 2 3 3 3 2 3 2 3 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL 2.0</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Living</td>
<td>3 3 2 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual employees</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for B-Corp</td>
<td>2 2 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Incusivity</td>
<td>2 5 2 3 5 5 3 5 5 5 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbundling services</td>
<td>2 3 2 5 5 3 2 3 5 5 3 2 3 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>2 2 2 2 2 4 2 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralization of Product Package</td>
<td>2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Team</td>
<td>a b c d e a b c d e a b c d e a b c d e a b c d e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>33 34.2 39.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Strategic and Research value     | 23.8 24.6 32.1 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest ranked project</th>
<th>IL 2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest ranked criteria</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>Return on Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>Client centered quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>Core values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>Branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>Public perception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Project selection matrix.

Projects received subjective ratings and weights on selection criteria. The highlighted cells have the highest individual and group ratings. The screen clipping was from a modified relationship matrix (Cartin, 1999, pp. 156-157). The team generated the criteria and project list. I had each team member subjectively rate from one to five the relevance of the criteria, seen in the box of seven ranked criteria and the 11 suggested ranked projects. The highest scores are shaded, with “sustainability” being the most important criteria. Therefore, the IL+2.0 was unanimously selected as the first inquiry team project.
### Appendix J: Interview Questions and Summarized Answers

Table 2. Interview questions and summarized answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you describe what happens when you place a purchase order? How do you follow up?</td>
<td>The participants typically source their own material or service autonomously, either go out and buy it out of pocket, or create and purchase order (PO) and then submit that for invoicing. Sometimes the order is checked depending on what it is and when it arrives, and the terms of sale are typically 30 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What issues seem to creep up regularly?</td>
<td>Time to order, source, process, and control stocks. Sourcing can be the most difficult and there is little coordination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think this is happening or not happening?</td>
<td>Growth, no standards are created yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is that activity or outcome important?</td>
<td>The company hasn’t had the resources available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most time-consuming aspect of the current process and what impact does it have on the system?</td>
<td>Time to order, scheduling, sourcing. They could be doing something closer to the client experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the current system contributes to the organization’s value for sustainability?</td>
<td>Not sure, there are no measures or indicators, some use of brands such as Ocean-wise exist, but only used out of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What aspect of the system or process do you think could be improved?</td>
<td>Standardization, centralization of some processes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix K: CVF Outputs

Table 3: CVF Discussion questions. Related points captured from the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What does each quadrant tell us about the culture?</td>
<td>- We are not innovative but have strong clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sites think we move quickly but HO does not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Not focused on short term market but the long-term gain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Not surprised to see clan and hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Driven by operations for quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A diversity of perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- We may not interact frequently with all elements of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- We are internally focused, may be missing something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discuss what characteristics will drive change to get us to where we need to be.</td>
<td>- Move towards create and innovate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- We say we’re innovative but not really, we are still risk intolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- We maintain the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- We need to be more competitive, we risk being too reactive for the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- We need to define our customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Competitive priorities need defining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What role do different sites play in this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is different about the future state map? What does it mean or not mean?</td>
<td>- Faster growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- We already know what works so how do we execute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Can we still collaborate more when geographically dispersed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Greater competition is coming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Scaling requires standardization</td>
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<td>- Differentiation is needed, IL+ innovation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- New models should be considered, new clients</td>
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<td>4. What are the implications of making this change?</td>
<td>- New offers and products</td>
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<td>- Clients might have different ideas than the current ones</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- May require different services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Paradigm shift, new way of living, e.g., snowbirds</td>
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<td>- Rebrand or refinement, resort style living, younger demographic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Maintain uniqueness</td>
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<td>- Succession and legacy are at risk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Change in vertical integration, loss of development</td>
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<td>5. What behaviors need to be changed?</td>
<td>- Develop more documents, standards, and evidence</td>
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<td>- Gather more data for analysis</td>
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<td>- Develop managerial competencies</td>
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<td>- Be tactical for speed and adaptability to market trends</td>
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<td>- Quantify to clarify differing perspectives</td>
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<td>- Systems thinking</td>
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<td>- Adopt best practices</td>
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<td>6. What systems need to be changed?</td>
<td>- Demographic understanding</td>
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<td>- Do more systems evaluations</td>
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<td>- Organizational-centric versus client-centric</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Variation in technology adoption</td>
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CVF Current and Future Map

Figure 7: CVF diagnosis map, current and future state.
Black was the current state (now). Red was the future state (needed).
Appendix L: Document Analysis – Spend analysis

The following protocol was used to identify, collect and organize, and analyze documents for the purpose of interpreting and presenting information to the action team in support of the procurement project. The protocol framework followed:

1. Identifying and acquiring documents
   a. Select documents from accounting, from 2016 to present, that represent income statements, and invoices paid to vendors. Acquire satisfaction surveys and supply contracts.

