Leadership Development in a Mid-Sized Manufacturing Firm

by

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Abstract

This thesis employed appreciative, action research engagement to explore how a mid-sized manufacturing firm could better develop and leverage leadership within its manufacturing division from a constructionist viewpoint. Three focus groups involving a total of 10 participants, two interviews, and a survey of the firm’s 180 employees were conducted. Five findings pointed to a performance-oriented organizational culture, as employees have responded positively to change initiatives and recognized the importance of good leadership for organizational performance. Three short-term recommendations suggest that management sustain existing change management initiatives rooted in transformational and authentic leadership, introduce greater distribution of leadership, and emphasize internal talent management. Two longer-term recommendations suggest that the organization consider bolstering transformational leadership by introducing more formal leadership development and leveraging servant leadership tenets by way of mentoring approaches. The contribution of this research to the literature consists of a case study illustrative of followers’ perspective of transformational leadership and leadership development in an SME context and the acute resource challenges faced by SMEs in developing leadership capacity.
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Finding 3: Leaders at B.G.E. Service & Supply are engaged in an ongoing, organization-wide change initiative.

Finding 4: There is a focus and commitment on the part of employees in the manufacturing division to contribute to improved company performance. Workload distribution, Process improvements, and Increased accountability and feedback.

Finding 5: Employees and managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply recognize the importance of people and leadership development. Emergent, unplanned skills leverage and capacity development is taking place. Employees would welcome a more structured framework for people development, with a preference for acquisitive and dialogic approaches. Employee perspectives on the debate of internal versus external talent management strategies were highly objective and reflect an organization-first orientation.

Study Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Cohesion, cooperation, and commitment are building blocks for distributed leadership and leadership development.

Conclusion 2: Momentum and readiness for change is already in place.

Conclusion 3: A structured approach to human capital assessment and development would be beneficial.

Conclusion 4: Internal talent management is advantageous over external recruitment, but both are needed for organizational growth and sustainability.

Summary of conclusions

Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry

Low response rates for survey and interviews.

External researcher status.

Applicability to other organizations.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Five: Inquiry Implications

Study Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Bolster positive initiatives underway to improve communication, information flow, and enunciation of a values-based corporate culture.

Recommendation 2: Encourage greater distribution of leadership in the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply.

Recommendation 3: Implement formal leadership training and experiential training to build leadership skills of employees. Front line manufacturing staff, Supervisory-level staff.

Recommendation 4: Encourage and reward mutual skill development through the introduction of mentorship and peer-learning initiatives. Consider a combination of formal and informal mentorship is recommended.
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Chapter One: Focus and Framing

Roberta MacGillivray, president of B.G.E. Service & Supply, says that for her, the question of where she would invest extra money is simple: “In the development of our people; they are key to our success. (“If you had $100,000,” 2015, Centre bar).

Organizations of all sizes depend on the strength of the people within them. Small- and medium-sized enterprises are particularly vulnerable to weaknesses in human capital (Darcy, Hill, McCabe, & McGovern, 2014; Krishnan & Scullion, 2017), making an understanding of how to develop and support leadership in smaller firms highly pertinent. The research on leadership in small and medium firms was, however, limited (Cope, Kempster, & Parry, 2011). This inquiry project explored the exercise and development of leadership in the context of a medium-sized manufacturing firm, B.G.E. Service & Supply. This is a thesis project report, which contains five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the research questions explored in this thesis, an explanation of the importance of the inquiry to the sponsoring organization, an overview of the organization and its operational context, a description of this inquiry from a systems perspective, and an outline of the overall organization of the thesis.

Founded in 1968, B.G.E. Service & Supply is a mid-sized family owned manufacturing, sales, and service operation specialized in filtration products headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta (B.G.E. Service & Supply, n.d.-a, para. 1). The President of the company has identified leadership development as an issue crucial to the long-term well-being of the company. However, she is keenly aware that it is a priority repeatedly overtaken by urgent, albeit not necessarily more important, operational matters (Owner, B.G.E. Service & Supply, personal
As principal researcher, I employed Rowe, Graf, Agger-Gupta, Piggot-Irvine, and Harris’s (2013, p. 19) “Action Research Engagement (ARE),” a scientific approach that calls on researchers to study, plan, implement, and observe organizational changes in context in a cyclical fashion, drawing on lessons learned from each cycle to inform the approach of the next (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Rowe et al., 2013). In this instance, I used ARE to explore how the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply can better develop leadership. I am an actor external to the organization and played a consultative role in the context of this research.

The objective of expanding leadership potential is both logical and laudable; however, a clear path forward is not obvious to researchers who study leadership, much less the many individuals in organizational life who engage in its practice. Researchers in the field of leadership development have debated the individual versus organizational lens (R. T. Harrison, 2017; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Turner & Baker, 2017), skills as opposed to mindset (Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010; Day & Sin, 2011; Kennedy, Carroll, & Francoeur, 2013), and the merits of various approaches to leadership development (Garavan, Carbery, & O’Brien, 2016; Groves, 2007; Hezlett, 2016). This research project was an occasion to study these phenomena in an organizational setting and explore which perspectives and approaches may be most pragmatic in the scenario of B.G.E. Service & Supply as a proxy for any number of similar organizations.

As leadership development is an underexplored research area (Avolio et al., 2010; Day & Sin, 2011; Turner & Baker, 2017), this project’s contributions to both the body of knowledge on leadership development and organizational outcomes were relevant for B.G.E. Service & Supply.

1 All personal communications in this report are used with permission.
Glesne (2016) indicated that researchers employ research questions to provide focus by stating what challenges, issues, and/or problems a study seeks to address. I applied a constructionist viewpoint to examine interrelations in B.G.E. Service & Supply to develop an understanding of how this organization is performed (Ray & Goppelt, 2011) and develop suggested recommendations as to how leadership may be leveraged to improve organizational performance.

The main research question was: How can B.G.E. Service & Supply better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its members? Sub-questions deriving from this overarching inquiry question were:

1. How do members of B.G.E. Service & Supply demonstrate and experience leadership?
2. What is currently—explicitly or implicitly—supporting (or inversely, impeding) employees’ engagement in leadership?
3. What approaches could managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply introduce to encourage front line and first level supervisory employees to take on greater aspects of organizational leadership?
4. What strategies would help the organization’s leaders better manage the polarity between developing and promoting internal talent and meeting organizational leadership needs in a timely fashion?

Significance of the Inquiry

B.G.E. Service & Supply’s senior management team consists of six individuals serving in the roles of President, Vice-President Operations, Vice-President Sales, Director Fort McMurray Operations, Controller, and Advisor. Based on the demographic profile of the senior management team, it is anticipated that up to one-third of the members of this group could retire
over the next five years. Ms. MacGillivray took over from her father, Darrel Sutton, as company President in June of 2010 (B.G.E. Service & Supply, 2010, para. 1), assuming full ownership of the company within the past two years (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, May 17, 2017).

Upcoming transitions in the senior management cadre are among the organization’s most pressing leadership concerns (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, April 13, 2017). Equally salient is an organizational objective to distribute decision-making power beyond the senior management team, creating formal and informal leadership opportunities for high potential staff throughout the organization. Historically, the senior management team has made all decisions, constraining empowerment of other managers and limiting capacity for senior level strategic planning (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, April 13, 2017). Ms. MacGillivray has a clear desire to shift towards a model of distributed leadership, an approach described by researchers as one enabling individuals to exercise leadership irrespective of whether or not they occupy a formal management role (Fitzsimons, James, & Denyer, 2011; Gronn, 2002; Jackson & Parry, 2011; James, 2011). Implementation of a distributed leadership model at B.G.E. Service & Supply would enable cooperation and collaboration across various levels of the organization and thereby improve team performance (Engel Small & Rentsch, 2011) and business outcomes (Cope et al., 2011; Yukl, 2008).

To ensure a manageable scope for this inquiry project, I focused on the manufacturing division, representing approximately 45 individuals, or one-third of the company, based in Edmonton, Alberta. The group is highly diverse, with an average age of 44 years old, representing a range of 24 to 70 years old. The average years of service is five years, with a range of less than one year to 30 years working with the company. Predominantly female, with
31 women to 14 men, employees in the group come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including the Philippines, Vietnam, India, China, Africa, and Malta (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, May 17, 2017). The manufacturing division specializes in customized filtration products in special sizes or for unique applications (B.G.E. Service & Supply, n.d.-a, Building Air Quality section, para. 8).

Two major change goals were identified for this research inquiry. The first was to help senior managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply explore how to draw more benefit from value-added capabilities of its workforce: namely, leadership competencies. The second was to identify approaches the company’s senior managers could adopt to facilitate and encourage leadership activities and behaviours on an organizational basis. Effective and competent leadership is key to ensuring organizational personnel sustain forward movement and necessary financial returns by increasing efficiency, adapting to changing external environments, and maintaining necessary human capital (Scharmer, 2009; Sternberg, 2007; Yukl, 2008). In the case of B.G.E. Service & Supply, organizational leadership development objectives also included identifying and preparing candidates for succession in key roles—a core outcome of leadership development programs in best practice organizations (Groves, 2007; Van Velsor, McCauley, Ruderman, & Center for Creative Leadership, 2010).

Potential benefits to the organization resulting from this inquiry included increased employee empowerment, satisfaction and engagement, better information flow and performance within teams, more robust decision making and planning, as well as organizational resiliency for personnel transitions (Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2013; Takahashi, Ishikawa, & Kanai, 2012; Yukl, 2008; Zhou, Vredenburgh, & Rogoff, 2013). Amongst the advantages of distributing leadership capacity broadly in an organization are enhanced self-monitoring (Jackson & Parry,
2011), bringing decision making nearer to responsible actors (Giles, 2016), and the “distribution of resources and social capital, plurality of experience, and enhanced capability for sense-making and problem-solving” (Cope et al., 2011, p. 280).

From an employee perspective, the change goal was to enrich workplace experiences by creating a culture where leadership behaviours are encouraged and rewarded regardless of position or rank. Goleman (2000) identified job enrichment through the sharing of responsibilities typically associated with leadership as an important strategy in employee motivation, a conclusion backed by findings linking shared leadership to job satisfaction (Bethke-Langenegger, Mahaler, Staffelbach, 2011; Drescher & Garbers, 2016; Wegge et al., 2010). Research has demonstrated that the presence of shared or distributed leadership—the terms are often used interchangeably (Fitzsimons et al., 2011)—contributes positively to team and organizational performance (Engel Small & Rentsch, 2011; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Friedrich, Griffith, & Mumford, 2016). This thesis includes a range of recommendations for consideration by the senior leadership team at B.G.E. Service & Supply, specific to the organization’s context, to help the organization realize the benefits outlined in this discussion.

This inquiry was not about fixing a problem, but rather enhancing an organization, so any downside risks related primarily to opportunity costs. If senior managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply decided not to implement the recommendations resulting from this inquiry project, they would be unable to capitalize on the many organizational benefits identified with leadership development programs, including optimization of leadership transitions (Groves, 2007), increased employee commitment to the organization (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010; Cao & Hamori, 2016), improved realization of strategic change initiatives (Amagoh, 2009), maximized entrepreneurial orientation (Alegre & Chiva, 2013; Altinay, Madanoglu, De Vita, Arasli, &
Ekinci, 2016), and a wide range of positive behaviours beneficial to the overall wellbeing of the organization (Aime, Humphrey, Derue, & Paul, 2014; Amagoh, 2009; D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2016).

**Organizational Context**

B.G.E. Service & Supply is a family-owned service and manufacturing operation that specializes in filtration products. Its headquarters and sole manufacturing facility are in Edmonton, Alberta, with seven customer service locations across four Western provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The company has 185 employees and has been in business since 1968 (B.G.E. Service & Supply, n.d.-a; R. MacGillivray, personal communication, May 17, 2017). The company was initially a sales and service operation only, with senior managers making the decision to enter into manufacturing in the mid-1980s when a key product was discontinued by the then manufacturer (Flakstad, 2013). B.G.E. Service & Supply’s products and services are used by a highly diversified customer base, representing industrial, commercial, education, healthcare, manufacturing, government, and residential sectors (B.G.E. Service & Supply, n.d.-b; Ferlaino, 2015). The company President characterizes the organization as generally strong and sustainable from a revenue standpoint, as the customer base is highly diversified and the filtration products and services sold are necessary purchases that form part of customers’ regular and ongoing maintenance (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, April 13, 2017).

B.G.E. Service & Supply is a non-unionized work environment. Approximately half of its employees work in branch office operations and the other half in manufacturing or headquarters corporate roles (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, May 17, 2017). Managers at the company place a strong emphasis on diversity in the company workforce, putting in place
workplace accommodations for mobility, hearing, and other forms of impairment (B.G.E. Service & Supply, 2014; Ferlaino, 2015; Hardy, 2014). Women account for approximately half of the workforce, outnumbering men more than three to one in administrative roles and two to one in manufacturing roles. The proportion is the reverse in the case of senior management and sales roles; the male to female ratio surpassing 2:1 in senior management and 6:1 in sales. The age of the workforce ranges from 18 to 70 years old and has at times comprised up to 90% new immigrants from the Philippines, Vietnam, India, China, Africa, Malta, and the United Kingdom (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, May 17, 2017; Mah, 2012). The company is also an active participant in employability programs, employing people with various types of impairments. B.G.E. Service & Supply has been formally recognized for its accessibility as an employer (B.G.E. Service & Supply, 2014; Mah, 2012).

The organization is a small to medium enterprise (SME) whose competitors are much larger, multinational groups. There is a need to exploit the organization’s strengths related to its service level and custom manufacturing ability (Ferlaino, 2015) so as to retain clients and competitiveness in existing market niches, all the while exercising initiative and creativity in developing new areas of competitive advantage (Altinay et al., 2016). B.G.E. Service and Supply’s owner identified the ability to be nimble and to customize products for the operating conditions of customers (Flakstad, 2013) among the company’s strengths as an SME. B.G.E. Service & Supply’s business plan for future growth includes a continued commitment to supplying customized filtration solutions and a high level of service to its clientele as well as developing new, specialized filtration products and technology (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, May 17, 2017). The success of this approach will depend on the organization’s adaptation to evolving client needs and an ever-changing external environment. The necessary
organizational agility will in turn require strategic decision making, persuasion, and engagement of employees, all of which are outcomes closely linked with initiative and personal leadership at the level of individual members of the organization (Sternberg, 2007; Yukl, 2008). B.G.E. Service & Supply does not exist in a vacuum where other operational matters are concerned. Factors impacting the company include the availability of appropriate personnel in local labor markets, regional economic conditions and their impact on the financial health of B.G.E. Service & Supply’s customers, regulatory changes impacting product design and demand, as well as the company’s own operations. Specific examples include Alberta legislation raising the minimum wage to $15.00 by October of 2018 (Employment Standards Regulation, 1997), the introduction of a carbon tax (Climate Leadership Act, 2016), implementation costs around a potential industry shift towards ISO standardization (Hogan, 2006; Rosenthal, 2016; Tronville & Rivers, 2005), and weakening of the Canadian dollar, as 90% of raw materials are sourced from the United States (Harchaoui, Tarkhani, & Yuen, 2005).

Burnes (2009) posed the question:

What is it about the nature and characteristics of a particular group that causes it to respond (behave) as it does to the forces that impinge on it, and how can these forces be changed in order to elicit a more desirable form of behavior? (p. 231)

This query has offered a framework to consider B.G.E. Service & Supply management responses to not only external forces, but also highly relevant to this research project: how to leverage leadership to change internal forces for the betterment of the organization.

Systems Analysis of the Inquiry

Senge (2006) stated, “To understand the most challenging managerial issues requires seeing the whole system that generates the issues” (p. 66). Therefore, while the change goal,
agents, targets, and direct advocates and opponents of this inquiry were internal to the organization, I have employed a systems-based analysis to consider both internal and external factors. Systems thinking involves “the ability to view issues holistically, and the insight to see nonobvious connections between things while understanding why they behave a certain way” (Arnold & Wade, 2017, p. 2). This includes looking at “non-linear relationships, delays, feedback loops, and multiple sources of causation” (Kopainsky, Alessi, Pedercini, & Davidsen, 2015, p. 297) as well as managing undefined boundaries and predicting the impact of change (Squires, Wade, Dominick, & Gelosh, 2011).

Ultimately, the organizational sponsor’s overriding goal related to this project was improving the competitive position and financial health of the company while ensuring a healthy and positive workplace. I adopted a systems-based perspective to enable an understanding of how this inquiry’s change goals could contribute to the desired organizational outcomes, as well as which factors may negatively or positively impact overall organizational objectives. In the case of B.G.E. Service & Supply, relevant internal factors included employee satisfaction, initiative, and engagement; leadership behaviours; employee development initiatives; approaches to talent management; and relationships with customers. From an external perspective, significant factors included the regulatory environment, economic and labor market conditions, demographic shifts, and competitors’ actions.

B.G.E. Service & Supply is a supplier to customers across a wide range of industries, located in Western Canada. The company’s overall financial health is, therefore, impacted to a certain degree by economic conditions in that region, but the risk of being negatively impacted by a broad-based economic downturn or a significant weakening in performance of any one industry is mitigated by the diversity of its customer base (Itzkowitz & Loviscek, 2016). B.G.E.
Service & Supply personnel have been able to develop and maintain a market-leading position in the filtration market in Western Canada in the face of competition from much larger, multinational firms. Threats to this position include potential decisions by competitors to target B.G.E. Service & Supply more aggressively, particularly in the areas of pricing and service levels (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, April 13, 2017). A secondary, related threat is consolidation in the filtration industry, as multinational groups are aggressively acquiring competitor distributors like B.G.E. Service & Supply (Guy & Fitzsimmons, 2009; “Mergers & Acquisitions Review 2015,” 2016; “Mergers & Acquisitions Review 2016,” 2017; Ramsey, 2017; Thomas & Cardot, 2016). If the company’s managers are unable to leverage the organization’s human resources to maintain strong brand recognition, customer relationships, grasp market opportunities, and adapt to a dynamic operating environment, the company risks losing market share and a weakened financial position, putting in jeopardy the company’s survival (Altinay et al., 2016; Darcy et al., 2014).

For the purposes of this inquiry, the system I focused the research within was the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply. The relationship between the factors that make up this system and the ultimate objectives sought by B.G.E. Service & Supply managers through this change inquiry are illustrated in Figure 1: namely, organizational health and competitive position. I have outlined the point of leverage for this inquiry using an orange box in Figure 1. The green box in Figure 1 represents interventions in the system. The initiators of any interventions are the change agents, represented by the red box, and the recipients of these actions are the change targets, represented by the blue box. The elements of Figure 1 contained outside of the orange box illustrate the anticipated impacts of the change project.
Notwithstanding the fact that this inquiry focused on the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply and that I conceptualized Figure 1 on that basis, the figure is readily applicable to the entire organization or other parts of the company. I purposely depicted the system in such a way to enable consideration, from a systems perspective, of replication of the change initiative I explored through this inquiry elsewhere in B.G.E. Service & Supply or even within other, unrelated manufacturing and/or service firms.
Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One included an overview of the organizational imperatives driving this inquiry project and the corresponding research questions I explored in this thesis project. In contextualizing the research, the chapter contained information on the organization’s current situation, a systems analysis illustrative of the proposed organizational change, relevant stakeholders, desired intermediate and final outcomes, as well as external factors with the potential to impact end results.

Chapter Two consists of a literature review, wherein I furnish perspectives and pertinent findings from research in the areas of leadership development, distributed leadership, and talent development.

Chapter Three comprises an outline of the methodology employed in this inquiry project. I situate the research in the context of the ARE model (Rowe et al., 2013) and explain the data collection methods I employed: namely, focus groups, surveys, and one-on-one interviews. I also outline project participants, inquiry team makeup, and how I conducted the study and analyzed ensuing data, including measures I took to verify data. The chapter closes with a summary of ethical issues related to the inquiry.

Chapter Four contains the findings resulting from the analysis of participant data, offering conclusions drawn from situating these findings in the framework of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. I also discuss the scope and limitations of the inquiry.

In Chapter Five, I conclude the thesis with a series of actionable recommendations, including a description of the sponsoring organization’s role in developing the same and implications for the organization in moving forward with the change initiative I propose in this
inquiry. Finally, I identify the contributions brought to existing research by this inquiry project and make suggestions for future areas of research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The focus of this research project was the enhancement of leadership at B.G.E. Service & Supply. Reviewing existing knowledge in the domain of leadership studies will enable the project sponsor to benefit from others’ work and identified new knowledge developed by way of this project.

This literature review focused on areas most pertinent to these objectives: namely, prevailing theories of leadership, leadership development, distributed leadership, and talent management. An overview of leadership theories was included to contextualize this inquiry in the realm of leadership scholarship. Leadership development was the overarching focus of this inquiry project, and while there is ample literature in this area, the resources on leadership development in an SME context were very limited and represent an area of knowledge contribution. Distributed leadership was relevant because the project sponsor was interested in leadership development not only from the perspective of managerial positions, but also to encourage leadership behaviours writ large. Talent management was included as the initial driver for B.G.E. Service & Supply’s decision to engage in this project, which answered an interest in exploring how best to manage the impending retirement of a handful of key personnel.

Theories of Leadership

Defining leadership. All attempts to define leadership in the literature were consistent on one point—the difficulty of arriving at a definition (C. Harrison, 2018; Jackson & Parry, 2011; Sorenson & Goethals, 2004). This is perhaps explained, in part, because the pervasive nature of leadership in collaborative activity lends itself to varying definitions, depending on the situation, the role played by the leader, as well as one’s perspective (Ansell & Gash, 2012). The most useful and credible approach to defining leadership was that the possible definitions represent a
spectrum, all of which have a place in organizational life. These definitions ranged from highly operational processes involving leaders and followers working together to achieve goals, to facilitate the emotive activities of inspiring vision and enabling psychological conditions conducive to healthy workplaces and highly functional teams (C. Harrison, 2018; Jackson & Parry, 2011). However, at the same time, the applied nature of this project did necessitate a narrowing in the concept of leadership used to inform the inquiry and research interactions. For the ends of this project, I have, therefore, defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal all the while creating positive change for the common good.

In light of the practical nature of this research project, it was also important to consider a comparison of leadership and management, constructs that are most often treated as separate in the academic literature. Management is typified as mechanical in nature, focused on monitoring resources, budgets, and outputs, while leadership is about vision and direction as well as enabling and improving the operations of an organization (Bolden, 2004; C. Harrison, 2018). As stated by management guru Peter Drucker (2009): “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things” (p. 368). The differences between management and leadership notwithstanding, the two are interdependent and are usually, by necessity, exercised by the same individual as part of a single organizational role (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, & Taylor, 2011).

**Leadership theories.** A scan of leadership compendia (C. Harrison, 2018; Jackson & Parry, 2011; Sorenson & Goethals, 2004) or a keyword search using “leadership theory” in online academic databases might give the impression that there are potentially as many leadership theories as there are adjectives in the English language. Dinh et al.’s (2014) review of the preceding 10 years’ publications on leadership theory catalogued over 60 different theories,
Meuser et al. (2016) tabulated almost 50, while Anderson and Sun (2017) stated that “research since 2000 has examined a bewildering number of other leadership styles [besides transformational]” (p. 76). As an exhaustive review of leadership theory was beyond the scope of this project, this section consists of an overview of commonly referenced leadership theories. These theories are organized under the general headings of individual-centric and relational theories.

**Individual-centric theories.** For simplicity of classification, I have included theories of leadership with a primary focus on the individual as an actor impacting a group. These theories do not necessarily incorporate the reactions or feedback of followers. Amongst the very first leadership theories developed, trait theory, sometimes compounded with “great man” or heroic leadership theories, identifies personality characteristics of leaders that correlate with leadership outcomes (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Jackson & Parry, 2011).

Contemporary studies often draw on Costa and McCrae’s (1992, p. 5) “Big Five” personality traits of “neuroticism (N) versus emotional stability; extraversion (E) or surgency; openness to experience (O) or intellect; agreeableness (A) versus antagonism; and conscientiousness (C) or will to achieve.” Not to diminish the longstanding and intrinsic appeal of trait theory, correlations between leader traits and leadership outcomes have not been found consistent across situations (Grint, 2000; Sorenson & Goethals, 2004).

Behaviour theory shares some structural similarities with trait theory, but rather than examining personality, behaviour theory looks for correlation between measurable behaviours and outcomes. There was an especial emphasis on behaviours oriented towards relationships, tasks, and change (Bolden, 2004; DeRue et al., 2011). While leader behaviours have been shown to have a greater impact on outcomes than traits (DeRue et al., 2011), the influence of behaviour
was also not shown to be consistent across situations (C. Harrison, 2018; Sorenson & Goethals, 2004).

While both trait and behaviour theory appeared to have been superseded by subsequent developments in the study of leadership theory, recently, both have seen a resurgence. This is, in part, due to the emergence of more sophisticated personality measurement tools (Meuser et al., 2016) and, in part, as a component of transformational and charismatic leadership, related to interest in which leader traits and behaviours most enable inspiration and motivation of followers (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012; Sternberg, 2007).

