Improving the Leadership Capabilities of Municipal Elected Officials through Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

by

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Abstract

Saskatchewan Elected Municipal Officials are regularly challenged to make decisions that impact the entire municipality. While adhering to the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, this study explored both the understanding of leadership by elected municipal officials and the resources available to those same officials. Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities was the partner organization for this inquiry and the question posed was how they might help the rural elected municipal officials improve their leadership capabilities? A World Café was held with 30 participants followed by nine semi structured interviews with members who were Municipal Elected Officials, Chief Administrative Officers, or other key stakeholders from across Saskatchewan. The main research finding centred around the evolution of leadership and the lack of a current effective leadership model, hence the recommendations focused on education for elected officials that would offer them a greater understanding of leadership and the necessary resources to carry out their roles and responsibilities better.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter One: Focus and Framing

Municipal leaders are empowered to make decisions every day that impact their constituents and shape the future of their municipality. This thesis has focused on capacity building and leadership in Saskatchewan rural municipal governments. Potter and Brough (2004) offered capacity building as the “creation, expansion or upgrading of a stock of desired qualities and features called capabilities that could be continually drawn upon over time” (p. 337). Even more detailed and precise is the definition offered by United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (2006), “capacity-building involves establishing the conditions under which public servants are able to embark on a continuous process of learning and adapting to change—building on existing knowledge and skills and enhancing and using them in new directions” (p. 8).

As a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) with 15 years experience in municipal government, I have come to believe that municipalities would benefit from additional growth in the capabilities of their elected officials, especially in the area of leadership. Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) is the provincial association that gives voice to the 296 rural municipalities in Saskatchewan and who agreed to be my research partner organization. I chose to partner with this association believing that this research would benefit numerous Saskatchewan rural municipalities. SARM provides guidance and support to all Saskatchewan rural municipalities in the form of advocacy, services, programs, events, and resources. Through the identification of capacity-building needs for elected officials, SARM is able to create the tools and resources needed to support the leadership capacity development of these rural municipalities. By partnering with SARM in this project, the outcomes will be shared with not
only the municipality I am CAO of, but possibly with all Saskatchewan municipalities, allowing many to realize the benefits of the findings and recommendations of this research.

The thesis inquiry question was:

- How might Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities help the rural elected municipal officials in Saskatchewan improve their leadership capabilities?

The sub questions were:

- What stories do elected municipal officials and CAOs tell about their leadership experiences within their own municipalities?
- How might SARM improve its partnership with its member municipalities to foster leadership, learning, and growth?
- What leadership tools and/or resources do a sample of elected municipal officials and CAOs in Saskatchewan say they, and other elected officials, need to better carry out their roles and responsibilities?
- How can shared leadership be strengthened between CAOs and elected officials?
- How can the scholarly and professional literature contribute to the improvement of leadership or leadership development for SARM and its member municipalities?

These questions were the focus of this study, and the suggestions and recommendations resulting from the research will be of importance to leadership growth in Saskatchewan rural municipal government.

Significance of the Inquiry

This thesis focused on ways to strengthen the leadership of municipal elected officials through identifying tools and resources available to assist Saskatchewan rural municipal
governments. The original idea was that by identifying current tools and resources, it would then be possible to recognize what changes are needed, if additional resources are required, and what those new resources may look like. The hope is that this research will be a resource not only for my own municipality, but also for other municipalities throughout the province.

By working with SARM, the impact of the research will be further reaching, as they have an influence on all rural municipalities in the province. SARM (n.d.-d) identifies itself as:

the independent association that represents the interests of rural municipal government in Saskatchewan and is the principal advocate in representing them before senior governments. The Association takes direction from its members and forms its policy accordingly. (para. 1)

SARM’s (n.d.-a) mission, vision, and values are included in this thesis (Appendix A) for consideration now as well as in chapters four and five where the findings and recommendations are presented as a mechanism to ensure the mission, vision, and values align with the final outcomes of this present inquiry.

My municipality, the Rural Municipality of Bone Creek, No. 108 (located in the corner of southwest Saskatchewan), is a smaller system interwoven into a larger complex provincial system. Through working with SARM, I strove to impact the larger system where this thesis, at minimum, would identify the leadership resources currently available as well as identify any gaps or capacity deficits needing consideration moving forward. Any province-wide changes as a result of this action-oriented inquiry will likely occur long after this research is complete.

In 2018, SARM identified capacity building as a current strategic priority. Their organization has been exploring topics, including inventory of current tools and resources, training needs, and training providers. Through completion of a needs assessment, SARM
created a multi-year “capacity action plan” outlining SARM’s leadership role and actions (J. Meyer, personal communication\(^1\), June 6, 2019). Through this research, and to complement SARM’s efforts by engaging SARM members in the data collection, I was able to identify what the members believe is required to further support the leadership of the elected municipal officials. This information will be useful on its own and will also be compared to other investigations SARM has engaged in to determine where there might be commonalities that can be strengthened. The participating members of this study included elected officials, CAOs, and other key stakeholders. The other key stakeholders are comprised of employees in provincial government, members of other boards or associations within the province (including representatives from urban municipal government), and other participants who have regular dealings with rural municipal governments.

As the CAO for a rural municipal government in Saskatchewan, I have observed the leadership skills of elected officials and administrators, the availability of mentorship for both, as well as the resources and supports available for overall leadership development. The purpose of this research was to co-create a process where participants were engaged and shared stories to co-create ideas of how the leadership in municipal government could be enhanced and strengthened.

**Organizational Context and Systems Analysis**

An understanding of the organizational context and a systems analysis provide the base for understanding the project as a whole. In this section, information is provided that will build a foundation of the organization and the community that the research focussed on. An explanation

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\(^1\) All personal communications in this report are used with the permission of the named individuals.
will be offered indicating how participants were selected, showing a diversity of voices engaged in the inquiry. The systems analysis explores the key concepts, key stakeholders, considerations, and leverage points of the organization. To begin this section, an exploration of the municipal government organization is offered.

**Organizational Context**

Action research projects would typically take place within the organization the researcher is part of; however, this project looked at municipal governments as a whole throughout Saskatchewan, being a much higher level than focussing only on the municipality the researcher is employed with. All rural municipal governments are governed under the same legislation in Saskatchewan: The Municipalities Act (2006). This means that all rural municipalities must adhere to the same requirements, duties, roles, and responsibilities. Being that these municipalities are all similar in their legislative requirements, the study included members from the entire group throughout the province. It is important to note the other two types of municipal governments in Saskatchewan, which include cities that fall under the Cities Act (2003) and the Northern municipalities that fall under the Northern Municipalities Act (2011). Participants were included in this study from the urban municipal government, as they are important key stakeholders in this research.

When determining which participants to engage in this study, many different elements were taken into consideration. There are many differences in elected officials, and it was necessary in this study to ensure a diversity of voices were included to accurately reflect the overall views of the group. There are elected officials who are new to council and others that are serving past their first four-year term. Some officials are younger, and others have more life experience. There are both those who identify as male and female, obviously bringing forth
different perspectives. Some rural people are ranchers, others are farmers, and some work in oil, gas, or other sectors. There are those with young families and those who are retired. Believing that all these people would bring different strengths and views to the conversations, it was of utmost importance to involve as many as possible. In addition to rural participants, participants from the urban municipalities were included to provide geographical diversity in the sample.

Exploring tools and resources that support leadership capacity for elected officials will not only benefit the Rural Municipality of Bone Creek, but also other municipalities in Saskatchewan. By sharing the outcomes of the research in this thesis, the hope is for other municipalities to be able to grow their own leadership capacity development.

It was anticipated that this research would support SARM in expanding their knowledge so they could identify and address opportunities not previously considered. When reflecting on the many opportunities and challenges I have experienced as CAO, especially with respect to resources and leadership, this project intrigued me. An example of one situation requiring effective and loving leadership took place in the summer of 2018.

Within a 3-month period, two elected officials had each lost a son to suicide, with one of those boys also being another councillor’s nephew. This tragedy directly touched the lives of three of the team at the Rural Municipality of Bone Creek. In speaking with a number of our other elected officials who were unable to suggest a process for moving forward that offered support, I suggested arranging a video conference call with a grief counsellor from Ottawa and the entire council and management team, a service provided by SARM, prior to the commencement of the next regular meeting of council. Prior to arranging this, there were conversations with all three elected officials impacted to confirm they would be comfortable with this process, expecting that it would likely include sharing of personal thoughts, feelings,
and experiences with the rest of their team. It understandably would be emotionally challenging and difficult. Even though the three impacted did not know what to expect, they agreed and voiced appreciation for the initiative and support.

The council strengthened their relationship the day of that video conference call, as a safe environment was created where they shared their thoughts, feelings, and fears, without judgement, and received overwhelming support. Each person actively listened while the others shared their stories. Once the three directly impacted had a chance to share, the others sitting around the table were given a chance to share their feelings, concerns, and condolences. The meaningful support the three grieving councillors received from the remainder of the group was remarkable. Starting that day, each member of council practiced both check-ins and check-outs, at each meeting, to share what they were feeling, the issues they were currently struggling with, and what was going well for them. This communication process informed the methodological stance I undertook later in this research project.

Unfortunately, three months later, a new member was elected to council, and at this point, the Reeve, being the head of council, chose to no longer perform these personal exchanges. This type of sharing was out of the ordinary for municipal government and was not received well by those who were not part of the initial process. The dynamics of a council expectedly shifts when there is a change to council. Depending upon the strengths or the personal intent of new council members, the council needs to shift to account for these new factors. Sometimes the team grows stronger however this was not the result brought by the addition of this new councillor. The bond the team had built, along with the support gained, was unfortunately lessened once this change to council took place. Some members reverted back to disrespectful conduct, meetings took longer, some council members were unprepared for meetings, responsibility for leading the meetings
was left to chance, and historical decisions were often questioned and criticized by those not part of the original decision.

Personally, it was rewarding to be part of that holistic collaborative team experience for the brief time it flourished. It felt like the team culture had improved substantially, and even when decisions were not unanimous, the members understood and supported each other and moved forward together, which had not always been the case. It was rewarding to be part of something unique and special, where members were supporting people on their team to heal, even if only so slightly. This is just one example of the importance of positive leadership, not only in everyday occurrences, but also when there are circumstances that are painful, uncomfortable, and difficult to confront.

**Systems Analysis**

Systems thinking is a process where, rather than focusing on individuals in a system, people consider how the actions they take impacts the entire system, creating shifts and movements on every agent around them. Senge (2006) provided that “systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively” (p. 7). People must recognize what is going on around them before they can take steps to change their actions or patterns. Stroh (2015) posited that “systems thinking can be viewed as the work of enabling people to make connections in service of the whole” (pp. 208–209). He further pointed out that “since we are a part of the system we seek to understand and influence, we need to cultivate a certain way of being and also learn new ways of doing things” (p. 205). Once people start looking through a systems lens and understand their part in each of the systems they are part of, they become more aware of their actions and, therefore, choose to act in a way that supports
the complete system. Stroh supported this idea when he stated, “The greatest opportunity for lasting change arises when all the players reflect on and shift their own intentions, assumptions, and behavior” (p. 18). Systems thinking for social change supported this research to foster participants to recognize their part in the system, leading to an organic and lasting change.

Upon review of the systems map (Appendix B), the multiple stakeholders and considerations at play in this system are apparent. Stroh (2015) explained, “The best way to optimize the system is to improve the relationships among its parts, not to optimize each part separately” (p. 35). He also offered: “Systems shift not as a result of making many changes, but by sustaining focus on only a few changes over time. These changes are called leverage points because the leverage limited resources for maximum long-term impact” (p. 147). The intention for this project was to look at the research through a systems thinking lens to initiate systems change.

In the systems map, the key stakeholders were identified as ratepayers, elected officials, staff, CAOs, SARM, provincial government, and other associations or groups. One important group not initially included in the systems map was the urban elected officials. Inclusion now is necessary, as there are many opportunities for collaboration of neighbouring municipalities, which would consist of both the urban and rural municipal governments. The agents initially identified on the systems map certainly were not the only agents in the system, but perhaps the most visible. The considerations, which were the elements that may have impact on the elected officials, were also identified in the map. To briefly explain a few of those elements, an exploration of larger farming operations is offered.

In earlier times, each farmer or rancher owned smaller areas of land. For the most part, there were farmyards every couple of miles. Due to various circumstances, the size of the farms
has grown for example, some farmers have sold land to neighbouring farmers and moved to urban centres, leaving fewer farmers farming the same amount of land in the rural municipalities. This has had an impact on municipal government, as there are fewer people eligible to run for office in the rural municipalities. Legislation also has had significant impact on the elected municipal officials, as there are rules and responsibilities set out for their positions. A further barrier lies in the language of legislation, as it is a language that most elected officials are not familiar with due to its legalese and complex terminology. CAOs are required to complete a university class on law and the interpretation of legislation. Therefore, they are often responsible to translate legislation for the elected officials, which adds another variable into what councillors understand or are provided for information. For example, if the CAO does not fully understand legislation, they will be less likely and able to attempt to explain it to their council.

The systems map included in Appendix B also includes leverage points that were identified as CAO training requirements, leadership training opportunities, eligibility of elected officials, elected official training opportunities, available resources and tools, willingness to learn, legislation pertaining to municipal government, and mental models. Many of these leverage points are also the key concepts identified in the system. These are the areas considered where possible change could happen, thus impacting the system. A pertinent leverage point missing in the original systems map relates to what participants referred to as time management. This was further identified in the time commitment of the elected officials to carry out their roles and responsibilities or to participate in anything other than the regular meetings of council, including conventions and learning opportunities. Considering the system as a whole provided a much richer experience for the researcher because it allowed a thorough consideration of municipal leadership in a larger context.
Overview of Thesis

There is a specific purpose of the remaining chapters in this thesis. Chapter two will include an exploration of what previous research has already discovered in areas similar to this topic. Chapter three of this thesis describes the context for this inquiry as action-oriented research, how participants were chosen, what type of data-generating methods were used, how the data were then analyzed, and what the ethical considerations included. Chapter four then explains the findings and conclusions of the inquiry and the scope and limitations of the inquiry. Chapter five moves into the recommendations and implications for SARM as well as for other parts of the system along with considerations for my role as the researcher and implications for further study. An additional chapter is included at the end of this thesis, chapter six, as a place to be creative and include my reflections on this inquiry as action learning at the personal (i.e., first person), the organization (i.e., second person), and the larger sphere of knowledge and education that is third-person research (Reason & Torbert, 2001, pp. 16–20). Having provided an overview of what one can expect in the subsequent chapters, it is important now to explore what researchers have already uncovered in their previous investigations through a look at existing literature.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two of a thesis concentrates on exploring relevant literature that supports one’s research. In this chapter, many topics are presented to support this research. The primary topic concentrates on the evolution of leadership theories, as it became clear from the data collected that participants seemed to hold one particular understanding of the concept of leadership. Next will be an exploration of modern relational theories of leadership, including shared leadership, inclusive leadership, and leadership as practice. The final topic presented is the appreciative process, which will look at exemplary leadership practices, specifically appreciative inquiry and appreciative leadership. This appreciative section is important, as it was the main Philosophical framework used throughout the entire research project.

A fundamental component of research includes consideration of existing scholarly and professional literature relevant to one’s own research. It is necessary to identify what has already been researched, what is missing, and how the current inquiry is able to fill those gaps. Rowley and Slack (2004) defined the literature review as “a summary of a subject field that supports the identification of specific research questions” (p. 31). The first subject field presented is the evolution of leadership.

Evolution of Leadership

The evolution of leadership entails a vast amount of literature for exploration. Respecting the scope of this project, a succinct summary will be introduced here. During a search executed in ProQuest and Google Scholar, few resources were found that simultaneously identified “leadership theories” and “elected officials” and “Canada.”. This search provided only eight articles (Alexis-Schultz, 2018; Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Johnson, 2018; Kukay et al., 2000; McIntosh, 2009; Muchiri et al., 2012; Riccucci, 2000; Wobschall, 2009), with most being studies
conducted in the United States and only one of those studies taking place in Canada (McIntosh, 2009). Unfortunately, the Canadian resource did not focus on leadership theories in relation to the elected officials, which was the focus of this research, but rather that of the CAOs. In order to complete a further search, one word, “theories,” was removed from the search topic.

