

# **Building the Capacity of Governance Volunteers: Giving Meaning to Governance**

**Leadership and Governance: Literature Review**

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**Canada**

# Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF GOVERNANCE VOLUNTEERS: GIVING MEANING TO GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>LEADERSHIP SKILLS</i>	6
<b>CONTEXTUAL DIMENSION</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>ANALYTICAL DIMENSION</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>EDUCATIONAL BENCHMARKS OF LEADERSHIP SUCCESS</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>ORIENTATION PROGRAMS</i>	28
<b>INTERPERSONAL DIMENSION</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>POLITICAL DIMENSION</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>STRATEGIC DIMENSION</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>49</b>

# **Building the Capacity of Governance Volunteers: Giving Meaning to Governance Leadership and Governance: Literature Review**

## **Introduction**

The bulk of the research and resulting literature on governance falls within the category of board education or board development and more specifically regarding the board's responsibilities, roles, performance and other qualifiers that encapsulate the fiduciary elements of governing. Much of the governance material available focuses on the best practices surrounding policy and procedures based on the Carver (1990, as cited in Nobbie & Brudney, 2003) model of policy governance.

The foundation of the policy governance model is that boards lead their organizations through the development of policies which the executive director (ED) or staff then implements under the watchful eye of the board. Carver and Carver (1997) emphasize that the policies created by a board must be fully owned by the board, i.e. board policy development cannot be delegated. At no point does the policy governance model address a framework or process within which nonprofit organization (NPO) boards or their members can adequately determine *their* ownership. In fact Nobbie and Brudney (2003) state that,

The policy governance model emphasizes the identification of *owners*; a group of individuals *not* (writer's emphasis) at the board table but on whose behalf the board governs (Carver & Carver, 1996). Policy governance holds the board responsible for identifying the ownership and connecting with them, even though this determination can be quite problematic (p. 593).

This gap begs for the role of governance to be linked to the understanding and development of leadership within the governance volunteer. In order to bring clarification to the role of

leadership within governance it will be beneficial to assess what information is available within the nonprofit and corporate literature.

## Definition of Leadership

The literature available on leadership is vast and varied and similar to the literature on governance the literature on leadership contains many definitions of which the following are only a few:

- Authentic leaders anchor their practices in ideas, values and commitments, exhibit distinctive qualities of style and substance, and can be trusted to be morally diligent in advancing the enterprises they lead. Authentic leaders, in other words, display character, and character is the defining characteristic of authentic leadership (Sergiovanni, 1999, cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 14).
- Leadership, then, is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed. (Fullan, 2001, p. 3)
- Leadership is much more an art, a belief, a condition of the heart, than a set of things to do. The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed, ultimately, in its practice. (DePree, 1989, p. 148)
- Leadership, the exercise of social power (and often attendant economic and political power), is fundamentally a moral endeavour. There is an inescapable moral dimension to the exercise of power, whether or not it is formally acknowledged. Effective leaders are able to engage with others in building, by example and constructive effort, an environment within which individuals and groups are free and encouraged to discern and actualize the right and the good in fulfillment of shared goals, values and purpose. (Thompson, 2004, p. 28)
- The theory of transactional leadership, like that of social capital, places trust, embodied in social transactions, at the centre of its model and stresses the importance of social networks. Leadership in social networks involves maintaining a flow of transactions within the constituency. (Purdue, 2001, p. 2217-2218)
- Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things. (Drucker, cited in Hechinger, 2005, p. 51)
- ...we define leadership as the collective activities of organizational members to accomplish the tasks of setting direction, building commitment, and creating alignment. (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, cited in Martin & Ernst, 2005, p. 84)
- Leadership is about interpreting and making sense, or meaning, of the experiences of organizational life...Voluntary sector leadership is a career not for the faint of heart or mind. (Zimmerman, cited in National Learning Initiative (NLI), 2003b, p. 2)