Situational and contingency theories approached the leader’s actions and the situation in combination, considering the interplay between leaders’ methods and the reality at hand (Jackson & Parry, 2011; Sorenson & Goethals, 2004). At the risk of over-simplification, complexity leadership theory could be characterized as the younger sibling of situational and contingency theory. As such, complexity theory has evolved to incorporate organizational adaptability in response to emergent and highly interconnected complex systems (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009).

**Relational theories.** Leadership theories with a greater emphasis on the interaction between leader and follower are sometimes also referred to as follower-centric theories. However, given the relatively underdeveloped nature of follower-centric leadership studies, representing only 9% of leadership theories canvassed over a 10-year period by Dinh et al. (2014), a characterization as relational theories may be more accurate. Amongst the earliest of these were leader-member exchange and transactional theories of leadership, whereby leaders and followers engage in a negotiation of exchange of economic or other benefits, namely output from the follower in return for rewards from the leader (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Transformational leadership, is conceptually—although not always by
name—arguably amongst the most popular and widely ascribed to contemporary philosophies of leadership (Jackson & Parry, 2011) as well as the most studied (Dinh et al., 2014; Dionne et al., 2014). This theory involves leaders transforming attitudes, motivations, and behaviours by way of intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, inspiration, and individualized consideration, channeling followers towards a shared cause (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Ghasabeh, Soosay, & Reaiche, 2015; Goethals, Sorenson, & Burns, 2004).

Charismatic leadership was often treated in the literature simultaneously with transformational leadership, as charisma is one of the tools drawn upon in effecting transformational leadership (Anderson & Sun, 2017; C. Harrison, 2018). Authentic leadership was also frequently mentioned in tandem with both charismatic and transformational leadership. While the core tenet of authentic leadership relates to the leader being transparent and bringing his or her full and true self to the organization (Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, & Sels, 2012), it has often been linked with integrity, morality, and ethics (Dionne et al., 2014). These characteristics are an area of increasing interest in the study of leadership (Dinh et al., 2014), likely in no small part due to the potential for authentic leadership to play an enabling role in transformative leadership (Hoch, 2013) and counter balance some of the unethical behaviours that have come to be associated with charisma in leadership (Anderson & Sun, 2017).

In the same vein, somewhat further along the spectrum, is servant leadership. Frequently viewed as overlapping with spiritual leadership, given the common focus on altruism and follower well-being (Anderson & Sun, 2017), servant leadership is an approach where the leader, through empathy, listening, and stewardship supports followers’ growth and achievements (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Hoch, 2013). Implicit leadership theory relates to the follower’s perspective and perceptions that a leader is only a leader to the extent that followers grant him/or...
her the authority to be so, based on their assessments of his/her suitability for the role (Fischbein & Lord, 2004; C. Harrison, 2018). Related to the phenomenon of followers ascribing leadership to individuals is the theory of distributed leadership, explored in greater detail later in this literature review.

Social constructionist leadership theory acknowledges the relational and interdependent nature of leadership, whereby leadership is not about the individual, but rather about the constant social interaction ongoing within an organization, incorporating social activity, conversations, actions, meanings, and context (Barge & Fairhurst, 2008; Ray & Goppelt, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Under the social constructionist viewpoint, leadership is a co-constructed domain of the many, not the few, and, given the emphasis on process, it is not necessarily attributable to traits, competencies, or specific individuals (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Another pertinent characteristic of the theory is the importance of everyday acts, including communication and dialogue, in giving rise to leadership (Endres & Weibler, 2016).

The constructionist viewpoint was highly applicable to this particular project, as the emphasis was on describing processes in organizations with a view to understanding how organizations work (Ray & Goppelt, 2011) and allowed for multiple interpretations of the same reality, depending on an individual’s interpretation of any given social interaction (Endres & Weibler, 2016; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010)—an approach altogether suitable for the research questions at hand, given the objective of considering the perspectives of multiple individuals from very diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the process orientation aligned well with the definition of leadership I selected for the purposes of this research, describing leadership as a process influencing a group to achieve a shared objective while at the same time creating positive change.
Leadership Development

The topic of leadership development is very broad; therefore in the interest of ensuring both relevancy and manageability in terms of scope, literature reviewed in this domain was limited to a select number of sub-topics. A definition of leadership development was included to contextualize the overarching focus of this thesis and balance the literature review. An overview of literature on approaches to leadership provided an academic framework within which to situate the current and recommended future state of leadership development approaches at B.G.E. Service & Supply.

Definition of leadership development. The concept of leadership development does not readily lend itself to being defined. As expressed eloquently by Day and Sin (2011), “The difficulty is that it requires melding one fuzzy construct (leadership) with something that is equally complex and nebulous (development)” (p. 546). Particularly challenging in determining how to circumscribe leadership development in the context of this ARE project involving B.G.E. Service & Supply was the difference between an individual-centric approach and an organization-centric approach. This is captured in the linguistically slight, yet conceptually significant, difference in the literature between the terms “leader” and “leadership” development. The former relates to growth of an individual’s leadership capacity, whereas the latter places the emphasis on the organization, focusing on interconnectedness, relationships, and outcomes at the collective level as opposed to that of the individual (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005; Day & Dragoni, 2015; James, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 1998). Consistent with this differentiation between leadership and leader, leadership development literature tended to focus on the relational nature of leadership, meandering between planned and emergent approaches to developing know-how, methods, and environments that facilitate the development of social
capital by leaders (Garavan et al., 2016; Hezlett, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2013). Kennedy et al. (2013) described a shift away from building skills to an emphasis on mindset, as “leadership development is less directly concerned with developing a set of discrete skills and is increasingly concerned with participants’ underlying assumptions and how these shape possibilities for the future” (p. 10).

This shift in thinking around leadership development could be said to represent a parallel to the evolution of leadership theories themselves, as researchers moved away from trait and behaviour theories to focus on the enabling capability of transformational, authentic, and servant leadership theories. However, of late, the thinking of some leadership theorists has again shifted to recognize that leaders’ traits and behaviours make essential contributions to transformational leadership. This integrated approach to leadership theory (DeRue et al., 2011; Meuser et al. 2016) is arguably a better fit with the reality that leadership development necessarily focuses on the behaviour of individuals.

Leadership development is about creating knowledge, skills, and approaches that contribute to a transformative organizational environment that enables rich, constructive communication and relationships that contribute to organizational outcomes (Hanson, 2013; James, 2011; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016).

**Approaches to leadership development.** In general terms, approaches to leadership development are holistic, focusing on organizational objectives and well-being, even when done so through the lens of actions targeting individual leaders (Day & Sin, 2011; Garavan et al., 2016; Groves, 2007; Hezlett, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2013). As was the case with leadership and management, it is not possible to completely dissociate leader and leadership development, as
differentiation between the two concepts notwithstanding, one cannot do one without the other (Hanson, 2013).

Garavan, McGuire, and Lee (2015) proposed a development typology to provide a framework representative of both the independent and interdependent, or relational, nature of development, overlaid with planned and emergent qualities of the same. Turner and Baker (2017) and Turner, Chung, Schroeder, and Johnson (n.d.) drew on Garavan et al.’s (2015) four categories of autonomous (i.e., independent and emergent), acquisitive (i.e., independent and planned), dialogic (i.e., interdependent and emergent), and networked (i.e., interdependent and planned) to suggest developmental approaches specific to leaders and leadership, which was a practical approach of pertinence and utility to this research project. Turner et al.’s model provides for categories that represent a blend of independent and interdependent approaches as well as a blend of planned and emergent approaches. Notwithstanding the merits of considering the axis of independent versus interdependent and planned versus emergent as spectra rather than defined points, I have organized the following review of literature on leadership development approaches under the headings of acquisitive, dialogic, and networked for the purpose of simplicity. The autonomous domain, representative of purely emergent and independent approaches, has been excluded, as no leadership development approaches were identified as belonging exclusively in that sphere (Turner et al., n.d.).

**Acquisitive leadership development.** Acquisitive leadership development is characterized as planned and purposeful, with a focus on knowledge and skills at the level of the individual. These include concepts such as communication skills, emotional intelligence, as well as coaching and motivating others (Garavan et al., 2015; Schroeder, 2017; Turner et al., n.d.). This approach to leadership development includes (a) formal leadership learning and (b) peer learning.
**Formal leadership learning.** The treatment of classroom and course-based training is noteworthy, given its strong presence as a commercially offered option for leadership development. In keeping with the trend in leadership development studies towards holistic, organizational, and context-oriented approaches with an emphasis on mindset, training risks missing the mark if too focused on competency models and behaviour (Ardichvili, Natt och Dag, & Manderscheid, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2013). In contrast, Lacerenza, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph, and Salas’s (2017) meta-analysis of leadership development programs identified training as having a positive impact for leaders and their subordinates. The critical difference had to do with the alignment between classroom training and organizational objectives and context (Ardichvili et al., 2016; Tourish, 2012) and the format of training. Professionally led, face-to-face programs incorporating practice opportunities resulted in better outcomes than those involving solely information transmission (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

**Peer learning.** Peer learning, in the context of leadership development approaches, consists of mechanisms whereby peers come together to serve as sounding boards, partners in reflection, role models, and potential sources of solutions to management challenges (Leitch, McMullan, & R. T. Harrison, 2009; Reichard & Johnson, 2011). Peer learning groups are most effective when made up of individuals of a similar level who are committed to high quality relationships, mutual benefit, and establishment of trust (Cole, 2016; Parker, Wasserman, Kram, & Hall, 2015). In practice, peer coaching includes mechanisms to establish and maintain trust, is time-bound, and focuses on a specific issue or learning goal identified by individual participants who take turns being coached (Ladyshewsky, 2017; Parker et al., 2015). Potential benefits to participants include greater self-awareness, adaptability confidence, and exposure to alternate approaches to common challenges (Cole, 2016; Parker et al., 2015). Peer coaching may also
make it easier for participants to bring issues to more senior managers’ attention, as it reduces
the perceived risk if more than one individual at a given organizational level has been unable to
find a solution (Ladyshewsky, 2017). Organizational benefits include increased honesty,
openness, and communication amongst participants (Parker et al., 2015) and, consequently,
stronger networks across the organization (Cullen-Lester, Maupin, & Carter, 2017).

**Dialogic leadership development.** Dialogic leadership development is participative and
social in nature and driven by the context of individual participants, making it an emergent form
of development (Garavan et al., 2015). Informal, co-emergent leadership development
approaches are characterized as being potentially advantageous in the SME context, given the
ability to better adjust developmental activities in response to dynamic, competitive situations.
This flexibility enables SMEs to learn as they adapt their leadership development approaches
over time and better align this with their overall company strategy (Garavan et al., 2016).

Multisource feedback and mentoring are aspects of dialogic leadership development.

**Multisource feedback.** Also called 360-degree feedback, multisource feedback exercises
involve collecting assessments of a range of leadership behaviours from a participant’s
subordinates, peers, and supervisor to identify areas for growth and development. An outside
firm is often used to collect data and analyze results (K. Y. Kim, Atwater, Patel, & Smither,
2016; Markham, Smith, Markham, & Braekkan, 2014). Multisource feedback tools may also be
used to measure improvement following participation in a leadership development program or
activity, as self-assessment of improvement can be unreliable (MacKie, 2015). While many 360-
degree feedback exercises are combined with executive coaching programs, if debriefed
appropriately, the use of multisource feedback on its own has resulted in positive changes in
subsequent ratings of individuals’ leadership behaviours (MacKie, 2015; Nieminen, Smerek,
Kotrba, & Denison, 2013). At the organizational level, benefits such as increased knowledge sharing and employee productivity have also been linked to the use of multisource feedback (K. Y. Kim et al., 2016; MacKie, 2015).

**Mentoring.** Mentoring usually involves a more experienced colleague providing work-related advice and guidance to a junior colleague. Mentoring relationships may be informal, arising organically between two members of an organization, or formal, whereby a mentor is assigned to one or more mentees, often for a defined period of time (Ligon, Wallace, & Osburn, 2011). To be effective, mentoring should be pervasive, crossing business units, areas of expertise, and experience levels (Groves, 2007). The potential benefits of mentoring and coaching are wide-reaching for both potential leaders and organizations themselves (S. Kim, 2007), including career planning/talent management and strengths assessment (Amagoh, 2009; Groves, 2007); perceived organizational support, contributing to greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Baranik et al., 2010); transfer of firm-specific skills (Cao & Hamori, 2016), and improved diversity and cross-cultural management practices (Cumberland, Herd, Alagaraja, & Kerrick, 2016; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014). It is recommended practice to use both informal and formal mentoring approaches, as research has indicated that informal mentoring relationships are often perceived by protégés as being more beneficial than assigned mentors in terms of the range of support provided to protégés, impact on career progression, and overall satisfaction with mentoring experiences. However, not all employees can readily access these relationships, so formal programs can fill this gap (Groves, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

**Networked leadership development.** Networked development approaches are planned and purposefully targeted at the organization and relationships within the organization. This
category comprises initiatives to enhance collaborative problem solving, adaptation, and improvement (Garavan et al., 2015), resulting in experiential leader development and action learning.

*Experiential leader development.* Experience-driven options such as stretch assignments, expatriate assignments, and job rotations were prominent in leadership development literature in terms of both approach and effectiveness (Day & Sin, 2011; Garavan et al., 2016; Groves, 2007; Hezlett, 2016). McCall (2010) went so far as to state that “to the extent it is learned, leadership is learned from experience” (p. 3). Experiential learning opportunities enable leadership learners to develop new mental models for future application in addressing challenging situations (Ligon et al., 2011) and develop complex interpersonal and strategic skillsets (Hezlett, 2016). Optimal stretch assignments are identified as being diverse in nature (Groves, 2007), trans-boundary, high responsibility, and unfamiliar (Hezlett, 2016). A learning and growth-oriented mindset on the part of learner, his or her supervisors, and the organization as a whole further contributes to the potential gains from experiential learning (Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Heslin & Keating, 2017).

*Action learning.* While experiential learning focuses on the growth of individuals through experience in the organizational context (Day & Sin, 2011; Hezlett, 2016), action learning emphasizes development and learning through action, innovation, and experimentation in addressing business challenges, but at the group or organizational level (Leitch et al., 2009; Volz-Peacock, Carson, & Marquardt, 2016). Action learning begins with a problem that needs solving, engaging the members of the group affected to reflect on and make sense of the issue holistically, from multiple perspectives. The depth of this process allows the group to detect structures and root causes, rather than just symptoms, of the problem. The group then takes action to implement potential solutions, reflecting upon the outcomes to both learn from the
experience and to inform the next possible intervention (Leitch et al., 2009; Marquardt, Yeo, & Yeo, 2012). In today’s fast-paced world, action learning is advantageous as a multi-tasking approach, improving learning and addressing operational problems simultaneously (Leonard & Lang, 2010). In relation to leadership development specifically, action learning is well suited to creating common understanding and experience across functional areas and enabling a broad, strategic view of the organization and its issues (Groves, 2007) as well as helping leaders learn through practicing how to motivate, empower, and inspire followers by adopting the leadership style most appropriate to a given context (Leonard & Lang, 2010).

Leadership development is about creating an enabling organizational environment that maximizes the contributions of an organization’s members. Strategies to achieving this end include (a) acquisitive (i.e., planned and independent) approaches, such as formal leadership learning, experiential development, and peer learning; (b) dialogic (i.e., emergent and interdependent) approaches, including multisource feedback and mentoring; as well as (c) networked (i.e., planned and interdependent) approaches like action learning. Leadership development, whether focused on the individual or at a group level, is consistently an inter-relational, organizational construct. In keeping with the theme of an organizational lens and leadership, the second topic in this literature review is that of distributed leadership.

**Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership is a term that may imply a deceptively straightforward concept, making the examination of relevant literature prudent to ensure an accurate understanding of the construct and its application. This section of the literature review begins with a definition of distributed leadership, followed by an overview of advantages and disadvantages of distributed leadership models, closing with perspectives on the implementation of distributed leadership.
Defining distributed leadership. There is a wide variety of terminology used in the literature around distributed leadership. Fitzsimons et al. (2011) listed the terms “dispersed, devolved, democratic, distributive, collaborative, collective, co-operative, concurrent, coordinated, relational and co-leadership” (p. 313); however, shared and distributed leadership are arguably those that came up most frequently (Bolden, 2011; Cope et al., 2011; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Vine, Holmes, Marra, Pfeifer, & Jackson, 2008). The common tenet of all descriptions is that leadership is not the responsibility of a single individual, but that of many or all members of an organization (Bolden, 2011; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Friedrich, Vessey, Schuelke, Ruark, & Mumford, 2009; Gronn, 2002). Distributed leadership is characterized as a dynamic process involving both leading and following (Cope et al., 2011), wherein leadership shifts between individuals depending on the specific challenge faced and who has the most relevant expertise and/or information (Friedrich et al., 2009; Vine et al., 2008).

The notion of leadership as a process or shared influence, as opposed to a role, is a core characteristic of distributed leadership that came forward in the literature (Cope et al., 2011; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Gronn, 2002). The leadership process coalesces in various ways, including spontaneous collaboration, intuitive understandings developed through long-term working relationships, or structures implemented to formalize informal relations or temporarily pool distributed talent (Gronn, 2002). The notion of intuitive understandings also encapsulates what Friedrich et al. (2009) referred to as subtle utilization of team member expertise via consultation and revision of solutions related to relational exchanges between leader and team members. The act of distributing leadership may occur via informal channels or may be directed by one or more leaders (Cope et al., 2011; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Friedrich et al., 2009).
Ultimately, the sharing of leadership under distributed leadership results in a system likened by Friedrich et al. (2009) to a human neurological system with many layers of linkages. Meaning is created when information flows through certain paths or certain groups within the organization. The network, or organization, also develops learned, automatic responses to certain stimuli. Associated to this network of leadership within an organization is the trait of interdependence. Responsibilities may overlap or be complementary, building resilience into an organization, but also necessitating a certain level of coordination (Gronn, 2002; Maznevski, Stahl, & Mendenhall, 2013; Mendenhall & Bird, 2013).

**Advantages of distributed leadership.** Distributed leadership is recognized for enabling an organization to take advantage of diverse expertise, both horizontally and vertically (Friedrich et al., 2009). This helps teams better communicate, anticipate issues, position themselves to address challenges, and develop problem-solving skills that result in long-term performance improvements (Friedrich et al., 2009; Wegge et al., 2010). The approach is one that is merit-based, as it “does not privilege the work of particular individuals or categories of persons, nor is there a presumption about which individual’s behavior carries more weight with colleagues” (Gronn, 2002, p. 429), thus contributing to an overall climate of justice and equality beneficial to team performance (Friedrich et al., 2009; Wegge et al., 2010). Evidence pointed to the benefit of high levels of autonomy and participation in important work-related decisions, leading to higher employee satisfaction and commitment as well as better team performance (Drescher & Garbers, 2016; Wegge et al., 2010). Distributed leadership models are also associated with innovation and knowledge creation in organizations by releasing energy and ideas irrespective of hierarchy (Cannatelli, Smith, Giudici, Jones, & Conger, 2017).
Disadvantages of distributed leadership. Among the disadvantages of distributed leadership identified are that it takes time and can be costly; that knowledge and information shared amongst group may be incorrect (Wegge et al., 2010); and that while leadership may be distributed, this does not necessarily mean that the same is true for power and/or accountability (Bolden, 2011; Corrigan, 2013). Furthermore, complex tasks may not be well-suited to shared leadership (D’Innocenzo et al., 2016). Undesirable ancillary impacts of implementing distributed leadership may include a spillover of work-related mental effort into employees’ leisure time, contributing to workaholism (Wegge et al., 2010) as well as disturbances to existing role and authority relations negatively impacting emotional dynamics within an organization (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). Specific to an SME/entrepreneurial context, it can be difficult to implement distributed leadership, as employees need to shift expectations away from the heroic, individual-focused leadership model under which a leader has successfully established and nurtured survival of the organization (Cope et al., 2011).

Implementing distributed leadership. Implementing a distributed leadership model requires a fundamental commitment to leadership as opposed to management, in that the latter prescribes how to divide labour, while the former is a catalyst for the division of labour (Gronn, 2002). The organizational culture must embrace the reality that leadership can be attributed to anyone, and employees must be willing to accept leadership from one another as well as step up and engage in leadership (D’Innocenzo et al., 2016; Gronn, 2002). The organization will also need to take a collectivist approach to leader selection and the formation of leadership teams. Individuals with strong boundary spanning skills, able to create empowering environments, will be more effective in a distributed leadership setting than leaders with an individualist approach (Yammarino, 2012). Leadership team formulation must also take into account context, as both
external and internal factors have the capacity to impact the emergence of collective leadership (Friedrich et al., 2009; Yammarino, 2012).

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that implementing distributed leadership involves sharing leadership processes among multiple individuals. The literature has identified a clear role for vertical leadership tied to a specific person or small number of individuals (Pearce & Sims, 2002). The concept is one of “super-leadership,” where the emphasis is on an empowering vertical leader helping others to lead themselves (Fitzsimons et al., 2011, p. 316), establishing an environment where employees are more involved in decision making (Cope et al., 2011). The leader’s conceptual skills (i.e., intelligence, creativity, intuition), interpersonal skills (i.e., network awareness, political skills, emotion regulation, communication, relationship-building), and leader capacities related to network building and the effective operation of collectives have been identified as being key to enabling shared leadership (Friedrich et al., 2009; O’Connell, 2014).

Ultimately, the leader’s objective is to enable a shift in the dynamic of the leader-follower relationships within an organization (Cope et al., 2011), thus establishing a network amongst team members to facilitate information exchange and the selection of appropriate expertise for tasks (Friedrich et al., 2009). The leader can facilitate positive relational exchanges, giving rise to collective leadership, by encouraging interpersonal contact, collaboration, creating common understanding of challenges and goals, and giving team members a voice in organizational processes (Friedrich et al., 2009). Cope et al. (2011) identified two points of intervention, with the first being the leader and helping him or her understand the need to shift from heroic leader to empowering enabler, the second being development of followers’ expectations and roles. In spite of the clear parallel with employee engagement, only limited
research existed on the enabling leadership behaviours and processes necessary (Shuck & Herd, 2012).

There are also situational factors to consider in examining approaches to distribution of leadership. In the case of decision making, desire for involvement in decisions may depend on the type of decision and its proximity to one’s actual work. One study found that employees wanted influence on issues close to them, but preferred management influence on most distant issues (Jeppesen, Jønsson, & Shevlin, 2011). Contributing factors to the success of implementing distributed leadership include a high level of self-leadership competency among employees and supervisors; trust among employees; team perceptions of justice in the workplace; and manageable stress, referring to job, interpersonal, and work-life balance related stress (Friedrich et al., 2009; Wegge et al., 2010). In an SME context specifically, Cope et al. (2011, p. 280) highlighted the importance of being cognizant of “the delicate nature of the SME ecosystem,” incorporating flexibility to allow for emergence of distributed leadership as best suited to the organization at hand.

Distributed leadership is ultimately about the exercise of leadership at all levels of the organization, irrespective of hierarchical considerations. It is perhaps best characterized as a dynamic network of shared communication, meaning, and action across an organization. The advantages of distributed leadership include employee autonomy and engagement as well as increased innovation, leveraging skill sets and knowledge throughout the organization. Disadvantages include the potential to dilute accountability; difficult emotional shifts related to hierarchy disruption, especially in an SME context; and incongruence with complex tasks. Implementing distributed leadership requires adaptation of the organizational culture to emphasize leadership over management, including a focus on leader skills and mindsets that
contribute to an empowering environment. How an organization ensures it has the necessary leaders with the requisite skill sets in place is the next topic of this literature review: namely, talent management.

**Talent Management**

Talent management was the initial management challenge identified in conceptualizing this thesis project, which is an issue common to many organizations. A review of the literature in this area has been organized under the topics of (a) defining talent management, (b) scope of talent management approaches, (c) internal succession management, and (d) knowledge retention.

**Defining talent management.** Talent management is a term encapsulating and often used interchangeably with a wide range of human resource management constructs, including workforce planning, succession planning, performance management, employee development, and career management (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Ultimately, the literature tended to agree that talent management is the process used by organizations to identify, obtain, and leverage the human resources needed to achieve their objectives, often with an emphasis on strategic roles within the organization (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Cappelli & Keller, 2014).

Talent management is topical from both an academic and practitioner perspective due to demographic shifts as the baby boomers exit the workforce (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Barnett & Davis, 2008; Groves, 2017; Levy, 2011) and as organizations seek to bridge intergenerational gaps between employees retiring and those replacing them (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Barnett & Davis, 2008; Castro, 2012). Talent management is also a response to awareness that in today’s knowledge economy, the retention and transfer of an organization’s know-how is critical to its
competitiveness and well-being (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Levy, 2011). However, formal talent management programs are found in only a minority of organizations (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). In Cooper and Jackson’s (2017) survey of 150 Canadian organizations, less than half of respondents indicated that they had sufficient candidates in their leadership pipelines to ensure smooth management changeovers and “that less than a third of executives reporting to the CEO (29 percent) are recruited and promoted from within” (p. iii).