Refining this literature search provided an additional four resources specific to Canada (Carbert & Black, 2003; Hubbard, 2001; Rosenbaum, 2003; Urbaniak, 2014). Though these resources did not cover leadership theories, they did focus on leadership styles such as mayoral leadership (Urbaniak, 2014), societal leadership (Hubbard, 2001), women politicians (Carbert & Black, 2003), and adapting to change (Rosenbaum, 2003). Although this search was not extensive, it is a subtle indication that further research is required on the subject of leadership theories and elected officials in Canada.

Many of the original thought leaders have identified different stages or eras of leadership theories and their evolution. “The leadership evolution can be summarized into four major eras in which each era represented by the prevailing leadership thinking at that moment in time but which may be less influential in this current business environment” (Daft & Lane, 2008, p. 36). A visual presentation of the four eras of leadership evolution is presented in Figure 1.

Literature pertaining to the evolution of leadership presents varying basic theories. Some sources listed as few as six theories, and others expanded the list to 10 or more (Agger-Gupta & Harris, 2017; Daft & Lane, 2018; Johns & Moser, 2001; Rubenstein, 2005; Wong et al., 2019; Zigarelli, 2013). For the purpose of this review, Daft and Lane (2018) and Wong et al. (2019) are the two most relevant and current literature sources used for discussion. Both include the great man theory, trait theory, behaviour theory, contingency theory, influence theory, and relational theory. Other theories that are less relevant, but also discussed include (a) skill-based and
visionary theories (Metcalf & Benn, 2013); (b) the style approach, path-goal theory, leader-member exchange theory, team leadership, psychodynamic approach, and leaders of leaders (Rubenstein, 2005); and (c) situational approach (Johns & Moser, 2001; Metcalf & Benn, 2013). The current exploration of the evolution of leadership begins with the “Great Man Theory” (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019; Zigarelli, 2013).

Figure 1. The four eras of leadership evolution showing the transitions from individual leadership focus to organizational leadership focus and back as well as how leadership has been considered in both stable and turbulent times.

Note: Adapted from Daft and Lane (2018, p. 19).
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Great Man Theory

Many scholars have indicated the evolution of leadership began with the “Great Man Theory” (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019; Zigarelli, 2013), while others reasoned otherwise. Spector (2016) asserted, “The Great Man formulation is less a theory than a statement of faith” (p. 251). During this initial theoretical stage or era, leaders were predominantly male, white, and born with the traits and abilities that gave them power and influence to lead on their own (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019). These great men were often regarded as heroes. Agger-Gupta and Harris (2017) shared, “The turn from heroic leadership is simultaneously the turn toward inclusion as a core part of leadership” (p. 308). Nevertheless, there have been many theories adopted between the great man theory to that of relational leadership theory, which is the theory more practiced today. The trait theory emerged subsequent to the great man theory.

Trait Theory

The great man theory and the trait theory are regarded to be in leadership era one (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019). During the time of the great man theory, people studied and contemplated the qualities of those great men, which introduced trait theory (Metcalf & Benn, 2013; Wong et al., 2019). In studying the great man theory, focus turned towards determining leadership traits. Research indicated that “in its pure form the trait approach grew out of the ‘great man’ theory, which is probably the oldest conception about the basis for leadership” (Hollander, 2009, p. 24) and “possibly the most researched area of leadership is the traits approach” (Yukl, 2003, p. 2). The evolution of leadership theory suggested that great leaders possessed certain traits, all of which could be learned (Daft & Lane, 2018; Johns & Moser, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Rubenstein, 2005; Wong et al., 2019). Recognizing this, an interesting point on learning leadership skills was offered by Kouzes and Posner (2017):
Not everyone wants to learn it, and not all those who learn about leadership master it … becoming the very best requires a strong belief that you can learn and grow, an intense aspiration to excel, the determination to challenge yourself constantly, the recognition that you must engage the support of others, and the devotion to practice deliberately. (p. 302)

Although leadership traits can be learned, this does not guarantee one will master those traits.

During this era, it was believed good leaders possessed certain qualities and traits, such as confidence, integrity, connection, resilience, and aspiration (Jackson & Parry, 2011), and others identified those traits as being honest, competent, inspiring, and forward looking (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). While strong leadership has been discussed, the literature was not able to provide an exact list of traits guaranteed to produce a great leader. With that being said, research has continued to explore and consider what that list may look like (Daft & Lane, 2018). Kouzes and Posner (2017) dispelled this theory: “Leadership is not some mystical quality that only a few people have and everyone else doesn’t. Leadership is not preordained. It is not a gene, and it is not a trait” (p. 301). In the evolution from trait theory, the transition considered the behaviours of successful leaders.

**Behaviour Theory**

Era two began when organizations grew to a point of being too large for one single leader. This era includes behaviour theory and contingency theory (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019). Literature suggested that when traits could not be accurately identified, researchers started pondering instead what great leaders do (Daft & Lane, 2018; Johns & Moser, 2001; Rubenstein, 2005; Wong et al., 2019; Yukl, 2003). It was important during these times to look at the behaviours of leaders. This is still being considered today, as Kouzes and Posner (2017)
recently asserted, “In these turbulent times, the world needs more people who believe they can make a difference and who are willing to act on that belief” (p. 296).

Much literature advocated the importance of the leader as self and that there needs to be a focus on improving oneself to become a great leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Senge, 2006; Storey, 2011). As noted in Wong et al.’s (2019) overview of leadership, “leadership behavior can be learned and, hence it is accessible to everyone” (p. 35). This was the beginning of an understanding that leaders are not born and can be developed. The next theory is one that looks more at what is happening rather than who is leading.

**Contingency Theory**

Contingency theory, sometimes also referred to as situational theory, is a theory that suggests leadership is dependent on an analysis of the situation at hand. In a report exploring challenges of government leaders, Rosenbaum (2003) argued that contingency theory and situational theory are similar because “leadership situations can be differentiated into three distinct groupings; (1) leader-member relations; (2) task structure; and (3) position power” (p. 41), and situations have no grouping as such. Centering on contingency theory, research showed leaders can adapt their behaviours and styles to suit a situation to improve the effectiveness of their leadership (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019). This theory emphasizes that all elements of the situation must be taken into consideration to determine how to most effectively move forward and it looks at all parts of the system (Daft & Lane, 2018; Johns & Moser, 2001). This moves into the next stage, which focusses on the interactions between leaders and followers.
Influence Theory

The influence theory appears to be the last to surmise that leadership is a relationship between the leader and their follower(s) and is the only theory in era three. In this era, life became chaotic and new approaches were sought to help organizations grow and prosper (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019). Influence theory resorts slightly back to the traits theory and suggests that leaders are able to influence others to follow them (Daft & Lane, 2018; Johns & Moser, 2001). The influence theory suggests that the leader creates a vision along with the culture and values to lead the followers towards that vision (Daft & Lane, 2018; Johns & Moser, 2001). Building upon both the traits and behaviour theories, leaders had to possess certain qualities and act a certain way to create the influence desired to have others willingly follow them. The last theory explored is the most current and modern theory presently practiced, and perhaps the most complex, as it deals with how people interact with others.

Relational Theories

Stepping into era four, “the era of digital information age” (Wong et al., 2019, p. 37), the current theory being exercised today is the relational theories and is presently the area of focused study in leadership at this time. Wong et al. (2019) suggested that a relational approach “focuses on the relational process that allows a meaningful engagement among all the participants in the workplace settings and everyone contributes to achieve the desirable organization outcome or vision” (p. 36). Relational theories focus on how people work and interact with each other. An explanation recently offered that “rather than being seen as something a leader does to a follower, leadership is viewed as a relational process that meaningfully engages all participants and enables each person to contribute to achieving the vision” (Daft & Lane, 2018, p. 19). In consideration of what needs to take place within relational theories, the emphasis is on the
behaviours of the leader, where “leaders execute a vision by motivating, guiding, inspiring,
listening, persuading—and, most crucially, through creating resonance” (Goleman et al., 2013,
p. 27). It is understandable that leadership theories blend both past and current theories and
practices.

Relational theories are where the act of leadership is between all involved, including both
leaders and followers, and are not concerned with the organizational positions of the participants
(Hollander, 2009; Nasmyth, 2014; Jackson & Parry, 2011). It is where all are encouraged to
contribute so that leadership is a joint effort. For clarification Kouzes and Posner (2017)
emphasized “leadership is about relationships, about credibility, about passion and conviction,
and ultimately about what you do” (p. 295). In explaining how relational theories benefit
organizations, Agger-Gupta and Harris (2017) summarized, “This relational work entails leaders
engaging others to work toward a common purpose, facilitating inclusive processes, and
removing barriers” (p. 314). Theories of relational leadership will be the next topic explored.

Theories of Relational Leadership

Within relational theories, three have multiple benefits to municipal government, among
other organizations, if implemented, including (a) shared leadership, (b) inclusive leadership, and
(c) leadership as practice. Each theory is detailed in this section.

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership is not a new topic of discussion; however, the lack of literature
suggests that it has not been contemplated as a possibility within Canadian municipal
governments. Many scholars have asserted the value of everyone contributing within a shared
leadership role, making it possible to achieve something greater (Jackson & Parry, 2011;
Nasmyth, 2014; Raelin, 2003; Wheatley, 2005), where others have offered similar styles or
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concepts such as transformational leadership or collaborative agency. When referring to collaborative agency, Raelin (2016) stated, “Together we seek to create an enterprise that is bigger than what any one of us could have created on our own” (p. 22), supporting the idea of co-creating wonderful leadership opportunities.

Jenkyns (2016) touched on shared leadership as a possibility for organizations and stated, “Reducing hierarchical influence through shared leadership, safe communication, collaboration, and team cohesiveness may lead to enhanced collective experiences” (p. 34). In his dissertation, McIntosh (2009) focused on leadership styles of CAOs, speaking more of situational leadership rather than drilling down to shared leadership. He offered: “Many research efforts acknowledge the fallacy of the political/administrative dichotomy, but then suggest how to bring day-to-day realities in line with this ideal instead of pursuing a collaborative approach that deals with the real strategic context” (p. 43).

Focussing on sharing responsibilities, Whitney et al. (2010) reported on what was desired: “They want leadership teams that espouse, live, and lead with a shared set of values, a shared leadership style, and a shared approach to human development and change” (p. 162). In support of this, Harris and Agger-Gupta (2015) advocated that “the role of the leader is to influence and listen deeply, to engage others in creating a shared vision, and to harness the hearts and minds of the people in an organization in forging new directions” (p. 2). There are definite benefits to shared leadership as a foundation; however, to kick it up a notch, one could also adopt some concepts that are part of an inclusive leadership style.

Inclusive Leadership

One of the more recent relational theories of leadership practiced today is inclusive leadership. “Professor Edwin Hollander was the first person to coin the phrase inclusive
leadership and define the role of inclusive leadership in the development of effective leaders” (Chin et al., 2017, pp. 236–237). Many scholars offered their own suggestions of inclusive leadership, summarized as what many can accomplish by working together where everyone is treated equally no matter where they fit in the organization (Agger-Gupta & Harris, 2017; Blessinger, 2016; Chin et al., 2017; Hollander, 2009; Siegel, 2010). While offering that Helgesen was the first to share case studies in inclusive leadership in 1995, Agger-Gupta and Harris (2017) shared an excellent definition: “Inclusion is about sharing ownership of issues, opportunities, and processes, and includes a shared implementation of cocreated solutions” (p. 307).

Inclusive leadership considers helping and involving others. Chin et al. (2017) purported that “inclusive leaders empower those under their command and facilitate the team’s mission success” (p. 234). Research on inclusion has uncovered that people feel included when they have “a sense of uniqueness … [and] a sense of belonging” (Nugent et al., 2016, p. 2; see also Prime & Salib, 2014). Chin et al. (2017) echoed this claim: “Researchers have shown that people who are valued for their unique talents and have a voice in decision making feel valued as members of the team” (p. 239). Endorsing this perspective, Prime and Salib (2014) emphasized, “When employees feel unique—recognized for their differences—and feel a sense of belonging based on sharing common attributes and goals with their peers, organizations best increase the odds of benefiting from workforce diversity” (p. 6). People will feel included if they are treated with “respect, dignity, collegiality, and kindness” (Nugent et al., 2016, p. 4). Inclusive leadership is also about having a connection to others (Nugent et al., 2016; Wheatley, 2005) where the leader is more focused on the needs of others than on their own, being more of a servant leadership style (Jackson & Parry, 2011; Prime & Salib, 2014). Building the concept of team and inclusion with employees contributes to a sense of uniqueness and belongingness as a part of the process.
In inclusive leadership, leaders support and encourage others to be a part of a process, which “invites the ideas, thoughts, and feelings of diverse people; and that recognizes and affirms the good work of many different people” (Whitney et al., 2010, p. 91). To create this type of culture, leaders need to “value the diversity of talents, experiences, and identities that employees bring” (Prime & Salib, 2014, p. 6). When leaders include stakeholders at the table or in the game, it will lead to improved outcomes and results. It is likely the successes would increase through inclusion, building buy-in and strengthening a cohesive voice.

There are many other benefits of inclusive leadership, particularly for organizations. Chin et al. (2017) attested that “becoming an inclusive leader paves the path for building teams that will work together more efficiently and effectively” (p. 235). Specific to municipal government, Rusnak (2005) offered, “In this fast paced world it is absolutely imperative to practice inclusive leadership if government is going to attract and retain top-notch people” (p. 30). Inclusion of all people increases the likelihood of stronger leadership. Agger-Gupta and Harris (2017) described inclusive leadership as “creating contexts that welcome the wisdom and engagement of all stakeholders, and away from autocratic, top-down direction” (p. 308). Inclusive leadership is not only practiced in work environments, but also part of self-care; “being inclusive is a state of mind—a critical and reflective one” (Prime et al., 2012, p. 6). Personal reflection is a huge part of leadership, which is indicated by how one shows up in the world and is part of leadership as practice.

Leadership as Practice

Leadership as practice is also a relational theory that is quite modern and being used in today’s organizations. Raelin (2003) described leaderful practice that “offers a true mutual model
that transforms leadership from an individual property into a new paradigm that redefines leadership as a collective practice” (p. 5). He further explained his theory as the conception of leadership as occurring as a practice rather than residing in the traits or behaviors of particular individuals. . . . Leadership-as-practice is less about what one person thinks or does and more about what people may accomplish together. (Raelin, 2016, p. 1)

He also described, “The practice view may consequently upend our traditional views of leadership because it does not rely on the attributes of individuals, nor does it focus on the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers” (p. 3). This progression has resulted in today’s leadership practices. Regardless of which relational leadership theory or style is practiced, it is imperative that leadership is approached with appreciation and kindness.

**Appreciative Process**

The issues leaders are faced with in today’s world require strong leadership. There are some wicked problems society is faced with, and more will likely rear their heads in the future, which will require strong leaders who are equipped to address them. With inclusive leadership, where leadership is a practice in which everyone contributes, there must be a certain empathy and patience embedded in the process. People generally are doing the best they can, and those sharing this leadership experience must have that belief. Leaders need to be patient with themselves, realizing they too are doing the best they can in their leadership practices.

Through an appreciative process where the focus is on the desired outcome, leaders practice seeing the best of any situation and visualizing what is possible (Bushe, 2001; McArthur-Blair & Cockell, 2018). Whitney et al. (2010) described how an appreciative process works: “Appreciative leaders use inquiry to engage people’s hearts and minds, to draw out and
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listen to their innovative ideas, and to give them confidence to trust their own intuition and take risks for a better future” (p. 44). Applying an appreciative perspective to leadership practices could filter down into everything one does and every decision one makes. An exploration of how to accomplish this is part of leadership practices, which will be considered further in the following paragraphs.

**Leadership Practices**

To practice an appreciative perspective, the leader needs to look inward and focus on improving themselves in order to become the best leader they can be (Chin et al., 2017; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; McArthur-Blair & Cockell, 2018; Senge, 2006). Kouzes and Posner (2017) specified that “the instrument of leadership is the self, and mastery of the art of leadership comes from mastery of the self” (p. 308). There are some key practices that will provide for great leadership.