- Global leadership is the ability to look beyond one's own community to the broader society and its needs. (NLI, 2003b, p. 3)
- ...it would appear that successful leadership involves certain skills and capabilities – interpersonal, technical, administrative and intellectual – enabling leaders to be of value to their group or organization. These skills allow them to maintain satisfactory levels of group cohesiveness, drive and productivity. They are further assisted in execution of the above functions if they possess a high degree of task motivation, personal integrity, communicative ability and the like. (Bass, 1981, cited in Terry, 1993, p. 18)
- For team leadership theorists, leadership is not so much a matter of possessing the right personal characteristics as a matter of being able to develop teams of others. (Terry, 1993, p. 21)
- Leadership, in one of its aspects, is the art of cutting into [the] chaos [caused by a messy and complicated reality] and imposing a simplified definition on the situation, that is, making people act as if the simplified picture were the reality. ...Leadership is a form of cultivating ignorance, of stopping doubts, and stifling questions. (Bailey, 1989, cited in Terry, 1993, p. 32)
- [Servant leadership realities] require that a servant-leader be of exemplary character, vigilant in pursuing the organization's primary mission, and, while anticipating the need for defensive measures, simultaneously aware of the perils of this posture to the service motive. (Maciariello, 2003, p. 400)
- Greenleaf's approach to leadership encompasses visioning and practicality. In his words, the servant leader must always live at two levels: in the real world "concerned, responsible, effective, value-oriented" and also detached from that world "riding above it, seeing today's events, and seeing oneself deeply involved in today's events, in the perspective of a long sweep of history and projected into the indefinite future. Such a split enables one to better foresee the unforeseeable". (Greenleaf, 1970, cited in Cooke, 2001, p. 27)

These definitions of leadership leave room for the expansion of thinking and opportunity for critical self-analysis for each individual. The discussion and participation within the research project may provide the opportunity for these nonprofit governance volunteers to define exactly what leadership skills or characteristics they bring as individuals and what their construct of leadership is. Based on their personal ideas, values, style and ecological environment their contributions to their organizations may prove to be as unique and diverse as the organizations they lead. With this as a foundation we turn to the literature to examine what leadership skills or characteristics are identified.

### *Leadership Skills*

Believing that interviews or surveys of individuals left too much room for personal bias Rodler, Kirchler, and Holzl (2001) turned to the examination of obituaries in their quantitative

analysis of leadership qualities that individuals were perceived to have as identified by their former employees or co-workers. These obituaries had been written by the corporations within whom the deceased individual had a leadership role and were published within four different German newspapers. Originally conducted to determine if there was a difference in perception based on the gender of the deceased, this article is still useful to the research as it identifies no less than 58 different descriptive categories of words or terms which were used to describe the deceased individual's leadership by their former employees. The following nine categories are ranked according to the reported percentage of frequency as they appeared within the obituaries over the 24 year span examined (p. 833).

Top Highest frequencies of terms identified.					
*(Columns with more than one category mean these terms received equal ranking.)					
4.8%	4.5%	4.2%	3.0%	2.7%	2.5%
Expert	Committed	Companionate Indefatigable	Humane	Experienced Intelligent Loyal	Pioneer

In their analysis Rodler et al. (2001) further categorized the characteristics into clusters according to indicators of success, stability, and those that represented both stability and indicators of success. The characteristics noted as representing stability seem to reflect the 'authentic leader' (Sergiovanni, 1999, cited in Fullan, 2001) previously identified. They include characteristics such as "being committed, being a decision-maker, having an entrepreneurial spirit, being farsighted, humane, intelligent, professional, reliable, responsible, skilful, sociable, and possessing a strong personality" (p. 835).

In their final analysis Rodler et al. (2001) note that "With regard to leadership style, the overall results showed that more descriptive words in the obituaries were related as indicating task [rather] – than person-orientation" (p. 837). This agrees with Angelini's (2005) findings in the literature where she states:

Also of note is that the themes in general address process and procedural issues. We do not find evidence of philosophical, ethical, or purposive dimensions of governance [leadership]. In effect the literature emphasizes that boards [board members] should only address the who, what, where, when, and how questions of governance [leadership] (p. 22).