In instances where talent management programs do exist, these have been found to be relatively new programs (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011). In view of the premature state of talent management in organizational life, it is perhaps not so shocking that the literature in this field was also somewhat sparse and lacked the cohesion found in other areas of leadership academia (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016).

**Scope of talent management approaches.** Reflective of the downward trend in long-term employment with a single organization, there is a recognition that career management has shifted from the organization to the employee, leading to talent management approaches that are either internal or external to the organization (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). External talent management activities include attraction, recruitment, selection, hiring, and eventually integrating outside talent. While there has been a significant upsurge in external hiring by organizations, there has been some debate as to whether the costs related to bringing in external individuals represents a satisfactory return for the hiring organization (Cappelli & Keller, 2014), predicting and measuring return on investment being a challenge in and of itself (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). Some studies have indicated that internal succession planning is more cost-effective than external practices when it comes to filling key roles (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Bond & Naughton, 2011; Groves, 2007). However, the practicalities of
meeting organizational requirements when unanticipated human resource needs occur may mean that a combination of internal and external approaches will best minimize the risk of undersupply of human capital (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

A debate related to that of an internal versus external loci is that of whether talent management efforts should be focused on specific individuals or if the emphasis should instead be on roles. The literature has reached agreement that talent management programs rightly invest more in the individuals or jobs that are likely to deliver the greatest return, but recommend a shift towards a role-oriented approach (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Using the role as a starting point enables organizations to take into consideration situational, job-related factors that will contribute to an incumbent’s performance, allowing the organization to select the right individual to fit the job and not the other way around (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Collings, 2014).

Research about the impact of high potential employee programs on those not selected to participate or removed from high potential streams was limited (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Lacey & Groves, 2014). However, talent management programs that purport to include everyone, but in reality do not, can lead to employee misunderstandings of who is and is not talented (Sonnenberg, van Zijderveld, & Brinks, 2014). On balance, this leads to less desirable outcomes and lower returns on investment than selective talent management approaches that are explicitly communicated (Dries, 2013).

**Internal succession management.** Irrespective of whether an organization selects the employee or the job as the focal point for talent management planning, at some point, an employee is drawn from a talent pool and matched to a role. In the case of the research project at hand, practices related to the management of internal talent have been identified as a priority
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(Owner, B.G.E. Service & Supply, personal communication, April 14, 2017); therefore, a discussion of internal succession management approaches was à propos. Barnett and Davis (2008) described succession planning as fulfilling two main requirements: namely, “(a) the processes and structure for identifying and understanding the leadership talent in the organization, and (b) . . . ongoing learning and development for the organization’s most talented leaders” (p. 722). A wide variety of models for succession management planning were presented in the literature, and while virtually all of them would satisfy the aforementioned needs, the approaches differed. For ease of comprehension, I have outlined the main steps present in most of the models, with a view to providing a reference in considering which components and characteristics to consider for a succession planning approach at B.G.E. Service & Supply. To expand the understanding of this management approach, three subtopics are introduced: (a) alignment with organizational objectives; (b) assessing performance and potential; and (c) accountability, support, and feedback.

Alignment with organizational objectives. Forward-looking approaches drawing on organizational objectives to identify the roles most needed for future organizational performance are identified as a best practice (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Bethke-Langenegger et al.’s (2011) study of 138 Swiss companies’ talent management programs found that those “with a strong focus on corporate strategy and its alignment with overall corporate goals have a statistically higher significant impact on corporate profit; one that is greater than that of any other focus on talent management practices” (p. 534).

Assessing performance and potential. In identifying potential internal candidates for leadership growth opportunities, performance to date and potential for future performance were identified as the key factors to be considered (Bond & Naughton, 2011; Cappelli & Keller,
In assessing past performance, there has been a shift in many organizations towards competency modeling as opposed to job analysis. The assessment of candidate potential was characterized as being highly challenging, as performance in a past role has been found to be a poor indicator of future performance. Possible contributing factors to this observation include significant changes in the functions required and displacement of an employee from his/her social network. A best practice identified, albeit not the norm, was the identification of talent at multiple levels so as to ensure development of a pipeline (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Cappelli & Keller, 2014).

**Accountability, support, and feedback.** Clarity in expectations and accountability combined with the support of peers, mentors, and coaches were identified as best practices and recommendations in ensuring the success of leaders in new roles (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Bond & Naughton, 2011). Bond and Naughton’s (2011) “four-way contract with the coach, coachee, mentor and sponsor; defin[ing] the overall objectives of the [leadership] transition planning process, timescales, who does what, ground rules for external/internal coaching and mentoring support” (p. 174) stood out as a recommendation to ensure individual performance remains on track with organizational objectives for the role occupied. Specific advantages of coaching and mentoring include a better understanding of the overall strategic organizational picture, connections to social networks, increased self-awareness, and identification of areas for development. The benefits derived from a strong support network are perhaps equally important for the organization and the individual in helping the new leader avoid costly errors (Bond & Naughton, 2011).

**Knowledge retention.** Knowledge retention, often referred to in the literature as knowledge transfer or knowledge continuity, is considered a sub-discipline of knowledge
management. It is the process of transferring and retaining knowledge of long-serving, departing experts in an organization (Levy, 2011; Martins & Meyer, 2012). Small and medium enterprises are identified as being particularly vulnerable to knowledge loss, given that their decision-making processes are often fluid, informal, and highly centralized. Furthermore, SMEs’ knowledge management practices are also less developed than in larger firms (Durst & Runar Edvardsson, 2012; Joe, Yoong, & Patel, 2013). Drawing on Levy’s (2011) framework developed on the basis of 30 knowledge transfer projects in eight Israeli organizations, I have organized the stages of knowledge retention under the headings of scope, knowledge transfer, and knowledge integration.

**Scope.** This stage in the process entails deciding which knowledge is of highest priority to transfer. It is a matter of planning and prioritization, as “where preliminary scope is missing, people tend to transfer what is easy and not always what is important” (Levy, 2011, p. 594). A knowledge-mapping exercise that identifies information to be retained, including description, rationale, and location facilitates awareness of information resources and access for other employees (Daghfous, Belkhodja, & C. Angell, 2013; Levy, 2011). Joe et al. (2013) provided a useful taxonomy to consider information for retention, which included “declarative or explicit knowledge (know about), procedural to tacit knowledge (know how), causal knowledge (know why), conditional knowledge (know when), and relational knowledge (know with)” (p. 916).

**Knowledge transfer.** In terms of actual transfer of knowledge, the mechanisms recommended fall into two main groups: (a) those related to documentation and (b) those related to person-to-person channels. Document-based knowledge transfer methods included templates, procedure and process documentation, inventories of key documents, information technology-based information structures, wikis, videos, and photographs. Audiovisual media may be
especially effective in the case of implicit or tacit knowledge that is better transferred through a
demonstration than a written explanation (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Levy, 2011).

Person-to-person channels for executing knowledge transfer are advisable for
complicated information and situations where the knowledge recipient may benefit from being
able to ask questions and request clarifications. Moreover, these personal channels offer an
opportunity to help new leaders develop crucial social bonds and support networks with others in
the organization (Bond & Naughton, 2011; Levy, 2011). Mentorship was identified as a
particularly effective approach for passing knowledge from senior employees to junior
colleagues (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Martins & Meyer, 2012). Job shadowing or rotation were
other in-person methods identified to supplement theoretical knowledge transfers (Appelbaum et
al., 2012; Daghfous et al., 2013).

Knowledge integration. The stage of integrating and embedding transferred knowledge
into an organization’s processes so that they are actually used is critical. Transferred knowledge
that cannot be found or goes unused is also a form of knowledge loss (Durst & Aggestam, 2017;
Levy, 2011). In terms of achieving information integration, approaches include making
information easy to find and access in the organization’s existing knowledge management
system and training sessions utilizing the transferred knowledge repository (Levy, 2011).

Suggested strategies to augment knowledge integration include retaining retirees for a
longer period via an approach of phased retirement. Even if working part-time on a contractual
basis or via telework, the retiree can be accessible to his/her successor in support of transfer and
absorption of knowledge (Aiman-Smith, Bergey, Cantwell, & Doran, 2006; Appelbaum et al.,
2012). In the absence of a formal employment arrangement, Appelbaum et al. (2012) suggested
informal practices to facilitate a personal connection between retirees and their successors: for
example, via social events prior to retirement or an alumni network post-departure from the workplace. More generally speaking, the existence of dense social networks within an organization, characterized by trust and mutual exchange between employees, are known to contribute to knowledge transfer (Daghfous et al., 2013; Harvey, 2012).

Simply put, organizations use talent management programs to ensure they have the right people with the right knowledge and skills in the right place at the right time. The term talent management has been used to apply to a broad range of topics, including external recruitment and internal planning for succession purposes, assessment of employee skill sets, measures to support leaders in new roles, and knowledge retention. This research project has sought to contribute to this area of literature, given its paucity in an SME context.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of literature pertinent to this thesis project in the areas of (a) leadership development, (b) distributed leadership, and (c) talent development. In addition to providing a definition for all three topics, I expanded upon the discussion of each. In the case of leadership development, an overview of leadership development approaches was presented in the form of a framework comprising acquisitive, dialogic, and networked leadership development methods. With respect to distributed leadership, the advantages and disadvantages of distributed leadership were explored as were means of implementing distributed leadership. Finally, in relation to talent development, I have discussed literature about the scope of talent development programs as well as factors linked to internal succession management and knowledge retention. The next chapter is comprised of an explanation of research methods and the conduct of the data collection phases of this thesis project.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This third chapter begins with an overview of the appreciative inquiry approach and action research engagement methodology that I used in this inquiry project. I have drawn on academic literature to rationalize the selection of the approach and methodology in the context of this research project. I then describe project participants, inquiry team, data collection processes involved in the project and, finally, ethical considerations.

The main inquiry question for this project was: How can B.G.E. Service & Supply better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its employees? The related sub-questions were as follows:

1. How do members of B.G.E. Service & Supply demonstrate and experience leadership?
2. What is currently—explicitly or implicitly—supporting (or inversely, impeding) employees’ engagement in leadership?
3. What approaches may, if introduced by B.G.E. Service & Supply, encourage front line and first level supervisory employees to take on greater aspects of organizational leadership?
4. What strategies would help the organization better manage the polarity between developing and promoting internal talent and meeting organizational leadership needs in a timely fashion?

Methodology

The research methodology utilized for this inquiry project is based on an action research approach. Action research is a scientific approach to exploring issues in context, together with those directly impacted (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Action research was well suited to this
research project for bringing clarity to broadly defined issues (Stringer, 2014), for which successful resolution is likely to benefit from a high level of stakeholder engagement. Among the strengths of action research is its democratic, collaborative, and participative nature as well as its capacity to help individuals gain new insights and engage in collective, community-based approaches (Burnes, 2009; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Stringer, 2014). Action research consists of a cyclical approach of planning and implementing changes in situ, subsequently observing and reflecting upon the impact of the same, with a view to informing the next cycle of changes to be implemented (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Rowe et al., 2013).

How leadership is experienced and exercised within B.G.E. Service & Supply is a very broadly defined topic area, fundamental in nature and wide-ranging in its impact within a highly diverse organization. The organizational sponsor has identified leadership development as an issue of great importance to the ongoing well-being of B.G.E. Service & Supply. The fuzzy yet critical nature of the challenge made it a good match for action research as well as satisfying the success criteria of Burnes’ (2009, p. 232) “felt need” around a serious and important matter from the perspective of management (see also Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Rowe et al., 2013).

Notwithstanding the merits of action research, the realization of a full-blown action research project would have been beyond the scope of the inquiry at hand given time and resource limitations. I, therefore, limited the scope of this project to the preparatory phase of action research, utilizing a methodology known as action research engagement (ARE). In ARE, as researcher, I played a preliminary role in what I hoped would be an expanded action research process taken on by B.G.E. Service & Supply, by engaging with employees and management about the change objective via my inquiry project. Through my interactions with members of the organization at various levels, I aspired to both catalyze future change and to lay down some
initial groundwork to prepare the group for change—a phase in change projects that is often underdeveloped (Rowe et al., 2013; Weiner, 2009). ARE can be likened to a prequel of action research, or in the words of Rowe et al. (2013), “a preparatory model designed to enhance organizational stakeholder acceptance or readiness for the change phase in action research” (p. 8).

In carrying out this inquiry, I sought to address the project’s research questions by uncovering perspectives, wisdom, ideas, and all other possible input from as wide a range of organizational representatives possible. I aspired to do so in a way that encouraged further discussion and planted seeds for future engagement in advancing positive and constructive practices (Matthews, MacCarthy, & Braziotis, 2017; Sternberg, 2007). In describing action research, Weisbord (2012) stated, “Diagnosis does not mean just finding the problem but doing it in such a way as to build commitment for action” (p. 80).

Finally, this action research engagement project strived to build on people’s existing assets and develop opportunities for the future. The approach I took was, therefore, one of appreciative inquiry: “identifying what is positive and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, vision, and action for change” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, Introduction, The Focus of Appreciative Inquiry section, para. 2).

**Project Participants**

The focus of this project was on the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply. B.G.E. Service & Supply has nearly 200 employees, and while employees from elsewhere in the organization were invited to participate in some phases of the data collection, the overall population was too large to allow for the depth of engagement with me as researcher as envisioned under Rowe et al.’s (2013) ARE methodology I utilized for this project. The
manufacturing division was selected, as it was manageable from a logistics perspective, yet remained sizeable enough to represent a good cross-section of demographic characteristics found elsewhere in the company. Other possible samples would have been either the sales and service division or the administrative and corporate division. The former represented a logistical challenge, as the employees are geographically dispersed, and the latter option was discarded as not representing a very diverse population in terms of function and hierarchy.

The first phase of data collection was conducted via three separate focus groups involving a total of ten front line and supervisory-level employees of the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply. All 45 of the organization’s front line and supervisory-level employees were invited to participate in the focus groups. The focus group data collection phase had been structured so that front line employees would participate in groups separate from those of supervisors. All employees in the manufacturing division received an invite to participate in the focus group and were informed that the first 10 front line employees and the first 10 supervisors to confirm attendance would be able to participate and that all others would be put on a waiting list. This approach represented stratified sampling, as a fixed number of participants with certain characteristics representing two strata within the population were being sought out (Robinson, 2014). In practice, the selection method employed was one of convenience sampling within the selected population, as I was “including participants . . . on the basis of ease of access or ready availability” (Roulston, 2010a, p. 81).

The second phase of data collection was a survey that was open to all employees in the company, except for senior management, as I would be inviting these individuals to participate in the third phase of data collection. This sampling technique would be considered a census sample, as I invited all members of the organization’s population, with the exception of senior
management, to complete the survey (Brewer, Torrisi-Steele, & Wang, 2014). The survey was completed online for employees with access to email and in paper format for employees with no email access. The survey consisted of 21 multiple-choice questions employing a Likert scale, three pick-list questions allowing between three and five selections each, two open-ended questions, and a series of demographic questions.

The third phase of data collection consisted of qualitative interviews with key stakeholders at the executive level. Interview participants were selected via purposeful sampling, as this type of sample “provide[d] an illustrative profile that is considered representative, albeit not statistically” (Saunders, 2012, p. 42) of the upper management cadre of B.G.E. Service & Supply. Following discussions with the project sponsor, I invited the company Controller, Advisor, Vice President Sales, Vice President of Distribution and Information Technology, Director of Fort McMurray Operations, and the Calgary Branch Manager to participate in the interviews. I excluded the President and the Vice-President of Operations as their proximity to the project in their respective roles as project sponsor and member of my inquiry team and resulting awareness of my thinking and perspectives on leadership may have skewed the data collected. As the Vice-President of Operations is responsible for the manufacturing division, this meant that no one participating in the interviews was directly connected to the manufacturing division. Due to a low response rate and scheduling limitations, I was only able to conduct two qualitative interviews.

In addition to the research project participants, I also utilized an inquiry team. The inquiry team for this project was comprised of four representatives of B.G.E. Service & Supply: namely, the Vice-President of Operations, the manufacturing division Production Manager, an assistant from Human Resources, and a first-level manager from the manufacturing division with
Vietnamese language capability. As a researcher external to the organization, the members of the inquiry team played a critical role in providing background information on the company and support for data collection, and each member was required to sign a Letter of Agreement that explained their roles and the confidential nature of the research (Appendix A).

The Vice-President of Operations has senior level managerial responsibility for the manufacturing division; the Production Manager plays a key role in implementing recommendations resulting from this ARE project; and an assistant from Human Resources provided a connection to the human resources function of the organization and played a very important logistical role in support of data collection. To eliminate any potential for power-over concerns, as the Vice-President of Operations and the Production Manager had hiring and firing authority within the manufacturing division, neither were involved as research participants. The first-level supervisors invited to participate in the focus groups did not have any hiring or firing authority. The Human Resources assistant who provided support in terms of disseminating invitations and information to potential research participants about the project had no reporting relationship with the sample population. As I was not a member of this organization, there was no power over or conflict of interest for me as the researcher.

**Inquiry Project Methods**

The overall conduct of this research inquiry is outlined in this section. Descriptions are provided for data collection methods, study conduct, data analysis, and a foundation for momentum to carry forward eventual project recommendations.

**Data collection methods.** I used three different data collection methods in this ARE project in the following order: (a) focus group, (b) survey, and (c) qualitative interview. I selected this mix of methods to create a balance between breadth and depth in terms of reach
within the company. My objective was to engage in deeper interactions with the manufacturing
division as the target population for the inquiry (i.e., focus group) and those members of the
organization who will play a leadership role in supporting suggestions for change moving
forward (i.e., interview), while capturing relevant perspectives from the broader organization
(i.e., survey). The strategy I employed was that of integrating strands of qualitative and
quantitative data collection (O’Cathain, Murphy, & Nicholl, 2010) within the methodological
approach of action research engagement. As described by Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016),
“The use of mixed methods is shaped by and adapted to the parameters associated with the
overarching methodological approach as a means for enhancing the ability to address the
research purpose” (p. 143). Within the field of mixed methods research, there is a clear
movement to consider qualitative and quantitative methods in a more integrated fashion, often in
combination with other theoretical or methodological approaches (Creswell, 2016; Mertens et al.,
2016; Nastasi, Hitchcock, & Brown, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Plano Clark &
Ivankova, 2016). More simply put, it is about research design that works in the context of the
research problem at hand, and “mixed methods are . . . just a description of how most people
would go about researching any topic that they really wanted to find out about” (Gorard, 2010,
p. 246).

Focus group. Researchers use focus groups to assemble a group of participants to discuss
a focused topic, using a limited number of discussion questions to provide some structure to the
discussion. Focus groups are sometimes also referred to as group interviews. A typical focus
group is facilitated by a moderator, involves six to 10 participants, and lasts for up to two hours
(Glesne, 2016; Liljestrom, 2010; Morgan, 1997). The quality of data generated by a focus group
depends significantly on the ability of the moderator to stimulate meaningful discussion amongst
the participants, which is an objective supported by careful preparation of appropriate discussion questions and adopting an attitude of genuine interest in the participants and their perspectives (Glesne, 2016; Krueger, 1998a, 1998b).

I selected the focus group as a method of data collection for two reasons. The first was the method’s advantages in expanding my understanding of the area of focus for this inquiry project, as its semi-structured nature made it an emergent form of data collection, enabling new perspectives to emerge (Glesne, 2016; Liljestrom, 2010). For this same reason, the focus group was an ideal method for the initial phase of data collection, as I was able to refine phases two and three of data collection. The second reason I selected the focus group as a method was its transformative power in an ARE setting: developing knowledge, reflection, and dialogue amongst participants with the potential to contribute to future behaviour changes (Barbour, 2008; Chiu, 2003). As focus groups are dialogic, I was able at times to reverse the power balance between me as researcher and the participants, empowering them to lead the conversation (Liljestrom, 2010). The resulting empowerment was important, as it paralleled the change objective of this inquiry, seeking to encourage employees, such as the focus group participants, to take initiative and lead.

Survey. The second data collection method employed was a survey delivered both online and on paper. Researchers conduct survey research to better understand a target population, administering a questionnaire to ask about respondents’ opinions, attitudes, and beliefs, often in support of decision-making processes (Boeren, 2014; Brewer et al., 2014). Surveys can be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, depending on the design of questions used. Open-ended questions are typically considered qualitative in nature and closed-end questions quantitative (Andres, 2012). In the context of the mixed-method approach taken for this research,
both kinds of questions were utilized. The insights gleaned from the focus groups conducted in
the first phase of the research were important in informing the data to collect, as surveys are
explanatory, not exploratory (Boeren, 2014) as the first phase of research had been.

The survey was conducted for three reasons. The first was to obtain perspectives of
B.G.E. Service & Supply employees on ideas around leadership that had been generated by the
focus groups as well as from the review of secondary sources (e.g., books, articles, etc.) on
leadership development, distributed leadership, and talent management. The second reason for
choosing the survey method was to expand the reach of the data collection beyond the
manufacturing division in a cost-and-time effective fashion, to incorporate perspectives from
elsewhere in the company. Finally, similarly to the rationale for selecting the focus group
method, I viewed the survey as a method to engage other parts of the company and, even if only
minimally, prepare some ground outside of the manufacturing division for future change
initiatives related to leadership development. As explained by Brewer et al. (2014), “Survey
research does not provide causal results it can provide rich information about populations which
in turn, provides a platform for action” (p. 397).

**Qualitative interview method.** As a third data collection method, one-on-one interviews
were conducted with two representatives of B.G.E. Service & Supply’s executive and senior
management team. Invitees to the interview phase of the research included incumbents in the
roles of Controller, Advisor, Vice President Sales, Vice President Distribution and IT, Director
of Fort McMurray Operations, and the Calgary Branch Manager. The rationale for using
interviews with this select group of research participants was to obtain “in-depth information
pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic” (Turner, 2010,
p. 754), in this case: namely, leadership within B.G.E. Service & Supply. Furthermore, as per
Alvesson and Ashcraft (2012), “Research interviews are deemed reliable gateways into what goes on in organizations . . . [including relevance in this instance of] how leadership is conducted” (p. 240).

The interview protocol contained questions about B.G.E. Service & Supply’s approach to leadership, leadership amongst its employees, and near-term succession requirements. This protocol was informed by and refined using data from the focus groups conducted in the first phase of data collection. The objective of the interview design was consistent data collection across interviewees to enable meaningful analysis, all the while allowing for the emergence of relevant themes that may not have been foreseen based on data collected in the initial phase of the focus groups. In addition to a review of existing literature and creation of a well-thought-out interview protocol, an open-minded, self-aware, and reflexive approach were crucial to interviewing success (Hunter, 2012; Roulston, 2010c). Despite the small number of interviews conducted, I was able to collect good data and, therefore, achieved the objective of enabling a rich interaction with interviewees. I successfully avoided the risk of taking a pure question and answer approach “and failing to understand the complex nature of interview interaction between interviewers and interviewees” (Roulston, 2010b, p. 5).

**Study conduct.** An explanation of how the study was conducted is presented in this section. Included are descriptions of the data collection methods employed, which included focus groups, surveys, and interviews. For each method, recruitment, instrument, or protocol development and implementation are discussed.

**Focus groups.** Three separate focus groups took place. The focus groups numbered two, three, and five participants respectively, recruited with support from the project sponsor and inquiry team. The focus groups were open to all front line and first-level supervisory members of
the manufacturing division. Individuals with hiring and firing authority within the manufacturing division, namely the project sponsor, the Production Manager and Vice President of Operations, were excluded due to power-over issues.

**Participant recruitment.** Recruitment materials were distributed to all front line workers and first-level supervisors in the manufacturing division by the human resources assistant, via the company’s internal email server, three weeks before the focus groups were scheduled to take place. My inquiry team made paper versions of recruitment materials available for staff without access to email. Separate invitation letters to role-specific focus groups were used for front line personnel and supervisors (see Appendices B and C and Appendix D) and the information letter in Appendix E was attached. A single consent form was used for both groups (see Appendix F). A professional translation firm translated these documents to Vietnamese for staff with limited English reading capacity (see Appendices C, G, and H).

Participants sent confirmations along with the signed consent letter to my Royal Road University email address. Extra copies of the information letters and consent forms in the two languages, English and Vietnamese, were available onsite the day of the focus groups. I invited participants to contact me by email with any questions either before or after the focus groups. I informed potential participants that all communications would be confidential. I made it clear in the information letters (see Appendices E and G) that participants would be able to withdraw at any point prior to the focus groups, but that given the open nature of the data collection and responses not being assigned to specific individuals in the transcription phase, it would not be possible to remove any input afterwards.

I visited B.G.E. Service & Supply the week before the focus groups, to meet my project sponsor and inquiry team members in person for the first time as well as to make a final decision
on location for the focus groups. I had not yet received any questions or confirmations of participation. I consulted my inquiry team, and we agreed that to eliminate any barriers presented by the instruction to RSVP by email and make participation easier, the best approach would be to implement the focus groups on a drop-in approach. We identified three time slots that were communicated to staff by my inquiry team members, inviting participants to attend at the time most convenient for them. I also toured the manufacturing division and provided a brief explanation of the project to employees and invited potential participants to attend the focus groups. I reiterated that participation was completely voluntary and that information provided would be confidential.