Walking the walk and talking the talk is one of the behaviors often identified in what others consider good leadership. Many authors spoke in regard to modelling the way and leading by example. While considering modelling the way, Kouzes and Posner (2017) offered five exemplary leadership practices as being “model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart” (p. 20). Some literature also speaks empathically about leading from the heart. Supporting this when considering inclusive leadership, Agger-Gupta and Harris (2017) advocated that inclusive leaders “harness the hearts and minds of all organizational members, forging new directions by listening deeply, understanding and engaging others in dialogue to create shared meanings” (p. 308). In a personal voice, this is explained as leading with love. It is looking at the world, our colleagues, neighbours, family, and friends always in an appreciative way.
Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry considers how one interacts with themselves, others, and the world around them. It not only is a practice of asking questions, but also is a point of view or a way of being (Bushe, 2012; McArthur-Blair & Cockell, 2018). Putting a positive spin on it, McArthur-Blair and Cockell (2018) asserted, “Believing in appreciative inquiry as a way of being and doing influences people to focus on what is working well in order to build their futures on that” (pp. 34–35). One researcher offered appreciative inquiry as “taking some type of action to effect some type of positive change in the world” (Bishop, 2017, 4:21). Looking for the positive and imagining the best in people, situations, and organizations is a fundamental aspect of appreciative inquiry (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Kotellos et al., 2005; McArthur-Blair & Cockell, 2018; Stavros & Torres, 2018). Watkins et al. (2011) offered a creative explanation:

Appreciative Inquiry is, essentially, a collaborative and highly participative, system wide approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the “life-giving forces” that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic and organizational terms. It is a journey during which profound knowledge of a human system as its moments of wonder is uncovered and used to co-construct the best and highest future of that state. (p. 22)

Working collaboratively, looking for what is working well, and then finding ways to implement those same practices in the future is the essence of appreciative inquiry.

Today’s buzz words include concepts of gratitude and positivity, which are consistent with the appreciate perspective offered in this section. This again connects back to Kouzes and Posner’s (2017, p. 12) five leadership practices, where leaders “encourage the heart.” When
speaking on appreciative inquiry, Bushe (2001) explained, “For myself, it means that before I ask a question or make a statement, I locate my consciousness in my heart region and notice how my thoughts and questions are shaped and let those be what I say” (p. 3). Appreciative inquiry is not only what we do for and with others, but also with ourselves.

Organizations are often looking to their leadership to create change. McArthur-Blair and Cockell (2018) offered that “change begins because the question being asked ignites ideas and possibilities” (p. 29). Chevalier and Buckles (2013) purported,

[Appreciative Inquiry] starts with the assumption that organizational change towards enhanced performance hinges on people’s ability to change gears from a problem finding and solving mindset to reflection on group life that emphasized stories of success, positive experiences and dreams, relations of trust, existing assets and opportunities for effective change. (p. 15)

Focusing on how simply changing one’s questions can bring about impactful change, both for individuals as well as organizations, is essential to growth and development. Further, even the act of asking a question brings about change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) offered: “Our experience suggests that the more positive the focus of the change effort, the stronger the attraction to participate and the more likely people are to get involved and stay involved” (p. 45). This is an important aspect to change management, which is a fundamental component of leadership.

One of the main focuses of appreciative inquiry as a method is in how questions are asked. In addition to this, there exists a principle created by one of the original voices of appreciative inquiry called the simultaneity principal, which purports that change happens as soon as the question is asked. Explaining this principle, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) wrote,
Inquiry and change are not separate moments but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention. The seeds of change—the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future—are implicit in the first question we ask. (p. 50)

Supporting this, Orr and Cleveland-Innes (2015) reiterated, “The questions we ask and the changes we make are not separate moments but are considered to be simultaneous” (p. 236). This begins to show the importance of framing questions in an appreciative way.

This demonstrates the importance of the questions asked as well as the simplicity of change by purely asking a question. An additional author emphasized, “A world of questions is a world of possibility. Questions open our minds, connect us to each other, and share outmoded paradigms” (Adams, 2016, p. 7). In some of his earlier writings, Bushe (2001) attested, “The change theory is: If you change the stories you change the inner dialogue. Nothing the ‘rational mind’ decides it wants will actually happen if the ‘inner dialogue’ is resistant to it” (p. 4). This represents the constructionist principle of appreciative inquiry. One’s self-talk is very important to the future outcomes of one’s life. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) shared:

Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about, and this propensity is strongest and most sustainable when the means and ends of inquiry are positively correlated. The single most important action a group can take to liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future is to make the positive core the common explicit property of all. (p. 9)

This quote reflects both the anticipatory and the positive principle of Appreciative Inquiry. The remaining two principles of appreciative inquiry include the simultaneity principle and the poetic
principle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Positivity and appreciation are two absolute musts in an appreciative process.

**Appreciative Leadership**

Abundant literature focused on appreciative leadership, which positively concentrates on people and their relationships. Bushe (2005) asserted, “Appreciative leaders can create cultures of continuous improvement and organizations where people feel pride in their work and committed to their organizations” (p. 700). The leader needs to focus inward on their thoughts.

Appreciative leaders concentrate on positive situations, in which they aspire to have more of, where positive change can happen (Bushe, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; McArthur-Blair & Cockell, 2018). In their explanation, Orr and Clevlenad-Innes (2015) offered, “An Appreciative Leader encourages positive inquiry and an imagery which leads to new, even multiple, future realities” (p. 237). To summarize in a poetic and descriptive way, Whitney et al. (2010) identified:

Appreciative leaders hold each and every person in positive regard. They look through appreciative eyes to see the best of people, no matter their age, gender, race, religion, or culture—even education or experience. They believe that everyone has positive potential—a positive core of strengths and a passionate calling to be fulfilled—and they seek to bring that forward and nurture it. (p. 7)

An additional description of this was offered by Thatchenkery and Metzker (2006) when they wrote about seeing the mighty oak in the acorn. They wrote about appreciative intelligence as being “the ability to reframe a given situation, to appreciate its positive aspects, and to see how the future unfolds from the generative aspects of the current situation” (p. 6). Imagine what might transpire if an appreciative perspective was practiced with inclusive leadership.
Coaching

To conclude this section on appreciative process, an exploration of coaching will transpire. Inclusive practice, where everyone is included to solve issues, enhance services, and collaborate would also benefit from including a coaching type of model. Coaching includes when leaders ask their team members for their thoughts on solving problems and discovering possibilities and best practices moving forward, rather than telling their people what to do and how to do it. Kouzes and Posner (2017) offered, “Exemplary leaders use questions to help people think on their own, and actively coach people on how to be at their best” (p. 243). Coaching is a practice of inclusivity and draws out ideas and stories from everyone sitting around the table or who are on the team.

Empowering Others

During the exploration of relational leadership, another theme discovered was the importance of empowering others to lead. Interestingly enough, this appears to have been explored more recently, perhaps a newer concept, as the sources used were all within the last nine years. Because organizations are complex entities, it is beneficial to encourage people and allow them to lead themselves and others (Brown, 2018; Jackson & Parry, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Rusnak (2005) stressed, “When people feel empowered, their self-worth, confidence, competence, self-determination and passion grow” (p. 29). In additional to empowerment, love has been brought into the leadership mix. In her recent book, Brown (2018) reflected on this when she stated,

From corporations, nonprofits, and public sector organizations to governments, activist groups, schools, and faith communities, we desperately need more leaders who are committed to courageous, wholehearted leadership and who are self-aware enough to lead from their hearts, rather than unevolved leaders who lead from hurt and fear. (p. 4)
By introducing the concept of leading with love into any relational leadership practice in municipal government, a new and dynamic form of governance could emerge.

**Further Research Required**

While recent studies on municipal government and leadership exist, there was very little regarding a shared responsibility for leadership or opportunity between elected officials and CAOs, indicating further research would be beneficial. O’Flynn and Mau (2014) suggested that leadership training and development also require further research. Adding to the many studies regarding leadership styles of CAOs (McIntosh, 2009; O’Flynn & Mau, 2014; Siegel, 2010) that have focused on how the existing leadership can be strengthened, this project further supports how shared or inclusive leadership in municipal government is a style worthy of further consideration.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, many concepts were explored. The literature review began with a discovery of the evolution of leadership, including the great man theory, trait theory, behaviour theory, contingency theory, influence theory, and concluded with relational theories. Next, an extensive consideration was given to three relational theories of leadership, including shared leadership, inclusive leadership, and leadership as practice. The final topic in the literature review regarded an appreciative process. Leadership practices, appreciative inquiry, appreciative leadership, coaching, and empowering others were looked at in this section. The chapter ended with an examination of where further research is required. The methodology employed for this research project will be provided in the next chapter.
Chapter Three: Methodology

How the study was conducted, with whom, and why are explored in this chapter. First, the methodology used in this study is explained, followed by a brief description of action research and engagement. The people involved, including the participants and the inquiry team, are explained next. How the study was carried out and how the information was analyzed is then presented. To conclude, information will be provided on ethical implications, proposed outcomes, and how this study contributes to the organization in the future. To begin, a definition of the methodology used is offered.

Methodology

Defining methodology was challenging to pinpoint and give an exact title or name to. Wilson (2001) described methodology as being “how you are going to use your way of thinking (your epistemology) to gain more knowledge about your reality” (p. 175). In addition to the researcher’s thinking to gain more knowledge, “a methodology is, most simply, a strategy or plan for how a study will be executed” (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 7). Alisa Harrison, faculty member, expressed that researchers already know how they will carry out research projects, how they will collect data, and what would be important during the process (Personal communications, July 12, 2019). The researcher’s way of thinking and being guide them to their methodology, which aligns with their truth and reality. The methodology chosen for this research was an action-orientated participatory inquiry using an appreciative lens.

Participants were included from different areas of municipal government to ensure a diversity of voices were heard, which led to community-based research. Hall et al. (2014) explained that community-based research is impactful because “action-oriented, community-centred, and participatory approaches to research have been characterized as natural ways that
people organize and work together to solve pressing issues affecting their communities” (p. 12). This methodology was used because of the desire to explore the natural ways of working with people to create solutions. Hall et al. also offered that “participatory means that the intended beneficiaries of the research … have significant control over some if not all parts of the research process: from problem definition, to research design, data collection, representation, and dissemination of findings” (p. 8); however, they cautioned that “not everyone can be involved in all parts of the research at all times” (p. 8). Understandably, working with members from 296 municipalities across the province of Saskatchewan involved many possible participants. This made it virtually impossible to include everyone in all stages of the research process; however, the intentions were to include as many participants in as much of the research process as possible.

Working with and learning from all participants who contributed to the different stages of the study was a valuable experience. Rowe et al. (2013) stated,

Employees who participate in dialogue and deliberations to share perspectives about a change initiative experience deeper engagement and, therefore, are more open to accept other points of view, change their own understanding, form new ideas and solutions and adopt new practices related to the change initiative. (p. 15)

When participants are included in the change process, it provides opportunities to make changes within the system. Stroh (2015) offered that “learning from a diverse group of stakeholders not only builds understanding but also develops the relationship required to shift how the system operates” (p. 120). Working with elected officials, CAOs, and other key stakeholders ensured all agents in the system were present and being heard. Hall et al. (2014) further added an appreciative stance, where “the purpose of community-based research is not simply to document
the world’s injustices, but to transform them” (p. 22). While using the appreciative stance, four phases of the Appreciative process were considered including discovery, dreaming, design, and destiny (Watkins et al., 2011). The phases include the discovery phase, which took place in the collection of data; the dreaming phase, which is where the analysis took place imagining what could be; the design phase being where recommendations were offered; and then ending with the destiny phase. This phase concentrates more on what the organizational partner chooses to do with the information collected and offered from this thesis and is mostly out of the control of the researcher. Collaboration with the organizational partner happened through updates during the entire research process, and when possible, information was shared regarding progress in the study with those participants involved.

Understanding Action Research and Engagement

A concrete understanding of action research through engagement is required for a successful action oriented thesis project. Greenwood and Levin (2007) defined action research as “a continuous and participative learning process, not as a form of short-term intervention, … [where] the change process has an open starting point and often no absolute ending point” (p. 17). The action research completed within this study is only the first cycle of this action research engagement. The following cycles will be dependant on the partner organization.

An engaged action-oriented approach to research means that the participants have the desire to voluntarily contribute to the change process, recognizing that they are all agents in the system. Coghlan (2019) provided:

Action research is defined as a procedure in which the participants of a social system are involved in a data collection process about themselves, and utilize the data that they have
generated to review the facts about themselves in order to take some form of remedial or developmental action. (p. 59)

Coghlan further offered, “Action research builds on the past, takes place in the present with a view to shaping the future” (p. 6). In the action research process, the researcher works with the participants to complete an inquiry of a specific question or issue in hopes of finding new ways of being and doing that will improve both the individuals and the organization. Gergen and Gergen (2015) provided: “A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being ... of human persons and communities” (p. 6). Action research is inclusive of all participants, the organization, and the community being studied. Hall et al. (2014) wrote, “An orientation to action means that the researchers, whether as members of the community or outsiders, commit to supporting the community in improving conditions in some way” (p. 8). The participants of this study were committed to improving the leadership in municipal government.

Being that engagement is one of the main focuses of an action oriented research project, discovering ways to promote engagement would improve the process. Rowe et al. (2013) focused on the theme of action research engagement and shared that:

ARE [action research engagement] is a cyclical process of inquiry, dialogue and deliberation that aims to lead organizational members to: shift in attitudes toward change; open understanding of different points of view on issues and opportunities for change; identify potential approaches to challenges and barriers; generate vision/goals, strategies and actions; and lead to viable action plans for sustainable change. (p. 6)

Accepting that this project would not realize a complete cycle where action or structural change would occur, since the researcher only provides the findings, conclusions, and recommendations
and then the organization is in control of the change process, action research engagement was the umbrella research method employed (see Appendix C for diagram).

A meaningful element in creating an engaged research project is the relationships that either exist or will be created. Steier et al. (2015) explained, “What is clear is that the culture of inquiry that is action research, whatever form it takes, requires attention to the relationships that allow it to unfold” (p. 211). Once a trusting relationship was formed, participants were enthusiastic to engage and collaborate which resulted in the creation of useful findings and recommended actions to deal with the topic being examined. Upon presentation of the findings to the partner organization, attention will be required to implement any changes, giving strength to the change process.

Central within the research epistemology was appreciative inquiry and was included within this research methodology. Bushe (2005) described appreciative inquiry as being “a research method [that] is not interested in discovering what is but in allowing a collective to uncover what could be” (p. 14). The researcher’s holistic way of being is grounded in appreciative inquiry, but it did not limit the ability to consider varying lenses through this research. A systems thinking lens was used as well as a lens of personal experiences. McArthur-Blair and Cockell (2018) explained appreciative inquiry: “Appreciative inquiry includes tools and processes for positive change and is also a way of being in the world” (p. 5). Bushe further explained the premise is that by using appreciative inquiry, more is gained from the interaction, the stories, and the discussions than if they just came up with new ideas or plans (p. 14). The stories from the participants provided valuable data for the current inquiry. All elements of the research process were completed in an appreciative and caring way, including how the
participants were chosen, the design of the questions, the methods used, and how the data were analysed and then presented back to SARM as findings and recommendations.

**Data Collection Methods**

Numerous methods are available to collect data for a research project. To include many participants at once, often a large group method is used such as the World Café described in this section. Another useful method often used to collect data is the interview. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this project to allow for the participants to offer stories of leadership and, in turn, also allow for questions from the researcher that dug deeper into those stories. The combination of these two methods created an opportunity that allowed participants to have a collective voice as well as their own individual voice. An exploration of the World Café is presented first, as it was the first method employed.

**World Café**

This large-group method, which was first developed by Brown and Isaacs starting in 1995 (Brown et al., 2005), was chosen because most elected officials enjoy sitting in the café while sharing stories and ideas with their neighbours and friends. By recreating this environment, the hope was to allow for collaboration and the creation of powerful conversations (Senge, 2006). Senge (2006) wrote, “Few, if any, forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision” (p. 192). Bringing all the participants to the same conversation enabled the design of a shared vision.

This large-group method allowed for the diversity of voices to collaborate and explore possibilities that would improve municipal leadership. Coghlan (2019) offered: “With the whole system in the room, ... the past can be reviewed, the present assessed and the future planned” (p. 157). Watkins et al. (2011) further supported this and said, “By far the strongest and most
effective way to imagine our own future is to engage in continuous dialogue and exploration from an open and curious mindset” (p. 10). The World Café simulated that familiar environment, allowing participants to comfortably share authentic experiences, opinions, and concerns in small and comfortable groups.