Martin and Ernst (2005) found similar results in their mixed study investigating what 157 participants, comprised of EDs and managers, of whom 80% represented the corporate sector with the remaining 20% representing the public or nonprofit sectors, identified as being skills which leaders of the future will need in order for their organizations to be successful within an increasingly complex social environment.

Their findings prove interesting in that a definite shift in thinking appears within the results where participants responded to what skills they would identify as being present in their organizations now and what they identified as skills needed for the future. The results showed the following as the top five in each (p. 85-86):

Leadership Skills Needed Now	Leadership Skills Needed for the Future
1. leading employees	1. leading employees
2. resourcefulness	2. building and mending relationships
3. straightforwardness & composure	3. change management
4. decisiveness	4. participative management
5. building & mending relationships	5. resourcefulness

Martin and Ernst (2005) reported that, regarding the five skills identified as necessary for future successful leadership, 85 of the participants noted that leaders would need to be able to; “delegate important tasks, provide prompt feedback, coach employees, interact with staff, develop employees, get things done, gain trust and respect, lead change, adjust management style, do his/her homework, link responsibilities to mission, understand... how higher management operates, and learn from mistakes” (p. 87).

These findings agree with Rodler et al. (2001) in that the leadership styles recognized as having value now indicate the skill sets of process and task rather than relational. The skills identified for both now and the future once broken down still seem to be focused more on the *doing* of leadership rather than the *being*. There does, however, appear to be a glimmer of recognition that leaders will need to develop more relational skills in order to be successful in the future. This is indicated in the table where we see “building and mending relationships”

move from fifth spot with regard to skills needed now to second place within skills needed for the future.

The National Learning Initiative (NLI) (NLI, 2003b) researched leadership with 64 leaders from the nonprofit sector across Canada. The report noted the following characteristics as being fundamental to good leadership within nonprofit organizations and agencies:

- Helps effect social change
- Collaborates well with others
- Stays informed about relevant issues
- Remains focused on the organization's mission
- Uses the skills of creativity, innovation and strategic thinking
- Works toward change with care and ethical consideration
- Manages effectively with tenacity and determination
- Cares for self, is aware of limits, remains flexible and open-minded
- Mentors, cares for, trusts, and delegates to staff (p. 3)

It is interesting to note that although there is still recognition of the tasks required from leadership, the NLI report indicates more detail about the relational and personal leadership traits and qualities needed to fulfill these. Terms such as “collaborates, care and ethical consideration, creativity, tenacity and determination, cares for self, is aware of limits, flexible and open-minded, mentors, cares for and trusts” all fit with the “person orientation” leadership style of Rodler et al. (2001).

Examination of these three articles shows a definite shift in perception of what good leadership looks like which Martin and Ernst (2005) identify within their research as the idea that “the nature of leadership is changing” (p. 91). From the predominance of task orientation, recognized by Rodler et al. (2001), to the recognition of changes in leadership for the future needing to incorporate relational skills in “building and maintaining relationships” of Martin and Ernst (2005), with tasks still being the focus. To the identification of tasks with full recognition of the definitive relational leadership skills needed to fulfill them as identified by the NLI report of 2003. Martin and Ernst (2005) agree with the NLI as they note that “At the individual level, the skills that practicing leaders believe will be most important to effective leadership in the future

fall generally in the category of relationships and collaboration” (p. 91). The NLI report differs in that this recognition already appears to be addressed in the mind set of the leaders within the nonprofit sector.

The research may provide insight into how this shift in leadership can be expanded or if it is present in the perception of the governance volunteers. If the need for relational leadership skills is identified as necessary for effective governance; how do these governance volunteers envision these being developed and incorporated into their personal governance practices and that of their boards?

Chait, Holland and Taylor (1996) also recognize the challenges of future leadership within the nonprofit sector and state that,

After 10 years of research and dozens of engagements as consultants to nonprofit boards, we have reached a rather stark conclusion: *effective governance by a board of trustees is a relatively rare and unnatural act.* (p. 1)

Their research revealed 4 areas or obstacles that appear to be presenting the most difficulty to nonprofit boards. Not content, however, to only look at the problems they also identify six competency dimensions of effective boards. They are the “contextual, educational, interpersonal, analytical, political and strategic dimensions” (Chait et al. 1996, p. 7-8). The primary focus of the review of the literature will seek to identify where the literature falls in relation to the six dimensions as identified by Chait et al. (1996).