*Focus group protocol.* I developed a focus group protocol (see Appendix I), which I shared with my inquiry team for comment three weeks prior to the focus groups. Based on their comments, I simplified the language and finalized the protocol with the inquiry team one week later.

*Location.* The focus groups were held in a spare office near the staff lunchroom area, but removed from the production floor. The location was selected because it was discreet for participants making their way to the focus group, while still being easy to access, as it was in the same building as the production area.

*Implementation.* Two participants attended the first focus group, three participants attended the second group, and five participants attended the final group. The focus groups lasted between one and two hours. A mix of front line employees and first-level supervisors attended the focus groups.

I moderated all three focus groups. I began each focus group with a review of the information letter (Appendices E and G), answered any questions, and provided participants with
a copy of the consent form to sign. With participants’ permission, I then turned on a hand-held recorder and proceeded with the focus group as per the protocol in Appendix I. At the conclusion of each focus group, participants summarized their thoughts into final points. I took high level notes throughout the discussion, which, along with participants’ consent forms, were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Recorded files were sent to a professional transcription company that signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix J) prior to receiving any files. I reviewed transcriptions for quality within a week of completion, making any necessary corrections. An initial analysis of the focus group data informed both the survey instrument used in the second phase of data collection and the interview protocol for the third phase.

**Surveys.** The second phase of data collection consisted of an anonymous, confidential survey comprised primarily of quantitative questions supplemented by one open-ended question and a comments box to capture opinions and ideas that may not have been covered elsewhere in the survey instrument. The survey was delivered in both an online (Appendix K) and paper format (Appendix L) for a 2-week period.

**Participant recruitment.** My inquiry team distributed the invitation and information letter for the survey (Appendices M and N) to all employees with company email addresses, except for senior management. The email invitation contained a link to the online survey (Appendix M). In the case of employees without company email addresses, my inquiry team made available a print copy of the survey that included the information letter and consent form (Appendix L). The letter of invitation and survey preamble explained that participation in the survey was completely voluntary and would in no way affect participants’ employment. A total of 180 employees were invited to participate, with the only exclusions being senior management.
Survey instrument development. I developed a draft version of the survey instrument divided into roughly three categories. The first contained questions about employee experiences as followers at B.G.E. Service & Supply. The second was made up of questions about leadership development, and the third was about leadership behaviours, both actual and those required in the future.

Implementation: Online survey. I conducted the online survey using the eSurv (www.esurv.org) platform, which is a service targeting academic research that stores data only on servers in Canada or Europe. Survey participants were able to access the survey from any computer at work or at home, ensuring confidentiality was maintained. The survey contained multiple-choice questions to collect data about respondents’ general perspectives on leadership, status of leadership at B.G.E. Service & Supply, impediments to shared leadership, and assessment of suggestions to promote distributed leadership.

Participants who desired linguistic support to complete the survey were invited to contact the first-level management member of the inquiry team who had linguistic capability in Vietnamese. Respondents were advised in the preamble that they were able to withdraw from the survey at any time simply by closing their browser and that no data would be retained. They were able to skip any questions they did not wish to answer. The eSurv program does not track or record any personal information, thus unless a participant divulged personal information in the comment section, no identifying information was gathered or retained.

Implementation: Print survey. I used the online graphic design tool, Canva (https://www.canva.com/), to create an attractive format of the survey for printing purposes, including the information letter, consent form, and survey questions in a single document (Appendix L), and printed copies were made available to staff. A resource person was available...
for questions from staff with limited English language capability. An inquiry team member placed a locked box near the staff lunchroom in which staff left completed surveys. Extra copies of the survey instrument were placed beside the response box. After the stated closing date of the survey link, the completed surveys were collected, scanned, and sent to me by my inquiry team member. All raw data have been retained in a locked file cabinet with access only by the inquiry team member. I then input the responses from the individual surveys into the eSurv platform for ease of analysis. I conducted an initial analysis of the data generated by the survey to inform the interview protocol used in the third phase of data collection.

**Qualitative interviews.** The third phase of data collection focused on qualitative interviews. The target population for this phase of the data collection was senior management and executives of B.G.E. Service & Supply. The rationale for inclusion in the interview process of senior leaders outside of the manufacturing division was two-fold. The first reason was to obtain outsider perspectives on leadership in the division being researched. The second reason was to build curiosity and enthusiasm about the topic of leadership development, creating an environment supportive to the implementation of recommendations generated by this research project.

**Participant recruitment.** Interview participants were selected via purposeful sampling so as to “provide an illustrative profile that is considered representative, albeit not statistically” (Saunders, 2012, p. 42) of the upper management cadre of B.G.E. Service & Supply. My inquiry team invited the company Controller, Advisor, Vice President Sales, Vice President of Distribution and Information Technology, Director of Fort McMurray Operations, and the Calgary Branch Manager to participate in the interviews, sending them the invitation text, information letter, and consent form in Appendices O, P, and Q. Interested participants were
directed to contact me directly, maintaining confidentiality about which individuals expressed interest, declined, or participated in the interview process.

*Interview protocol development.* I developed the interview protocol contained in Appendix R based on my review of the literature as well as input from the initial analysis of data from the focus groups and survey data. To avoid introducing bias in the conduct of the interview, non-directive interview questions were formulated (Hunter, 2012). I shared the interview protocol with my inquiry team and project sponsor for comment and adjusted the protocol based on their feedback.

*Implementation.* Interviews were conducted via Zoom, an online tool that enabled video connection and audio recording. I was located overseas, so in-person interviews were not a practical option. With prior authorization from participants, I recorded interviews and transmitted files to a transcription service, Rev, for transcription. I took very high level, thematic notes during the interviews.

Validity of the data collected was verified by conducting member-checking with the interview participants (Roulston, 2011; Stringer, 2014). As part of the member-checking process, I provided interview participants with a draft of the transcribed file within one week of their interview to check veracity of transcription and jog participants’ memories if necessary.

*Data analysis.* The process used to analyze data collected during the three phases of data collection as well as measures taken to ensure data validity are described in this section. The discussion is organized as: (a) focus groups and interviews, as both methods were analyzed from a purely qualitative perspective; (b) survey, including an explanation of the approach taken in the case of a small sample; and (c) data validity.
Focus groups and interviews. Following completion of each interval of data collection, preliminary analysis of data generated by the focus groups, open-ended survey questions, and interviews was conducted utilizing what Ryan and Bernard (2003) characterized as scrutiny techniques, primarily looking at repetition, similarities and differences, missing data, and—if it emerged—theory-related material. To support the next stage of analysis of the focus group, open-ended survey question, and interview data, the qualitative data software MAXQDA (https://www.maxqda.com/) was utilized.

In first cycle coding, I applied what Saldaña (2016) described as eclectic coding, whereby more than one approach was used in developing code categories. I developed one set of codes best characterized as descriptive coding, frequently drawing on nouns used by participants, and a second set of codes based on actions described by participants, an approach called process coding. As process codes were attributed to the data, many of the codes selected comprised an emotional or value-oriented nature, representative of an affective coding approach (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were assigned until the process was complete, “when it [was] not possible to identify new categories in the data” (Hunter, 2012, p. 4). I erred on the side of assigning too many codes, a best practice recommended for novice researchers (Harding, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). While descriptive coding provided an important inventory of concepts to incorporate into subsequent analysis of data, my experience was consistent with the observation in the literature that the process-based approach reveals more useful and interesting insights (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2016).

The first cycle of codes assigned to the data set were reviewed to identify patterns and to distill the codes into categories representative of the most salient concepts coming through in the coding. These second-cycle coding approaches are called pattern coding and focused coding.
respectively (Saldaña, 2016) and fall into the broader category of selective coding, whereby I narrowed down the codes and funneled these towards my research questions (Urquhart, 2013). At the same time, I also looked for gaps in the codes (Glesne, 2016) to identify areas that I came across in my review of literature, but that did not come up in the data collection, flagging these as possible blind spots for B.G.E. Service & Supply.

Survey. Analysis of the survey data was purposefully limited to descriptive statistics about tendencies and preferences for two reasons. The first is that the research questions and resulting survey design are better suited to a descriptive approach that looks at percentages, averages, and outliers as opposed to inferential analysis that would incorporate correlations, means, and distribution (Guthrie, 2010). The descriptive nature of the survey instrument is reflective of the recognition that qualitative and quantitative research is a continuum as opposed to two discrete fields (Bazeley, 2009; Symonds & Gorard, 2010). Symonds and Gorard (2010) stated that presenting the interpretation of quantitative data does not require statistical analysis, even arguing that researchers should mostly avoid such techniques, emphasizing the meaning of numbers instead. The second is that, while an analysis of correlation between population characteristics and certain responses may have added a relevant dimension to the overall analysis of the research project, the low sample number of 30 was not sufficient to enable a statistically significant analysis of the data (Layder, 2013).

Validity. Qualitative researchers are increasingly using the term trustworthiness in reference to quality assessment of qualitative and mixed-methods research, a term that has come to encompass validity, reliability, and credibility (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016), and I found this approach an appropriate fit with this mixed-methods ARE research project. I have utilized multiple data collection methods to examine my research
questions from various perspectives to develop a body of knowledge about my sponsoring organization, ensuring a depth, breadth, and quality of data in this research project (Glesne, 2016; O’Cathain, 2010; Stringer, 2014). I also took measures at various steps in the process to ensure participants understood concepts and language used, which was critical to ensure credibility of data and findings (Stringer, 2014). Also in relation to method design, I paid significant attention to the development of protocols and instruments to ensure legitimation of design vis-a-vis research questions (Layder, 2013; O’Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). As the validity of the output of this research project was not solely about the quality of the inputs, but that the proof is in the proverbial pudding as it were, I have also paid careful attention to inferences made throughout the data analysis process, seeking to integrate analysis across all methods used for enhanced trustworthiness (Bryman, 2006; Mertens et al., 2016; O’Cathain, 2010).

**A foundation for momentum.** I purposefully structured the conduct of this study in such a way as to build in sponsor organization ownership of outcomes at multiple levels. The first and most broad-based of these strategies was the selection of focus groups as a research method, as it engaged participants and began a conversation about leadership, with the intention that this conversation would continue beyond the data collection phase (Barbour, 2008; Chiu, 2003). The second related to the structure of my inquiry team, as it included the senior leader responsible for manufacturing operations, the head of the manufacturing division, and a representative of human resources.

Once my project sponsor and Royal Roads University have approved the findings and recommendations, I will organize a video conference to present these to my inquiry team, participants in the qualitative interviews, and any interested members of the manufacturing
division. A Q and A session will follow the presentation. I will also make myself available for any follow-up conversations that B.G.E. Service & Supply may wish to have following further reflection. Relevant ethical issues were addressed in the conduct of this research project.

**Ethical Issues**

As a researcher external to B.G.E. Service & Supply, the primary ethical issues related to this project resulted indirectly and inadvertently from interactions with the organization and sponsor. There were also potential issues at the organizational level, related to its welfare. These points are explored in more depth in this section, under the headings of the core principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2014): “Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, [and] Justice” (Article 1.1., para. 2–4).

**Respect for persons.** The authors of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* described the importance of respect and consideration for human beings and the protection of individuals’ autonomy when it comes to deciding to participate in a research project. Key to ensuring autonomy is informed and ongoing consent, free of interference from other individuals who may seek to sway potential participants’ decisions (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2014, Respect for Persons section, para. 3). The potential influence of authority figures was my primary concern related to this project in terms of respect for persons, as senior management had a vested interest in a high level of participation given that this would bolster the organizational end goals of improved organizational health and performance. I ensured that the project sponsor and my inquiry team understood and accepted that ethical requirements related to this research required that participation be voluntary. I worked closely with the human resources representative issuing invitations for the research to ensure that messaging around the voluntary
nature of participation was clear and that individuals’ decision to participate—or not—in the project remained confidential. Information and consent documents were translated into Vietnamese, as some of the potential participants did not read English sufficiently well to be sure that English documentation would enable truly informed consent.

My inquiry team and I took measures to encourage potential participants to route confirmations of participation and questions about the process directly to me to avoid power over playing a role in terms of potential participants’ decision to participate or not in the research, Members of my inquiry team who may have had access to confidential information, such as the print surveys or enquiries about the research and participation, signed confidentiality agreements committing not to share this information (Appendix A).

**Concern for welfare.** The authors of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* defined welfare as encompassing the physical, mental, spiritual, economic, and social well-being of individuals. Researchers’ actions must not cause harm to the welfare of individuals, even in situations where this may be for the overall good of a group (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2014, Concern for Welfare section, para. 1). In the context of this research project, particularly salient factors to safeguard vis-à-vis the welfare of participants related to privacy and confidentiality and employment security given that the results of this research will be published. At the individual level, in terms of published results, participants’ responses are only reported in aggregate or in such a manner as to be non-attributable. I obtained participant authorization for any direct quotations that have been included in this report. To protect the privacy of project participants, the rooms used for focus group discussions were set away from the manufacturing division’s general work area, and participants were asked to protect each other’s privacy in not disclosing to others who participated or what was said. For the second phase of data collection,
surveys were submitted anonymously and confidentially, and in the case of the interviews, no one besides me knows who participated. Where the names of participants were known to me, I did not share this information with my inquiry team or project sponsor.

Justice. Justice, as defined by the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics (2014), is the fair and equitable treatment of all participants in terms of the burden of risk inherent in, and the potential to benefit from, the research undertaken. Factors include measures to ensure the fair treatment of vulnerable populations and the inclusion (or exclusion) of participants on the basis of rationales justified by the research questions examined (Justice section, para. 2). In the context of this research project, the diverse ethnocultural makeup of the manufacturing division combined with the low level occupied by some participants in the organizational hierarchy presented potential power-over risks from the perspective of justice. I arranged for translation of focus group recruitment materials into Vietnamese and provision of Vietnamese language support as a mitigating measure to reinforce messaging around participation risks and voluntary participation for Vietnamese-speaking participants, as these individuals had been identified as those whose English skills might not be sufficient to fully understand the documents.

During the conduct of the focus groups, I reinforced the message that participation was voluntary and that participants could leave the focus group at any time and that contributions would be treated confidentially by me as researcher. I also stressed the importance of participants respecting the confidentiality of contributions made by their colleagues, a condition to which all participants assented. Over the course of the focus groups, as facilitator, I made a conscious effort to strike a balance between inviting contributions from all participants, all the while respecting participants’ decisions to not contribute at any given point in the conversation.
Chapter Summary

An overview of the methodology utilized for this thesis project: namely, ARE and its basis in the theory of action research, has been provided in this chapter. The data collection methods selected and used for the project (i.e., focus groups, survey, and interviews) were described, including rationale and conduct of the phases of data collection. Finally, the ethical considerations of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice were discussed, addressing the relevant mitigating measures taken in this project. In the next chapter, this thesis project’s findings and conclusions are discussed.
Chapter Four: Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions

This chapter is comprised of the findings and conclusions of this thesis project. The overarching themes and related findings are described, followed by a discussion of the conclusions consequently drawn. The chapter concludes with a discussion of scope and limitations of the inquiry.

The main research question explored in this inquiry project was the following: How can B.G.E. Service & Supply better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its members? Sub-questions deriving from this overarching inquiry question were:

1. How do members of B.G.E. Service & Supply demonstrate and experience leadership?
2. What is currently—explicitly or implicitly—supporting (or inversely, impeding) employees’ engagement in leadership?
3. What approaches could managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply introduce to encourage front line and first level supervisory employees to take on greater aspects of organizational leadership?
4. What strategies would help the organization’s leaders better manage the polarity between developing and promoting internal talent and meeting organizational leadership needs in a timely fashion?

Study Findings

The overarching objective of this inquiry was to better understand the status of leadership within the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply, with an emphasis on the follower perspective. Research participants were asked to reflect on leadership in their organization from an appreciative stance in the context of focus groups (see protocol in Appendix I), interviews
(see protocol in Appendix R), and a survey (see instruments in Appendices K and L), the
analysis of which revealed three dominant themes. The first of these themes was that the
organizational culture at B.G.E. Service & Supply is cohesive and positive, inspiring loyalty and
mutual support amongst employees. The second theme was one of a drive for organizational
improvement, backed by a strong desire at the individual level to contribute to the performance
of the organization. The third theme related to the people and leadership development
approaches best suited to advancing B.G.E. Service & Supply as an organization. Five findings
served to underpin these themes and will be discussed in detail in this section.

1. Participants characterized the culture of the manufacturing division and of B.G.E.
   Service & Supply as close-knit and family like.
2. The follower experience in the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply is
   overwhelmingly positive.
3. An organizational change initiative representative of transformational leadership is
   already underway and is having a constructive impact.
4. Employees in the manufacturing division demonstrated a high level of engagement in
   contributing to overall organizational performance and identified three main areas for
   improvement.
   4.1 Workload distribution
   4.2 Process improvements
   4.3 Increased accountability and feedback
5. People and leadership development, including talent management, were recognized as
   important in the organizational context, and three subthemes were identified.
   5.1 Emergent leverage of employee skills and capacity development is occurring.
   5.2 Employees would welcome a more structured framework for people
      development.
   5.3 Employees took an objective perspective vis-à-vis internal and external talent
      management approaches.
These findings are expanded in more detail, drawing on supporting data from the focus groups, interviews, and survey conducted over the course of this inquiry project. For the purposes of this thesis, I have employed the verbatim principal in reporting participants’ quotations so as to reflect their voices as accurately as possible. Vocabulary selection and grammar usage reflects the fact that many participants were non-native English speakers. Direct quotes have been attributed using a unique, confidential identification code to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality. Focus group participant identifiers begin with FG, followed by a number to indicate which focus group they participated in, while interview participants are identified simply by I, and survey participants by S.

The focus groups were conducted with a total of 10 representatives of the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply, the interviews involved two members of the senior management team, and the survey was open to all members of the company, excepting the senior management team. In the case of the interviews, a total of 215 text segments were coded, and for the focus groups 1,077 segments were coded. A total of 106 codes were generated, of which 60 emerged as being most substantial and subsequently grouped into themes corresponding to the five emergent findings from this inquiry project.

The survey was sent out to 180 employees, with 30 responses received, representing a response rate of 17%. Any discussion of survey results reflects a narrative analysis of the 30 survey responses received, as the number of responses received was too small to allow for statistically significant quantitative analysis. There are variations in the number of responses for various questions, resulting from individuals opting not to answer certain questions. The findings resulted from the analysis of all three data collection methods.
Finding 1: The manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply is a tight-knit organization with strong loyalty and traditions. Participants representing the manufacturing division frequently described B.G.E. Service & Supply’s organizational and leadership culture as being like a family, sharing observations such as “we’re treated as a family” (FG 1-1) and “think of family dynamics” (I-2). Focus group participants’ unsolicited characterizations of relationships within the organization were often cohesive “because here, we [are] very close even the owner of the company, the manager” (FG 1-2), and members of the organization reported detecting this aspect of the organization early on. One participant recalled that when she/he first started with the company, “everyone was supporting me. My whole line” (FG 3-3), and another participant provided as an example a colleague’s solidarity on her first day on the job: “I make a mistake, but she stand up for me. She said, ‘Maybe that is mine’” (FG 3-1). Consistent with this finding, 24 of 29 survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that employees at B.G.E. Service & Supply offer each other help when needed.

Employees in the manufacturing division feel that their managers care about and protect them, expressing the view that “they’re very careful to make us safe” (FG 1-2), and 20 of 30 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “My managers care about me.” The feeling was reciprocated, with manufacturing division representatives expressing positive affect, loyalty, and appreciation towards managers. A representative sample of comments included: “I really appreciate and admire what they’re doing” (FG 2-2), in speaking about managers’ general approach; “her leadership is really good, awesome” (FG 2-2), in describing the owner of the company; and “sometimes we attach already the manager” (FG 1-2), speaking about departing managers in the case of leadership transitions.
In counterbalance to these general characterizations, participants also shared opinions that the organization’s cohesiveness may not always be positive: “You [also] get the bad sides of the family” (I-2), and “Sometimes, it can be somewhat of a hindrance” (I-1) and may not be universal across the organization. A survey respondent remarked that “there needs to be a GENUINE and honest caring for others to be a good leader not ‘who can I impress the most to better myself’” (S-4). However, in general, research participants described a highly collegial and supportive environment and spoke positively of the family-like nature of B.G.E. Service & Supply.

**Finding 2: Followers in the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply described their experience of followership in a positive, often affectionate, manner, identifying many positive atmospherics and interpersonal characteristics related to leadership in the organization.** The followership experience of employees in the manufacturing division was one of enjoyment and pride. In the words of one focus group participant, “I’m happy with what I do there . . . and I’m proud of what I do” (FG 3-2), and in those of a participant describing the work: “Looks like playing. . . . Time passes by, and we’re not noticing” (FG 1-2). One participant shared an impression of the unique nature of the follower experience at B.G.E. Service & Supply: “I work in how many companies, but I only experience here” (FG 1-1).

Participants identified with the concept of follower, introducing the term unprompted when asked how they would describe good leadership: “Leader means follower. So, before you lead, you should follow first” (FG 1-2); and “They have to be really good for us to follow” (FG 3-2). They also expressed a clear understanding of what constituted good leadership, identifying as important respectful behaviours: “Respect is important. It doesn’t matter what age you are” (FG 3-2); consideration of others: “They show you how to be a good leader . . . how to deal
people properly” (FG 1-1); and modeling behaviour: “You need to become a role model for your members” (FG 2-1). The importance of communication was also emphasized: “You can’t work if you do not understand” (FG 1-2); and especially listening: “Someone who learns and listens to those who work for them” (FG 3-5). Participants also identified with the concept of shared leadership, referring frequently to colleagues taking initiative to address issues or stepping up to assume additional responsibilities. One focus group participant verbalized the thread as: “I guess we’re all leaders in a way” (FG 3-3).

With regards to positive leadership behaviours at B.G.E. Service & Supply, participants often mentioned the presence of senior leadership in their physical workspace and at meetings. Participants stated, “Always Roberta and senior management will be here” (FG 2-3); and “You see Roberta[‘s] leadership. See what [she’s] doing” (FG3-4). In general, the organization’s senior managers’ leadership style could be characterized as authentic and that of the company President as taking on elements of charismatic leadership, whether by design or coincidence. Focus group participants noted a marked improvement in communication in recent years, mentioning regular staff meetings and town halls as being important channels to learn about what was going on elsewhere in the company as well as overall company performance: “We have always a monthly meeting. So that we know what’s happening in the company” (FG 1-2). They mentioned the company’s recent decision to implement English as a second language classes as a positive development vis-à-vis communication: “They want us to improve our communication, so we can communicate better” (FG 1-1).

Survey respondents, however, did not assess the organization’s performance on communication as positively, with 11 of 30 respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement that there is good communication between senior leaders and employees. Ten of 30
respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that managers kept them informed of things happening elsewhere in the company that they needed to know about for their jobs. This response rate indicated that other parts of the organization may not be experiencing the same improvements in communication as is the case of the manufacturing division.

When it came to experiencing appreciation of their work, responses were mixed across focus groups and the survey. One focus group participant commented that “the boss really appreciate our hard work” (FG 1-1), but another focus group’s conversation touched on a colleague’s helpful contribution that the participant felt had gone under appreciated by management: “When we make a good thing, let them come and say something to us” (FG 3-1). Survey results indicated that appreciation from managers may be perceived as weak across the organization. When asked how often managers do or say something to express appreciation of work, 20 of 28 respondents answered sometimes, rarely, or never.

Survey question number 24 asked respondents to mark the five phrases that best describe managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply. While the response rate for the question was relatively low at 26 responses, the aggregate results presented in Table 1 provide a sense of how employees perceive managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply. The top three characteristics, noted as technical knowledge, expertise, and delegation, may point towards a more managerial approach. In contrast with focus group participants’ positive comments regarding B.G.E. Service & Supply’s leadership and communication, communication skills such as speaking and writing in a way that is easy to understand, listening, and convincing others were ranked lowest in survey respondents’ assessment of managers.
Table 1
Responses to Survey Questions 23 and 24 Comparing Employees’ Assessment of Managers’ Current Characteristics Versus Characteristics Needed in 5 to 10 Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Employee Description of Managers Now</th>
<th>Needed of Managers in Next 5 to 10 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know about our products and services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at deciding who does tasks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep going when things are tough</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at planning and organizing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to new ideas and approaches</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have energy and excitement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate success</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on what is important</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at helping others learn</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at handling stress</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to take risks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at listening</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak and write so I can understand</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at building relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can convince others</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work well without needed information</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at settling disagreements</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at understanding difficult ideas</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of respondents 26 28
Finding 3: Leaders at B.G.E. Service & Supply are engaged in an ongoing, organization-wide change initiative representative of transformational leadership. In speaking about leadership at B.G.E. Service & Supply, various focus group participants commented on recent improvements and changes in progress. One participant stated, “Things have been actually changing and improving a lot since I first started here” (FG 3-5), and another stated, “I know right now they are doing some of the improvements projects” (FG 2-3). An interview participant confirmed: “We’re trying to adjust the culture, from a senior management perspective” (I-1). Concrete examples of changes introduced were widely varied. An anonymous suggestion box enabled input from employees: “We do have a suggestion box initiative” (FG 3-4). Another participant elaborated that: “Before they did not let us have suggestions, but that’s new” (FG 1-1). In general, participant comments reflected the importance of B.G.E. Service & Supply facilitating channels for communication from employees.