2. Prioritization and focus using Pareto analysis.
   a. Determine the Pareto priority to set boundaries for further documents
      1- Accounting documents
      2- Contracts
      3- Policy or procedure manuals
      4- Other technical documents and academic literature

3. Spend Analysis.
   a. The spend analysis is described as involving “collecting, cleansing . . . classifying, and analyzing (e.g., using charts) expenditure data with the purpose of reducing procurement costs, improving efficiency, and monitoring compliance with purchasing policies” (Stevenson, Hojati, & Cao, 2015, p. 444).
   b. Organize data into categories and create ratios or comparisons to display productivity of department spending.

4. Supplier analysis.
   a. This process required accounting documents that showed various data including supplier names and invoices paid. From this data, I could gather all the food supplier names and how many invoices were related to food purchases. Comparing the top 10 suppliers across four communities, I found that only three were used at all four sites. The other suppliers were used for varying degrees of consumption.

5. Relationship Portfolio analysis (Kriljic).
   a. The Kriljic portfolio is used to understand the purchasing and supply management relationship, which can be volatile, and can help manager guard against negative “profit impact” (Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p. 63). Three areas are described for profit impact: Volume purchased, percentage of total cost, impact on product quality and business growth. This process would require obtaining a full list of purchased goods and breaking them down into four quadrants.

   a. Two current contracts. One contract is with CPS and one contract is with GFS (see the Cox model, Lysons & Farrington, 2006, p. 227). CPS is a “contract administrative fee” (Nollet & Beaulieu, 2005) model, versus a group purchasing organization (GPO), in which CPS creates favorable deals with suppliers and charges the supplier a fee when a purchase is made to cover administrative costs (“2-3 per cent”, p. 13), much like a credit card.

7. Description of current and proposed structure and supply relationships.
a. The current structure generally follows a basic *purchasing cycle* defined by Stevenson, Hojati, and Cao (2015) as creating a purchase requisition (e.g., PO), selects a product or vendor, decide on the transaction type (e.g., check, credit, contract, etc.), monitor the delivery date, accept delivery, and pay the supplier (p. 442).

b. A suggested structure might include a clear strategic goal for procurement, the alignment of positional authority to act on the process, and to align the purchases with the organizational strategy.

8. Conclusions and recommendations.

a. This report suggests the organization needs to establish its strategic priorities, align those with the food services, set policies and procedures around the procurement process and function, and measure performance related to purchasing and supplier performance.
Appendix M: On the Progress of Change - Evaluation

I was reflecting on the literature, trying to understand my own limitations and short-sightedness when I recalled a leading scholar in AR who noted a common problem when working with stakeholders. Stringer (2007) admitted during a first person reflection that when he wrote his final report he “failed to clearly articulate what readers could expect as outcomes of the research process” (p. 177), and the researcher’s position, “The researcher may be described as a consultant, resource person, scribe, or coparticipant whose role is to assist people rather than control them...[that] participants in action research actively engage in monitoring and directing the processes of inquiry.” (p. 178). This reminded me of my own failures, assumptions, and limitations by acknowledging the “incompleteness” of my efforts as “Human inquiry, like any other human activity, is both complex and always incomplete” (p. 179). Having said that, as I move on with this research methodology my colleagues in the literature are suggesting that I address the things that are coming up, so the team has an opportunity to direct them, or due to my limited perspective, have the team bring up more fundamental or salient issues for the group. Until then, I will inform the team, so they can tackle the obvious and not so obvious issues the organization faces.