## **Contextual Dimension**

Chait et al. (1996) briefly define the competency of contextual dimension as,

The board understands and takes into account the culture and norms of the organization it governs. The board:

- Adapts to the distinctive characteristics and culture of the institution’s environment.
- Relies on the institution’s mission, values, and tradition as a guide for decisions.
- Acts so as to exemplify and reinforce the organization’s values. (p. 7)

The contextual dimension is noted in their work as being one of the cognitive based competencies in which boards and board members generally felt more comfortable working within.

Kim, Dansereau, Kim and Kim (2004) propose a multiple level theory of leadership within which they see culture having a moderating effect on leader/subordinate interaction. Their proposal is based on the integration of culture and leadership theory. Kim et al. (2004) define culture as “shared values about appropriate behaviours or behavioural patterns” (p. 79). They note that several leadership theorists view culture as an important component in the relationship between leader behaviour and leader effectiveness. Chait et al. (1996) agree that the understanding of culture and norms are keys to board competence. Adding to this Kim et al. believe that “culture exists as a multidimensional construct” (p. 80) within which they see culture at a society level having the possibility of influence at both a regional and organizational level. As well they recognize that “organizational culture may differ among organizations within the same country” (p. 88). They propose that “organizational culture may also moderate the relationship between a leader’s behavioural pattern and acceptance of the leader” (p. 88).

Miller-Millesen (2003) expands the concept of behavioural patterns to include the nonprofit sector board within a “theory-based framework of board behaviour that identifies the environmental conditions and board/organizational considerations that are likely to affect board behaviour” (p. 521). This article provides possible links to several of the six dimensions of competency of Chait et al. (1996) and the proposition of Kim et al. (2004) re: the idea of organizational culture affecting a leader’s behavioural pattern. This article looks at this concept through the application of agency theory (Fama & Jensen, 1983; Jensen & Meckling, 1976 cited in Miller-Millesen, 2003); resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978 cited in Miller-Millesen, 2003); and institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977 cited in Miller-Millesen, 2003) to the determining of nonprofit board behaviour as the board seeks to link its organization to the environment and acts as liaison between community, staff, volunteers

and clients (Miller-Millesen, 2003). Miller-Millesen also provides some further suggestions for research which may assist governance volunteers “understand the conditions under which the nonprofit board might assume certain roles and responsibilities over others” (p. 521).

Relating to the contextual dimension of Chait et al. (1996) where culture is in part the internal environment of an organization, Miller-Millesen (2003) cites various authors regarding the statements that “the institutional [theory] perspective asserts that conventional behaviour in organizations is shaped by the institutional environment” so that in order “to be deemed legitimate, organizations embrace the norms, values, beliefs, and expectations that conform to societal mores, even when these societal pressures may get in the way of effective organizational performance” (p. 536). Miller-Millesen relates this institutional theory to the behaviour of nonprofit boards that adopt the structural and procedural “best practices” of the corporate sector. Where some nonprofit boards and organizations have chosen to become more “business-like” rather than “value-laden” there may be a price to conformity in that these nonprofit boards may find themselves compromising on their values or mission in order to conform to the need to respond to more “business” pressures within a competitive market re: funding, legitimacy and measurable outcomes (p. 538). It is interesting to note that the behaviour suggested by Miller-Millesen does not agree with what Chait et al.’s (1996) contextual dimension addresses regarding how the board acts to reinforce the *organization’s* values.

The National Learning Initiative, which explored what leadership means to the nonprofit sector in Canada (NLI, 2003a), suggests that the personal values and beliefs of individual leaders are applied from the inside out. The NLI research reports that individuals “apply their beliefs and values to every level at which they work: self, organization, community and world” (p. 14). This recognizes that the beginning of the process is with one’s self and one’s personal beliefs and values.