The participants in this method were from across Saskatchewan and often found they were at a table with someone they had collaborated with in the past. Supporting the importance of this environment, Steier et al. (2015) shared that “the metaphor of the cafe recalled for us the importance of people and relationships as a key to seeking and seeing new connections” (p. 213). Stroh (2015) shared that “new conversations are designed to deepen awareness, cultivate acceptance, and develop new alternatives” (p. 129). In building connections through these conversations, the participants were able to share their own ideas and experiences and collaborate with the others to discover new ideas and initiatives to improve how they lead together.

One possible projected barrier of this method was that participants could confirm their attendance, but in the end choose not to attend, resulting in unpredictable participant numbers. To mitigate the potential barrier, the importance of their attendance at this event was stressed in each conversation with them. In the end, two individuals cancelled the morning of the event, but this did not hinder the process, and the impact was minimal. A second matter that required attention was the potential for power-over concerns, where participants might be engaged with those they report to, such as CAOs who were participating in the World Café along with one or more of their elected officials. To minimize any potential for power-over issues, participants were asked to self-organize into small groups where there was no one to whom they directly reported or who directly reported to them. There were four participants that fell into this
category. There were enough tables to choose from which allowed participants to easily move around without being seated with other participants from their same organization.

Strong themes arose from the World Café through the co-generation of collective wisdom of the participants thus informing the questions for the interview data generation method. The World Café contributed to a partial completion of the action research enquiry cycle through the data generation, reframing issues, and evaluating how to best engage the stakeholders in the second research method (Rowe et al., 2013), comprised of semi-structured interviews.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews are an effective method to gather information regarding the present state. Conveniently, interviews can be conducted in person, over the phone, or using an online platform such as Zoom, being a method that can be used no matter where the participant resides. Stroh (2015) shared, “Interviews, whether one-on-one or in small focus groups, are preferable to surveys because they enable you to uncover not only what people think but also the reasoning that leads them to their conclusions” (p. 92). This method created opportunities to dig deeper by asking further questions, especially when clarification was required. A sample size was selected, and an indicator that enough interviews had been completed was that themes started to repeat themselves, signifying data saturation had been reached (Saldana & Omasta, 2017). Whether the interview was held in person or via conference call, a relationship between the participant and the researcher was definitely formed, which was fundamental to both community-based research (Hall et al., 2014) and appreciative inquiry (Bushe, 2005).

The interview process was an engaged process that allowed the generation of data, with one significant consideration being the large amount of data gathered and the extensive amount of time required for both transcribing and analyzing. Having said this, the process proved to be
both rich and rewarding. During the collection of data from both methods, there were conversations with the partner as well as the inquiry team on what the implications of the finding from these methods revealed. This process was part of the discovery phase of appreciative inquiry.

**Project Participants**

There are 296 rural municipalities in Saskatchewan, each having a reeve and usually between six and eight councillors and one CAO. The elected official sample group comprised approximately 2,400 eligible participants and many others that could be considered key stakeholders along with the 280 or more CAOs. Thirty participants were included in the World Café which were selected from each of the three sample groups: (a) elected officials, (b) CAOs, and (c) other key stakeholders. The researcher, being in the industry for 15 years, was able to use personal connections to select potential participants that represented all the desired groups providing diversity. Ten participants were EOs, thirteen were COAs, and seven were other key stakeholders. There were 15 men and 15 women. Three of the 30 participants represented the urban allies. The other key stakeholders consisted of representatives from the Economic Development sector, a provincial government employee that has regular dealings with rural municipal leaders, an educator that supplies training to both EOs and CAOs, and a municipal software provider. Due to the scope of this thesis project, only three individuals in each of these sample groups were interviewed. Steier et al. (2015) offered that “diversity among the participants is important—the more diverse the group is the more perspectives are possible” (p. 217). To support this, representatives from backgrounds of farming, ranching, oil and gas, and other experiences were selected, both those who identified as men and as women, some newly elected to council or new to the field of administration and others with many years of
knowledge and experience. Participants were chosen from all regions of the province, with differing areas of expertise, resulting in different points of view. The diversity of voices was necessary to produce the best outcomes. Representatives from urban municipalities were necessary inclusions, as collaboration between all municipal governments, especially the ones that neighbour the rural municipalities and are their main trading centres, are beneficial.

 Targeting 30 to 35 participants resulted in 30 participants for the World Café. This number allowed the participants to move freely between the seven tables avoiding repetition. It was also a small enough group to build comfort and confidence of the participants who may not have been as comfortable sharing in a larger group setting. As previously stated, three participants from each sample group were interviewed, leading to sufficient data generation. Through personal relationships, potential participants were chosen that would bring a diversity of voices to the inquiry. The data generated through both the interviews and the World Café resulted in giving the research proper crystallization. Tracy (2010) explained crystallization as being “the practice of using multiple data sources, resources and lenses” (p. 843). Themes were soon repeated in the interview process as well as a few useful outliers, which will be discussed further in chapter four.

**Inquiry Team**

The inquiry team for this study consisted of four peers from my master’s program and two colleagues whom I collaborate with regularly. The cohort members were committed to assisting with inquiry questions, peer reviewing of chapters, and any other support required, including discussions about personal challenges, growth, and discoveries. It was important to include the cohort members, as they spoke the same academic language and understood the concepts, emotions, challenges, and growth involved in such an intense study. Additionally, two
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colleagues helped to facilitate the World Café, one as a table host and the other handled the registration of participants, and both helped with set up and welcoming the participants. The agreement for members of the inquiry team is provided in Appendix D.

**Study Conduct**

Throughout the research process, time was taken daily to personally reflect and journal, which helped to notice what was happening within the project and the ensuing personal growth. Coghlan (2019) explained that keeping a learning journal “seeks to capture how you try to: be attentive to what is going on around you, be intelligent in your understanding, be reasonable in your judgements and responsible in your actions” (p. 43). One benefit of this process was personal learning and growth, which is elaborated on in chapter six.

Once the research proposal and the ethics application were approved, planning and organizing of the World Café began. The date was previously set to coincide with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) mid-term convention, which was scheduled within only 13 days of receiving ethics approval. An additional life event took place and had severe repercussions on the ability to dedicate time, energy, and focus during this 13-day period being the passing of the researcher’s mother. Time was limited where participants could be invited to the World Café, providing them with information on the research and obtaining signed consent forms. Because of the limited amount of time available, a few colleagues offered assistance in suggesting possible participants for the World Café. Table hosts were secured who would assist in taking notes and ensuring the conversations were fluid and inclusive. For those table hosts, a table host guide was provided, which is attached to this thesis (Appendix E). Initially, 35 participants were the desired targeted amount; however, in the end, 30 people participated. This did not hinder the findings or effectiveness of this large group method.
The first step in the data collection or data generating process was to host a World Café. The room was set up to simulate the atmosphere of an actual café setting, with red and white checkered tablecloths on each of the seven round tables and a roll of white paper to add a runner down the centre of the table. Participants could draw, scribble, and make notes on these runners throughout the sessions. Each table had different coloured markers for the participants to use along with a dish of candy in the middle for their enjoyment. Coffee and water were available at the back of the room, and participants were invited to help themselves. A flipchart was placed by each table for the table hosts to make notes and to summarize the discussion. These different touches created inquisitiveness energy, where the participants appeared intrigued about what was transpiring.

The World Café consisted of three rounds, each round lasting 15 minutes, with small group conversations, with five to seven participants at each of the seven tables. The complete event lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes. The session began with a welcome to the participants from the researcher who also was the facilitator the session. They were thanked in advance for their participation and contributions. Participants were reminded of the confidentiality agreement (see Appendix F) they had previously signed and asked again to respect the anonymity of those present. An overview was provided of how the World Café would take place, and it was asked that when participants chose tables, to ensure there were no others at that table that directly reported to them or that they directed reported to. The first round then began.

Each table had enough menus for each participant; these menus contained the questions for each round (Appendix G). At the beginning of each round, the table host read out the questions to start the conversations. The 30 participants changed tables after each round, and the
table host, who had remained at the initial table they sat at, offered a summary of previous conversations before moving on to the next round of questions. The three rounds of questions were followed by a large-group plenary or “Harvest” round, where each small group shared results with the larger group, immediately realizing similarities of the smaller groups’ conversations. This harvest round allowed the participants to co-create the findings that would inform the interview questions, which was the next method of data generating employed.

With both the World Café and the interviews, one-on-one conversations happened with each participant regarding the study. Permission was obtained to email them the invitation to participate (see Appendix H) along with information on the study (see Appendix I) and a consent form for the specific method they were considering to participate in (see Appendix F for World Café and Appendix J for Interview Consent Form). In each email, participants were asked to review the information and, if they were still interested, to sign and return the consent form. As previously stated, this process was controlled by the researcher, as only two possible perceived power-over situations were identified in the World Café: two councillors from the municipality the researcher worked for were participating. With these two elected officials, who currently sit on the council at the Rural Municipality of Bone Creek, authentic conversations took place to ensure that the councillors were aware that it was not an expectation for them to participate and that withdrawal from the project was acceptable at any time prior to its completion. This same information was conveyed to all other participants. The appropriate consent forms (Appendix F) were provided along with the letter of invitation (Appendix H) and the information letter (Appendix I) so that the participants had all the information prior to committing to participate. The same information was presented to the participants who would engage in the interview
process, with the consent form being slightly modified from the one used for the World Café (Appendix J).

Once the administrative requirements had been met for the interviews and the signed consent forms received, the interview process began. Nine interviews were conducted, three from each of the participant groups being the elected officials, CAOs, and other key stakeholders, with the interviews lasting from just under 19 to 44 minutes with the average being 32 minutes long. Four interviews took place in person, and the remaining five interviews were completed via conference call. The questions for the interviews were meant to focus on Beckhard and Harris’s (2009) current state and perhaps lightly touch on the future state. The nine interviews were completed within a three-week time period. Once themes became repetitive, additional questions were added to allow for further exploration.

**Data Analysis and Validity**

The World Café data were captured through an audio recording from the harvest round, seven table sheets, each small group’s flip chart summaries, and personal field notes. Credibility was a validity-related concept that was attended to by practicing both member checking and peer debriefing (Schwandt et al., 2007). Themes created from the conversations of the participants reflected the summaries presented in the harvest round of the World Café. As a member check, participants were asked to confirm that the themes made sense and accurately reflected their conversations. This allowed participants the opportunity to add to, disagree with, or confirm that the data analyzed by their peers was being presented accurately, giving the data further confirmability.

To begin analysis, table sheets were hung up along with the flip chart summaries and studies of these sheets began. Supporting what the participants repeatedly voiced during the
harvest round, many themes were being repeated across each of the small group’s sheets. The creation of a Word document containing the data written on all table sheets and the transcribed audio file from the harvest round which provided the researcher with something physical to work with. This information was read repeatedly, and a process began of manually coding the data by using different coloured highlighters to represent the different emerging categories.

In distilling the data, categorizing and coding is one method that researchers use to “identify information that clearly represents the perspective and experience of the stakeholding participants” (Stringer, 2007, p. 98). During this process, the verbatim principle was diligently applied, “using terms and concepts drawn from the words of the participants themselves” (p. 99). This ensured further credibility and confirmed that the researcher was not imposing her own interpretations or biases during this analytical process. Sticky notes were placed with repetitive comments on a white board and another round of categorizing and theming was completed. Through noticing similarities in different participant’s statements, possible citations were identified for use in chapters four and five. The data analysis from the World Café was completed within one week of the date the event was held.

Member checks were used to improve credibility in the interview method as well. Once the interview was transcribed and personally reviewed for accuracy, the raw data were sent back to the participant and they were asked to verify the transcription for accuracy, giving them the opportunity to edit or remove sections they felt necessary. The interviews were personally transcribed by the research in order to build a relationship with the data. It was interesting that the audio version of the interviews sparked different thoughts, connections, and ideas than what was written. Working with both the written and audio data enabled a more in-depth process, resulting in a deeper understanding of the data.
After allowing 10 days for the participant’s review, the interview transcriptions were reread, coded, categorized, and themed accordingly. There were only two transcripts that were returned with edits by the participants. Transcribing conversations is difficult because conversations do not always happen in full and complete sentences. Both transcriptions that had edits were mainly due to grammar, not accuracy. The revised transcripts were then used for the analysis process. During data analysis, a matrix was used to organize the information within one document. The matrix created ease in identifying participants as well as the similarities, differences, and gaps in and of the data. A matrix was populated with information that fit into different categories, identified as themes, findings, recommendations, outliers, quotes, working collaboratively, benefits of collaborate training, and ended with a section that was simply labelled “of interest.” In this last section, ideas were recorded, as well as comments or themes that were repetitive between two or more interview participants. Once the data from the interviews were analyzed, the information was compared with the information from the World Café. This enabled the researcher to compare and contrast any findings, ideas, themes, and recommendations that arose from both methods performed.

Peer debriefing was another action that took place to ensure validity. The inquiry team members were engaged by explaining the process used to analyze data. This created an opportunity for peer review and debate of the findings. Finally, resulting conclusions were tested with a third inquiry team member.

To further mitigate any personal biases, reflexivity was practiced regularly. Tracy (2010) explained that “researchers can practice self-reflexivity even before stepping into the field through being introspective, assessing their own biases and motivations, and asking whether they are well-suited to examine their chosen sites or topics at this time” (p. 842). During reflection,
questions were considered to determine what the purpose of this research was. Personally, it was important to leave a legacy, to help colleagues discover tools or opportunities to improve leadership in municipal government, and to identify a way of learning that was suited to elected officials so that they could better carry out their roles and responsibilities. When considering why this was important right now, being that retirement for the researcher from this field is scheduled within the same year of the research completion, the importance of the research was realized, with the thought that the report could be left as a legacy in hopes of improving municipal leadership.

**Ethical Implications**

With each research project comes ethical implications that need to be considered and properly addressed. Direct reports were intentionally excluded from the study to eliminate any potential power-over implications. Additionally, participant selection did not include those whom the researcher normally worked with in an effort to avoid the potential of these same implications. An excerpt was included in the invitation letter (see Appendix H) that clearly explained there was no obligation or expectation to participate.

Closely working with the organizational partner and committee members ensured that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences, & Humanities Research Council of Canada’s (2014, p. 6) *Tri-Council Policy Statement* principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice was adhered to throughout the process. It was ensured that participants had a complete comprehension of the study and an understanding that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that they could also withdraw their data from the inquiry where possible. Withdrawing data pertained to the interview participants only. World Café participants
could withdraw from the inquiry, but their comments would have already influenced the group, and it would not be possible to withdraw their data from the anonymous data set. Through review of the information letter (Appendix I), they understood the potential risks and benefits of participating and knew that their identity would remain protected and confidential on the part of the researcher. Every participant was given equal opportunities to engage and contribute through both methods utilized, being assured that each of their voices were equally important to the data generated through both methods.

**Proposed Outcomes**

The findings and recommendations were provided to the stakeholders in a way that was useful to them and easy to understand. In my initial dissemination of the information to the organization, I created a beginning draft of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Coghlan (2019) suggested, “For the organizational readers, the researcher may produce a report which contains the core story and its analysis omitting the academic requirements” (p. 177). This document is not something to use in the future, but rather a basic summary of the findings and recommendations. Further, a six-page executive summary of this lengthier thesis was provided to individuals who showed interest in the results. This, of course, included the partner organization, SARM.

During two different zoom meetings with the partner at SARM, findings and recommendations were presented and explored. From these meetings, the partner was able to identify possible future steps to move forward along with a prioritization of recommendations by SARM. During the dissemination process of the key findings and recommendations, coaching skills were used to assist the partner in exploring what the next possible steps might look like and how that may improve the leadership skills of the elected officials in Saskatchewan.
**Contribution and Application**

With 15 years’ experience, a realization has taken place that being involved in municipal government can be challenging, whether as an elected official, a CAO, as a rate payer, or other key stakeholder. Bringing awareness to tools and resources that exist to support leaders to lead, through quality decision making, will benefit all agents in the system, as doing so strengthens how they conduct business. This research will assist SARM in identifying and addressing opportunities for more effective training and how to bring further awareness to the already available resources. The intent for this study was to bring about new knowledge (Torbert & Taylor, 2008). It brought awareness to what resources and knowledge were already available and indicated areas of focus of what is still required.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter on methodology, a complete explanation was provided in consideration of the methodology used in the research project. A full section was then devoted to understanding the concept of action research. The researcher then covered the two data collection methods used and gave details on the people involved in the project, including participants and the inquiry team. Following this were sections on study conduct, data analysis and validity, along with the ethical implication of the present inquiry. Wrapping up the chapter was the allowance of proposed outcomes and an offering of contributions and application of the results. The results of the study, including the findings and conclusions, are examined in the following chapter.
Chapter Four: Research Results, Conclusions, and Limitations

In this chapter, the inquiry question and sub-questions are restated and linked to the five findings resulting from those questions. The research conclusions are then presented, and a chapter summary ties the findings together and lights the way for the recommendations presented in chapter five. The thesis inquiry question was:

- How might Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities help the rural elected municipal officials in Saskatchewan improve their leadership capabilities?