A second example was a renewed emphasis on employee safety and welfare, linked to the hiring of a new safety specialist. One group mentioned that in the past, they had to supply certain pieces of safety protection equipment themselves, but that: “Now if we ask something, they will give it” (FG 1-1). Participants were also impressed at the safety specialist physically carrying out manufacturing tasks to detect potential issues: “He experienced what we’re doing. He’s standing with our own feet” (FG 1-1); and “He’s taking the rounds and going and learning everyone’s lines as well” (FG 3-3).

A third change was a greater overall presence of leadership on the manufacturing floor. In addition to the examples of the safety specialist, participants spoke about the positive impact of other senior managers being present: “Sometimes twice a week, she’s really on hand. Manager A too. Manager B on hand. Manager C too. Yeah. That’s why they know what we need” (FG 1-
1). Another participant commented, “He’s in the shop more, which is good” (FG 3-2), speaking in reference to a member of the senior leadership team. In yet another focus group, a participant commented, “Our main boss or our president of the company, she’ll be here, so that encourages us especially” (FG 2-3).

A fourth instance was the implementation of regular informational meetings that provide the opportunity for staff to share suggestions with management: “We conduct our Monday meeting, so we have a chance to suggest any improvements” (FG 2-2); introduce new staff members: “They introduce us in the meeting” (FG 1-2); and get an update on company performance: “They would come down to the town meeting, tell us how the company is doing as a whole” (FG 3-5).

A final example was the introduction of three core value statements: “Together we are better,” “Whatever it takes,” and “Be the expert” referred to collectively as the “circles of excellence” (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, January 8, 2018). Focus group participants’ references to the value statements made it clear that they had internalized the meanings in relation to their day-to-day work. In the words of one participant, “To achieve those circles of excellence, you need to . . . You have this unity, and together, like you work” (FG 2-2). Survey results indicated that respondents felt that managers are also applying the values, with 18 of 30 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that their managers’ actions match the three circles of excellence.

Employees in the manufacturing division generally spoke positively of the changes underway in the company. An openness to change was also reflected in the comments of an interview participant: “I believe that the staff would embrace it [change]” (I-1). While survey results seemed to indicate that managers are also open to new ways of doing things, with 18 of
30 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with a statement to that effect, the survey also revealed a gap between employees’ assessment of leaders’ present openness to change and required behaviour in the future. When asked to rank current characteristics of managers, being open to new ideas ranked fourth with only eight responses, but when asked about characteristics needed of managers over the next five to 10 years, being open to new ideas and ways of doing things ranked first with 19 responses (see Table 1).

Finding 4: There is a focus and commitment on the part of employees in the manufacturing division to contribute to improved company performance. Manufacturing division focus group participants expressed a strong self-identification with company outcomes: “Less production, less profit. It affects the company. The company gets affected, we get affected” (FG 3-2). This finding was reinforced by the survey result where 19 of 30 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their managers ensured they understood how their work helps B.G.E. Service & Supply reach its business goals. A strong commitment to the company was also evident in examples shared in the focus groups when speaking of employee responses to emergencies and people stepping up to fill in for absent colleagues. This was summarized by the comment: “There are people willing to stay behind and deal with things if problems come up” (FG 3-5). Focus group participants demonstrated a strong desire for better company performance, identifying a number of possible improvement mechanisms. Participants’ suggestions included the possibilities of (a) workload distribution, (b) process improvements, and (c) increased accountability and feedback.

Workload distribution. Respondents from the manufacturing division identified balancing of workload, both for themselves and for their leaders, as an area with potential to contribute to employee and company performance. One participant expressed the need for “a
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN A MID-SIZED FIRM  88

good balancing among the workload . . . [to] encourage or motivate the people” (FG 2-3), and this perspective was reinforced by FG (3-5): “Someone who leads is also able to see, and not put everything on their shoulders, but be able to disperse that out in a way where it’s not pushing anyone else down.” Participants also shared concerns about managers with excessive workloads: “A lot of the higher ups, they’ll either put too much on themselves and carry it themselves, that they’re not delegating enough to other people” (FG 3-5); and its impact on these individuals’ ability to lead “it interferes with the person who has a big load toward us” (FG 3-2). In contrast, survey results would seem to indicate that more broadly in the organization, managers are good at delegation, as “good at deciding who does what task” was ranked number two among characteristics describing current managers (see Table 1).

**Process improvements.** Focus group participants expressed a keen interest in identifying concrete operational improvements. Examples included the need for more storage room: “We need room to store our stuff because sometimes in one room, we store many different products in there. It’s not easy to figure out what’s there” (FG 3-3); or specialized machinery: “Our leader asked for a special die cut so that we don’t have a lot of joints, because it takes time to have joint” (FG 1-1). Participants lauded the efforts of a colleague who had organized and made a storage area more functional: “I think we should have took a before and after picture of how [our colleague] organized the [space]” (FG 3-3); and “[He] organized it really, really nice” (FG 3-2).

**Increased accountability and feedback.** Survey responses pointed to a desire from employees for greater accountability, such as “stronger/firmer deadlines that time constraints will make work more challenging” (S-5); and that if managers are not meeting performance expectations, “after a few years on consistent failing should be taken down from a management position” (S-1). Respondents also expressed a desire for greater feedback on performance,
suggesting, “Individual or team meeting quarterly to point out areas that many need to work on” (S-6), and “If you do a good job, the leader should see it and come and say something” (FG 3-1). Based on survey responses, work objectives are clear, as 22 of 30 respondents agreed with the statement that their work unit’s objectives were explained in a way that they understood. However, the same was not necessarily true for ongoing performance assessment, as only eight of 28 respondents indicated that managers gave feedback often or very often.

**Finding 5: Employees and managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply recognize the importance of people and leadership development.** The topic of leadership development was mentioned, unsolicited, by focus group participants in the context of talent management. One participant stated, “They can start preparing to develop a small group of leaders, or some particular leader, so it might helpful in [the near] future to the company” (FG 2-3), while another mentioned the potential advantage of knowledge and skillsets enabling leaders to manage various sections of the company in a more holistic fashion: “If the company needs a way to boost sales, somebody coming in from sales will know more about sales and how it works, and then they’ll be able to integrate that into the production to encourage that” (FG 3-5). Data analysis revealed three subthemes in relation to leadership development within the organization: (a) emergent, unplanned skills leverage and capacity development is taking place; (b) employees would welcome a more structured framework for people development, with a preference for acquisitive and dialogic approaches; and (c) employee perspectives on the debate of internal versus external talent management strategies were highly objective and reflect an organization-first orientation.

*Emergent, unplanned skills leverage and capacity development is taking place.* Participants acknowledged that B.G.E. Service & Supply is recognizing performance and leveraging the skill sets of its employees in its talent management approaches, remarking “a
worker, if they’re doing good, they can move to different position, like higher knowledge, because they know what they’re doing. So, the company give them a chance to do it” (FG 3-1).

Other participants spoke to their personal experiences. One participant describing the company’s decision to offer them a higher level position explained that: “They asked me what this is my job way back home, so it’s related to my [new] job here” (FG 2-1); and another described the organization offering a development opportunity: “Whoever’s in charge of the shift there tried to use me, my skills, and my experience, to get me development of different department” (FG 2-3).

In addition to the aforementioned on-the-job opportunities for growth and learning, participants identified mistakes as a learning opportunity: “Mistakes are a learning mistake” (FG 3-3); “Something you can learn from and something you can grow with” (FG 3-5); and the need to contribute at the working level to developing colleagues’ skill sets. One focus group participant mentioned, “We’re actually teaching someone else how we operate things” (FG 3-3), and another referred to the integration of a hypothetical new leader: “The secrets that we know that we achieved from our experience, where everybody will share it with the person who is going to be a leader. It’s very important” (FG 3-2).

Employees would welcome a more structured framework for people development, with a preference for acquisitive and dialogic approaches. Participants identified gaps in people development and training as an obstacle to proactively helping others: “You don’t touch the machine if you are not knowledgeable. . . . So, I think they are not allowing us to do” (FG 1-1). Another participant mentioned the “need to train some people to do multitask . . . so that it will not happen that [the manager] will have short people” (FG 2-2). Participants also identified limited human resource capacity as a barrier to developing others: “Biggest problem is we are busy, and when we have somebody new working with us, it’s very hard for us to train them” (FG
This challenge was echoed in an interview in reference to handling of management transitions: “At the end of the day, it comes down to a bit of an investment” (I-1). Survey results also contributed to a more tempered view of on-the-job development at B.G.E. Service & Supply. Only 10 of 28 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that B.G.E. Service & Supply offers opportunities for employees who would like to have manager and leader skills, with an almost equal number of respondents, nine, either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement. On the other hand, 14 of 29 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that B.G.E. Service & Supply wants to develop the manager and leader skills of employees, and 11 responded neutrally to the statement.

In terms of possible approaches to developing people, when asked what B.G.E. Service & Supply could do in this regard, focus group responses tended to focus on training as a generic category, sharing comments such as: “Give them more training” (FG 3-2); and “Trainings and seminars, something like that” (FG 2-1). Stretch opportunities also emerged as an option. One participant described a past opportunity to take on tasks outside of her normal role, stating, “It developed my skills, my ability, my knowledge” (FG 2-1). Another participant suggested a purposeful strategy of stretching individuals’ roles, stating, “Give them just a little bit more, and then maybe wean them off of some of the other stuff that they did. . . . You get more growth that way, and you can find the strengths of that person” (FG 3-5).

One interviewee mentioned the importance of mentoring support, both in ensuring that stretch assignments were successful and in developing leaders more generally at B.G.E. Service & Supply: “I don’t know that they get enough mentorship to make them a really good leader or develop those skills” (I-2). Survey respondents echoed the emphasis on mentoring, selecting this as the top option when presented with a pick-list of possible approaches for B.G.E. Service &
Supply to help employees learn how to be good managers and leaders (Survey Question 22, Appendix K). The next most-selected options were peer learning and taking on roles elsewhere in the company (see Table 2). Overall, survey respondents expressed a strong preference for internal, on-the-job development opportunities, with a particularly strong preference for methods with a purposeful, interactive component involving other colleagues.

Table 2

*Aggregated Responses to Survey Question 22: The best ways to help Filter Shop employees learn how to be good managers and leaders would be . . .*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring programs (with a more senior colleague)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing jobs in many areas of the company</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job ‘shadowing’</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short classroom training courses and seminars</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multisource or 360-degree feedback</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching (with a trained expert, usually external)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Stretch’ assignments</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online training</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training at a college or university</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Employee perspectives on the debate of internal versus external talent management strategies were highly objective and reflect an organization-first orientation. With regards to the merits of external versus internal recruitment of leadership personnel, focus group participants took a balanced view of the advantages and disadvantages presented by both approaches. When asked about external candidates, the focus groups’ responses were overwhelmingly positive. The primary desirable point identified was the opportunity for fresh ideas and other firms’ best practices to bring improvement to B.G.E. Service & Supply. Focus group comments included: “They get new ideas, or maybe what they are doing in their previous job, they can apply it here in the company” (FG 2-1); “They’ve seen the way that other companies do things that may be better” (FG 3-5); and the “advantage of having manager from outside, I think there’s improvement” (FG 1-1). Comments on the potential downsides of external candidates were limited. Concerns related primarily to the steep learning curve and challenges around meeting production expectations: “He needs or she needs to learn all the situations, the attitudes, the works and everything” (FG 2-2); and “As a new external hiring, because he or she also has pressure here. He has to deliver something in a time limit” (FG 2-3).

Interview participants, on the other hand, focused their responses on internal candidates, expressing a preference for internal recruitment approaches. As one interviewee explained,

I do believe that hiring internally has a lot of advantages. We take for granted how much product knowledge or company knowledge people have. . . . I think we underestimate people that we know. . . . We know their weaknesses, but that’s a good thing to know what they’re weak at, because we can work around that. (I-1)

As another interview participant stated, “You hire the person that you want to be president of the company. . . . Sometimes, it doesn’t work out, and you have to go outside, but if I had my
preference, I’d always look within” (I-2). Some focus group participants also expressed a preference for internal promotion over external hires, stating, “A good idea that they replace the person with one who have already [been] employed here in the company, rather than hiring a new one that have zero knowledge in the company” (FG 2-1); and “If inside, then usually this person does know better” (FG 3-5). Other participants confirmed that the primary advantage of internal candidates was knowledge, both technical expertise and organizational awareness, commenting, “The advantage is he or she know already what’s the process of this company” (FG 1-1); and “They work with the old manager. They know the lead hands that work together with them for a long time” (FG 3-4).

Notwithstanding this preference for internal candidates, focus group participants did spend more time on the disadvantages, than the advantages, of internal candidates. They highlighted the risk of favouritism in selection of candidates for promotion: “I don’t know if there’s favouritism, right?” (FG 1-2); and “If it’s not [fair and open], if it’s played like by politics, then it might create a work dispute disrespectful of the different people” (FG 2-3). The other main disadvantage identified with the promotion of internal candidates was stagnation: “A lot of times, if you’re using somebody who’s in the inside, things don’t really go anywhere. They just stay the same” (FG 3-3); “With internal hiring, or maybe others just follow the old instruction or the old way of leadership” (FG 2-1). Interview participants identified the risk of failure if internal candidates are not provided appropriate support in new roles: “We tend to promote from within, which is great in theory, but a lot of people don’t have the skillset, once they’re there. . . . There’s a good chance that we didn’t really help them enough” (I-2).

With respect to areas of focus for future leadership development at B.G.E. Service & Supply, a comparison between survey respondents’ rankings of leaders’ current characteristics
and characteristics needed over the next five to 10 years revealed a notable difference between participants’ assessment of where leadership in the organization is and where it needs to be (see Table 1). Significant gaps exist in relation to openness to new ideas and ways of doing things, relationship building, and, listening skills. Four conclusions were derived from the overall findings of this inquiry regarding employees’ experience of and engagement in leadership, potential barriers to exercise of leadership, and perspectives vis-à-vis talent management.

**Study Conclusions**

Analysis of the data generated over the course of this inquiry project led to four separate conclusions as to how B.G.E. Service & Supply can better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its members. These conclusions were as follows:

1. The cohesive and cooperative culture of B.G.E. Service & Supply and employee commitment to performance improvement represent a strong foundation to build distributed leadership and cultivate future organizational leaders.

2. Change initiatives at B.G.E. Service & Supply have created a momentum and readiness for change that will facilitate changes the company implements related to distributed leadership and leadership development.

3. A more structured approach to human capital assessment and development would benefit B.G.E. Service & Supply.

4. The advantages of internal talent promotion generally outweigh those of external recruitment; however, external recruitment offers benefits that warrant its occasional use to balance continuity and innovation in the organization’s growth track.
Conclusion 1: Cohesion, cooperation, and commitment are building blocks for distributed leadership and leadership development. As mentioned in Chapter 2, leadership development is by its nature an organizational and inter-relational phenomenon, defined by Day and Dragoni (2015) “as the growth of a collective’s capacity to produce direction, alignment, and commitment” (p. 134). The systemic nature of leadership and its development means that the overall atmosphere within the organization is a critical factor for the likelihood of any leadership development efforts success (Hanson, 2013). Cao and Hamori (2016) stated, “Employees respond positively to favorable treatment by the organization and reciprocate it with positive work attitudes” (p. 510), a description consistent with the positive and constructive follower experience at BGE Service & Supply portrayed by participants under Finding 2. As typical of SME development, Darcy et al. (2014) described “a strong bond to the organisation such that they feel truly a part of it and are, as a consequence, willing to invest their HC for the benefit of the organisation and to go beyond what is required” (p. 407), which is congruent with the loyalty and supportive environment at B.G.E. Service & Supply outlined under Finding 1. These findings point to the existence of strong conditions at B.G.E. Service & Supply for the advancement of organizational leadership capacities.

With regards to distributed leadership, Friedrich et al. (2009) identified cooperation, collective focus, cohesion, commitment, and trust among team members as positive indicators for the teamwork and problem solving necessary to make distributed leadership beneficial for an organization. The presence of these organizational characteristics within the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply, as outlined under Findings 1 and 2, indicate that distributed leadership behaviours are emergent within the organization. This momentum will undoubtedly grow if given more concerted impetus by senior management.
Conclusion 2: Momentum and readiness for change is already in place. As discussed in Chapter 3, the ARE methodology was chosen for this project to help lay the groundwork for future changes (Rowe et al., 2013), in preparation for an action research approach whereby B.G.E. Service & Supply leadership would introduce a series of changes in a cyclical fashion, learning and adjusting as an organization along the way (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Rowe et al., 2013). As was made clear in Finding 3, B.G.E. Service & Supply is already engaged in a series of organizational changes, introducing core organizational values, improved communication channels, and an increased emphasis on safety. While ARE and action research were not terminology used by any members of the organization to describe the organizational improvements underway, research participants identified connections between these initiatives, making it evident that B.G.E. Service & Supply has already initiated a cycle of iterative changes. This research project served to look at B.G.E. Service & Supply’s manufacturing division from a systems perspective, incorporating a view of changes underway as part of the organization’s overall system and “to recognize the key leverage points in a system and push these points in the right direction to influence system behavior” (Arnold & Wade, 2017, p. 11).

Research participants’ observations on the far-reaching impacts of workload under Finding 4 and the benefits of cross-functional leadership under Finding 5 demonstrated an intuitive ability to view B.G.E. Service & Supply from a systems perspective. This factor, combined with senior management’s inculcation of the core corporate value: “Together we are better” (R. MacGillivray, personal communication, January 8, 2018) has significant potential to strengthen the organization’s leadership building capacity. Furthermore, as discussed in Garavan et al. (2016), attitudes at the owner-manager level within SMEs are an important factor in the success of leadership development strategies. The decision by the President of B.G.E. Service &
Supply to engage in this ARE project served as another condition favourable to the implementation of future leadership development initiatives within the company.

**Conclusion 3: A structured approach to human capital assessment and development would be beneficial.** Potential positive outcomes include better leverage of existing employee skill sets and interests, more flexibility in deploying personnel, and development of a talent pipeline to meet future organizational needs (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Cappelli & Keller, 2014). As stated in Darcy et al. (2014), “Talent or [human capital] pools are essential to the growth and success of the [small and medium enterprise]” (p. 406).

Krishnan and Scullion (2017) asserted that nascent hierarchical evolution and a tendency towards informality and inclusivity make formal talent management approaches less pertinent to small- and medium-sized enterprises. B.G.E. Service & Supply’s 50 years in operation and the ability, as per Finding 3, to successfully implement organization-wide change management initiatives are both indicative of a certain level of organizational maturity: a contrast—or at the very least, an exception—to Krishnan and Scullion’s portrayal of SMEs. Another contradiction would be participants’ concerns about the transparency of internal talent selection approaches, as outlined under the third sub point of Finding 5, and supported by Dries’s (2013) and Sonnenberg et al.’s (2014) assertions that transparency around internal talent management exercises is advisable, indicating the relevance of a more formal talent management approach to the SME at hand.

Research participants identified a number of areas for organizational improvement that could be buoyed by a strategic focus on human capital development. Examples of such issues included workload distribution imbalances, inventory management, and weak performance feedback as outlined under Finding 4. Perceived gaps between actual and desired leadership capacities, as described in Finding 5, were another example. Hezlett (2016) observed that
experiential leadership development is well-suited in building the kinds of complex skills necessary to address organizational challenges. However, as McCall (2010) pointed out, “Certain experiences matter more than others” (p. 4), signalling the need for a planned and strategic approach beyond the growth and development that is occurring ad hoc at B.G.E. Service & Supply as per the first sub point discussed in Finding 5, Emergent, unplanned skills leverage and capacity development. Experiential development alone is unlikely to be sufficient. Ligon et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of mentoring in helping more junior colleagues learn from and infer deeper level meaning from learning experiences and stated that experiential learning “will fall short if implemented in isolation” (p. 307). Further rationale for mentoring as a leadership development activity is its capacity for two-way leadership development. At the same time that mentees are obtaining guidance and advice from mentors, their mentors are learning to lead their mentees by providing feedback and modeling behaviour (S. Kim, 2007).

Conclusion 4: Internal talent management is advantageous over external recruitment, but both are needed for organizational growth and sustainability. Research participants identified numerous benefits to BGE Service & Supply of recruiting new leadership talent internally. As outlined in in the third sub point of Finding 5, advantages included existing knowledge of products and processes; familiarity with personnel; and from a senior management perspective, known strengths and weaknesses of candidates. Research has shown that the benefits of promoting internal talent also extend to individual performance, financial returns and overall company performance (Groves, 2017). Internal succession management has been identified in the literature as a preferred approach for SMEs (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017), and a recent Conference Board of Canada survey indicated that most participants in that study also used internal processes to fill leadership roles (Cooper & Jackson, 2017).
As identified in Finding 5, one of the risks associated with internal promotion is that of job performance failures, attributed in this case to a lack of organizational support. This risk is echoed in Bond and Naughton’s (2011) leader transition model that recommended a combination of modalities, including awareness of candidate areas for development, establishing accountabilities at the outset of a new leadership assignment, and providing coaching and mentoring support to help ensure a successful new assignment.

Members of the manufacturing division also recognized the merits of bringing in external candidates to introduce best practices and new ideas. In addition to being a driver for innovation, as mentioned in Chapter 2, external hiring can be a desirable strategy to ensure sufficient personnel to meet organizational needs (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). The equilibrium between external and internal talent management strategies is part of a larger balance that organizations must strike in ensuring they have in place the right talent for today and tomorrow, identified as being particularly challenging for small and medium enterprises (Darcy et al., 2014).

**Summary of conclusions.** In summary, there are many positive factors upon which B.G.E. Service & Supply can draw in advancing the objective of both developing and leveraging leadership capacity. First of all, employees in the organization generally described their followership experience as being positive and expressed affect and commitment towards the company, representing fertile conditions for leadership development. Second, B.G.E. Service & Supply has put in motion changes that have in turn, laid the groundwork for the organization to introduce initiatives to foment shared leadership and leadership development. Third, the implementation of a more formal, structured approach to talent management would result in many benefits for the organization. Finally, while internal talent management is likely to be the
preferred approach for B.G.E. Service & Supply, balancing this with external recruitment would ensure continuity and innovation necessary for organizational growth. A discussion of the scope and limitations of this inquiry follows.

Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry

This inquiry sought to examine leadership development in the context of a family-owned, SME manufacturing firm, with an emphasis on talent management and distributed leadership. The scope of the inquiry was limited to developing an understanding of these concepts as currently perceived and experienced within the manufacturing division of the firm and uncovering suggested approaches and strategies to advance leadership development. It was not an organization-wide inquiry, nor was it an audit of current managerial and leadership practices in the firm. While employee engagement and distributed leadership may at times overlap and contribute to one another, this inquiry was also not an exercise focused on employee engagement. Limitations related to the inquiry were low response rates, my status as a researcher external to B.G.E. Service & Supply, and the applicability of research to other organizations.

Low response rates for survey and interviews. The survey was sent to 180 employees, and 30 responses were received, representing a response rate of 17%. In addition to precluding statistically significant quantitative analysis of data, the small number of responses has made it difficult to say with surety to what extent findings may apply to the entirety of B.G.E. Service & Supply. In the case of the interviews, I was only able to speak with two members of the senior management team. As I was located in a time zone 15 hours ahead of B.G.E. Service & Supply, the window of time for scheduling interviews was quite small. This factor, combined with the relatively short data collection period for interviews, made it challenging to schedule interviews. While the data collected from the interviews provided views that helped to round out input from
the project sponsor and that of participants in other data collection modalities, the senior management perspective of this inquiry is limited. In retrospect, offering a longer data collection period for the survey and interviews may have contributed to a better response rate.

**External researcher status.** As an actor external to B.G.E. Service & Supply, my knowledge of the organization was limited to what has been reported to me by research participants and the limited number of press articles I was able to find about the company. I did not have a contextual understanding or a framework of past experiences with the organization and its members to apply to my analysis of the data collected. While this situation may have been an advantage in enabling me to take an objective view of the organization, it was at the same time a limitation in terms of the depth and richness of analysis I was able to conduct.

**Applicability to other organizations.** While the primary aim of this inquiry project has been to provide relevant insights to B.G.E. Service & Supply on how to leverage and develop leadership, it was also my hope that the project would generate interesting perspectives that could be considered in the context of other manufacturing SMEs. Recognizing that no two organizations are exactly the same, the organizational leadership picture painted by the results of this inquiry is perhaps most useful if considered as a point of reference, represented by ordinal coordinates on a chart, with talent management/leadership development on one axis and distributed leadership on the other. Managers at other manufacturing SMEs can then situate their own organizations relative to B.G.E. Service & Supply in this chart and envision where they might like to be in the future, drawing on and calibrating the findings and recommendations of this inquiry to navigate accordingly.
Chapter Summary

In summary, the principal findings of this project were that B.G.E. Service & Supply has a positive and close-knit organizational culture with highly committed employees, that constructive organizational change is already underway, and that members of the organization recognize the importance of people and leadership development. These findings led to the conclusion that B.G.E. Service & Supply has a strong foundation upon which to carry out future change, buoyed by change initiatives already in place. Internal talent management is likely to be the preferred approach; however, a more formal and structured method to people and leadership development would be beneficial.