In contrast Kim et al. (2004) focus more on the acceptance of leaders based on the perceptions of the external, be it society or other individuals. Understanding that individuals do

not operate within a vacuum it is interesting to note that the current research does not appear to address the complexity of these two perspectives or the ebb and flow of the interchange between them and the effects this may or may not have on governance practices at the individual as well as the board/organizational level.

Chait, Ryan and Taylor (2005) state that leadership has evolved into a complex, “multidimensional, and dynamic concept” (p. xvii) and they propose that in order for boards to govern well their leaders need to identify what types of organizations they have and govern them accordingly. Kim et al. (2004) see the need to establish theory to “explain differential leader behaviour and effectiveness across cultures” (p. 79-80). There are polarized views on how values, beliefs and culture affect organizations and their boards within the influence of culture as it operates as an outer environmental influence and as an internal influence on individual board members as well as the boards which they govern. These possible discrepancies between what boards want to do and what they actually end up doing could be the basis for further research.

The current research with nonprofit governance volunteers within the framework of the Peer Learning Circles should provide opportunity for discussion of culture and norms and how these affect the board members themselves and in turn how this has the capacity to affect their individual and board decisions. Miller-Millesen (2003) agrees with the need for further research and states in her conclusion that “Until actual behaviour is observed and explained, linking board activity to organizational performance will continue to yield ambiguous results” (p. 543).

## **Analytical Dimension**

Ambiguous results are never the optimum, however, within the analytical dimension Chait et al. (1996) state that:

The board recognizes the complexities and subtleties of issues and accepts ambiguity and uncertainty as healthy preconditions for critical discussion. The board specifically:

- Approaches matters from a broad organizational outlook
- Dissects and examines all aspects of multifaceted issues
- Raises doubts, explores tradeoffs, and encourages the expression of differences of opinion. (p. 7)

Previously within the contextual dimension, the literature pointed to the ambiguous results regarding board activity and organizational performance (Miller-Millesen, 2003) in a rather negative tone. In contrast Chait et al. (1996) view boards wrestling with the dynamics of culture and norms within the complexities of nonprofit governance as pre-cursors for healthy critical discussion. Fullan (2001) agrees with Chait et al. as he describes leadership as “Leadership, then, is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed” (p. 3). In contrast, Bailey (1989, cited in Terry, 1993), opposes this as he states that:

Leadership, in one of its aspects, is the art of cutting into [the] chaos [caused by a messy and complicated reality] and imposing a simplified definition on the situation, that is, making people act as if the simplified picture were the reality. ...Leadership is a form of cultivating ignorance, of stopping doubts, and stifling questions (p. 32).

It is interesting to note that Bailey states that this may be only one aspect of leadership.

Considering that these diverse views of leadership may both be realistic leads to further challenges for governance volunteers to investigate. Both these aspects of leadership are valid and at the same time conflicting. With this in mind how do leaders embody or embrace both within the context of effective governance and leadership?

Collins (2005) addresses this within the corporate sector in his five-year empirical study in which he explored what made good companies great. Out of 1,435 companies that appeared on the Fortune 500 from 1965 to 1995 his research found that only 11 companies met the rigorous criteria and that the consistent catalyst was a “Level 5 leader” (p. 139). Collins describes this leader as the “Executive who builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility plus professional will” (p. 140). The leadership skills that he describes embody the ambiguous nature of leadership within nonprofit governance as previously noted.

Level 5 leaders possess the ability to exhibit; modesty, wilfulness, shyness and fearlessness within the same persona. Rare, says Collins, and not the usual combination that executives or their corporations have looked for in their search for the leader who will take them to the top. In fact he states that “boards of directors frequently operate under the false belief that a larger-than-life, egocentric leader is required to make a company great (p. 145).” Martin and Ernst (2005) compliment this perspective when they say, “When we examine the entire picture of leadership skills, essentially leaders and their organizations must build a proficiency to move faster with greater collaboration and shared commitment as opposed to the past, which simply focused on proficiency” (p. 91).