As a closing evaluation for the action team, I offered a memo that re-articulated the research purpose and the team’s role as agents of the organization. I noted two points or constraints to address; the first was the observed resistance around food services and how procurement impacts that area. The second was the lack of action from the group, such as delegation. These two points are manifest in their importance, as will be illuminated in the review, notably the absence of action. To evoke some thinking, I had adapted questions based on John Kotter’s (2011) seminal paper, Leading Change, which offered eight steps to change and asked the team of five to answer the questions; yes, no, or not-sure. There were six more questions, which I asked for paragraph style responses that were more directly related to the projects and team activities, which would add to my articulation of organizational understanding. I received only two and a half responses from the five members. I’ve presented this evaluation by stating the questions, the characteristics of the responses, and then the related research.

Kotter’s (2011) eight steps (adapted into questions)

1. Is there a sense of urgency? Does 75% of the company’s management believe the status quo is more dangerous than the change?

A total score of 10 is possible but only four scored. Two points for “no” and two points for “not-sure”. This score was a clear indication that there is no sense of urgency and in fact the lack of response from the team—regardless of the reasons—is a telling sign in-itself. Kotter (2011) puts failure rate at 50% on this first step (“Error 1”, para. 2). Kotter also argued that “paralyzed senior management often comes from having too many managers and not enough leaders”, which means new leadership is required at the level of activity being undertaken, but transformation under comfortable conditions can be difficult to do because there is no impetus or burning bridge as a motivator (“Error 1”, para. 3–4). The threat here was subtle, if the actions are not pursued.

19 May 26 memo referred to as “Homework”, with a due date of June 1st, 2019.
with vigor then the parable of the slowly boiled frog is likely evoked, “and the long-term future of the organization is put in jeopardy” (“Error 1”, para. 9).

2. Is there a powerful coalition or action team that works outside its own hierarchy with a sense of shared purpose and commitment to lead change?

A total score of five was possible with three responses for “not-sure”. A guiding coalition always grows because of the energy and interest of the developing effort. Kotter (2011) noted that if “some minimum mass is not achieved early in the effort, nothing much worthwhile happens” (“Error 2”, para. 1). In this case, there is an appearance of a guiding coalition, the team consists of members outside a single hierarchical structure to mitigate any defunct structures that cannot change, and project teams are adding numbers to the effort. However, without a sense of urgency and the ability of the team to prioritize, communicate, and share a commitment to action, eventually the “apparent progress” falters and “opposition gathers together and stops the change” (“Error 2”, para. 7). This might look like reprioritization of the projects, sacrosanct topics such as food, or similar statements like “it doesn’t fit our local condition” (Watson, 1967, pp. 372–373). This finding suggested a lukewarm effort that will likely have little progress, lacking “enough local initiative” (p. 373).

3. Has the team developed a clear vision and strategy for leading the change, e.g., project vision and plan?

A total score of five was possible with three answering “no” or “not-sure”. “Without a sensible vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible projects that can take the organization in the wrong direction or nowhere at all” (Kotter, 2011, “Error 3”, para. 3). This does not imply that a vision cannot grow or develop as new information becomes available, and strategies are hatched as to how to operationalize the vision. Failed efforts are preluded by many plans, actions, and programs but not a vision. Kotter says that you should be able to get all the heads in the room showing signs of “understanding and interest . . . in five minutes or less” (“Error 3”, para. 6) or you are not done developing the vision.

4. Is the team leading by example and communicating the vision and strategy with every vehicle possible to achieve it?

A total score of five possible with three “not-sure”, suggesting a lack of leadership. Three common failures proceed change, the quite mastermind group who thinks in isolation and communicates infrequently to the masses, the head of the organization who spend a lot of time espousing his vision—but nothing seems to stick—and third the senior management that do not model the way (Kotter, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder

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20 In this eight minute YouTube video, John Kotter discussed his most recent book with Holger Rathgeber, That’s not how we do it here!, which shares a familiar fable on organizational change and highlights the common challenges among businesses that think their problems are unique.

21 Kotter, 2011, para. 4.
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(1993) argued that employees need to know the organization is capable of useful change, employees are unlikely to help if they don’t get a sense that the capacity is there (Kotter, “Error 4”, para. 2). When change is required the executives constantly talk about the changes and how they are relevant to everyone in the organization and relate them to each area of the organization. Successful cases are demonstrated when executives “walk the talk”, but is undermined by not acting with integrity, by not communicating, or taking prompt action on the need in the first place (Kotter, 2011, “Error 4”, para. 6).

5. Is the team encouraging others to take risks and use non-traditional ideas, and empowering staff to take action? Is the team changing structures that are not leading to the vision and strategy?