The sub questions were:

- What stories do elected municipal officials and CAOs tell about their leadership experiences within their own municipalities?
- How might SARM improve its partnership with its member municipalities to foster leadership, learning, and growth?
- What leadership tools and/or resources do a sample of elected municipal officials and CAOs in Saskatchewan say they, and other elected officials, need to better carry out their roles and responsibilities?
- How can shared leadership be strengthened between CAOs and elected officials?
- How can the scholarly and professional literature contribute to the improvement of leadership or leadership development for SARM and its member municipalities?

The thesis inquiry question and sub questions were addressed through this research and are represented in the five findings, with the exception of the last question pertaining to scholarly and professional literature. This question was previously addressed in the literature review.

Research Findings

Five findings are presented for the consideration of my research partner:
1. The stories told of great leadership focussed on traits and qualities of great leaders.

2. Resources are already available for elected officials.

3. Time management is an issue for the training of elected officials.

4. A complete understanding of the level of commitment expected of elected officials is required.

5. A mindset exists that elected officials hold a volunteer position.

Each finding is discussed in detail in this section.

**Finding 1: The Stories Told of Great Leadership Focussed on Traits and Qualities of Great Leaders**

Research participants shared exemplary leadership experiences where the strength of leadership came from their knowledge and skills. These stories focussed on qualities and traits of good leaders and showcased personalities. Stories told consistently included qualities and traits of great leaders such as someone who trusts and is trustworthy and that supports and encourages all to participate. These leaders are knowledgeable, accountable, and consistent. They walk the talk, do what is best for the group and have great communication skills. The personalities of these leaders consisted of fairness, calmness, organization, and an ability to analyse situations and deal with issues in a professional and unbiased manner. To introduce the coding used for the participants for the remainder of this section, the coding was: elected officials were coded as EO, chief administrative officers as CAO, and other key stakeholders as OKS. Additionally, numbers were assigned according to the order in which the interviews took place.

One story told by participant EO-3 reflected on a tense and discontent situation at a public meeting over a new development in the municipality. He stated that the chair of the meeting “kept the meeting calm” and “kept the meeting rolling.” Participant EO-3 also expressed
admiration for chairs who are able to “think on their feet,” demonstrating what he considered a
good quality of strong leadership. Similarly, participant OKS-1 told a story where communication for
a new service initiative was relayed to the public ambiguously, resulting in public confusion and
dissatisfaction. To address this potentially conflicting situation, the chair of that municipality
brought the council together to share a plan of action, which mitigated the poor communication
and the resulting conflict.

Skills of effective leaders described by World Café and interview participants included
facilitation skills for conducting meetings, good relational skills for working with people, and
strong communication skills for creating team environments (CAO-1; CAO-2; CAO-3; EO-1;
EO-2; EO-3; OKS-1; OKS-2). Participants also identified core values of effective leaders,
including courage, trustworthiness, and being supportive to those around them (CAO-3; EO-1;
EO-3; OKS-2). The key themes from the participants were centred on communication,
collaboration, inclusivity, and relationships (CAO-1; CAO-2; EO-1; EO-2; EO-3; OKS-1; OKS-
2; OKS-3). Interview participant EO-3 stated, “Getting to good leadership for me has been
going to a process, to a place where I can communicate with other people.” Other important
leadership skills mentioned by participants included active listening (EO-3; OKS-1; OKS-2),
critical listening and careful analysis rather than knee-jerk reaction (EO-1; EO-3; OKS-1; OKS-
2), and decisive outcome planning (EO-1; EO-3; OKS-2). Characteristics, traits, and skills were
the focus of all stories told.

Municipal governance can sometimes be challenging, as opinions can be polarized, and it
can seem that decisions are based on the individual the issue pertains to. One EO in the interview
process shared a story of good leadership regarding a ratepayer who was asked to remedy a
nuisance situation with his property because of numerous written complaints (EO-1). After a
number of months with no forward movement, the CAO presented the situation to council that was well thought out, including factual details of the situation, applicable legislation that needed to be implemented or followed, possible options and steps for solutions, and realistic timelines. Everything was presented in a way that enabled the council to have an informed discussion and develop a plan to encourage the ratepayer to proceed with action to remedy the situation.

Participant EO-1 summarized the situation by stating, “We needed to gather information … analyze it … make a decision [and] expedite the decision.” This participant explained that through good leadership, proper information and consideration were provided on the situations, which were necessary to resolve the issue.

A few participants, still focussing on leadership traits and qualities, suggested engaging in personality assessments and other team-building exercises that could help leaders engage more effectively with one another. Participant OKS-2 stated,

Understanding everybody at your table and what makes them tick plus what their strengths and what their weaknesses are would have to be the foundation of anything, . . . [and that] you are eight personalities at a table trying to come to a consensus, and there is a lot of skills that come into play to help make that work.

Participant EO-1 endorsed this and added that other great information could come from such an exercise, such as understanding the different personality types, how they deal with conflict, and what their communication styles are. It was thought that by participating in a personality assessment, elected leaders would be able to see each other’s strengths through strategic strength-based placement. Another benefit would be that leaders would be able to build off each other’s strengths. Identifying and maximizing strengths comprise one approach EOs can use to mitigate the high level of commitment required of them.
Finding 2: Resources are Already Available for Elected Officials

From the conversations among the participants and from the harvest round in the World Café, it was established that many resources are already available to rural municipal EOs and CAOs, although they are rarely used. Increasing awareness and utilization of available resources would support both groups. Providing easily accessible resources would bring a stronger awareness to, or of, the resources available and increase usage by both EOs and CAOs.

Participants EO-1 and OKS-2 indicated that having a simplistic resource centre that is easy to access, both from a computer and a smart phone, would help them access tools and training resources. The present inquiry suggested that the most beneficial resources to be included are policy and bylaw templates; contact information for mentors, advisors, and key government offices; and resource documents for EOs such as the Council Meeting Guide and the Council Member Handbook. It is important to note that these already exist on the SARM website; however, it was apparent both in the World Café and in the interviews that most EOs and CAOs were not aware of the resources or simply forgot to access them.

A further point of interest regarding resources focussed on local collaboration. Participant OKS-2 stated, “Some of the greatest resources probably exist already on other councils.” In both the World Café and interviews, many ideas and suggestions of working collaboratively with surrounding municipalities were put forward. Interviewee CAO-3 stated that by collaborating with your neighbours, “you can share and feel good about your wins, and you can learn about your losses from other RM [Rural Municipality] wins.” Further, it was determined that EOs would be more comfortable learning in smaller settings with their neighbours whom they have previously worked with and already have a relationship with. Participant CAO-3 offered that in a smaller group, “they [EOs] can have their questions answered and be a part of the whole
conversation.” This type of training would allow for a discussion pertaining to practical application in individual municipalities. Unfortunately, local collaborative events like this seem to seldom take place, as it takes effort in planning and organizing as well as an additional commitment of time.

Participants voiced that working collaboratively is a resource that should be practiced more regularly. The benefits identified by the participants of working collaboratively were numerous. Participant EO-1 offered, “There’s a better chance of finding larger solutions for common problems,” and participant CAO-1 reinforced this by offering, “The more you collaborate, I think the more effective you become.” Other benefits of local collaboration spoke to effective time management considering that EOs have careers in addition to council commitments. This was widely discussed during conversations on council training. Participants noted that it is not plausible for EOs to take time away from their ranch, farm, or career because to do so would negatively impact their livelihood. When local collaboration is an option, participants felt that there would be a higher level of participation by the EOs because of the shorter distance to travel as well as the size of the group. “If you go down to a smaller venue, you’re probably going to get better local turnout” (OKS-3), which would result in a higher level of education and more engagement in the training opportunities. On local collaboration, participant EO-2 concluded, “As long as we’re trying to work together, it will make a better community.” Participants identified that working together and networking are ways to strengthen regional connections.

SARM conventions was identified as an existing resource that also supports collaboration. Participants said they appreciated these events, specifically the breakout sessions, trainings, and networking opportunities, which are useful for both the EOs and CAOs (CAO-3;
EO-2). Because of the importance of this event, one municipality is considering an amendment to their Council Procedures Bylaw to state that during each 4-year term as an EO, every councillor must attend at least one annual SARM convention (CAO-3). She went on to indicate that those who do not attend this convention simply do not realize the importance of the event. Unfortunately, because of the time commitments and not understanding the benefits of their attendance, there are EOs who have not taken part in these conventions or other valuable networking opportunities.

**Finding 3: Time Management is an Issue for the Training of Elected Officials**

A major theme that arose in terms of newly elected EOs was what the participants referred to as “time management” (CAO-1; CAO-2; CAO-3; EO-2; EO-3; OKS-1; OKS-2; OKS-3). For EO-2 and EO-3, both newly elected, existing time constraints limited their ability to participate in anything more than the regular monthly council meetings. Although there was discussion of having mandatory training for EOs, participants felt it would be better to offer training labelled as coaching, as “something we have to do to help you be the best you can be in the shortest amount of time” (EO-1). Participant EO-1 offered, “It goes to that unconscious incompetence. You don’t know what you don’t know, but once you know what you don’t know, then we’re forced to take another step forward.” This refers to the four stages of competence theory initially introduced by Broadwell (1969), which explains the four levels of teaching that include (a) unconscious incompetence, where you don’t know what you don’t know; (b) conscious incompetence, where you know what you don’t know; (c) conscious competence, where you know it, but it takes effort to do; and (d) unconscious competence, where you know what you are doing, and it becomes second nature. The next discussion considered whether training should be mandatory.
Many participants felt that it would be considerably more difficult to recruit ratepayers to run for council if training were mandatory (CAO-2; EO-1; EO-3; OKS-3). Participant CAO-1 went as far to say that “they just don’t seem to have the interest in the education part.”

Meanwhile, participant COA-1 supported mandatory training and stated that “if you don’t push it, they just don’t do it.” This issue is clearly one that needs a soft consideration, as pushing mandatory training could have negative consequences on future candidates who run in elections. Realizing this, it is still necessary to find ways to strongly encourage participation in the educational offerings.

To mitigate the issue of time management, a high majority of participants recommended that training be offered online, in short increments, so that EOs are not required to travel or take extended time away from their other responsibilities and have the ability to complete the courses at their own pace. The participants felt this would encourage more participation. Extensive discussion took place around the existing Municipal Leadership Development Programs (MLDP) that are offered through SARM (n.d.-b). The thought was that these programs are “effective and (I think they) give good information” (CAO-2). Participants acknowledged that the time commitment to attend these programs was not something many EOs are willing to give.

Participant EO-1 offered a solution which would be to offer MLDP courses online, in smaller chunks, with more repetition. Participant OKS-3 supported this and further suggested having webinars for training similar to the Respect in the Workplace Training (Respect Group Inc., 2020) that SARM is endorsing. This training is 90 minutes long, divided up into segments ranging from three to nine minutes in length, which can be completed all at once or in intervals that the participants choose.
Another consideration offered by participant CAO-3 was for the MLDP courses to be held in the six divisions throughout Saskatchewan, so the participants do not have to commit to the extra time to travel to complete the training. She also suggested that the courses be revamped to be half-day sessions, offering one in the morning and one in the afternoon, so that there were more opportunities to attend. Contrary to this idea, participant CAO-3 thought the courses still needed to remain face to face, as she “believe(s) that you get more out of the interaction.”

Participant OKS-3 stated, “We’re talking about more local inputs, more local participation. I think it is obviously something that is needed more and more because our schedules get busier and busier.” All these ideas deal with the issue of time management and lean towards finding different ways to offer the courses that would encourage more participation.

No matter how the training is offered or how often, it was well supported by all participants in this study that the training is necessary and beneficial. “MLDP gives elected officials the general knowledge they do not have as ratepayers” (EO-2). Completing these courses is a benefit that is widely realized by those who participate. Participant OKS-3 stated that the training “sets the direction not only for your own career…. It sets the direction for your municipality and … your municipality will benefit.” He also offered the suggestion that there could be events such as online symposiums for the EOs, which would be something EOs would not have to travel for. The key question regarding training was how to encourage and engage all elected officials to participate as there are many who do not yet see the value in the training.

There is much to learn as an EO. Participant EO-1 stated, “There is so much to learn over time,” and participant EO-3 added, “There’s never a point when the learning is done.” Not only do EOs have to learn about financial and legal issues, including legislation, but among many other things, they also must learn how to communicate and lead with others. Many of the EOs
are motivated and have the capacity to learn, but the question raised is: Where do they start? Participant OKS-3 offered, “Leadership is one of the most important things that we need to hone our skills on.” Perhaps learning for the EO is a non-linear process where they choose where they want to enhance their knowledge.

One final idea offered around the training of EOs was the importance of offering some type of incentive to encourage more participation. Both participants CAO-2 and OKS-3 felt this was important, as the education gained would enable the EOs to carry out their roles and responsibilities more effectively. Unfortunately, none of the participants were able to identify what the incentives might be. Although finding incentives was not the focus of this study, the suggestion has been added to the section pertaining to implications for future inquiry.

These findings shed light on leadership in municipal government. It is beyond interesting that the first and most dynamic finding of this research was that municipal government is working under an outdated model of leadership. As explored in chapter two, there has been tremendous evolution of the leadership model from the time of the Great Man Theory (Zigarelli, 2013). This finding certainly uncovered the reasoning behind many of the other findings. For example, if an EO believes that they are only stepping in to cover in a position until someone better comes along, it is understandable why they consider their position to be a volunteer one. To add to that, if they are volunteering, they are not engaged in understanding the requirements of their positions and consider the commitment temporary. Again, why would they go look for those tools and resources when the position is not considered professional? The Reeve or the CAO can provide the resources, as they are considered the leaders in the municipality. The last finding on the time management issue tied all the other findings together. These findings link to
the conclusions and recommendations to support the shifts that are necessary to support leadership development skills for EOs to successfully carry out their roles and responsibilities.

**Finding 4: A Complete Understanding of the Level of Commitment Expected of Elected Officials is Required**

Participants felt that SARM might improve its partnership with its member municipalities to foster leadership, learning, and growth through communication and training to fill in certain gaps. Within this research, it was confirmed that EOs must fully understand the commitment and expectations of their position. Participants indicated this to include the Council Procedures Bylaw and the Code of Ethics Bylaw as required by all municipalities in Saskatchewan as set out in the Municipalities Act (2006). Additionally, EOs must understand the policies of their municipality to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. There was much contemplation, especially in the World Café, around this topic.

EOs are expected to attend regular council meetings, and for rural municipalities in Saskatchewan, this usually occurs once per month. It is set out in legislation, specifically in the Municipalities Act (2006), that an EO is disqualified if he or she:

- is absent from all regular council meetings held during any period of three consecutive months during which at least two meetings of the council have been held, starting with the date that the first meeting is missed, unless the absence is authorized by a resolution of council. (§147(1)(c))

Additional time commitments will result from participating on committees that requires a representative of the municipality. Committee appointments come from the Reeve, being the head of a rural municipal council in Saskatchewan. More active EOs might have committee meetings weekly. Another expectation leading to additional time constraints is when the
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ratepayers have questions, comments, or concerns that may require a conversation with their EO. This all takes time away from the EO’s regular employment and family life. In certain situations, and for some EOs, attending council meetings and minimal conversations with their ratepayers are all that they are willing to commit; therefore, the expectation for spending additional time on training may not be something EOs are prepared to do. The participants of this research felt that a more complete understanding of the level of commitment of EOs prior to them running in an election would be extremely beneficial. Those with time management issues may choose not to move forward, leaving others who have the time required to commit to the position as the ones who might seek nomination in the election, including the continuous education piece.