Collins (2005) provides a summary of the Level 5 traits as follows (p. 142):

Personal Humility	Professional Will
- Demonstrates a compelling modesty, shunning public adulation; never boastful.	- Creates superb results, a clear catalyst in the transition from good to great.
- Acts with quiet, calm determination; relies principally on inspired standards, not inspiring charisma, to motivate.	- Demonstrates an unwavering resolve to do whatever must be done to produce the best long-term results, no matter how difficult.
- Channels ambition into the company, not the staff; sets up successors for even more greatness in the next generation.	- Sets the standard of building an enduring great company; will settle for nothing less.
-Looks in the mirror, not out the window, to apportion responsibility for poor results, never blaming other people, external factors, or bad luck.	- Looks out the window, not in the mirror, to apportion credit for the success of the company- to other people, external factors, and good luck.

Collins also notes that it was not the Level 5 leader alone which was responsible for the corporations moving from good to great and remaining there. His research found that there was a definite “symbiotic relationship between the Level 5 leader and what they do” (p. 141). Collins found that these leaders generally looked at “people first and strategy second” (p. 141). Within

this they assessed the skill sets of the individuals within the organization, the requirements of the positions, and then matched the qualified people to the right positions.

This positioning and assessment process represents the analytic dimension of Chait et al. (1996) in that it involves a broad organizational outlook and the analysis of many aspects of this issue. Chait, et al. (2005) caution that boards should organize with “flexibility around strategic priorities, *not* (writer’s emphasis) rigidly around administrative operations” (p. 70). They also identify the necessity of continuously re-examining and revising goals recognizing that “organizational purposes are not only multiple, complex, and abstract, but also fluid” (p. 105).

Another factor that Collins’ (2005) research discovered was one he termed the “Stockdale Paradox” (p. 141). This involved the individuals facing the hard truths of what their organizations were confronted with and at the same time focusing on and maintaining faith that their organizations would eventually rise above and succeed. Collins states that “they held both discipline - faith and facts - at the same time, all the time” (p. 141).

Within their discussion of transforming trustees into a board, Chait et al. (1996) quote one participant’s comments regarding the hard truths or disagreements which may surface.

Conflicts or problems can be a cementing factor. When we work together on a problem, peoples hidden talents come out. Once that happens, you know a person, and you know you can count on that person (p. 61).

Gill (2005) also recommends that the nonprofit board “address conflicts and conflict of interest directly, tactfully and constructively” (p. 107). Gill also notes that this requires “resolve and determination” in order for conflicts to be addressed in a timely manner. Observing that “trust is established through respect, openness, and transparent communication and decision-making” (p. 112). He states that in order for trust to be established “people [need to feel] free to express their opinions without being subject to personal criticism, that opinions will be given careful and thoughtful consideration, and that they will be treated as the property of the group rather than of the individual who expressed them (p. 112).”

All of these address Chait et al.'s (1996) analytical dimension with regards to "raising doubts, exploring tradeoffs, and encouraging the expression of differences of opinions" (p. 7).

When asked if it were possible to learn how to become a Level 5 leader, Collins replies that the data from their research did not look at how to attain this level of leadership. He speaks of the seed of level 5 and whether it lies within people. But candidly explains that "We would love to give you a list of steps for getting to Level 5...but we have no solid research data that would support a credible list" (Collins, 2005, p. 146).

Fullan (2005) challenges this thought with discussion about emotional intelligence. He states that, "It should come as no surprise then that the most effective leaders are not the smartest in an IQ sense but are those who combine intellectual brilliance with emotional intelligence" (p. 71). He then goes on to discuss five main emotional competency sets which are broken down into personal or social competencies by Goleman (1998, cited in Fullan, 2005).

These include:

- Personal Competence

  - Self-awareness (knowing one's internal state, preferences, resources, and intuitions)

  - Self-regulation (managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources)

- Social Competence

  - Motivation (emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals)

  - Empathy (awareness of other's feelings, needs, and concerns)

  - Social skills (adeptness at inducing desirable responses from others) (p. 72)

The challenge then becomes how do individuals learn these skills if they are not naturally present? Fullan (2005) believes that "...good news is that emotional intelligence can be learned.... Effective leaders work on their own and others' emotional development. There is no greater skill needed for sustainable improvement" (p. 74).