A total score of 10 was possible with two “no” and two “not-sure”, suggesting risk aversion, little empowerment/enrichment or job enlargement, and no assessment of structural constraints by embracing difficult information (Collins, 2001, p. 77). Empowerment, sometimes called enrichment, concerns the vertical loading of work which empowers employees to take more responsibility for jobs because “empowerment is a major factor in process improvement in customer-oriented organizations” (Cartin, 1999, p. 40; Stevenson, Hojati, & Cao, 2015, p. 276). Perpendicular to enrichment is job enlargement or horizontal loading, which expands the portion of total work an employee does (Stevenson et al., 2015, p. 276). Both vertical and horizontal loading build capacity in human capital. “Renewal requires removal of obstacles” (Kotter, 2011, “Error 5”, para. 2). “Sometimes the obstacle is the organizational structure…. inconsistent with the overall effort” (Kotter, 2011, “Error 5”, para. 3).

Kotter (2011) described an experience with one company that ultimately failed in the fourth step, noting how the senior manager,

paid lip service to the process but did not change his behaviour or encourage his managers to change. . . . motives were complex. . . . he did not believe the company needed major change. . . . he felt personally threatened. . . . he was afraid he could not produce. . . . [and] despite the fact that they backed the renewal effort, the other officers did virtually nothing to stop the one blocker. (Kotter, 2011, “Error 5”, para. 5)

Kotter (2011) acknowledged that the current staff had no experience dealing with something like this and the “CEO was concerned they might lose a talented executive” (Kotter, 2011, “Error 5”, para. 5). Although obstacles such as this must be removed Kotter argued that the executive must be treated “in a way that is consistent with the new vision” (2011, “Error 5”, para. 6). Although Kotter was discussing an empirical investigation that took much time, energy, and money for trouble to emerge, the cautionary tale should indicate a clear threat to performance around maintaining the status quo, for any organization.

6. Are short term wins being achieved and are people being praised for it?

A potential total of five points with only three scored, one “yes”, one “no”, and one “not-sure”. Kotter (2011) noted that the long journey to transformation and capabilities may not have any steam if short-term wins are not demonstrated. Others confirm that the organization and
individuals must demonstrate the ability to create improvements, calling it “efficacy”, or the capacity for change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, p. 572). On this, Kotter (2011) noted that the results must be “unambiguous. . . not just a judgment call that can be discounted by those opposing change” (Kotter, 2011, “Error 6”, para. 2). Since two of the three answers were “no” or “not-sure” then the burden to produce unambiguous results for the “yes” is critical and efforts should be made to support this evidence. Without the burden of proof, it is unlikely that detailed analytical thinking will support further initiatives.

7. Are systems changing due to the efforts, are people being recognized and promoted, are new projects emerging to continue the development?

A total of five points were possible with two “not-sure” and one “no”. No surprises, change takes time and it’s always too soon to declare a victory! Kotter noted that significant change in the culture that allows for sustainable success can take time, “a process that can take five to ten years” (Kotter, 2011, “Error 7”, para. 1). Kotter’s research over 20 years found that even when there is urgency, a strong action team, and a powerful vision the whole thing can crash if a premature victory is sung. In our case, we still need to claim some small wins so that momentum can be developed for use against the bigger problems (Kotter, 2011, “Error 7”, para. 3), e.g., to build trust and competency.

Q. 9-14 paragraph responses.

In this section, I have paraphrased the inquiry team answers in the first paragraph and made a short comment afterwards confirming or apprising the team’s thoughts.

9. What are the issues around quality and continuous improvement at [company]?

Team members confirmed that quality was not consensual in understanding or application and noted that the founder has different visions of quality for each site. This was also impacted by what is valued by the residents. To manage quality, intuition was used by site managers to meet the quality standards of the organization. The constraint here was that, what [founder] envisioned as quality may not align with what the residents view as quality, creating delays around improvements. This was justified by being a young company without developed measures or standards to serve multiple brand levels.

If multiple brand levels were the strategy then clarity is paramount, as some customers are not the right customers for every brand level. Economic theory, leadership theory, organizational psychology, and development theory inform these approaches. There seem to be issues of strategic alignment, likely clarity of strategy and vision, demonstrated by having different ideas of what quality means at each site. As explicated in previous communications quality can be defined, measured, and improved. In any case the impact of quality means reduced costs and improved revenues, this is because the philosophy of fitness for use and client satisfaction are not tied to price but do result in lowering variation and controlling variety. Certainly, intuition and flexibility are powerful tools for managers when used to accomplish tasks in highly variable conditions, however, if high variability continues it will lead to the need for heroics, tribal knowledge, and firefighting that saps the manager’s capabilities and eventually leads to
misalignment with strategic goals. Without a constant attempt to reduce variability there will be little continuous improvement.