Many ideas were offered to increase the understanding of the commitments of EOs to the public, one being education. In one municipality, because of transparency and inclusion of the public, the picture regarding the level of commitment is becoming clearer. Participant EO-1 stated that for her municipality, “I think there is a growing appreciation of the parameters of our roles.” She also offered that there needs to be a way to further educate the ratepayers ahead of time so that they understand the expectations of EOs prior to running for council in an election. For those municipalities that have a website or social media platforms, she suggested more interaction and information be posted regarding the expectations and regular responsibilities of the council member. Participant OKS-3 suggested that education on municipal governments incorporated into high school curriculum in Saskatchewan would increase knowledge of expectations of EOs. If residents of Saskatchewan learn early about the full commitment of local governments, including their level of commitment and the responsibilities assigned, perhaps there would be a more professional regard and preparedness of the municipal EOs.
Finding 5: A Mindset Exists That Elected Officials Hold a Volunteer Position

EOs are often referred to as holding volunteer positions, thus lacking the recognition as being both professional and business-like (CAO-2; EO-1; OKS-1). Participants felt that this recognition would support the relationship between the CAO and EOs to have clarity and understand of the commitments of their respected roles, resulting in cohesively creating a team that practiced shared leadership. It appears possible that EOs may believe that no one else is going to run for council; therefore, when there is a need for a candidate and when no one else steps in, the candidates believe they will “volunteer” until somebody better suited comes along. There is a great deal of responsibility attached to being an EO, and candidates are often unaware of the responsibilities associated.

In this study, themes arose that expressed the importance of leadership skills in both CAOs and EOs, especially in shared leadership scenarios. Participant EO-3 stated that if the administrator does not take charge of training the council, he did not know who would do it. He felt that none of the EOs would bring forth any suggestions of education or trainings, as they are not necessarily looking for those opportunities. The CAO is the one staff person reporting to the council and supports them as a conduit between operations and governance, including supporting the education and growth at both operational and governance levels. This also proves to be a challenge when EOs are of the mindset that they are in a volunteer position, often resulting in EOs who are not interested in participating in training, keeping in mind that they may be simply filling the position until someone better comes along, as was mentioned a few times throughout the data gathering process.

Participant EO-3 expressed that the responsibility of the CAOs to train the EOs is too high. He also suggested that there should be more support of council, especially in procedural
items such as conducting meetings, and that CAOs “should have some backup at the council level.” Participant OKS-2 supported this statement and offered:

The CAOs and the administrators that I deal with are some of the most creative, resourceful, patient saints. They are put in those positions I guess, to think on their feet and come up with solutions…. In some cases, I feel they are getting kind of left with an incredible amount of pressure.

To eliminate this pressure, it would be of benefit to look at a shared or inclusive leadership model where the CAOs and EOs work together, each having a leadership responsibility in all activities and decisions.

Participant OKS-2 perceived leadership more as the relationship between the CAO and the EOs, where there is a strong relationship built on respect. A story shared by CAO-3 that demonstrated this occurred during a project, where the:

Deputy Reeve took on a role, and it was a positive relationship. I felt that I was actually being supported. He took on some responsibilities as well. It turned out to be an effective and positive thing for the community.

If both the mindset of the EOs being volunteers and the idea of the Reeve being the only leader in a municipality were to change, a shared or inclusive leadership model, which was discussed in chapter two, could strengthen the entire team. This relationship would be an additional resource that could increase the effectiveness of the municipality.

**Conclusions**

SARM is proactive and constantly looking for ways to support its members in growing their leadership capabilities. Contemplation on the findings from this research made it apparent that the main issue facing Saskatchewan municipal governments today is the outdated
understanding of the definition of leadership. Each EO, as well as CAO, has a responsibility towards an inclusive leadership or leadership-as-practice, which is more in line with the modern concept of leadership. Next are the detailed conclusions resulting from this study.

1. Leadership training is required to increase the number of EOs who can effectively take part in an inclusive leadership role.

2. A broader exposure of the existing tools and resources provided by SARM would enhance their use by municipal EOs and CAOs.

3. An understanding and implementation of a type of shared or inclusive leadership model between the CAO and the EOs would enhance how they work together to make better decisions.

4. Adapting an appreciative process in municipal governance would help municipalities to grow and prosper

**Conclusion 1: Leadership Training is Required to Increase the Number of Elected Officials Who Can Effectively Take Part in an Inclusive Leadership Role**

There is a lack of engagement or desire for learning resulting from EOs not understanding modern leadership, and therefore, motivation to learn is lacking. A clear definition and understanding of modern leadership and how the leader’s role contributes to the process may increase motivation for increased participation in training. As previously discussed in chapter two, an evolution of leadership has taken place from where leadership was thought of as having certain traits or qualities to a modern understanding of how leadership is relational and inclusive. Everyone has a part to play in the leadership of municipal government. It would be advantageous to find ways to share with EOs in rural municipal government the ways in which they can each contribute to leadership.
A substantial disconnect in the understanding of leadership was found in all sample groups; yet, participant OKS-3 stated, “Leadership is one of the most important things that we need to hone our skills on.” SARM’s challenge is to formulate a plan to educate their members on inclusive leadership as a broader issue that concentrates on engagement, participation, and learning the skills necessary to help others lead. The EOs need to be assured that leadership is something that can be learned (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). People are often running for or staying on council only because they believe no one else is willing to do so. Leadership needs to be seen more on a personal level where everyone has agency, rather than some concept that is distant and far removed from the individual. McArthur-Blair and Cockell (2018) offered that “agency is the ability to influence one’s own actions and the actions of others” (p. 108). The EOs need to conceptualize how they can contribute individually to the leadership of their municipality.

Typically, the stories told by all three participant groups depicted the leader as being someone who possesses good people skills; who can build relationships and collaborate with others; are good communicators, both in listening and in speaking; and are knowledgeable, especially with meeting procedures, legislation, policies, and bylaws. Not only was it uncovered that there are not enough of these skills sitting around the table, but also that this trait theory of leadership is an outdated model that dates back many decades. It is unhelpful because the traits of good leadership are then considered to be inborn or genetic in famous leaders, not as something they have had to learn. Modern leadership is a mindset; it is how you live, how you show up, how you navigate through daily situations. Leadership as practice, as described by Raelin (2003, 2016), is where everyone engages in the leadership responsibilities.

In SARM’s (n.d.-a) vision, they have noted that they take direction from their members, meet the needs of those members, provide education, and strive for innovation and best practices
in programs and services. The member participants are saying that the structure of the training needs to be revised and that there are some additional topics that need to be included. This research has suggested that leadership is one specific topic. SARM might improve its partnership with its member municipalities by listening to these requests and exploring options available to meet the member’s needs with different offerings.

**Conclusion 2: A Broader Exposure of the Existing Tools and Resources Provided by SARM Would Enhance Their Use by Municipal Elected Officials and Chief Administrative Officers**

There are many unexplored and, therefore, unused tools and resources available to both the CAOs and to the EOs through SARM’s (n.d.-c) website. Because of this, it would be beneficial to have all resources in one location that is easily accessible and provide training to the EOs so that they become more aware of what resources and tools are available and how to locate them. Currently, there is no one portal where these tools and resources are located. The participants clearly have respect for SARM and feel that SARM is already doing a good job for municipal governments. However, if there were some adjustments made to the programs and more effective ways were created to offer them that respected the time commitment, more EOs would be engaged and willing to participate, thus improving how the EOs carry out their roles and responsibilities.

**Conclusion 3: An Understanding and Implementation of a Shared or Inclusive Leadership Model between the Chief Administrative Officer and the Elected Officials Would Enhance How They Work and Lead Together**

Shared or inclusive leadership can be strengthened between CAOs and EOs by ensuring that everyone has a solid understanding of leadership and is fulfilling their leadership role. Perhaps consideration could be given to including leadership education to the University
curriculum that all CAOs must complete to be certified as well as adding leadership to the MLDP courses offered through SARM. The participants shared stories of individuals who sit around their table, sometimes the Reeve, often the CAO, and at times either the Deputy Reeve or one of the other EOs, but rarely were there stories of where more than one person was actively leading. In addition to the literature discussed previously in chapter two, Jackson and Parry (2011) pointed out, “The critical perspectives make the claim that leadership is a process that goes on between all people and that all people can be involved in leadership, almost in spite of the formal position” (p. 95). Municipal councils seldom consider sharing those responsibilities with each other or with their CAO. In his video, Guy Nasmyth (2014) offered: “If we look at leadership as something towards which everyone in the system contributes but not anything that anyone does, we might increase our abilities, we might enhance our experience, we might achieve greater results” (9:52). Raelin (2003) explained that leadership as practice, or what he always refers to as leaderful practice, “offers a true mutual model that transforms leadership from an individual property into a new paradigm that redefines leadership as a collective practice” (p. 5). Building an understanding of inclusive leadership or leadership as practice could potentially change the performance of municipal government.

**Conclusion 4: Adapting an Appreciative Process in Municipal Governance Could Help Municipalities to Grow and Prosper**

An appreciative approach to leadership and learning is looking at what it is that gives life and the best of where people could go, not just replicating the past. It is focusing on what has been done well and in best case scenarios, what could possibly be. Kouzes and Posner (2017) offered that “the most effective leaders ... are the ones who ask, ‘what can we learn when things don’t go as expected’ rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame” (pp. 180–181). Being that
the position of EO is often seen as a volunteer position, being kind and gentle in helping those people to fit into their leadership positions and learn what they can do to better carry out their roles and responsibilities is an absolute necessity. Often, EOs are not aware of “what they are signing up for” (EO-3). As proposed in chapter two, there are many opportunities to use both appreciative inquiry and forms of appreciative leadership that may result in further engagement of the EOs. When the focus is positive, they may be more willing to embrace the leadership role in a rewarding way that they are proud of.

In addition to this, it would be favourable to keep the EOs in learner mode (Adams, 2016), where the focus is on what has worked and expanding on that. There is little value in identifying who made which mistakes, but rather, value comes from learning from those mistakes. If councils were apt to look at the continuous learning rather than laying blame, perhaps this would help them to make better decisions, try new processes, and be a part of a positive process with many advantages.

**Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry**

This current inquiry covered a small sample of participants throughout the province of Saskatchewan. Because of the size and scope of a regular thesis project, it was never meant to include a large sample. Being that this study is only the first cycle of the action research engagement process, much more detailed information, findings, conclusions, and recommendations could be offered through completion of further cycles. The main finding and conclusion of this study regarding the outdated definition of leadership currently held by the participants represents a large endeavour to attempt to change. Inclusive leadership has not been readily practiced in municipal government and would be an entirely new concept to this local level of government and is likely similar in higher levels of government.
A limitation of this inquiry, which could have supported this research, would be to expand the inquiry team involvement in the analysis process. The data analysis was completed without including any members of the inquiry team and no one was brought in after the World Café to check its validity or transparency. Although the participants were engaged in the harvest round of the World Café to determine the themes of their discussions and the raw data were returned to the interview participants, it may have been useful to include a member of the inquiry team or someone from the organization to assist further in the analysing process. Coughlan and Coghlan (2002, p. 232) stated that it is critical to include the organization in the data analysis in the action research process, as they obviously know their organization the best and will be the ones to implement the recommendations. As the participants were from across Saskatchewan and not only within the organization, it was not convenient to engage them in the analysis process. Considering that a repeated theme was that time commitments went outside of what most EOs were willing to give, it felt like an imposition to ask for further participation from these stakeholders. It may have had a stronger impact on the implementation of the recommendations if others were included in the analysis process.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, detailed consideration was given to the research findings and conclusions of the research project. Each finding and conclusion were provided with details and explanations. The chapter ended with the scope and limitations of the inquiry project prior to the chapter summary. The recommendations offered to the partner organization are documented in the following chapter.
Chapter Five: Research Recommendations and Implications

Chapter five is an exploration of the recommendations resulting from this research along with the implications to the organization and what is required for future inquiry. This will mark an end to one action research cycle and support the beginning of another by SARM, the partner organization. For convenience to the reader and to help connect these recommendations to the original research questions, the questions are repeated here. The thesis inquiry question was:

- How might Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities help the rural elected municipal officials in Saskatchewan improve their leadership capabilities?

The sub questions were:

- What stories do elected municipal officials and CAOs tell about their leadership experiences within their own municipalities?
- How might SARM improve its partnership with its member municipalities to foster leadership, learning, and growth?
- What leadership tools and/or resources do a sample of elected municipal officials and CAOs in Saskatchewan say they, and other elected officials, need to better carry out their roles and responsibilities?
- How can shared leadership be strengthened between CAOs and elected officials?
- How can the scholarly and professional literature contribute to the improvement of leadership or leadership development for SARM and its member municipalities?

Study Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this report answer the main inquiry question of how SARM can help the elected municipal official improve their leadership capabilities, which in
turn will help them to better carry out their roles and responsibilities. Six recommendations resulted from this study, and they are organized in the order of priority, which was decided by SARM.

1. Provide education on leadership to elected officials.

2. Lobby for inclusion of the topics of local government and leadership in secondary school curriculum.

3. Educate potential elected officials of roles and responsibilities and level of commitment of position.

4. Provide an easily accessible online resource centre for elected officials and CAOs.

5. Provide more productive and effective ways of learning.

6. Lobby the Ministry of Government Relations to consider a change to legislation to allow for reeve to be an appointed position by the elected officials.

The last recommendation is the only recommendation that is not fully supported by SARM but stays in as a recommendation. SARM does not want to disregard it without further exploration with the leadership team, management team, and the SARM board, realizing it is something that has resulted from data generated by their members. The first recommendation presented will increase understanding of leadership.

**Recommendation 1: Provide Education on Leadership to Elected Officials**

Finding 1 revealed that the majority of EOs are currently working under an outdated and ineffective model of leadership that concentrates on qualities and traits of leaders. There has certainly been an evolution of leadership since the great man theory (Daft & Lane, 2018; Wong et al., 2019; Zigarelli, 2013), which was discussed extensively in chapter two. A far-reaching action SARM could take to help improve the leadership capabilities of the EOs is to provide
them with education on the evolution of leadership and modern leadership practices often used today.

There simply is no education provided to the mainstream population that shares how leadership has evolved. It is the leaders who have the power to include everyone in a leadership-as-practice type of leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2017) shared, “The issue is not one of handing down leadership to these other people, but of liberating them so that they can use their abilities to lead themselves and others” (p. 103). A brief examination of relational leadership approaches was presented in chapter two. It would be interesting to imagine what the many different industries and sectors would look like if this more inclusive leadership were embraced, where everyone on the team had a role and a responsibility to lead themselves as well as each other.

In the stories told of great leadership during the interview process, an interesting suggestion arose multiple times. Even though the suggestion focussed on an older leadership model, it may still be beneficial for municipal governments to take notice. The suggestion was for the council and administration, possibly even the staff, to take part in some sort of personal assessment activity. Everyone has skills and abilities that can be beneficial for the team. Interview participants stated that for good leadership, you need someone around the table who can calm the waters (EO-1; OKS-2). This person could be determined by using some tool or resource on personality assessment. Other useful information would certainly come from an assessment such as this and would be able to strengthen the leadership team. If the municipality takes time to assess what each person’s strengths are, they could place those persons in areas that would be most effective for them to help the team be more efficient.
Recommendation 2: Lobby for Inclusion of the Topics of Local Government and Leadership in Secondary School Curriculum

SARM has recently been addressing this recommendation. At recent events, leadership at SARM have spoken to school age children during a large group gathering to gauge their knowledge and then inform them of what local government in Saskatchewan looks like. As was discussed in Findings 4 and 5, comprehensive knowledge needs to be provided on both the level of commitment and the roles and responsibilities of local government to steer the mindset away from that of the EOs being volunteers who do not require leadership capabilities.

Because most ratepayers are unaware of the level of commitment, it is understandable that this position is considered that of a volunteer. If constituents were aware of the extended level of commitment and the many expectations of EOs, it is expected there would also be a heightened level of respect for their position. If EOs are considered volunteers, it questions if that mindset devalues the position. In disseminating this recommendation to SARM, it was felt that including more education of local government in secondary school curriculum is a grassroots solution.