The next chapter is comprised of recommendations in response to the inquiry’s findings and conclusions. An overview of implications for B.G.E. Service & Supply and ideas for areas of future inquiry and research are also included.
Chapter Five: Inquiry Implications

This final chapter comprises the recommendations derived from the study findings, conclusions, and literature reviewed in examining leadership development at B.G.E. Service & Supply. I have provided an explanation of the recommendations, an overview of the implications for the organization resulting from the conduct of this study and its recommendations, as well as suggestions for potential future research in this area.

The main research question explored in this inquiry project was the following: How can B.G.E. Service & Supply better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its members? Sub-questions deriving from this overarching inquiry question were:

1. How do members of B.G.E. Service & Supply demonstrate and experience leadership?
2. What is currently—explicitly or implicitly—supporting (or inversely, impeding) employees’ engagement in leadership?
3. What approaches could managers at B.G.E. Service & Supply introduce to encourage front line and first level supervisory employees to take on greater aspects of organizational leadership?
4. What strategies would help the organization’s leaders better manage the polarity between developing and promoting internal talent and meeting organizational leadership needs in a timely fashion?

Study Recommendations

I have developed the following five recommendations and three sub-recommendations in response to the research questions for this inquiry, drawing on the research findings and conclusions and literature review presented in previous chapters. The recommendations are
crafted to respond to the specific needs identified in the research questions; however, the explanations provided consider a holistic, systems-oriented view of the organization and its evolution. Therefore, there is purposely some overlap in the expected outcomes of implementing these recommendations given the high likelihood of an intervention in one part of the system that is B.G.E. Service & Supply impacting another (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Squires et al., 2011). The recommendations are:

1. Bolster positive initiatives underway to improve communication, information flow, and enunciation of a values-based corporate culture.
2. Encourage greater distribution of leadership in the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply.
3. Implement formal leadership training and experiential training to build leadership skills of employees.
4. Encourage and reward mutual skill development through the introduction of mentorship and peer-learning initiatives.
   4.1. Consider a combination of formal and informal mentorship is recommended.
   4.2. Introduce peer-learning circles to provide a forum for practicing leadership skills and build cross-organizational awareness and relationships.
   4.3. Employ external resources such as executive coaching and inter-organizational peer-learning options for senior managers.
5. Favour internal talent management approaches, adopting staffing methods that maximize transparency around candidate selection and methods.

These recommendations were discussed in consultation with my inquiry team and project sponsor in draft format and refined based on their comments. The project sponsor’s prioritization
of roll out of these recommendations is reflected in the section on organizational implications. I will conduct a videoconference presentation with any research participants interested in hearing about the findings and recommendations once this thesis has been approved.

**Recommendation 1: Bolster positive initiatives underway to improve communication, information flow, and enunciation of a values-based corporate culture.**

Research participants identified a number of changes made by management over the past few years to improve communications, help employees better understand the overall operations of the company, and introduce guiding principles. Throughout data collection in all three intervals, it was evident that these initiatives were perceived as positive. Viewed through the lens of an action research approach, these improvements represent a first cycle of changes that the organization can build upon to further increase and sustain positive change (Stringer, 2014). As a result, this first recommendation is that B.G.E. Service & Supply not only sustain these changes, but, enhance and expand on them.

Research participants viewed favourably routine townhall meetings that furnish information about company performance and priorities, regular presence of senior management staff on the manufacturing floor, training to improve English language skills of employees, and the introduction of a set of company-wide values known as “the circles of excellence.” In addition to delivering positive outcomes from the perspective of research participants, these endeavours represent a range of best practices referenced in the literature on leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Schein, 1996). As such, it is suggested that these practices be continued.

In line with the spirit of appreciative inquiry informing this inquiry project, it is suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply consider implementing initiatives to enhance the
communications and values endeavours already underway. Potential ideas for consideration include training on soft skills such as active listening, self-awareness, consultation, relationship building, teamwork, and coaching/mentoring (Riggio, 2008). This type of emotional intelligence skills development would at the same time foster foundational leadership skills useful in growing personnel capacity for distributed leadership purposes and building a pipeline of future candidates for formal leadership roles (Goleman et al., 2013; Turner et al., n.d.). Based on data collected from research participants, from an employee perspective, seminar and workshop style delivery are likely to be the preferred approaches.

**Recommendation 2: Encourage greater distribution of leadership in the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply.** As an organization, B.G.E. Service & Supply seeks to develop a culture empowering its employees to take greater responsibility and initiative in contributing to the overall good of the company. In line with this approach, implementing a distributed leadership model in the manufacturing division would empower staff with the most relevant experience and knowledge to take leadership in addressing challenges facing the organization (Friedrich et al., 2009; Vine et al., 2008), resulting in positive effects for overall team performance (Barnett & Weidenfeller, 2016). B.G.E. Service & Supply, as outlined under Recommendation 1, has taken steps to implement an organizational culture serving as a solid base for the implementation of distributed leadership, introducing the core values of “Together We Are Better,” “Be the Experts,” and “Whatever It Takes.” It is suggested that the organization take this work to the next level by introducing a distributed leadership model, enlisting employees and managers alike to take action in identifying and overcoming structural and behavioural barriers that may impede full implementation of the changes being sought in the organization’s culture.
As an illustrative example of the potential presented by distributed leadership, research participants identified process improvements and streamlined workload distribution as a challenge in their workplace. Research participants also expressed reservations about being allowed to take on duties outside of their specific job packages. This represented a barrier—whether perceived or real—to employees’ ability to proactively take on work to help overloaded colleagues or make operations more efficient. Implementing and leveraging distributed leadership in this scenario would involve enabling staff to take on tasks themselves to address these issues and provide them the authority to instruct colleagues to do the same. In essence, it is a question of ensuring staff know they have the authority to “do whatever it takes” to complete a task.

In concrete terms, a strategy for implementing distributed leadership would include guidance for managers and supervisors in enabling employee empowerment (Cope et al., 2011; Yammarino, 2012), thereby engaging supervisors at all levels in delivering consistent messaging to employees. This messaging would encourage employees to be flexible and open to task changes, proactively seek opportunities to lend a hand, speak up with suggestions for improvements, and play a leadership role in teaching others and implementing ideas. Staff should also be encouraged to ask for learning opportunities to broaden their skills, including any necessary training to meet safety and/or certification requirements.

In line with a model of distributed leadership where decisions are the shared responsibility of a group or team (Gronn, 2002), it is suggested that the role of the supervisor or manager at B.G.E. Service & Supply become less about deciding who does what and how, but more about creating a space where a team is making and, perhaps more importantly, constantly adjusting decisions about operational objectives, challenges, and approaches together (Friedrich
et al., 2009, Wegge et al., 2010). Team meetings already in place at B.G.E. Service & Supply offer a good starting point, but the flow of these meetings may need adjustment to enable the interactive and collaborative conversations required for distributed leadership to be successful. Managers at all levels will need guidance and encouragement from senior leadership in fostering an environment where direction on work flow and task execution can come from any level in the hierarchy (D’Innocenzo et al., 2016). Supervisors will also need to facilitate robust communication amongst all team members, underpinned by teams having worked out a solid agreement on operating norms around how to provide one another feedback and work out differences of opinion (Barnett & Weidenfeller, 2016). Some of the classroom training and workshops suggested under Recommendation 3 may serve a dual purpose with regards to this recommendation. For example, a teamwork seminar could comprise content on effective interpersonal communication and an exercise helping members of a team work through the development of norms for working together.

**Recommendation 3: Implement formal leadership training and experiential training to build leadership skills of employees.** As part of the overall approach to enabling organizational leadership behaviours and developing necessary underlying skills and experience, it is suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply consider implementing a combination of formal training and on the job or experiential training, as leadership development programs have been demonstrated as effective (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Formal leadership training programs offer an opportunity to develop fundamental interpersonal skills, and experiential learning programs offer an opportunity to build employee knowledge across a range of functional areas, enabling greater flexibility in assigning personnel (Yammarino, 2012) and increased organizational awareness amongst future company leaders. It is suggested that a more rigorous needs analysis be
conducted to further refine which formal training offerings are most needed by the organization. Such an analysis could also establish a baseline of skill levels to inform eventual measurement of training effects, as a combination of an initial needs analysis and targeted results measurements have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on training outcomes (Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014; Riggio, 2008). The value of an in-depth needs analysis notwithstanding, based on this study’s findings around employees’ perspectives on skills needed by the organization’s leaders of the future, suggestions related to front line manufacturing staff and supervisory-level staff have been developed.

**Front line manufacturing staff.** In the case of front line manufacturing staff, it is suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply consider offering externally facilitated classroom seminars and workshops, with an emphasis on communication and interpersonal skills, organizational skills, and approaches to teamwork. It is suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply consider engaging a turn key service provider able to offer a range of customized training options. This service provider could also be in a position to play a consultative role, working with senior leaders to customize training content, modify specific courses, and adjust the overall suite of courses in response to training participants’ feedback and reactions. Seminars could be scheduled on a periodic basis, i.e. once per quarter, to minimize impact on production as well as to allow sufficient time between training sessions to enable management to assess impact and adjust upcoming training accordingly.

Such an approach would be consistent with an ARE approach whereby an intervention – in this case training – would occur, followed by an evaluation process to assess the intervention’s impact and inform adjustments to the next training session. Possible adjustments might include greater reinforcement of past material, introducing alternate material, or modifying pedagogical
methods. Formal training would build not only skill sets, but also understanding amongst team members, thereby bolstering the roll out of organizational values as per Recommendation 1 and the implementation of distributed leadership outlined in Recommendation 2.

In light of research participants’ strong interest in on-the-job training and peer-learning opportunities, it is also suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply consider implementing a job-shadowing initiative across product lines on the manufacturing floor, rotating employees outside of their regular work teams to allow them to develop skills related to other production lines. More experienced employees may benefit from opportunities shadowing installation and service colleagues to obtain and share information about how products are used in the field or involving sales colleagues to better understand customer needs and the revenue-generation cycle of the firm. It is suggested that both those doing the job-shadowing and the employees being shadowed be briefed on rules of engagement and how best to share information about their roles and expertise. This would maximize the quality of the outcomes for both participants, as being shadowed is a people development role and, therefore, also a leadership development opportunity (Simkins, Close, & Smith, 2009). At the close of the job-shadowing exercise, it is suggested that participants be invited to reflect upon the learning obtained, whether in terms of task-related information or interpersonal and leadership practice. For job-shadowing participants, such a reflective exercise would serve to reinforce the learning. Managers responsible for implementing the job-shadowing exercise could, consistent with an ARE approach, leverage these reflections in identifying improvements to the next cycle of job-shadowing assignments.

Supervisory-level staff. With regards to supervisory-level staff, it is suggested that these employees also participate in professionally facilitated classroom seminars and workshops, focusing on communications, teamwork, and interpersonal skills, in conjunction with front line
manufacturing staff. It is also suggested that training specific to formal management roles be considered for this group. Potential target areas for training that emerged in the findings of this research inquiry include (a) providing feedback (Amagoh, 2009; Shuck & Herd, 2012); (b) developing others (Church & Silzer, 2013; McCall, 2010); (c) relationship management and network building (Hall & Rowland, 2016); and (d) organization and priority setting (Friedrich et al., 2016; Gentry, Eckert, Munusamy, Stawiski, & Martin, 2013). Given the smaller number of employees implicated and the wide range of supervisory and managerial training programs available in the Edmonton region, B.G.E. Service & Supply may wish to explore the possibility of enrolling supervisory level staff in offsite training programs. It is recommended that senior management maintain close communication with participants in selecting and conducting evaluations of these programs and their impacts at an individual level to inform selection of future courses or programs. In this fashion, employing an ARE approach of assessing and adjusting training interventions, the organization will learn which programs best meet the needs of both individual employees and the organization itself.

Research participants ranked knowledge of the company and its products as the top competency required of current and future leaders at B.G.E. Service & Supply. They also demonstrated a strong preference for on-the-job leader development approaches. On the basis of these findings, it is suggested that development opportunities providing broad exposure to the organization be given priority over classroom training for supervisory-level employees. In particular, it is suggested B.G.E. Service & Supply employees be encouraged to occupy a range of roles and functions across the organization over the course of their careers, leading to organizational capacity in the form of a roster of individuals with broad exposure within the organization (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). An added benefit of adopting such an approach for
B.G.E. Service & Supply relates to talent management, as employee openness to taking on new types of roles is an important early indicator of growth potential (Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Church & Silzer, 2013). As cross-functional assignments are likely to last a matter of years, B.G.E. Service & Supply may wish to consider adopting an ARE approach of assessing and adjusting this type of intervention in concert with regular assessment of employee performance. Senior managers responsible for coordinating these assignments could confer with employees and their direct supervisors to discuss learning obtained and progress made in achieving development objectives, making pertinent adjustments to job packages and/or assignments to maximize developmental impact.

A related approach suggested for instances where a permanent assignment elsewhere in the organization is not pragmatic is that of using job shadowing or temporary stretch assignments to expose people to new areas or functions within B.G.E. Service & Supply. Benefits include the creation of personal relationships across the organization, exposure to senior leaders elsewhere in the company, and providing senior managers with data for the purpose of succession-planning decisions (Groves, 2007). The benefits are maximized if candidates approach developmental assignments with a readiness to learn, seek feedback, and reflect on their professional experiences (Ashford & DeRue, 2012). Therefore, it is suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply select candidates for such assignments purposefully and clearly communicate expectations around development objectives.

**Recommendation 4: Encourage and reward mutual skill development through the introduction of mentorship and peer-learning initiatives.** Participants in this inquiry project expressed a strong interest in leadership development methods involving mutual, intra-organizational learning approaches. In the case of mentorship arrangements, participants could
bridge hierarchical gaps, and in the case of peer learning, there is an opportunity to cross functional and organizational divides.

*Consider a combination of formal and informal mentorship is recommended.* It is suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply consider implementing the practice of mentorship within the company via both formal and informal channels to optimize reach and efficacy in developing leadership skills of both mentors and mentees (Groves, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The first of these, a formal mentorship program, would match volunteer mentors and mentees for a fixed period of time (i.e., one year). Further, the organization may want to consider compulsory mentorship for anyone assigned to a new supervisory or managerial role, providing psychosocial support in times of potential uncertainty and anxiety and facilitating self-reflection and understanding in times of professional transition and growth (Dhaenens, Marler, Vardaman, & Chrisman, 2018; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). This approach would take advantage of an increased openness to learning and feedback associated with such transitions (Yost & Plunkett, 2010). It is suggested that mentors and mentees participating in formally assigned mentoring relationships commit to connecting on a regularly scheduled basis, representing a minimum of between six and 12 conversations per year. It would also be advisable to structure the program to provide guidance to mentors and mentees on how to maximize each other’s time. Ideas might include a joint information and socialization kick-off session for the program, assembling a kit of best practices and tips, or hiring an external expert on mentoring programs to provide focused advice to program participants. At the close of mentorship period, mentors and mentees could be brought back together as a group to reflect on their experiences, learnings and best practices. This approach would augment the development of all involved at the individual level, as well as permit the organization to capture lessons learned and insights to adjust the next cycle of
assigned mentorship relationships, reflecting application of the ARE model. Participants could also be invited to participate in an anonymous evaluation of their mentorship experience, feeding this data into adjustments to future iterations of B.G.E. Service & Supply mentorship programs.

The second channel via which to advance a mentorship culture within B.G.E. Service & supply would be to encourage informal, self-selected mentorship relationships, as these tend to represent a better interpersonal match that results in greater reported positive outcomes (Groves, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). There are a number of ways that the organization might encourage informal mentorship. Members of the senior leadership cadre could set an example by each selecting a mentee and subsequently communicating an expectation to any direct reports—and the mentee—that they also initiate a mentorship relationship with a member of the company. Performance appraisals could include a requirement that any manager or supervisor engage another employee as a mentor. Mentors could be offered a token incentive of a gift certificate for a meal at a nearby restaurant to invite their mentee out for an informal lunch or coffee. Townhall meetings and team meetings could serve as platforms to encourage employees to ask more senior colleagues or managers to be their mentors, opening the door to employee selection of mentors as well. As this type of mentorship would be emergent as opposed to planned, it does not naturally lend itself as well to an ARE approach as does a planned mentorship program. However, regular performance management cycles of both mentors and mentees could be used as a vehicle to obtain insights as to the quantity and quality of informal mentorship relationships in existence. This would enable senior management to reflect on the progress of the organization in introducing a mentorship culture and potentially identify points of leverage to facilitate greater adoption of the practice throughout the organization.
In short, the more channels used to talk about and promote employees engaging in mentorship arrangements, the more likely that such relationships will take root. The benefits are certainly not unidirectional, as mentors develop their own leadership skills in helping develop others (Dalakoura, 2010) and report greater job satisfaction, commitment to their organizations, and lower likelihood of turnover (Ghosh & Reio, 2013).

It is suggested that in addition to mentors providing support to mentees for the exploration of career preferences, guidance in pursuing stretch assignments and promotions, as well as furnishing organizational visibility (Ghosh & Reio, 2013), the organization harness mentorship from a talent management perspective. This aspect of the mentoring function would help B.G.E. Service & Supply to identify high-potential employees and enhance understanding of the organization’s collective talent inventory as well as contribute to an employee development culture within the management cadre (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Groves, 2007). It is also suggested that individuals soon to retire take on younger mentors as part of overall knowledge transfer related to their impending retirement, thereby contributing to B.G.E. Service & Supply’s ability to retain critical knowledge (Yost & Plunkett, 2010).

*Introduce peer-learning circles to provide a forum for practicing leadership skills and build cross-organizational awareness and relationships.* Peer-learning circles, also sometimes referred to as coaching circles, are an approach to leadership and people development that enable peers to support one another in exploring professional challenges, all the while developing coaching competencies. Peer-learning circles are typically made up of six to 10 middle-management-level participants representing a mix of functional areas (i.e., manufacturing, sales, service, and administration representatives) who meet on a regularly scheduled basis. Participants take turns being the recipient of coaching support from the group, presenting to the
group a specific challenge or issue. Members of the circle then ask non-evaluative questions to help the coachee explore the issue and identify potential avenues for resolution (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008; “Peer-to-peer coaching circles,” n.d.). Key to the process is that participants are not to provide advice or suggestions; this characteristic is what enables participants to develop their active listening and coaching skills for use outside the circle (Ladyshewsky, 2017). As a best practice, at the following gathering of the peer-learning circle, the ‘client’ could be asked to recount his or her experience applying the ideas generated, inviting colleagues to ask a followup coaching or learning question of some sort. This approach would represent an opportunity for collective reflection and interdependent action learning, reflective of an ARE approach.

Peer-learning scenarios may offer an opportunity for employees to seek support in addressing issues and vulnerabilities they are uncomfortable exploring in a mentorship relationship due to organizational power differences (Ladyshewsky, 2017). Furthermore, peer-learning circles provide a forum for employees to practice key leadership skills such as listening, self-awareness, and coaching (Garavan, Carbery, & Rock, 2012; Parker et al., 2008), while at the same time developing relationships and becoming attuned to issues across the organization (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010).

Employ external resources, such as executive coaching and inter-organizational peer learning options, for senior managers. The retention of external coaching services on an as-needed basis as well as participation in inter-organizational peer-coaching circles are suggested. Executive coaching has been demonstrated to have a positive impact in areas such as job performance, goal attainment, communication skills, productivity, organizational strength, and coachee well-being by decreasing incidences of stress and depression (De Meuse, Dai, & Lee, 2009; Sonesh et al., 2015). Peer-coaching circles external to one’s own organization that involve
a group of individuals in roles of comparable scope and level of responsibility, albeit not necessarily the same functional area, have been found valuable in terms of not only providing perspectives from cross-functional areas, but also from other industries (Kotlyar, Richardson, & Karakowsky, 2015).

**Recommendation 5: Favour internal talent management approaches, adopting staffing methods that maximize transparency around candidate selection and methods.**

Research participants in management roles expressed a strong preference for internal talent management, a finding backed by academic studies that demonstrated internal succession planning delivers a better economic return than external hiring (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Bond & Naughton, 2011; Groves, 2007). When making staffing decisions, it is suggested that the focus be on the role as opposed to the individual (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Collings, 2014): an approach that would help address concerns raised by research participants about the potential for transparency and favouritism.

It is also suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply apply a consultative approach involving staff when determining whether to staff positions from an internal pool of candidates or to hire externally. The findings of this inquiry project pointed to objectivity on the part of frontline employees within the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply vis-à-vis the potential benefits of external hires, indicating that this group is likely to be open to logical rationales from management for external hires. Involvement in the decision-making process would contribute to greater buy-in to the rationale for external recruitment.

Notwithstanding the advantages of a role-based approach, whereby the organization focuses on the capacities needed for a given role as opposed to finding roles to fit individuals flagged as high potential employees, it is suggested that B.G.E. Service & Supply’s overall talent
management approach combine a role-based perspective along with the development of a pool of human capital talent with diverse capacities so as to have at-the-ready candidates to draw upon in filling a range of roles (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). The polarity of valuing and investing in B.G.E. Service & Supply’s people while at the same time ensuring maximum performance from key roles was an undercurrent in all conversations with senior management and the project sponsor, resulting in its reflection as one of subquestions for this inquiry.

**Organizational Implications**

While the three phases of data collection were complementary, the information and insights obtained were relatively discrete in nature and required a certain level of analysis and distillation to arrive at findings and conclusions meaningful for informing a path forward for the organization. Therefore, to present as holistic a picture as possible and use the project sponsor’s time most effectively, I engaged the sponsor once draft findings and conclusions had been assembled. I shared the draft findings and conclusions in writing, inviting my sponsor to provide any comments. Shortly thereafter, I also sent a draft version of the recommendations responding to the findings and conclusions and organized a videoconference to discuss the sponsor’s overall impressions of the study results and thoughts on implementation. Following this discussion, the sponsor and I concluded that while all recommendations developed were relevant to the research questions posed and of potential value to the organization over the longer term, it was necessary to prioritize some recommendations over others in the short to medium term.

In the spirit of appreciative inquiry and in line with Recommendation 1: namely, to build on the positives already in place, the organization would prioritize, in addition to Recommendation 1, the implementation of Recommendation 2 (distributed leadership) and Recommendation 5 (internal talent management approaches). The project sponsor expressed
satisfaction at seeing the impact of hard work already undertaken to make organizational improvements in terms of communication flow and culture building and certainly has no plans to reverse course in this regard. It is hoped that the findings of this study will serve to cement leadership buy-in to these initiatives and follow-up activities, such as the introduction of conversational English groups and continued reinforcement of company values.

With regards to Recommendation 2, related to expanding distributed leadership, the project sponsor has acknowledged that its implementation represents a significant amount of work. B.G.E. Service & Supply will shortly be implementing lean manufacturing. This is an operational approach that involves structured devolution of leadership to the working level, essentially institutionalizing a form of distributed leadership (Alefari, Salonitis, & Xu, 2017; Hoyte & Greenwood, 2007). As such, this study’s findings and recommendations are timely, providing at once further rationale and understanding of the organizational context as B.G.E. Service & Supply moves forward with expanding the ability of its employees to exercise leadership at the working level.

In terms of internal versus external recruitment, the project sponsor has decided to move forward with prioritizing internal recruitment over external recruitment, as per Recommendation 5. The organization’s leadership will begin with steps to increase awareness on the part of potential internal candidates when job openings present themselves. Involvement of staff in hiring processes would be a step requiring careful consideration and forward planning, given that the small, close-knit nature of the organization may present risks of information about promotion and hiring processes being shared inappropriately, resulting in reduced transparency—precisely the opposite of the intention behind Recommendation 5.
Recommendations 3 and 4, related to leadership development, mentorship, and peer learning programs, will be considered by B.G.E. Service & Supply on a longer-term basis. These recommendations, as is the case with Recommendation 2, involve a significant investment of planning and resources on the part of the organization’s senior leadership. For this reason, it is not feasible to implement all three at once. The implementation of Recommendation 3 will require organizational leadership to identify training resources, prioritize training objectives, and dedicate internal resources to organizing the training. The implementation of internal, experiential learning opportunities will also involve a certain level of planning and coordination at the senior manager level, particularly where staff members would be crossing functional divisions within the organization. As B.G.E. Service & Supply implements Recommendation 2 and lean manufacturing, this process may shed further light on leadership needs at the level of manufacturing staff and their front line managers that will inform thinking as to priorities for further leadership development needs.