10. How can internal capacities, skills, and structures be developed by the team at [company]?

Internal capacities can be improved by having management review the available online tools and technology. Other options would be to develop KPIs that can be reviewed for decision making and offer training at all levels.

As noted earlier, delegation, job expansion and empowerment, and confronting brutal facts are critical to the learning organization and its ability to improve by exposing, and collegially arguing about, constraints rather than shaming or avoiding them altogether (Collins, 2001, p. 77). Current tools, online or otherwise, should be reviewed for utilization and strategic alignment. An unused tool may be unused for two reasons, it either doesn’t support the culture or it doesn’t support the strategy; Either way, they need to be reviewed. KPIs are very important for managers to be able to make decisions, as long as those KPIs support the strategic priority, vision, and short and medium objectives. Managers should be updated and trained on measures and how they impact the operation and objectives.

11. Does management need specific training and what would it need to be?

There may be an assumption that the current tools are known or used by the site managers, such as the building service managers that may negatively impact price advantages. Ordering, tracking, and other processes up to invoicing should receive further training. The difficulty was that [company] is growing so quickly that the focus is not on systems but individual flexibility (heroics and firefighting?).

Tools and techniques need to be mapped out and aligned with organizational objectives, where skills are short training and performance appraisals should take place or positions and structures should be modified. Systems are a priority for scaling and long-term capacity, where variability is high, fires smolder or burn.

12. Are there structural issues impeding change at [company]?

While not a structural issue, “we are risk averse”. This may create a need for group think that removes accountability and thus stops results from being achieved. A need for enduring leadership strategies and measures that support improvements and drive behaviour for management that is consistent.

Organizational authority and structures, including people, skills, and resources, should all demonstrate a return on investment and should align with the organizational strategy and objectives. For example, can one manager really be responsible for another manager’s structure and responsibilities? Matrix organizations share resources but clear lines of hierarchal, cultural authority, and autonomy to take action are crucial.

13. What do you think the inquiry team should be doing?
The inquiry team could be more curious, trying to understand and act on the information being presented. The team could also be more engaged by offering information and direction for further data collection, and to explain how things are done at [company]. [company] is different than other businesses and would not compare to a retail business, because [company] is about people and that focus should drive improvement decisions.

There are a couple of business management clichés that indicate fundamental blockages to progress when asking why something is done a certain way and the response is, “because we’ve always done it that way” as the classic example of not looking for improvements, often because “we’re different, so that doesn’t apply to us”, and Watson’s earlier cynicism that “it doesn’t fit our local condition” (Watson, 1967, pp. 372–373).

14. How do we seek valid information, choice, and measurable action?

By inquiring and discussing, we can understand expectations and determine accountabilities. Our system produces data that can be used if we agree on its interpretation and decide how to use it.

Yes, valid information comes from our outputs, how we choose to act and create data, and how we know if it has accomplished anything. We can validate performance measures by testing them and observing their outputs.

Summary

In this memo, I have referred to previous discussions and questions in regard to the academic research and [company] projects, noting the difference between the two. While I admitted that I got caught up in the progress of the [company] projects and did not clearly articulate that I was not the driver of [company] success, I soon realized that the research cycle was nearly complete. The input provided helped me to formalize my closing evaluation. This intends to help inform the following investigation in sustainability and improvements, or lack of improvements, that lead [company] to the benefits of sustainability.

The key insights from this memo reveals a lack of importance for the research effort or the [company] projects. This is not unusual and is well supported in a vast array of literature on change management, academic research issues, and organizational development. Despite that, changes will occur as a natural organizational life-cycle effect, regardless of the type, format, or approach to addressing such change.