If the public were better informed on the expectations and duties of local government, even from these early ages, much could be resolved in the issues local governments currently face. By providing this education in secondary school curriculum, not only would the students have an increased general awareness of leadership and municipal government, but it is also likely that in sharing this with their parents and families, the ratepayers would benefit in learning as well. In addition to this, it is of utmost importance to include education on leadership, including the evolution of leadership theories and models. It would be useful to find a way to also offer this
type of training and information to the general public, not only for their understanding of leadership in municipal government, but also for navigating through their everyday lives.

**Recommendation 3: Educate Potential Elected Officials of Roles and Responsibilities and Level of Commitment of Position**

This recommendation is directly linked to Finding 4. It is important for ratepayers to have a better understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and level of commitment of an EO prior to agreeing to being nominated to run for the position. Out of this study, mostly from the comments made by participants, it was decidedly obvious that most EOs had little to no understanding of the immense amount of responsibilities that came with the position. Not only is there budgeting, financial statements, planning, development, and bylaws, but there are also human resources, policies, committee meetings, and administration. Experience shows one of the most challenging elements of the position comes with making decisions that your friends and neighbours may not agree with and the repercussions that come with that, such as strains on relationships. Inadequate preunderstanding of EO positions, on the part of the ratepayer, is changing, but there is still room for growth. This is one of the recommendations that surprised and interested the organization the most.

**Recommendation 4: Provide an Easily Accessible Online Resource Centre for Elected Officials and Chief Administrative Officers**

For many people who surf the internet browsing different webpages, if more than two or three clicks are needed to find what they are looking for, they simply give up and move on. When looking for tools and resources online, interview participant EO-1 made the comment, “It really has to be tap and go, it has to be simple, simple.” The resource centre that participants are looking for needs to be easily accessible, otherwise they will abort, and the opportunity to find
the resource will be lost. This recommendation directly relates to both Finding 2 and Conclusion 2. There are many tools, resources, and training opportunities available, and most of them can be found by a Google search or through a link on the SARM website, but many are unaware that they exist. There is not one single portal that either the EOs or the CAOs can go to find available resources. The participants who took part in this study want to see information that includes, but is not limited to, contact information for municipal advisors and mentors, links to Saskatchewan government and other partner’s websites, such as the 10-minute trainers and other online training opportunities, and links to other resources such as the Council Meeting Guide and Council Member Handbook. SARM is interested in the exploration of a single portal for resources.

**Recommendation 5: Provide More Productive and Effective Ways of Learning**

Originally five recommendations were individually offered that focussed on training and education. It proved to be useful to group these recommendations under one heading. An explanation of each of the five subtopics is offered, which include (a) encourage municipalities to set aside 10-15 minutes for monthly training, (b) lobby the Ministry of Government Relations to create more online training opportunities, (c) encourage more participation in training opportunities, (d) showcase the benefits of local collaborative training of neighbouring municipalities, and (e) refine municipal leadership development programs (MLDP).

*Encourage Municipalities to Set Aside 10-15 Minutes for Monthly Training*. The five actions suggested for this recommendation pertain to Finding 2 and Conclusion 2 and pertain directly to more productive and efficient ways of learning. The participants often referred to the many topics they were expected to have knowledge in. They also indicated that the training opportunities they currently take part in are too long, too far apart, and offer little repetition. To help resolve this, the participants felt that municipalities should be encouraged to set aside 10-15
minutes at the beginning of each council meeting to participate in some form of training. This could include such things as the 10-minute trainer videos, review of bylaws or policies, or an exploration of other key resources such as the Council Meeting Guide, the Councillor’s Handbook, or other pertinent information or legislation. An additional benefit to this type of training would be that a discussion could follow on how the information or training could be practically applied to each individual municipality, making the information more relatable and, therefore, easier to retain and then share with surrounding municipalities. This recommendation, if accepted by a municipality, could be written into their individual Council Procedures Bylaw to ensure that it would be carried forth even after changes in council or administration.

It is also important to note here that, in several discussions with participants, a theme surfaced that a factor contributing to good leadership was the knowledge of procedures, specifically the Robert’s Rules of Order, which focusses on how to effectively running meetings. There were many comments suggesting that several EO’s have little to no knowledge of Robert’s Rules of Order and often neither do the CAOs. This could become a topic that SARM provides further training opportunities on.

*Lobby the Ministry of Government Relations to Create More Online Training Opportunities.* Focussing again on training, participants felt that SARM should lobby the Ministry of Government Relations to create more videos, webinars, and other online training opportunities for CAOs to offer to their EO’s. As was previously discussed in chapter four, typically, it is the CAOs who have the responsibility to provide the resources to the EO’s. Additional training opportunities could include 15-minute videos that could be played at the beginning of council meetings, focussing on information needed for newly EO’s, which, in turn, would also be a refresher for the experienced council members. There could also be more in-
depth training, for example 1-hour sessions, which could be offered as webinars. Participants suggested providing something similar to the Respect in the Workplace training, which is currently endorsed by SARM, where the training is short, engaging, and interesting and can be completed in short increments. Participants felt that it was important for one body, whether it be the Ministry of Government Relations or some other partner, to create the training opportunities to provide consistency in the information presented to the EOs across the province. This would also eliminate the burden on the administrative team to find and facilitate individual training opportunities and would enable the EOs to complete the training on their own time from the comforts of their home or office, eliminating the need for travel and taking time away from their other obligations.

When presenting this recommendation to SARM, the comment was made that the same results are expected to arise out of the investigation into SARM’s capacity plan. SARM had previously hired a firm to explore areas pertaining to capacity development and felt confident this same recommendation will be repeated. It was also confirmed that the members had indicated previously to SARM that there is an appetite for more opportunities to learn online.

**Encourage More Participation in Training Opportunities.** During the dissemination process, SARM stated that training has been the ongoing focus and priority in the last decade or more. There are definite geographical barriers to offering training. The trainings are often not attended by the majority of the EOs because of the distance required to travel and the time commitment involved. Finding ways to encourage and/or entice EOs, reeves, and CAOs to participate in more training opportunities is something SARM recognizes as a priority and something that has been identified as needing further exploration. At the most recent SARM
mid-term convention, members passed a motion to have SARM offer more workshops and training opportunities, obviously seeing the value in further education and training.

*Showcase the Benefits of Local Collaborative Training of Neighbouring Municipalities.* Individual municipalities would benefit from more local collaborative training or information sessions where their neighbouring rural municipalities could celebrate and share best practices and learn from unsuccessful activities or decisions of other municipalities. In discussions with SARM, it was suggested that perhaps an ad hoc committee could spearhead and organize local collaboration. For example, a process could be offered where members have five or six session options, held two or three times per year, and led by an experienced facilitator. Participants indicated it would be beneficial to offer the session in the six different areas of the province that coincide with the SARM divisions.

*Refine Municipal Leadership Development Programs (MLDP).* SARM is constantly reviewing and refining the courses and programs offered through their MLDP. Participants voiced their desire for SARM to make changes to the MLDP program to include more training, specifically on governance. Besides this, participants would like the sessions to be offered at a local level (i.e., in each division), perhaps shortening the sessions to assist with better retention by providing less information, and offer the courses online as well as in person. As was previously discussed in chapter four, participants felt the sessions were too long, with too much information, and provided little opportunity to consider the practical application.

**Recommendation 6: Lobby the Ministry of Government Relations to Consider a Change to Legislation to Allow for Reeve to be an Appointed Position by the Elected Officials**

This recommendation was the only recommendation that came in the form of an outlier, being a suggestion that was offered only by one participant. The participant had extensive
experience in challenges in local government and presented the idea in such a compelling way that it felt imperative that the recommendation be included in this study for further consideration. When presented to the organization, there was a definite interest and even a level of agreement about how it could solve issues many municipalities are faced with. If the position of Reeve, being the head of council, was one appointed by those elected, it seems obvious that the person being appointed to that position would possess some leadership skills and have the respect of their peers. This process is currently being practiced with the municipal districts in Alberta.

There was further conversation with SARM that if those electing the Reeve are not aware of the roles and responsibilities of the EOs in general, perhaps the votes are based more on popularity rather than how well they perform well as a leader. The partner in this project indicated that this recommendation would instigate much debate around the SARM board table but appreciated leaving the recommendation for consideration as a way to help management carry out their strategic work. This idea is not new to the province, as it is used with other boards and at least deserves further discussion.

**Organization Implications and Next Steps**

The findings and recommendations were presented back to the partner through two face-to-face interactions and one further telephone conversation. The first meeting was scheduled to review and discuss each of the five findings and to have an initial discussion regarding the recommendations. None of the findings or recommendations were a surprise to the partner organization, in fact most had already been discussed and considered by the board. After the initial meeting, field notes were created to assist with the writing of this chapter. The second meeting provided for a more in-depth conversation about the recommendations exploring what interested, surprised, and intrigued the partner. As previously stated, initially there were ten
recommendations and through the discussion of the second meeting, it was determined that multiple recommendations were focussed on the training and therefore were combined into one recommendation. Also, during this session, the priority of the recommendations was determined, and a discussion took place as to what the next steps would be. During both meetings, open-ended coaching questions were asked to encourage the partner to explore the possibilities and implications of each recommendation from an organizational standpoint. A third and final telephone conversation was held to update and discuss further realizations that came about during the writing process.

As indicated previously, the research partner stated that in the past, SARM had previous discussions about each recommendation, with the exception of Recommendation 6 being to lobby for a change to legislation regarding the appointment of the Reeve. These recommendations are not new ideas or concepts to SARM. Meyer stated that at the very least, these findings and recommendations would be used as evidence of what is being asked for by the members. Meyer further stated that this study was evidence that there is an appetite from the members to learn more (J. Meyer, personal communications, January 31, 2020). Having a desire for further education is a positive step towards making it happen.

Being that SARM had previously considered most of the recommendations indicated their commitment to listen to their members and consider providing to them what is being asked for. Recognizing this, the partner identified that some findings and recommendations from this study were given deeper exploration than what SARM had done previously. As a next step, it was indicated that these findings and recommendations would be compared to results from the investigation that was concurrently underway with a consulting company previously hired by SARM. The information from the consultation was not available at the time of the dissemination.
Once SARM reviews the new capacity plan and compares it with the results from both inquiries, the leadership team, along with the board, will identify which recommendations to move forward on. At that time, the management team will begin working on a three to five year plan with initiatives that would implement recommendations from both inquiries.

Keeping in line with SARM’s (n.d.-a) mission, vision, and organizational values statements, SARM is committed to considering the findings and the recommendations of this project, as their organizational values include that they “take direction from their members” (para. 3) and provide education, while playing a leadership role with Saskatchewan municipalities. SARM is the body that has the ability to influence Saskatchewan municipalities, and if action is not taken on their part, it is unlikely that these recommendations would be considered at the local level. Each research participant will receive a executive report that will briefly describe this project and include the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. They will be free to share this information with their councils, but without the support of SARM, the study may only be an opportunity for a brief discussion with no lasting change.

While considering all of the recommendations to SARM as opportunities to help the elected municipal official carry out their roles and responsibilities better, one enormous key to improving leadership in municipal government is changing their perception of the outdated model of leadership currently understood and practiced and replacing it with a model that is more inclusive. As widely discussed in chapter two, leadership needs to be the responsibility of every member of the team—not just one thing that is done, but rather many actions taken as a team on a regular basis. Education desperately needs to be offered to municipal government to help shift the mental model from that of leaders being people that have specific qualities and traits to how everyone can collaborate and lead together. Councils need to see that leadership is
not a power or an authority, but actions taken together to benefit the entire municipality. This research provides the initial groundwork to SARM and all municipalities to consider a new leadership approach.

At this time, there has been no discussion of my involvement in moving any of these recommendations forward, although SARM would only be in initial discussions about these study results. I will discuss further in chapter six how I have been able to personally implement some processes that resulted from the recommendations.

**Role as Researcher**

One of the most significant learnings realized through this research process is the importance of staying open to anything, especially change, through each step of the process. An inquiry project is an extremely non-linear process, and at times, there are little dabs of paint to be added here, then there, then it has to dry. Unfortunately, there are times where you must scrape the canvas of everything already created and start all over. Wilson (2008) commented on action research,

> It just can’t be thought of in a linear or one-step-leads-to-another way. All of the pieces go in, until eventually the new ideas come out. You build relationships with the idea in various and multiple ways, until you reach a new understanding or higher state of awareness regarding whatever it is that you are studying. (pp. 116–117)

After accepting the personal frustration of the process being non-linear and allowing things to take shape and reveal themselves in their own time, the process became quite exciting.

Another key learning was to authentically trust the process. Even when unsure what to do next, as the researcher, trust that whatever is happening is intentional and at the right moment. In this inquiry, work often had to be completed, and then time was needed to rest and reflect.
Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) stated, “The challenge of action researchers is to engage in both making the action happen and stand back from the action and reflect on it as it happens in order to contribute theory to the body of knowledge” (p. 224). It was a definite challenge to allow ideas to percolate because of the time and patience required for it to happen. Lowan-Trudeau (2012) confirmed the importance of reflection by the researcher: “A reflexive researcher examines their role in the research process, reflecting on their experiences throughout the research journey, the influence of their cultural and social positioning, and their interpersonal interactions with research participants” (p. 122). It was surprising to realize how involved the researcher becomes in the inquiry. Dey (1993) explained, “The researchers meanwhile become a participant in his or her own research project, for their own interpretations and actions become a legitimate object of subsequent analysis” (p. 38). Of course, attention needed to be attributed to any bias that may be arising on a personal level of the researcher on a consistent basis. Acknowledging biases happened through daily reflective journaling.

During the coursework, the researcher is expected to have a vision, even if ever so slight, of what the research inquiry will look like. This vision is molded and changed, shaped, and reshaped many times before its completion. It could be disappointing and frustrating for the researcher who has a vision from the beginning of what the end result should look like, especially if they are unwilling to alter that vision. Action researchers must be open to all sorts of possibilities and choose easily to take different paths during their exploration if there appears to be a better direction. Being open to change and maintaining flexibility made the process much more enjoyable.
Implications for Future Inquiry

The scope of this thesis project only allowed for an initial and very brief examination of leadership in municipal government; therefore, many implications have been uncovered that could benefit from future inquiry. One area specifically identified by the organization requiring further inquiry resulted from Recommendation 5. There is a question regarding the demographics of those who are willing and desire to engage in continual education versus those who are not interested in training opportunities of any sort. SARM wonders if there are identifiers of those individuals, and if so, the next question would regard the incentives or actions that would encourage participation from all EOs. Personally, as the researcher, I feel there is a specific need for education on leadership models at all levels, starting in the secondary school system and moving up and addressing those currently in leadership roles. There is a need to dispel the myth that leadership is only about power and authority. Accountability needs to be taken by the EOs to take part in continual education to help them learn and grow as leaders. If both topics of municipal governance and leadership were introduced in secondary school, the young adults who will one day be in those leadership positions will do so with ease and grace.

Being that half of the recommendations are centred on training or learning opportunities, it makes one curious as to what this means to the big picture. Future inquiry could look at what local government would look like if there was mandatory training. That inquiry could look at how making training mandatory would impact the decisions made by rural municipal governments. Would mandatory training decrease the number of individuals who would be willing to run for those positions, and if so, would that increase the effectiveness of the decision made because the EOs would be better informed? This could be another implication for future inquiry. Finally, uncovering what types of online training could assist the EOs most and how and
when to offer it would be another step towards helping improve the leadership capabilities of the EOs.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, a presentation of the six recommendations was initially presented. Under each recommendation, an explanation of the reasoning for the recommendation was given. An examination of the organization implications and next steps followed. A summary of the role of the researcher was offered next, followed by recommendations for future research or considerations. The chapter was wrapped up with this chapter summary. There is one additional chapter offered in this thesis for the sole purpose of personal reflection of and for the researcher.
Chapter Six: Reflections on the Inquiry

This additional and final chapter will serve to provide an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the present inquiry. The action-orientated process is complex and provides many opportunities to learn and grow. To consider these opportunities, an examination of first-person, second-person, and third-person contributions resulting from the study are presented. The chapter will end with a chapter summary.

Learning at the First-Person, Second-Person, and Third-Person Levels

First Person

As a lifelong learner, this project was chosen for the academic challenge, but also to improve the understanding of a situation that has been experienced by the researcher for more than a decade in municipal government: specifically, the current leadership practice. Hersted et al. (2019) offered that “first-person action research is about self-inquiry” (p. 6). It was important to reflect throughout the inquiry on personal learnings or discoveries. It was interesting to realize the part played in leadership by the researcher and the CAO, in this case being the same person. As the researcher, choosing to approach the inquiry with an appreciative stance was a positive leadership choice that brought caring and empathy to the experience.