The introduction of mentorship practices and peer-learning initiatives, as per Recommendation 4, also represents a sizeable investment in organizational resources. The roll out of a formal mentorship program requires a significant amount of forward planning in identifying potential mentors, matching these with mentees, as well as determining and putting in place parameters to support such a program and maximize the likelihood of its success. The encouragement of an informal mentorship culture may represent a more feasible starting point, encouraging members of the senior leadership and managerial cadre to “Be the Expert” and “Do Whatever it Takes” when it comes to contributing to the learning and development of others in the organization.
It is clear that the findings and recommendations of this inquiry represent building blocks, with the capacity to add to work underway at B.G.E. Service & Supply for some time before this project began. Some of the recommendations are more aspirational at this point than others, but it is my hope that they can be taken into consideration by the firm and its leadership as stepping stones that they may utilize in the future in the quest to make B.G.E. Service & Supply an ever better organization, whether it be in terms of manufacturing excellence, operational efficiency, or simply as a place to work. As a researcher external to the firm, I will not be involved in the implementation of the study’s recommendations. I will make a presentation of the findings and recommendations via video-conference for any interested research participants, answering any questions they may have. I plan to maintain contact with my project sponsor and inquiry team at B.G.E. Service & Supply, as I would very much like to know how this dynamic company evolves in the future.

From a research perspective, this inquiry has, at a case study level, revealed an employee perspective on leadership that is highly constructive and collaborative, demonstrating the extent to which employees understand the importance of good leadership and its role in ensuring the good of the organization and, by consequence, that of the employees. Followers in this instance were shown to be cognizant of the qualities and conditions necessary for leadership to an extent that was not readily apparent in the scholarship. This inquiry also served to demonstrate the challenge for an SME, faced with many competing day-to-day priorities in carving out the necessary resources to invest in organizational change and leadership development. It is clear that barriers to be overcome by SMEs interested in improving their cadre of leadership skills are significant, making the SME population one that warrants special consideration in leadership scholarship.
Implications for Future Inquiry

In conducting this research inquiry, reflecting upon the issues identified by the project sponsor, the perspectives of B.G.E. Service & Supply as expressed through data collection, and a review of academic literature in the areas of leadership development and talent management, three major lacunas stood out as areas warranting future investigation. These were (a) talent management in the mature SME, (b) succession planning in family-owned firms for roles not occupied by family, and (c) optimization of planned independent (i.e., acquisitive) and planned interdependent (i.e., networked) leadership development initiatives.

Talent management in mature SMEs. Much of the research on talent management has typically focused on larger firms questioning its applicability to SMEs (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Valverde, Scullion, & Ryan, 2013), likely given these firms’ capacities to leverage robust HR systems, broader talent pools, and greater role specialization. SME research presents a significant challenge, given the great variability in the characteristics of the SME population in terms of age, nature of activity, and strategic direction (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). Within talent management research with an SME orientation, there has been some focus on innovative firms, but limited differentiation between SME types beyond this. Situations like that of B.G.E. Service & Supply, as a mature SME approaching its 50th anniversary, were not well represented in the talent management literature. It is important to ensure the sustainability of firms like B.G.E. Service & Supply, whose smaller size enables an agility in offering specialized products and services larger firms prefer to ignore. These small firms can play an important role in the economic well-being of many developed countries (Durst, Yip, & Lee, 2015; Thorpe, Cope, Ram, & Pedler, 2009). Robust, context-specific talent management research for this class of
organization would make an important contribution towards the objective of maintaining their viability in filling an important economic and societal niche.

**Succession planning in family-owned firms for roles not occupied by family.** Transition management for key roles in smaller firms is crucial given the multiple roles played by the individuals occupying these positions. Overlap certainly exists with the domain of talent management; however, the focus of most talent management literature tended to be too broad to be applicable in the scenario of management transitions in family-owned SME firms. The terminology of succession planning in an SME context has often been treated interchangeably with that of generational transitions in family-owned firms. While parallels exist, the research has primarily emphasized the particularities of family member management transitions (Durst & Katzenschlager, 2014). Based on this research inquiry, given the close-knit nature of many family firms, particularly in situations like that of B.G.E. Service & Supply where senior management cohorts have “grown up” together, there is scope and relevance to further examine how to handle transition of key members of management teams who are not family members and will not be replaced by family members.

**Sophisticated analysis of multiple case studies involving multi-pronged leadership development programs.** This research inquiry recommended B.G.E. Service & Supply implement a combination of planned independent (i.e., acquisitive) and planned interdependent (i.e., networked) leadership development approaches (Garavan et al., 2015), recognizing that there was already some ad hoc, emergent leadership development taking place within the organization. However, these were not of a nature sufficient to meet the organization’s future leadership needs. The study of leadership development is relatively new, and the rapid, iterative evolution of leadership development—characterized by R. T. Harrison (2017) as “collective
improvisation” (p. 93)—has been outpacing the literature (Ardichvili et al., 2016). Further research in B.G.E. Service & Supply, post implementation of recommendations, and in other similar organizations having implemented a combination of leadership development approaches would contribute to the practical understanding of the impact of intersecting initiatives. However, the fast pace of change and the wide variety of organizational characteristics and approaches taken would likely generate a large number of seemingly disparate data points. An approach that may be worth considering is to harness advances in technology to bolster data analysis capacity, such as artificial intelligence, to analyze large numbers of such case studies. This would offer real-world evidence of the potential strategic value and practicality of organizations investing effort and resources into leadership: an important supplement to the rhetoric so characteristic of the leadership “buzz” in today’s mainstream business media.

Thesis Summary

This research inquiry employed an action research engagement approach to explore how B.G.E. Service & Supply employees experience and demonstrate leadership, with a view to evaluating the potential for an increased distribution of leadership and informing leadership development approaches for the organization. The inquiry also examined the polarity of developing and employing internal talent as opposed to recruiting external talent for specific organizational needs. In exploring these themes, I conducted a series of focus groups with working-level employees of the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service & Supply, interviewed representatives of the senior management cadre, and implemented an organization-wide survey to gather employees’ views on leadership and leadership development in the firm. This primary research was supplemented by a review of literature in the areas of leadership development, distributed leadership, and talent management.
The outcomes of this research were explored in detail in Chapter Four, resulting in five findings and four conclusions around the themes of leadership, leadership development, and succession planning within the organization. The inquiry results, in turn, informed the content of this final chapter, in which five main recommendations and three sub-recommendations were presented to help B.G.E. Service & Supply improve organizational performance by developing and leveraging its organizational leadership capacity. I have also provided an overview of how B.G.E. Service & Supply foresees implementing the study recommendations of greatest pertinence and implications of not implementing recommendations. As part of the implementation plan, I will share the study findings, conclusions, and recommendations with any interested representatives of B.G.E. Service & Supply via videoconference, including a question and answer period to explore topics of interest in more depth. The presentation deck used for this purpose will be provided to B.G.E. Service & Supply for distribution as appropriate. An electronic copy of this thesis will also be made available to the senior management team of the firm.

Leadership is all about unlocking potential—whether it be to do more, reach higher, go faster, or just be better than anyone thought possible. The challenge to which we rise with projects like this, therefore, is in unlocking the potential of leadership itself.
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Appendix A: Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Karra-Lee Gerrits (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry research study at B.G.E. Service and Supply to explore how the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service and Supply can better develop leadership amongst its employees. 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 an 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, or reviewing analysis of data, to assist the Student and the B.G.E Service and Supply organizational 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 Karra-Lee Gerrits, the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.

________________________   _________________________   _____________
Name (Please Print)   Signature   Date
Appendix B: E-mail Invitation ‘Focus Group – Front Line Employees’

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project I am conducting on behalf of B.G.E. Service and Supply. This project is part of the requirements for my Master’s Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by Ms. Roberta MacGillivray, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose. I am not employed or associated in any other way with B.G.E. Service and Supply. My role is that of an external thesis researcher.

The objective of my research project is to explore how B.G.E. Service and Supply can better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its employees. The study will look at how employees demonstrate and experience leadership and factors that support, or limit, employee engagement in leadership. The sponsor of this research is the President of B.G.E. Service and Supply.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are a Production Worker, Labourer or Cleaner within the Manufacturing Division of B.G.E. Service and Supply. This phase of the research project will consist of a focus group discussion with five to ten Production Workers in the Manufacturing Division. A separate focus group will be held with Lead Hands and Production Specialists. All the Production Workers, Labourers and Cleaners have received an invitation to participate, but only the first ten people to confirm will be able to participate. Any additional respondents wanting to participate will be placed on a waiting list. The discussion will be about your ideas and thoughts about leadership as an employee at B.G.E Service and Supply and will last for 90 to 120 minutes.

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

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

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 your employment status in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. Your questions and comments will be treated confidentially.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me by email at: [email address]

Sincerely,

Karra-Lee Gerrits

Mục tiêu của dự án nghiên cứu của tôi là khám phá cách Công ty Dịch vụ và Cung ứng B.G.E. có thể phát triển và tận dụng tốt hơn khả năng lãnh đạo của các nhân viên của họ. Nghiên cứu này sẽ xem xét cách mà các nhân viên thể hiện và trải nghiệm sự lãnh đạo và các yếu tố hỗ trợ, hay giới hạn sự gắn kết nhân viên xét đến khía cạnh lãnh đạo. Người tài trợ cho nghiên cứu này là Ngài Chủ tịch của Công ty Dịch vụ và Cung ứng B.G.E.

Tên của quý vị đã được chọn làm một người tham gia tiềm năng bởi quý vị là Nhân viên Sản xuất, Lao động hoặc Vệ sinh trong Bộ phận Sản xuất của Công ty Dịch vụ và Cung ứng B.G.E.


Tài liệu đính kèm chứa thông tin bổ sung về việc tiến hành nghiên cứu và sẽ giúp quý vị đưa ra quyết định đúng đắn về việc liệu quý vị có muốn tham gia hay không. Quý vị vui lòng xem kỹ thông tin này trước khi trả lời.

Quý vị không bắt buộc phải tham gia vào dự án nghiên cứu này. Nếu quý vị muốn tham gia, quý vị có thể rút lui bất cứ lúc nào mà không vấn đề gì cả.

Nếu quý vị không muốn tham gia, chỉ cần không trả lời yêu cầu này. Quyết định không tham gia của quý vị cũng sẽ được giữ bí mật. Lựa chọn của quý vị sẽ không có bất kỳ ảnh hưởng gì về tình trạng lao động của quý vị.

Quyết định về việc tìm kiếm thông tin về việc tiến hành nghiên cứu này được quý vị đưa ra quyết định đúng đắn về việc liệu quý vị có muốn tham gia hay không. Quý vị vui lòng xem kỹ thông tin này trước khi trả lời.

Quyết định không tham gia của quý vị cũng sẽ được giữ bí mật. Lựa chọn của quý vị sẽ không có bất kỳ ảnh hưởng gì về tình trạng lao động của quý vị.

Quyết định về việc tìm kiếm thông tin về việc tiến hành nghiên cứu này được quý vị đưa ra quyết định đúng đắn về việc liệu quý vị có muốn tham gia hay không.

Nếu quý vị muốn tham gia dự án nghiên cứu này, hãy liên hệ với tôi qua email tại: [email address]

Trân trọng,

Karra-Lee Gerrits
Appendix D: E-mail Invitation Focus Group – First Level Supervisors

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project I am conducting on behalf of B.G.E. Service and Supply. This project is part of the requirements for my Master’s Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by Ms. Roberta MacGillivray, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose. I am not employed or associated in any other way with B.G.E. Service and Supply. My role is that of an external thesis researcher.

The objective of my research project is to explore how B.G.E. Service and Supply can better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its employees. The study will look at how employees demonstrate and experience leadership and factors that support, or limit, employee engagement in leadership. The sponsor of this research is the President of B.G.E. Service and Supply.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are a Lead Hand or Production Specialist within the Manufacturing Division of B.G.E. Service and Supply.

This phase of the research project will consist of a focus group discussion with five to ten Production Specialists and Lead Hands in the Manufacturing Division. A separate focus group will be held with Production Workers. All the Lead Hands and Production Specialists have received an invitation to participate, but only the first ten people to confirm will be able to participate. Any additional respondents wanting to participate will be placed on a waiting list. The discussion will be about your ideas and thoughts about leadership as an employee at B.G.E Service and Supply and will last for 90 to 120 minutes.

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

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

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 your employment status in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. Your questions and comments will be treated confidentially.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me by email at: [email address]

Sincerely,
Karra-Lee Gerrits
Appendix E: Information Letter for Focus Group

Study title: Leadership Development in a Mid-Sized Manufacturing Firm

My name is Karra-Lee Gerrits, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts 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 #].

I am not employed or associated in any other way with the B.G.E. Service and Supply. My role is that of an external thesis researcher.

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to explore how B.G.E. Service and Supply can better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its employees. The study will look at how employees demonstrate and experience leadership and factors that support, or limit, employee engagement in leadership. The sponsor of this research is the President of B.G.E. Service and Supply.

Your participation and how information will be collected

This research will focus on the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service and Supply. A small group conversation involving between five and ten Production Workers from the manufacturing division will be held. This invitation has been issued to all production workers and confirmations will be accepted on a first come, first served basis. The conversation will be moderated by me. Interpreters will be present for non-native English speakers who require interpretation support. I would like to hear about your experiences at B.G.E. Service and Supply, your impressions of leadership at this company and your ideas for how everyone can become more involved in leadership.

Benefits and risks to participation

The benefits for you of participating in this research include: the opportunity to share your views and ideas about a topic that is very important to your organization and its leaders; a chance to contribute to making B.G.E. Service and Supply an even better place to work; and, to learn from your colleagues’ thoughts and ideas about leadership in your workplace.

The benefits to B.G.E. Service and Supply of this research are to obtain insights on how they might leverage leadership to empower employees and to better understand employee perspectives on succession planning.

The benefits to the researcher, Karra-Lee Gerrits, include fulfilling the requirements for a Masters’ Degree in Arts in Leadership; expanding her understanding of leadership in a privately-owned firm; and, obtaining experience in data collection in a large group setting.
The benefits to society of this research are to contribute to the body of knowledge on leadership development, particularly as this happens in family-owned small and medium enterprises (SME).

The more actively you participate in the research, the better the final results will be. However, it is important that you understand what risks may be involved in your participation so that you can make an informed decision about participating or not. In the case of the focus group you will decide what information you are comfortable sharing openly in front of your colleagues and how.

**Inquiry team**

An inquiry team is a group of people put together to provide support a research project. The inquiry team for this project is made up of Mr. Dan Gagne, Vice-President of Operations, Mr. Hoang Lam, Production Manager, Ms. Anu Prasanna, Human Resources Coordinator and two members of the front-line manufacturing team. They have helped me prepare material for the focus groups, identify participants and made logistical arrangements.

**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 computer on my home computer. Information will be recorded in handwritten format, 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 the conclusion of this project. Any data provided by individuals who have decided to withdraw from the research will be destroyed immediately after their withdrawal and will not be included in the study results.

**Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with senior management of B.G.E. Service and Supply. If any participants wish to receive a copy of the findings, I would invite them to contact me at [email address] and I will provide a copy. The findings will also be published in thesis format in the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, and ProQuest/UMI and may also be used at a future date for the purpose of journal article publication and/or conference presentations.
Procedure for withdrawing from the study

If at any time, you would like to withdraw from this study you can either contact me at [email address] or Ms. Anu Prasanna, Human Resources Coordinator by Date X. Focus group comments are not assigned to specific individuals although comments will be noted anonymously as per FG#1, FG#2, etc. As a result, specific individual comments cannot be withdrawn should an individual decide to withdraw over the course of the focus group or following its completion.

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.
Focus Group Research Consent Form

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 18 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.

☐ I consent to the audio recording of the focus group.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________

Signed: _____________________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________________
Appendix G: Information Letter for Focus Group (Production Workers) (Vietnamese)

TỜ THÔNG TIN – NHÓM TẬP TRUNG (NHÂN VIÊN SẢN XUẤT)

Tiêu đề nghiên cứu: Phát triển Năng lực Lãnh đạo trong một Công ty Sản xuất cỡ Vừa

Tên tôi là Karra-Lee Gerrits, và dự án này là một phần trong yêu cầu cho Bằng Thạc sĩ Nghệ thuật về Lãnh đạo của tôi ở Đại học Royal Roads. Thùy ước nhiệm của tôi với Đại học Royal Roads có thể được kiểm chứng bằng cách liên hệ với Tiến sĩ Catherine Etmanski, Giám đốc, Trường Nghiên cứu Lãnh đạo: [email address] hoặc [phone #].

Tôi không làm việc cho hay có liên kết bằng cách này hay cách khác với Công ty Dịch vụ và Cung ứng B.G.E. Vai trò của tôi là một nhà nghiên cứu luận văn vận bên ngoài.

Mục đích của nghiên cứu này và tổ chức tài trợ


Sự tham gia của quý vị và cách thức thu thập thông tin


Các lợi ích và rủi ro của việc tham gia

Lợi ích cho quý vị khi tham gia vào nghiên cứu này bao gồm: cơ hội chia sẻ quan điểm và ý tưởng của quý vị về một chủ đề rất quan trọng đối với tổ chức của quý vị cũng như các lãnh đạo của tổ chức; một cơ hội đóng góp ý kiến giúp Công ty Dịch vụ và Cung ứng B.G.E. trở thành một nơi tuyệt vời để làm việc; và, học hỏi những suy nghĩ và ý tưởng của đồng nghiệp về công việc lãnh đạo ở nơi làm việc của quý vị.

Các lợi ích cho Công ty Dịch vụ và Cung ứng B.G.E. từ nghiên cứu này là hiểu rõ cách họ có thể tận dụng năng lực lãnh đạo để trao quyền cho các nhân viên, và hiểu rõ hơn quan điểm của các nhân viên về kế hoạch đào tạo lãnh đạo mới.
Các lợi ích cho **người nghiên cứu**, Karra-Lee Gerrits, bao gồm đáp ứng các yêu cầu của Bằng Thạc sĩ Nghệ thuật về Lãnh đạo; mở rộng hiểu biết của tôi về quy trình lãnh đạo trong một công ty tư nhân; và tiếp nhận kinh nghiệm thu thập dữ liệu trong một môi trường nhóm lớn.

Các lợi ích cho **xã hội** của nghiên cứu này là đóng góp cho cơ sở tri thức về việc phát triển năng lực lãnh đạo, cụ thể là trong các doanh nghiệp vừa và nhỏ (SME) thuộc sở hữu của gia đình.

Quý vị càng tham gia tích cực vào nghiên cứu thì kết quả cuối cùng sẽ càng xác đáng hơn. Tuy nhiên, quý vị cần hiểu về những rủi ro có thể có khi tham gia, để đưa ra một quyết định đúng đắn về việc có tham gia hay không. Trong trường hợp nhóm tập trung, quý vị sẽ quyết định những thông tin nào mà mình có thể thoái mái chia sẻ hoặc khai trừ trước các đồng nghiệp, cũng như cách thức chia sẻ.

**Nhóm truy vấn**

Nhóm truy vấn là một nhóm được thành lập để hỗ trợ một dự án nghiên cứu. Nhóm truy vấn cho dự án này bao gồm ông Dan Gagne, Phó Giám đốc Vận hành, ông Hoang Lam, Quản Lý Sản xuất, cô Anu Prasanna, Điều phối viên Nhân sự cùng hai thành viên của nhóm sản xuất tuyển đầu. Họ đã giúp tôi chuẩn bị tài liệu cho nhóm tập trung, xác định những người tham gia và thu xếp việc hậu cần.

**Tính bí mật, bảo mật dữ liệu và thời gian lưu trữ**


**Chia sẻ kết quả**

Thủ tục rút lui khỏi nghiên cứu

Nếu tại bất kỳ thời điểm nào quý vị muốn rút lui khỏi nghiên cứu này, quý vị có thể liên hệ với tôi qua karralee.gerrits@royalroads.ca hoặc cô Anu Prasanna, Điều phối viên Nhân sự trước Ngày X. Các nhận xét từ các nhóm tập trung sẽ không được gán cho bất kỳ cá nhân nào, tuy nhiên chúng sẽ được ghi nhận dưới dạng an danh theo định dạng FG#1, FG#2, v.v... Kết quả là, các nhận xét cụ thể của cá nhân không thể được rút lại nếu cá nhân đó quyết định rút lui trong quá trình diễn ra nhóm tập trung, hoặc sau khi kết thúc nhóm này.

Quý vị không bắt buộc phải tham gia vào dự án nghiên cứu này. Thông qua việc trả lời trực tiếp đến e-mail yêu cầu tham gia này, hoặc ký tên vào biểu mẫu đồng thuận trực tiếp, quý vị thể hiện rằng mình đã đọc và hiểu thông tin trên đây và tự nguyện và đồng ý - với đầy đủ kiến thức - tham gia vào dự án này.

Quý vị vui lòng giữ một bản sao của tờ thông tin này để tham khảo.
BIỂU MẪU ĐỒNG THUẬN THAM GIA NHÓM TẬP TRUNG NGHIÊN CỨU

Thông qua việc ký vào biểu mẫu này, quý vị đồng ý rằng mình hơn 18 tuổi và đã đọc tờ thông tin cho nghiên cứu này. Chữ ký của quý vị thể hiện rằng quý vị tự nguyện và đồng ý - với đầy đủ kiến thức - tham gia vào dự án này.

☐ Tôi đồng ý với việc ghi âm nhóm tập trung.

Tên: (Vui lòng Viết In): __________________________________________________

Chữ ký: _____________________________________________________________

Ngày: ______________________________________________
Appendix I: Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Thanks for agreeing to be part of this focus group, As I mentioned in the invitation email I sent out, this focus group is part of a research project I am doing here at B.G.E. Service and Supply for a Masters’ in Leadership at Royal Roads University. As mentioned in the invitation letter and information letter you have received about this focus group, your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide you don’t want to participate any more, all you need to do is leave the room. You can leave at any time. Your job here at B.G.E. Service and Supply will not be affected if you decide to leave.

Today’s session is being audio-recorded. The consent form that you signed had a check box that you checked to say that you are okay with the recording of today’s session. The recording will be sent to a professional transcription company that will transfer everything said today into text. This company has signed a confidentiality agreement, which means that they promise not to share anything from the recordings with anyone else. They will also not have any information about who is in this room. They will be noting comments anonymously, for example as comments of FG Participant #1, FG Participant #2, etc. This means that if you decide to leave the room partway through today’s session, the transcription company will have no way to know who has left the focus group and so will be unable to remove your comments from the text they produce. Otherwise, the audio recordings are for my use only so that I can listen to today’s conversation again if needed.

Let me come back to the reason we are here today. I am working with The Filter Shop on this project for two main reasons. First, managers and leaders would like to understand what leadership means for you, both in general and in your work lives. The second goal is to look at ways that everyone in the company, no matter what job they have, can be involved in leadership. Today’s focus group is a chance for me to learn about what you think about leadership in your workplace. I hope that you will feel comfortable sharing your honest and open thoughts.

Ground Rules

1. I WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. I would like everyone to participate. I as you to speak if I haven’t heard from you in a while.

2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS Every person’s experiences and opinions are important. Speak up whether you agree or disagree. I want to hear everyone’s opinions.

3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE I want everyone to feel comfortable sharing if sensitive issues come up, which means that you cannot share anything you hear today with anyone else.
4. I WILL BE RECORDING THE GROUP I want to make sure I have a record of everything you say so that I can go back to it when I write about this part of the project. As I mentioned earlier, your names will not be attached to any of your comments, so no one will be able to know what you personally have said afterwards.

Ground rules have been adapted from Eliot & Associates, (2005).

**Opening question**

To start our conversation, I’d like to ask everyone to share a short story about a time at B.G.E. Service and Supply that was a really positive work experience for you. What happened? Who was there? What made it special?

**Introduction questions**

“Introductory questions introduce the general topic of discussion and/or provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on experiences and their connection with the overall topic” (Krueger, 1997).

When you hear the word ‘leadership’ what comes to mind?

**Transition questions**

“Transition questions ask participants to go into more depth than introductory questions about their experiences and use of a product. While the introductory question brings the topic to the surface, the transition questions make the connection between the participant and the topic of investigation” (Krueger, 1997).

I’d like to share a couple of simple definitions of leadership.

“Leadership happens when one person influences a group of people to achieve a common goal.”

“Leadership is successfully creating positive change for the common good.”

Think about a time when you worked with or saw someone who demonstrated what you felt was true leadership. What did you see and hear? What made you feel that that leadership was the real thing?
Key Questions

If you think about leadership here at The Filter Shop, in what ways would you say this company and its employees are good at leadership?

In what ways is the company not so good at leadership?

Groups often experience big changes when managers leave, or, new managers come in. Just like any company, The Filter Shop will go through change when managers retire or move on. What do you think The Filter Shop could do to make changes in manager easier for employees in the company?

Sometimes new managers come from outside a company – they may or may not have worked as managers somewhere else. Sometimes a new manager is someone who is already working at the company and is promoted to become a manager. Which do you think is better? Why?

If you were asked to help pick new managers from among employees at The Filter Shop, what would be important to think about in picking these new managers?

What could The Filter Shop do to help employees be ready to take on bigger jobs, including supervisor and manager jobs?

I would like to talk about something a bit different now.