## Educational Dimension

Chait et al. (1996) recognize that in order to be effective nonprofit boards will need to “swim against the tide” in order to add significant value for themselves and establish a competitive edge for their organizations. Their definition of effective governance involves “a collective effort, through smooth and suitable processes, to take actions that advance a shared purpose consistent with the institution’s mission” (p. 1). As well, Chait et al. (2005), acknowledge that fiduciary governance is important but that boards and board members who function solely in this capacity can become problematic. They state that “Before long, the board develops such a limited sense of the organization that the trustees’ ability to challenge and enrich organizational thinking atrophies” (p. 49).

In an effort to deal with this Chait et al. (1996) recommend the educational dimension address the following:

The board takes the necessary steps to ensure that directors are knowledgeable about the institution, the profession, and the board’s roles, responsibilities, and performance. The board:

- Consciously creates opportunities for director education and development.
- Regularly seeks information and feedback on its own performance.
- Pauses periodically for self-reflection to diagnose its strengths and limitations, and to examine its mistakes. (p. 7)

Carver and Carver (1997) agree that board self-evaluation and education are important but only to the maintenance of the policy governance system. They state that self-evaluation needs to be built into the “Governance Process” policies the board develops and then board conduct is monitored frequently with the policies as criteria. The policies that they include as samples have titles such as “global governance commitment, governing style, board job description, agenda planning, chairperson’s role, board members’ code of conduct, board committee principles, and cost of governance” (p. 197).

Carver and Carver provide carefully worded preambles for each of these samples which identify the general purpose of each policy. What they do not provide is a path through the

maze of the decision making process required in order to identify critical organizational benchmarks. This can leave boards turning to best practices or costly consultants whose recommendations may or may not suit their organization or their budget.

The literature (Sonpal-Valias, 2005; Wallin, Cameron & Sharples, 2005; NLI, 2003; Seel, Regel & Meneghetti, 2001; Carver & Carver, 1997) agrees with Chait et al. (1996) in that in order for NPO boards to provide effective leadership as they govern they are going to have to “consciously create opportunities for director education and development” (p. 7). Hechinger (2005) agrees and states, “The responsibilities of non-profit boards don’t stop with legal compliance, though. Boards must also focus on advancing their organization’s mission through active leadership” (p. 47).

Leadership development becomes imperative for the organization as a whole and for the board in order for the NPO to succeed within the highly accountable and competitive environment they now find themselves operating within. Sonpal-Valias (2005) describes it this way:

Nonprofit organizations have recently been paying particular attention to the topic of leadership development. A lot of this stems from the realization that, to succeed in today’s rapidly changing, demanding and resource-constrained conditions, organizations must not only be ready to react to change quickly, but also be capable of anticipating or leading in setting potential trends (p. 1).

Martin and Ernst (2005) concur with the following statement, “To create higher levels of organizational capacity for leadership, customized, action learning-based interventions that are built around the culture, complex challenges, and structure are a necessity” (p. 94).

The Canadian Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (PAGVS, 1999) recommends the following in its summary of proposals, “invest in board members with orientation and ongoing information sessions” (p. 81). This will require purposeful, intentional planning and implementation on the part of NPO boards (Gill, 2005; Hechinger, 2005; Martin &

Ernst, 2005; Sonpal-Valias, 2005; Wallin et al., 2005; NLI, 2003; Pointer & Orlikoff, 2002; Seel et al., 2001; Carver & Carver, 1997; Chait et al., 1996).

As Chait et al. (2005) identified, NPO boards need to determine what their preferred future will look like and identify what needs improvement. Education is a fundamental tool in improving the board and leadership development is a common focus area. Sonpal-Valias (2005, p. 1) states that “Leadership development is a *process* that requires (i) a variety of rich experiences, (ii) tools to enhance learning and (iii) a clear understanding of how each developmental experience contributes to overall learning goals”. Hechinger (2005) agrees and one of the twelve principles of governance that she mentions in her article is the principle of “continuous learning”. This principle reads as follows:

Exceptional boards embrace the qualities of a continuous learning organization, evaluating their own performance and assessing the value they add to the organization. They embed learning opportunities into routine governance work and in activities outside of the boardroom (p. 48).