Other insights to close the evaluation reveal some misunderstanding of operational improvements and the role of quality, mostly around assumptions about what quality is or is not. Again, this is normal but mental models and assumptions restrict member’s ability to confidently act to create improvements that could lead to sustainable activities. Another more important finding was the issue around structural and strategic alignment. If structure is not clear, then resistance and conflict will occur. Where strategy is not clear, efforts will be divided and costly. These are not simple issues for management to address, in fact some companies never get there, and every management book written highlights the very issues [company] must deal with daily. Fortunately, [company] is full of smart and friendly people that demonstrate an inclusive and thoughtful environment where progress can be made.
Thank you for helping me with this evaluation. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know. The next part will discuss sustainability and how the current project impacts or fails to impact [company’s] values for sustainability.
Appendix N: Adaptation of the GATE Survey

PROCUREMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY (2018-5-16)

The intention of this memo is to get us thinking about sustainability as a competitive advantage, what our espoused values are versus what we actually do, how sustainable we really are, and how do we prove it. The follow excerpt expresses a wicked problem, which is one that may be too complex to solve. In terms of food, we can ask ourselves questions such as, does local matter? How much green house gas do we produce from our purchases? Are we socially sustainable? The survey will help us think about what other companies in Vancouver and Toronto are already doing.

Our ancestors gave us priceless gifts, but none has prepared us for a world beyond the Internet, virtual teams, and inedible BlackBerries. I am too much of a historian to imagine that today’s trendiest large-group methods are the end of history. Every method has its limits, as we all are destined to learn. More to the point, we live in a global economy that is consuming resources at a rate far beyond our ability to replace them. Indeed, sustainable organizations have no future in an unsustainable world of our own making.\(^\text{22}\)

Weisbord’s prescient statement on the repetition of history is a clear warning that even if we act in a sustainable way, it may not matter. So, what is the point? This may be a personal question for each of you, for me, I am either working on the problem or contributing to it, probably both. For the most part, I focus on the benefits of action, for example, improving a process reduces or eliminates waste which reduces costs, improves environmental outcomes, and values human capital, but not always. Lean concepts have established eight forms of waste in operations: overproduction (too much), excess purchases, waiting, transportation, over processing, inefficient methods, defective works, and underutilization of human capabilities.\(^\text{23}\)

Sustainability is also a problematic term because of our government, which has traditionally followed the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on policy, has had a gross domestic production (GDP) fetish. We see the impact of this in Industry Canada studies that represent sustainability in terms of a firm’s ability to grow that year, not a very sustainable ideology (see an example in Seens, 2013, but a general observation notes government and media narratives espousing GDP and economic growth). The contemporary definition of sustainability as we know it came to prominence in Chapter 2 of the Brundtland Report in 1987, defined as using resources effectively to meet today’s needs without risking resource scarcity for future generations.\(^\text{24}\) This implies that resources are conserved or used sparingly so that they might replenish at a rate faster than they are consumed. In order to have an impact there must be some agenda to do something sustainable.

\[\text{[company]}\] website covers both social and environmental activities under “community connections” and “environmental commitment”. For example, the web site suggests that \[\text{[company]}\] reduces the waste of water, energy and green house gas emissions. These ideas go

\(^{22}\) Weisbord, 2012, p. 467.
\(^{23}\) Stevenson, Hojati, & Cao, 2015, pp. 607–608.
\(^{24}\) Brundtland, 1987.
back to the purpose of the firm, first thought of as a closed system, but being actively engaged in a complex community as an open system, impacting the people and environment around it.\textsuperscript{25} This idea also considers social licence to operate as far back as the 1930s.\textsuperscript{26} However, it’s not clear by just looking at [company] website if these are being met or having a benefit to the organization or are altruistic, in terms of performance.

To get a better understanding of [company] sustainability, it is important to have indicators and practices that reflect the values, goals, and expected benefits that a sustainable approach enables. Please respond to the following questions and do a quick survey that will lead the discussion and help image our place in the community.

Questions:
1. What is sustainability?
2. How should [company] leverage sustainability for competitive advantage?
3. What don’t we know?
4. Where should we start looking?