Can you think about a time when, without anyone asking, you did work that would not normally have been part of your job? Or maybe a time when you suggested a way to improve how work is done at the Filter Shop?

What happened exactly?
Who was there?
Thinking about what happened, how do you feel about it?

What does the Filter Shop do to make it easy employees to do things without being asked or to suggest improvements?

What could the Filter Shop do to make it easier employees do things without being asked or to suggest improvements?

What is the Filter Shop doing that may make it difficult for employees to do things without being asked or to suggest improvements?

Ending Question

Is there something else we should have talked about, but didn’t?
Appendix J: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcription Service

Confidentiality Agreement – www.rev.com

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Karra-Lee Gerrits (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry research study at a manufacturing firm on leadership in the organization. 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]

Rev.com Role Description

Rev.com is being contracted by the Student to transcribe audio and/or video files of focus groups and/or one-on-one interviews. In the course of this activity, representatives of rev.com 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 accessed by rev.com representatives 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.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement and accept these terms on behalf of rev.com

________________________  _________________________  _____________
Name and Position (Print)  Signature                   Date
Appendix K: Online survey

Survey—Leadership at The Filter Shop

Thank you very much for agreeing to take this online survey! It should only take 20 to 30 minutes. It is your choice if you would like to participate in the survey or not. The survey does not ask for your name, so no one will know how you have answered the questions. In other words, your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential. You may withdraw from the survey at any time simply by closing your browser window, no data will be retained. Please be aware that once you have pressed the ‘submit’ button at the end of the survey, because of the anonymous nature of the survey platform, it will be impossible to withdraw your data.

If you need help to complete the survey because of the language used, Dung Nguyen is available to help Vietnamese speakers. She has signed an agreement promising not to share any responses she may see with anyone else.

Please read the information letter on the next page. At the bottom of the information letter, you will find a consent statement - you will need to read and agree to this statement by clicking a check box before proceeding to the actual survey.

Thank you again for your assistance with this research!
Please tell me about your experiences as a ‘follower’ of leaders at The Filter Shop.

Note: Manager means Lead hand, Supervisor, Manager or Senior Management

1. My managers explain my work unit’s objectives in a way that I understand.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree
   – Not applicable

2. When decisions or goals change, my managers explain why.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

3. My managers make sure I understand how my work helps The Filter Shop reach its business goals.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

4. My manager tells me about things happening elsewhere in the company that I need to know for my job.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

5. My managers are excited about the work we do.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree
6. My managers do what they say they will do.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

7. My managers’ actions match the three circles of “Together We are Better,” “I am the Expert,” and “Whatever it Takes.”
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

8. My managers are easy to talk to.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

9. My managers are open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

10. My managers encourage and inspire me to reach my goals at work.
    – Strongly agree
    – Agree
    – Neutral
    – Disagree
    – Strongly disagree
11. My managers care about me
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

12. My manager looks for ways to learn from mistakes and things that go wrong.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

13. How often do your managers give you feedback about your work? (Note: feedback may be positive or negative)
   – Very often
   – Often
   – Sometimes
   – Rarely
   – Never

14. How often do your managers do or say something to let you know they appreciate your work?
   – Very often
   – Often
   – Sometimes
   – Rarely
   – Never

15. What do you think managers and supervisors at The Filter Shop should do to help employees do the best work possible?

   Please tell me about your opinions on leadership (generally speaking) and leadership development at The Filter Shop.
16. There is good communication between senior leaders and employees at The Filter Shop.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

17. Senior management and employees at The Filter Shop trust each other.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

18. Employees at The Filter Shop are allowed to say that they disagree with a supervisor’s decisions.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

19. Employees at The Filter Shop offer each other help when needed.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

20. The Filter Shop wants to develop the manager and leader skills of employees.
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree
21. The Filter Shop offers opportunities for employees who would like to have manager and leader skills
   – Strongly agree
   – Agree
   – Neutral
   – Disagree
   – Strongly disagree

22. The best ways to help Filter Shop employees learn how to be good managers and leaders would be (select up to 3)
   – Short-term, classroom training courses and seminars (e.g. 1 day to 3 weeks)
   – Online training
   – Training at a college or university (e.g. certificate/degree)
   – Doing jobs in many areas of the company
   – Job ‘shadowing’ (following a more experienced colleague on the job for a period of time)
   – ‘Stretch’ assignments (temporarily doing a job one level up from your normal job)
   – Mentoring programs (meeting regularly with a more experienced colleague for advice about work)
   – Coaching (someone who is specially trained, usually from outside the company, works with you one-on-one to develop leadership skills)
   – Peer learning (discussing challenges, best practices and ideas with colleagues in the same level of job)
   – 360 degree feedback (managers and colleagues at all levels provide their anonymous opinions on how you are doing as a leader)
   – Other (please explain)

23. Mark the five phrases that best describe managers at The Filter Shop:
   – Are good at building relationships
   – Can convince others
   – Speak and write in a way that is easy for me to understand
   – Are good at listening
   – Are good at helping others learn new things
   – Are good at understanding difficult ideas
   – Have lots of energy and excitement
   – Work well even when they do not have all the information they need
   – Are open to new ideas and ways of doing things
   – Are willing to take risks
   – Are good at handling stress
   – Are good at settling disagreements
   – Are good at planning and organizing
   – Are good at deciding who should do which tasks
   – Focus on what is most important
– Are knowledgeable about the company’s products and services
– Celebrate others’ success
– Keep going even when things are tough
– Other (please write)

24. Pick the five things that will be most important for managers and leaders at The Filter Shop to have over the next 5 to 10 years.
– Are good at building relationships
– Can convince others
– Speak and write in a way that is easy for me to understand
– Are good at listening
– Are good at helping others learn new things
– Are good at understanding difficult ideas
– Have lots of energy and excitement
– Work well even when they do not have all the information they need
– Are open to new ideas and ways of doing things
– Are willing to take risks
– Are good at handling stress
– Are good at settling disagreements
– Are good at planning and organizing
– Are good at deciding who should do which tasks
– Are knowledgeable about the company’s products and services
– Other (please write)

25. Generally speaking, the things that make a good manager or leader can be learned over time.
– Strongly agree
– Agree
– Neutral
– Disagree
– Strongly disagree

26. If you have any other ideas or comments you would like to share about leadership at The Filter Shop, please write them in the box below. Your input will help me provide the best possible suggestions about leadership to The Filter Shop.
About you

Please tell me a bit about you. These questions will allow me to group and compare responses among people with similar backgrounds.

27. What is your job?
   - Worker
   - Technician
   - Lead Hand
   - Supervisor
   - Manager
   - Senior Manager
   - Other

28. What department do you work in?
   - Production
   - Warehouse & Purchasing
   - Customer Service
   - Sales
   - Service
   - Administration

29. How many years have you been employed at The Filter Shop
   - 0-2 years
   - 3-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 20+ years

30. How interested are you in having a supervisor, manager or leader position at The Filter Shop within the next 5 years?
   - Extremely interested
   - Very interested
   - Moderately interested
   - Slightly interested
   - Not at all interested
31. Age group
   – 18-24
   – 25-34
   – 34-44
   – 45-54
   – 55-64
   – 65+

Thank you very much for having taken the time to complete this survey!
Appendix L: Print Survey

Thank you very much for taking this survey! It should only take 20 to 30 minutes. It is your choice if you would like to participate in the survey or not. The survey does not ask for your name, so no one will know how you have answered the questions. In other words, your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential.

Once you have filled out the survey, please put it in the box provided by The Filter Shop. Please be aware that once you have put your survey in the response box, it will be impossible to get your survey back so your answers will be included in the study.

If you need help to complete the survey because of the language used, Dung Nguyen is available to help Vietnamese speakers. She has signed an agreement promising not to share any responses she may see with anyone else.

Please read the information letter on the next page before proceeding any further. You must read the consent statement below and check the box beside it for your responses to be included in the study.

Thank you!

consent

I AM OVER THE AGE OF 18 AND HAVE READ THE INFORMATION LETTER FOR THIS STUDY. I AM GIVING MY VOLUNTARY AND INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.
information letter

My name is Karla Lee Gerrits. This survey is part of my Masters of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. To confirm this information, please contact Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies. Catherine.etmanski@RoyalRoads.ca or 250-391-2600 ext. 4162.

Purpose of my research project at The Filter Shop

- Learn about employees’ experiences and ideas around leadership
- Identify things that help – or block – employee involvement in leadership
- Suggest ideas to develop and utilize leadership skills of employees

Your participation

- Tell me about your thoughts, ideas and experience of leadership
- Share your views on informal leadership (leadership by non-managers)
- Provide suggestions for developing leadership at The Filter Shop

Benefits and risks to participation

- Share your ideas about a topic that is very important to your organization and its leaders
- Give The Filter Shop ideas to better utilize leadership skills of employees
- Help The Filter Shop understand employee views on management changes
- Make The Filter Shop an even better place to work
- For me: better understand leadership in a private company and get experience doing research with a large group of people
- For society: increase knowledge of leadership development, especially in family-owned firms
- Possible risks: Depending on your answers, it may be possible to figure out who you are from a comment in one of the text boxes in the survey. No specific comments will be used in the final report – the main meaning of similar comments will be grouped together.

Other information you should know

- This project is sponsored by Ms. Roberta MacGillivray.
- There is a team at The Filter Shop helping me to write questions and with logistics. The people on this team are Dan Cagno, Hoang Lam and Anu Prasanna.
- Surveys will be collected in a locked box and later scanned and sent to me by Anu Prasanna.
- I will work to protect your privacy. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected home computer. Written files and data will be destroyed one year after the project finishes.
- My final report will be submitted to Royal Roads University and shared with senior management of The Filter Shop. If you would like to receive a copy, please contact me at KarlaLee.Gerrits@RoyalRoads.ca.
- My final report will be published in thesis format in the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, ProQuest/UMI and may also be used at a future date for the purpose of journal article publication and/or conference presentations.
- I will offer a presentation of results to anyone at The Filter Shop who is interested once the final report has been approved by Roberta MacGillivray and Royal Roads University.
survey questionnaire

PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A 'FOLLOWER' OF LEADERS AT THE FILTER SHOP.

Note: Manager means Lead hand, Supervisor, Manager or Senior Management

1. My managers explain my work unit's objectives in a way that I understand.

2. When decisions or goals change, my managers explain why.

3. My managers make sure I understand how my work helps The Filter Shop reach its business goals.

4. My managers tell me about things happening elsewhere in the company that I need to know for my job.

5. My managers are excited about the work we do.

6. My managers do what they say they will do.

7. My managers' actions match the three circles of "Together We are Better," "I am the Expert," and "Whatever It Takes."

8. My managers are easy to talk to.

9. My managers are open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.

10. My managers encourage and inspire me to reach my goals at work.

11. My managers care about me.

12. My managers look for ways to learn from mistakes and things that go wrong.
13. How often do your managers give you feedback about your work? (Note: feedback can be positive or negative.)

14. How often do your managers do or say something to let you know they appreciate your work?

15. What do you think managers and supervisors at The Filter Shop should do to help employees do the best work possible?
PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT YOUR OPINIONS ON LEADERSHIP (GENERALLY SPEAKING) AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AT THE FILTER SHOP.

16. There is good communication between senior leaders and employees at The Filter Shop.
17. Senior management and employees at The Filter Shop trust each other.
18. Employees at The Filter Shop are allowed to say that they disagree with a supervisor's decisions.
19. Employees at The Filter Shop offer each other help when needed.
20. The Filter Shop wants to develop the manager and leader skills of employees.
21. The Filter Shop offers opportunities for employees who would like to have manager and leader skills.

22. The best ways to help Filter Shop employees learn how to be good managers and leaders would be (select up to 3 by marking circles):

- Short, classroom training courses (e.g., 1 day to 3 weeks)
- Online training
- Training at a college or university (e.g., certificate/degree)
- Doing jobs in many areas of the company
- Job shadowing (following a more experienced colleague on the job for a period of time)
- 'Stretch' assignments (temporarily doing a job one level up from your normal job)

- Mentoring programs (meeting regularly with a more experienced colleague for advice about work)
- Coaching (someone who is specially trained, usually from outside the company, works with you one-on-one to improve leadership skills)
- Peer learning (discussing challenges, best practices and ideas with colleagues in the same level of job)
- 360 degree feedback (managers and colleagues at all levels provide their anonymous opinions on how you are doing as a leader)

Other (Please explain)
23. Mark the five phrases that best describe managers at The Filter Shop:

- Are good at building relationships
- Can convince others
- Speak and write in a way that is easy for me to understand
- Are good at listening
- Are good at helping others learn new things
- Are good at understanding difficult ideas
- Have lots of energy and excitement
- Work well even when they do not have all the information they need
- Are open to new ideas and ways of doing things
- Are willing to take risks
- Are good at handling stress
- Are good at settling disagreements
- Are good at planning and organizing
- Are good at deciding who should do which tasks
- Focus on what is most important
- Are knowledgeable about the company’s products and services
- Celebrate others’ success
- Keep going even when things are tough
- Other (Please explain)
24. Pick the five things that will be most important for managers and leaders at The Filter Shop to have over the next 5 to 10 years.

- Are good at building relationships
- Can convince others
- Speak and write in a way that is easy for me to understand
- Are good at listening
- Are good at helping others learn new things
- Are good at understanding difficult ideas
- Have lots of energy and excitement
- Work well even when they do not have all the information they need
- Are open to new ideas and ways of doing things
- Are willing to take risks
- Are good at handling stress
- Are good at settling disagreements
- Are good at planning and organizing
- Are good at deciding who should do which tasks
- Focus on what is most important
- Are knowledgeable about the company’s products and services
- Other (Please explain)

25. The things that make a good manager or leader can be learned.

Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree

26. If you have any other ideas or comments you would like to share about leadership at The Filter Shop, please write them in the box below. Your input will help me provide the best possible suggestions about leadership to The Filter Shop.
about you

PLEASE TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOU. THESE QUESTIONS WILL ALLOW ME TO GROUP AND COMPARE RESPONSES AMONG PEOPLE WITH SIMILAR BACKGROUNDS.

27. What is your job?
   - Worker
   - Technician
   - Lead Hand
   - Supervisor
   - Manager
   - Senior Manager
   - Other

28. What department do you work in?
   - Production
   - Warehouse & Purchasing
   - Customer Service
   - Sales
   - Service
   - Administration

29. How many years have you been employed at The Filter Shop?
   - 0-2 years
   - 3-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 20+ years

30. How interested are you in having a supervisor or manager position at The Filter Shop within the next 5 years? If you are already a supervisor or manager, how interested are you in advancing to a higher level position within the next 5 years?
   - Extremely interested
   - Very interested
   - Moderately interested
   - Slightly interested
   - Not at all interested

31. What is your age group?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65+
Appendix M: E-mail Invitation Online Survey

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project I am doing on behalf of B.G.E. Service and Supply. This project is part of the requirements for my Master’s Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University.

The goal of my research project is to explore how B.G.E. Service and Supply can better develop and utilize the leadership abilities of its employees. The study looks at how employees show and experience leadership.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are an employee of B.G.E. Service and Supply. All employees of the company except for the President, Human Resources Assistant, Advisor, Vice President Sales, Vice President of Distribution and Information Technology, Director of Fort McMurray Operations and the Calgary Branch Manager have been invited to participate in this phase of the research project, a confidential survey. The survey is about your ideas and thoughts on leadership as an employee at B.G.E Service and Supply and should take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

You can access the survey at: << URL >> The survey will be active until February 19th at midnight. If you require help to complete the survey for language reasons, Dung Nguyen is available to help Vietnamese speakers.

All of your answers are completely confidential and anonymous. The survey is online and does not record any information that would identify you. You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do not want to participate, simply do not click on the link to the survey above. Your choice will not affect your job in any way.

This project was approved by Ms. Roberta MacGillivray. I am an external researcher. I am not employed or associated in any other way with B.G.E. Service and Supply.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions about the project. Your questions and comments will be treated confidentially. You can contact me by email at:

[email address]

Sincerely,

Karra-Lee Gerrits
Appendix N: Information Letter and Consent Form for Online Survey

My name is Karra-Lee Gerrits. I am doing this survey as part of my Masters of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. If you would like to confirm this information, please contact Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [phone #].

Purpose of my research project at The Filter Shop
- Learn about employees’ experiences with and ideas around leadership at The Filter Shop
- Identify things that help – or block - employee involvement in leadership
- Suggest ideas for The Filter Shop to develop and utilize leadership skills of employees

Your participation
- Tell me about your thoughts, ideas and experience of leadership at The Filter Shop
- Share your views on informal leadership (leadership by non-managers)
- Provide suggestions for developing leadership at The Filter Shop

Benefits and risks to participation
- Share your ideas about a topic that is very important to your organization and its leaders
- Give The Filter Shop ideas to better utilize leadership skills of employees
- Help The Filter Shop understand employee views on changes in management positions
- Make The Filter Shop an even better place to work
- For me (the researcher): better understand leadership in a private company and get experience doing research with a large group of people
- For society: increase knowledge of leadership development, especially in family-owned small and medium enterprises
- Possible risks: Depending on your answers, it may be possible to figure out who you are from a comment in one of the text boxes in the survey. No specific comments will be used in the final report – the main meaning of similar comments will be grouped together.

To withdraw from the study
- If at some point during this survey, you decide you do not want to participate, just close your browser window. All of the answers you have provided will be erased by the survey software.
- If you hit the ‘submit’ button at the end of the survey, because the software does not collect any information about your identity, it will be impossible to find your responses and remove them.
Other information you should know

- This project is sponsored by Ms. Roberta McGillivray. I do not work for The Filter Shop.
- There is a team at B.G.E. Filter Service and Supply helping me to write questions and with logistics. The people on this team are Dan Gagne, Hoang Lam and Anu Prasanna.
- I will work to protect your privacy. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer in my home. All written files and data will be destroyed one year after the project finishes.
- My final report will be submitted to Royal Roads University and shared with senior management of The Filter Shop. If you would like to receive a copy, please contact me at Karralee.Gerrits@RoyalRoads.ca.
- My final report will be published in thesis format in the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, ProQuest/UMI and may also be used at a future date for journal article publication and/or conference presentations.
- I will offer a presentation of results to anyone at The Filter Shop who is interested once the final report has been approved by Roberta McGillivray and Royal Roads University.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By accessing the online survey form and checking the consent box at the beginning of the survey, you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

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

Consent

☐ I am over the age of 18 and have read the information letter for this study. I am giving my voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.
Appendix O: Email Invitation Interview

Dear Ms./Mr. X,

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project I am conducting on behalf of B.G.E. Service and Supply. This project is part of the requirements for my Master’s Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by Ms. Roberta MacGillivray, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose. I am not employed or associated in any other way with B.G.E. Service and Supply. My role is that of an external thesis researcher.

The objective of my research project is to explore how B.G.E. Service and Supply can better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its employees. The study will look at how employees demonstrate and experience leadership and factors that support, or limit, employee engagement in leadership. The sponsor of this research is the President of B.G.E. Service and Supply.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are a manager at B.G.E. Service and Supply.

This phase of the research project will consist of a one-on-one interview between you and me to be conducted via Zoom. It is estimated that the interview will last between 40 and 60 minutes. The interviews will be scheduled between February 26 and March 2 as well as March 6 and 9 – I will coordinate exact scheduling with you if you decide you would like to participate in this research.

The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Following your interview, you will receive a transcript within two weeks for your review to ensure accuracy. You will be given one week to make any corrections or decide to withdraw from the study. After that time, you can still withdraw from the study with regards to any attributable comments you may have authorized me to utilize but your data would at that point already be part of the anonymous data of the inquiry.

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 your employment status in any way.

If you do wish to participate, please contact me by February 20th if possible. I will be away from February 21st to 24th so it may be challenging to arrange an interview time after the 20th.
 Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding
the project and its outcomes. Your questions and comments will be treated confidentially.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me by email at:
[email address]

Sincerely,

Karra-Lee Gerrits
Appendix P: Information Letter for Interviews

My name is Karra-Lee Gerrits, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts 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 #]. I am not employed or associated in any other way with the B.G.E. Service and Supply. My role is that of an external thesis researcher.

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to explore how B.G.E. Service and Supply can better develop and leverage leadership capacity amongst its employees. The study will look at how employees demonstrate and experience leadership and factors that support, or limit, employee engagement in leadership. The sponsor of this research is the President of B.G.E. Service and Supply.

Your participation and how information will be collected

This research will focus on the manufacturing division of B.G.E. Service and Supply and will involve one-on-one interviews with some managers of B.G.E. Service and Supply to ask for their views on leadership in B.G.E. Service and Supply. The anticipated questions include questions about their experiences as managers and leaders in B.G.E. Service and Supply, their views on informal leadership exercised by employees within the manufacturing division and suggestions for developing leadership within the company.

Benefits and risks to participation

The benefits of participating in this research include: the opportunity to share your views and ideas about a topic that is very important to your organization and its leaders and a chance to contribute to making B.G.E. Service and Supply an even better place to work.

The benefits for you of participating in this research include: the opportunity to share your views and ideas about a topic that is very important to your organization and its leaders; a chance to contribute to making B.G.E. Service and Supply an even better place to work; and, to learn from your colleagues’ thoughts and ideas about leadership in your workplace.

The benefits to B.G.E. Service and Supply of this research are to obtain insights on how they might leverage leadership to empower employees and to better understand employee perspectives on succession planning.

The benefits to the researcher, Karra-Lee Gerrits, include fulfilling the requirements for a Masters’ Degree in Arts in Leadership; expanding her understanding of leadership in a privately-owned firm; and, obtaining experience in data collection in a large group setting.

The benefits to society of this research are to contribute to the body of knowledge on leadership development, particularly as this happens in family-owned small and medium enterprises (SME).
The more actively you participate in the research, the better the final results will be. However, it is important that you understand what risks may be involved in your participation so that you can make an informed decision about participating or not.

This interview will be recorded using an online software called ‘Zoom.’ Files recorded will be created and stored exclusively on my home computer. Recordings of interviews will be heard and transcribed only by me. You will be provided a copy of the transcription as asked to verify its accuracy. Any information you provide will only be reported together with the responses of all interview participants and in such a way that you cannot be identified. If you make a statement that I may wish to use in the form of a quote but that may risk identifying you, I will ask your permission to do so. All written and audio files will be destroyed approximately one year after the conclusion of this project.

Inquiry team
An inquiry team is a group of people put together to provide support a research project. The inquiry team for this project is made up of Mr. Dan Gagne, Vice-President of Operations, Mr. Hoang Lam, Production Manager and Ms. Anu Prasanna, Human Resources Coordinator. They have helped me formulate interview questions, pilot questions with representatives of the organization, identify participants to be interviewed and supported logistical arrangements for interviews.

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 computer on my home computer. Information will be recorded in handwritten format, 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 the conclusion of this project. Any data provided by individuals who have decided to withdraw from the research will be destroyed immediately after their withdrawal and will not be included in the study results.

Sharing results
In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with senior management of B.G.E. Service and Supply. If any participants wish to receive a copy of the findings, I would invite them to contact me at [email address] and I will provide a copy. The findings will also be published in thesis format in the Thesis Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, and ProQuest/UMI and may also be used at a future date for the purpose of journal article publication and/or conference presentations.
**Procedure for withdrawing from the study**

If at any time, you would like to withdraw from this study you can contact me at [email address] by Date X. If you decide to withdraw from the study after the interview has already taken place, any files related to your interview will be destroyed. Following your interview, you will receive a transcript within two weeks for your review to ensure accuracy. You will be given one week to make any corrections or decide to withdraw from the study. After that time, you can still withdraw from the study with regards to any attributable comments you may have authorized me to utilize but your data would at that point already be part of the anonymous data of the inquiry.

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.
Appendix Q: Consent Form Interview

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 18 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.

☐ I consent to the audio recording of the interview.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________

Signed: _____________________________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________
Appendix R: Interview Protocol

Background

How long have you worked at B.G.E. Service and Supply?

What is your current role?
- How long have you been in this role?
- How long have you been in a supervisor or manager role at B.G.E. Service and Supply?
- What other roles have you occupied at B.G.E. Service and Supply?
- Have you occupied managerial roles in other organizations?

Body of Interview

- Can you tell me about a time that stands out for you, when you were either part of, or led, a high-functioning team? One that really delivered over and above on one or more projects? What happened? Who was involved? What was your role? Reflecting back on the experience, what lessons did you learn about leadership?
- What would employees at B.G.E. Service and Supply say are the greatest strengths of its leaders?
  o And the greatest weaknesses?
- What factors encourage leadership on the part of employees at B.G.E. Service and Supply?
- What may be stopping employees at B.G.E. Service and Supply from demonstrating leadership in the workplace?
- How can B.G.E. Service and Supply help employees be better leaders?
- I understand that a number of key senior people will be retiring at B.G.E. Service and Supply over the next five years. From your perspective, how can B.G.E. Service and Supply best prepare for these upcoming management transitions?
- When it comes to talent management and succession planning, especially for leadership roles, there is often a debate as to whether it’s better to promote people from within or hire externally. From the perspective of B.G.E. Service and Supply, what do you think are the pros and cons of the two approaches?