The leader I aspire to be is one who leads with love and who looks for the good in situations, people, and myself, the latter being the most challenging. To consider all personal contributions through this research process, not only to the research, but also to the leadership in the RM of Bone Creek, was certainly enlightening and fulfilling. At the beginning of the project, the researcher’s concept was that there is one leader in municipal government, the Reeve, who is the head of council. However, at the conclusion of this study, it became apparent that every person involved in the organization should and needs to play a part in leadership for the
betterment of the entire municipality. There is a question of whether it matters who the perceived leader is and if their willingness to allow others to lead will impact the inclusive leadership model. That question was not explored in this inquiry but would be a topic for further research. This study allowed for opportunities to expand understanding of self in system, participants and their contributions, the organization, and municipal government as a whole.

Personally, it was realized that there are opportunities to lead in all situations that present themselves on a regular, if not daily, basis. There are occasions to offer ideas, suggestions, coaching, and processes that support organizations or communities to move forward. It is difficult to constantly consider the personal impact of self in systems, as the impact may not always be positive, which is hard to accept. It also takes the time required to reflect, and in today’s fast-paced world, that time is often precious and not made available or a priority. Allowing daily reflection on how the systems are impacted by individuals uncovers what actions are beneficial and deserve to be repeated. Reflection is also an opportunity to avoid unwanted future behaviours and to correct and rectify mistakes or regrets from the past.

There were a few opportunities to immediately implement suggestions and recommendations that came out of this study. Listening to the participants’ voices, which stated shorter and more consistent opportunities to learn were desired, a practice of taking 10 minutes at the beginning of the council meeting to learn was undertaken. This time provided an excellent opportunity to simply explore one key piece of information, a resource, or a tool. The first time this transpired, an exploration of the Government of Saskatchewan website was offered. The EOs were shown where on the web page pertinent information could be found, such as links to training, contact information for government bodies, and ways to discover information regarding neighbouring municipalities. Another action taken was to begin posting notices on the municipal
website and share it to other social media, which provided information to ratepayers of the municipality on different processes and policies that the EOs were implementing. This action was taken to help improve the understanding of the level of involvement of the EOs by those who elected them. One final action practiced was to include others when decisions were made through the art of coaching, rather than offering an immediate solution. Including everyone at the table, and sometimes recognizing who is not at the table and inviting them into the conversation, is a practice that is becoming more readily entertained in the municipality. Realizing these steps are small, there is hope that the benefits are obvious, and others will start duplicating these actions in this municipality and others.

Second Person

There were many conversations and interactions that lent to second-person learning and benefits. Hersted et al. (2019) noted second-person action research focusses on “interactions, norms, governance and the mission of specific personas and groups with whom the researcher is working” (p. 6). During one interview, the participant decided to implement a new practice, which was to include a page on the municipal website to help educate the public on the responsibilities and level of commitment of EOs. This will extend to the third-person benefits, as the organization will also benefit as well as other individuals reading that information on that website. The participants have regular opportunities to communicate with each other and share information on new best practices, some resulting of this research, such as the example just discussed.

Through conversations with each other, new and better ways of being present and contributing can be explored. Collaboration is occurring, and without trying to control the environment, changes are organically taking place. In the small group of 37 participants involved
in the project, there was a level of excitement and hope that leadership will improve in municipal
government and that new best practices will replace the ineffective model of leadership currently
used in most municipal governments. If action is further taken because of this study, it is possible
that more collaboration can take place, encouraging a more inclusive leadership, where members
are all invested in leading and moving forward with better ways of practicing. Tracy (2010)
stated, “Transferability is achieved when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps
with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action” (p. 845).
This is currently happening, and best practices are starting to change.

Third Person

Finally, consideration is given to third-person action research and its benefits being
where the “primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to
people in everyday conduct” (Hersted et al., 2019, p. 6) not only for the individuals, but also
reaching out to the communities and beyond. This study brought to light that participants have
minimal understanding of a modern model of leadership. Through stories told during the data-
generating process, participants continually referred to traits and qualities of great leaders, but
seldom considered or spoke of how leaders included and collaborated with others. Identifying the
outdated model of leadership currently understood is a first step to exploring a leadership-as-
practice or an inclusive leadership model, where everyone has a responsibility towards the
organization’s leadership. Now that it has been discovered that an outdated individualistic
leadership model exists, one which focusses on power and authority of a person with certain
traits and behaviours, it is possible to shift the perception. SARM has an opportunity to impact
the understanding of how municipalities lead by providing education and training on leadership,
thus playing a role in helping catalyze the education. If the focus shifts to a leadership model that
is inclusive and is practiced, the way municipalities are led and how they function is bound to improve and be more effective. This research is helping SARM to model the way (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) by suggesting and bringing light to new leadership models and practices while showing the benefits to the organizations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides for the conclusion of the thesis project. The chapter provided for an examination where first-person, second-person, and third-person benefits were identified, offering an opportunity to see how the research contributed to self and community. Self-reflection was occurring daily throughout the 2-year study process, making it imperative to grant it this space to be documented.

Thesis Summary

The main inquiry question in this study focussed on how SARM could help the EOs improve their leadership capabilities. In the process of action research, there were many discoveries; however, the most prevalent one was that there is an ineffective outdated model of leadership being used in many municipal governments. Additionally, there is a mindset that the EOs are often considered volunteers, and this could be contributing to the hesitance in their willingness for continued education. In any event, several interesting findings, conclusions, and recommendations emerged that have the ability to change the municipal governments in Saskatchewan.

Personally, the process was a great experience full of personal growth and discoveries. It is satisfying to have the ability to contribute towards, by shedding light on, a better model of leadership at the municipal level. Leaving a legacy that consists of possible changes that will assist the future for both the CAOs and EOs provides great pleasure and offers a sense of closure.
in regard to growing and moving into new career options. There are many different views of leadership, both within and outside of municipal government. Some are more ancient and ineffective; some are so new that there is only a basic understanding of them. Rather than focusing on tools and resources for the EO, it may be more beneficial to consider their concept of leadership and explore where changes could be made to improve how municipalities govern as a whole. Leadership is ever changing, and collaboration and education will make the evolution for municipal governments an easier transition while providing opportunities to work together, make better decisions, and understand each other and themselves, so that inclusive leading or leadership-as-practice becomes the new normal.
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LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

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Appendix A: SARM Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision Statement
By being the rural voice, SARM will effectively lead autonomous municipalities in creating a vibrant, diverse economy resulting in a strong, sustainable Saskatchewan.

Mission Statement
SARM delivers timely, dependable programs and services to meet the needs of its members while influencing government policy and facilitating municipalities to work together to foster rural development and build strong, sustainable communities.

Organizational Values
SARM delivers timely, dependable programs and services to meet the needs of its members while influencing government policy and facilitating municipalities to work together to foster rural development and build strong, sustainable communities.

- We act with integrity and ethics.
- We take our direction from our members.
- We exist to meet the needs of all our members, regardless of their size.
- We undertake our role in a responsible and professional manner.
- We strive for accountability and transparency with our members.
- We educate and inform our members.
- We represent the interests of rural governments.
- We play a leadership role for rural Saskatchewan while respecting local autonomy.
- We strive for innovation and best practices in the programs and services provided to our members.

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Appendix B: Systems Map
Appendix C: Action Research Engagement Model

RRU School of Leadership Studies

Action Research Engagement (ARE)

Engagement Readiness Cycle

1. Focus and Framing
   Carry out a situational analysis to understand the organizational context and the driving forces impacting on the organization, the key issues and focus of the inquiry, and the research questions.

2. Engaged Action
   Engage key stakeholders in actions of inquiry and dialogue that generate new data, understanding and possibilities about the issues.

3. Engage Forward
   Engage stakeholders collectively in dialogue on outcomes of the action inquiry and recommends strategies for moving forward.

4. Engage Forward
   Engage stakeholders collectively in dialogue on outcomes of the action inquiry and recommends strategies for moving forward.

Change Action Cycle

5. Re-contextualize & Reconstruct
   For Organizational Change
   Broader organization engaged to formulate the change intervention or action plan and initiates steps to implement the plan at the next step in the action research process.

6. Sponsor Plans Action

7. Take Action

8. Evaluate Action

9. Re-contextualize & Reconstruct

Transition Zone

Leadership transfers to organization

Organizational Ownership

AR Team Facilitation

Appendix D: Inquiry Team Member Agreement

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Lana Bavle (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry study at Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) to identify tools and resources for elected officials in rural municipal government through engaged action oriented research. The Student’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership, at [phone #] or email [email address].

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, reviewing analysis of data, and/or reviewing associated knowledge products to assist the Student and SARM’s change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

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

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with Lana Bavle, the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.
World Café Table Host Guide

What is a World Café?
A World Café is a conversational process meant to allow all types of groups to foster learning while building relationships. Participants are provided the opportunity to contribute to various questions in an effort to provide feedback, and generate ideas and suggestions. The World Café I will be facilitating for my research project will have 7 tables with up to 5 participants at each table, including you. There are 3 questions in total. Each participant will have the opportunity to take part in all 3 questions, with 15 minutes being allotted for each question.

What is my Role as Table Host?
Unlike the remaining participants, the table host remains in their location for the entire World Café. Primary responsibilities of the table host include:

- Welcome participants to the table
- When the round begins, let the participants know the question and point out where the question is located on the menu so they can refer back to it when needed
- After the first round, when the new round is starting, share key insights that were contributed by the previous groups. This will eliminate discussion on items already contributed, but will also allow the new participants to build on the previous ideas and link new ideas
- Encourage participants to write their ideas down on the paper provided
- Take notes of key items discussed
- At the end of the World Café session, provide a verbal summary of key items brought forward.

As a table host, it is not your role to facilitate discussion but please contribute to it. The purpose of World Café is to allow open conversation among the participants.
Appendix F: Research Consent Form for World Café

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and permission to have the data collected to be used in a final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.).

☐ I consent to the audio recording of the World Café

☐ I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the World Café be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed

☐ I consent to the material I have contributed to and/or generated such as flipchart notes, post it notes, notes on butcher block paper thorough my participation in the World Café be used in this study

☐ I commit to respect the confidential nature of the World Café by not sharing identifying information about the other participants

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________

Signed: _____________________________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________
The World Café is an “innovative yet simple methodology for hosting conversations about questions that matter. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or community. As a process, the World Café can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people’s capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims.”

- Brown and Isaacs (2005)


**Menu**

*Antipasto* (5 min)
Overview of the meal
Your Maître D to facilitate the World Café:
Lana Bovle

*Primo (First Round)* (15 min)
Dialog at up to 7 tables of no more than 5 participants:
- *Table Host* (stays at table through the next round; summarizes conversation at the table at start of next round.)

  Questions:
  1. Think of a time when you were part of an organization that had positive leadership. What did that look like for you?
  2. Is there an experience you had that demonstrates why this was such positive leadership? What happened, and what made this memorable?

*Secundo (Second Round)* (15 min)
- Table Host recaps key stories/values discussed in Primo (Round 1), and then others share their experiences of the first round, their stories and values & add new questions:

  Questions:
  1. What might better leadership look like in municipal government?
  2. What supports, resources and/or tools might help elected officials carry out their roles and responsibilities better?

*(Menu continued)*

*Terzo (Third Round)* (15 min)
- Table Hosts recap the key elements from Secundo (Round 2)
- Group selects one or more reporters to present conversation to the plenary. (Record points on flip-chart paper)

  Questions:
  1. How might SARM more closely work with municipal government to help support learning, leadership, and growth among elected officials?
  2. What needs to happen to make any of these ideas come to fruition? Who needs to do what?
  3. What could elected officials do differently without any additional resources or staff?

*Pozzo (Harvest Round)* (20 min)
- Plenary (entire group). One or more reporters share with the room their conversations on regarding the following:

  What key themes are you seeing with respect to:
  1. Needed, tools, and resources?
  2. Municipality leadership development?
  3. SARM?

*Closing Comments & Next Steps* (5 min)

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**Café Etiquette**

*Focus on what matters!*

- Listen to understand
- Share for insight and learning
- Connect ideas
- Notice patterns, insights, and deeper questions
- Contribute your thinking and experience

*Note that this is an abbreviated world café!*
Appendix H: Invitation to Participate

Dear [Prospective Participant],

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Master’s Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities/Jay Meyer and, therefore, I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of my research is to co-create a process that identifies tools and resources (both currently available and what is yet required) that could help improve the leadership capabilities of elected municipal officials in Saskatchewan.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are involved in municipal government either as a chief administrative officer, an elected official or a stakeholder that has regular dealings with municipal government, either in Saskatchewan or other Western Canadian provinces.

This phase of my research project will consist of interviews, an electronic survey and a World Café and is estimated to last about two months. The interviews will be completed in October and November 2019, the World Café will be completed during the SARM annual midterm convention on November 12, 2019, and the electronic survey, if required, will be sent out in December 2019.

The attached document, being the information letter, contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

I realize that due to our collegial relationship, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship in any way.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please reply by contacting me at:
Lana Bavle
Email: [email address]
Cell: [phone #]

Sincerely,
Lana Bavle.
Appendix I: Research Information Letter

Identifying Tools and Resources for Elected Officials in Rural Municipal Government through Engaged Action Oriented Research

My name is Lana Bavle and this research project is part of the requirement for a master’s degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [phone #].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to co-create a process that identifies tools and resources (both currently available and what is yet required) that might assist elected officials to lead and carry out their roles and responsibilities better. I am conducting this survey in partnership with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM).

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of interviews, an electronic vote survey and a World Café and is estimated to last about two months. The half hour interviews will be completed in October and November 2019 and the one hour World Café will be completed during the SARM annual midterm convention on November 12, 2019. An electronic survey may be used and would be sent out in December 2019.

The anticipated questions includes ones that will identify the tools and resources that are currently available to elected officials, will inquire into what additional tools are required, will explore how SARM can partner with municipalities to support their learning and growth and ask how better leadership from elected officials will benefit municipalities.

Benefits and risks to participation

The partner organization will have the benefit of a one year research project pertaining to one of their strategic pillars at no financial cost. The elected officials, CAOs, and other stakeholders that participate may benefit from the possible increased leadership that may arise as an outcome of this study. Of course, one personal benefit for myself will be the successful completion of the MA Leadership degree. Another possible benefit may be advanced employment opportunities either in the same sector or in one focused on leadership or academia.

One risk that may occur is concerning confidentiality. Because my intention is to facilitate a World Café, I will maintain confidentiality however there is no way to guarantee that confidentiality will be kept by the participants involved in this event. I will request that all participants respect the confidential nature of this study and not share identifying information with others by including the request in an introduction letter, including it in the consent form and
by reminding them at the beginning of any group sessions. A second risk that may occur is that of raised expectations. SARM may not be able to create all of the resources that are requested in the immediate future.

**Inquiry team**

My inquiry team consists of SARM staff, fellow cohort members and fellow Administrators who will assist me in facilitating these events and helping keep the study on track.

**Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**

I am completing this study only as a process to hopefully improve the leadership in rural municipalities. I am not wishing to obtain other employment options either with SARM or with any other municipality. I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

**Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected laptop. Information will be recorded in hand-written format as well as audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. All raw data will be destroyed one year after my graduation (graduation is November 2020).

**Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a master’s degree in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with SARM. The findings and recommendations may become part of further SARM professional development sessions and/or used in a professional or scholarly journal article or in a conference presentation. I will provide a creative final report that will be presented to SARM and any participants wishing to receive it.

**Procedure for withdrawing from the study**

If at any time through the research process a participant wishes to withdraw from the study, their request should be sent to myself through email or delivered in person. If the participant withdraws after participating in an interview, the interview recording and transcript will be destroyed immediately. If the participant withdraws after participating in the World Café, it might not be possible to identify individuals’ comments in order to remove them.
You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation or signing the in-person consent form, you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Best Regards,

Lana Bavle
[email address]
[phone #]
Appendix J: Research Consent Form for Interviews

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data I contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.).

☐ I consent to the audio recording of the interview whether done in person, over the telephone, or through a video conferencing platform. Note: no video recording will occur if a video conferencing platform is used, only the audio portion will be recorded.

☐ I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the interview be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________

Signed: ______________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________