SUSTAINABILITY SURVEY (Burch, et al., 2018, GATE-SURVEY)
1. How important is sustainability to your company? (1= NOT AT ALL; 2=NOT VERY; 3=IMPORTANT; 4=VERY IMPORTANT; 5=NOT SURE) _____________
2. Mark which environmental measures are important to your company?
   a. \[] Purchase new equipment and services. Have you done it? [ ]
   b. \[] Reduce your company’s waste production. Have you done it? [ ]
   c. \[] Retrofit buildings. Have you done it? [ ]
   d. \[] Designate an employee or team to address sustainability. Have you done it? [ ]
   e. \[] Change your suppliers to one that is more environmentally friendly. Have you done it? [ ]
   f. \[] Change employee behaviour to be more environmentally friendly. Have you done it? [ ]
3. Which social measures are important to your company?
   a. \[] Foster employee well-being. Have you done it? [ ]
   b. \[] Create and inclusive work environment. Have you done it? [ ]
   c. \[] Support social justice through purchasing practise. Have you done it? [ ]
   d. \[] Participate in community outreach. Have you done it? [ ]
4. What benefits do you think will result if your company makes progress on sustainability?
   a. \[] Improving our reputation in the community. Have you done it? [ ]

\textsuperscript{25} Rahdari, Anvary Rostamy, Asghar, & Rostamy, 2015.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 757.
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b. [ ] Reducing the costs of operating the business. Have you done it? [ ]
c. [ ] Aligning business with personal values. Have you done it? [ ]
d. [ ] Complying with government regulation. Have you done it? [ ]
e. [ ] Responding to customer/client demands. Have you done it? [ ]
f. [ ] Increasing sales. Have you done it? [ ]
g. [ ] Retaining/attracting employees. Have you done it? [ ]
h. [ ] Becoming a leader in my field. Have you done it? [ ]
Appendix O: Creating a vision at [Company]

Leader Developed Vision

Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols (2011) noted that a vision is useful for giving organizational members direction by imagining what the future will look like. They argued that storytelling is one way of accomplishing that goal (p. 120). The vision should be connected to the purpose of the organization (i.e., mission) and inform the core values. Sub-visions are generated within departments that feed off of the primary vision. Cawsey et al. offers the vision of FedEx’s express service: “absolutely, positively, overnight” (p. 120). So, a sub-vision for the logistical department might be, “enhancing accuracy in package tracking to reduce error rates to below .00001%” (p. 121).

The authors cited Jick (1993) who offered some key components of a vision (p. 121):

1. Clear, concise, easily understood
2. Memorable
3. Exciting and inspiring
4. Challenging
5. Excellence centered
6. Stable but flexible
7. Implementable and tangible

Writing a vision statement should answer what the organization “aspires to be” (Onsman, 2004, p. 8) and should answer several questions:

1. What are you trying to create?
2. Does it give a sense of direction?
3. Does the vision provide the basis for implementing a strategy and plan?
4. Does it give a direction and guidance for ongoing decisions?
5. Does is express the critical factors members should be concerned about?
6. Does the vision inspire and clarify action?
7. Does the vision promote commitment? What level of action, some, a lot?

Kouzes and Posner (2012) argued that it was critical to inspire a shared vision for “themselves and others” (p. 104). A vision should do two things well, “imagine the possibilities [and] find a common purpose” (p. 104). But first it is important to talk about the past, Kouzes and Posner noted that researchers found that executives that talked about the past experiences where more prepared to envision a future state, known as the ‘Janus effect’ (p. 108).
The vision should contain what Collins and Parras believed are two critical parts, “core ideology. . . [and] envisioned future” (cited in Onsman, 2004, p. 9). It may be that a shared vision has a better place in a more mature organization. As Onsman (2004) argued, the shared vision may help people to “coalesce” (p. 12) around a common ideal. Onsman cited Tarnow who called it ‘social categorisation’ (p. 12) and Mulane (2002) who said, “the usefulness of [such statements] is found in the development and implementation process, not in the final product” (p. 12).

**How to develop a vision statement (Onsman, 2004, p. 13):**

1. Decide who should be in the room.
2. Get the group to decide the purpose of the organization.
3. Why does it matter? Record the group discussion for details.
4. Ask for stories that give examples from the past about why it matters.
5. Try to round out a statement that is not ambiguous.
6. What would be lost if the organisation ceased to exist?

**Start by:**

1- Ask each member in the group what the purpose of the organization is?
   a. Why do those things matter?
2- Ask each person to tell a story of a great success they have experienced at [Company]. Why was it important?
   a. Take note of the key elements of each story and extract the values that are expressed.
3- If those stories didn’t happen what would have been lost?
   a. Extract the key losses.
4- Find out from the Founder what, ideally, does the organization aspire to do?
   a. Confirm with the group what their interpretation is or if they can paraphrase the Founder.
5- Try to draft up a vision statement, check it against Onsman’s list of seven items above.
   a. Get the group to clarify the wording until some agreement exists.