#### Educational Benchmarks of Leadership Success

Leblanc (2005, p. 655) states that “It is difficult to assess individual performance without some explicit standards or expectations”. In order for nonprofit governance volunteers to be able to identify and improve their leadership it is necessary to examine what some of the indicators of leadership success are and how the literature identifies them.

Collins (2005) proposes the following five levels of success in leadership within the corporate sector:

Level 1 – Highly Capable Individual – Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits.

Level 2 – Contributing Team Member – Contributes to the achievement of group objectives; works effectively with others in a group setting.

Level 3 – Competent Manager – Organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives.

Level 4 – Effective Leader – Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision; stimulates the group to high performance standards.

Level 5 – Executive – Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility plus professional will. (p. 140)

The first four levels contain identifiable outcomes which may have application in measuring the success or effectiveness of the individual governance volunteer as well as the NPO board and organization. Wording such as; “productive contributions”, “group objectives”, “effective and efficient pursuit of pre-determined objectives”, and “stimulates the group to high performance standards” indicate goals which boards and stakeholders should be able to see in outcome measures, job satisfaction surveys, and increased effectiveness.

As well, the first four levels include leadership qualities that are generally recognized and pursued by the corporate sector (Collins, 2005). However, Collins’ research identified that it was the unique combination of “personal humility” and “professional will” within the Level 5 leader that provided the catalyst for 11 companies out of 1,435 to move from “good to great” (p. 139). Collins has no delineated process for individuals to work through in order to achieve the Level 5 status. He does, however, propose that, “conscientiously trying to lead using the other disciplines can help you move in the right direction” (Collins, 2005, p. 146).

These five levels of leadership could become some of the goals which NPO boards and governance volunteers work toward as part of their conscious effort to incorporate “opportunities for director development” as recommended by Chait et al. (1996, p. 7).

Lee, Martodam, Richardson and Sonpal-Valias (2005) declare that “As a learning organization, we firmly believe that leadership development is based on having well articulated learning goals which are clearly tied to the development of the core competencies and skills that are essential in future leaders” (p. 2). Chait et al. (1996) agree with this and say that, “most trustees will not attend diligently to the board’s performance without some assurance that the practical value of board development will warrant the efforts (and anxieties) that the change requires” (p. 20).

From the Canadian perspective; the NLI (2003a) report identified no less than 34 different leadership competencies within their nation wide initiative. Their definition of what a core competency embodies is as follows:

The knowledge, skills, abilities, intangible/tangible mindsets and behaviours (savoir, savoir-faire, et savoir-etre) that lead to improving life in the community and the world through principled actions and professional behaviour in the voluntary sector. Core competencies are those competencies which are common across the voluntary sector, irrespective of regional or sub-sectoral differences (p. 10).

With this as the base definition, the competencies which were identified by the 64 nonprofit voluntary sector leaders were then categorized under five different areas which included:

- beliefs and values;
- vision and alignment
- strategies and resource management
- relationships
- complexity

The participants also noted that there needed to be “critical abilities” evident as underlying factors within NPO leaders and they are listed as, “a high level of self-understanding; a commitment to lifelong learning and ethical, principled actions; an awareness and ability to articulate personal values; wisdom, acumen and the ability to intuit future needs and directions” (NLI, 2003b, p. 3).

The need for the nature of leadership and board education to change is apparent (Martin & Ernst, 2005) as the complexity of governing NPO’s increases. According to the NLI (2003a); leaders within the nonprofit sector “must have a global and holistic understanding of leadership (their role as leaders), as well as a full understanding of the world around them” (p. 3). How are governing boards and governance volunteers of these boards going to adapt? Are there assessment tools available that will assist them in this process as they seek to identify gaps in their development as NPO boards and governance volunteers? In order to try and answer these questions a review of some of the assessment tools that are currently available to boards is needed.

Assessment Tools: Learning what needs to be learned.

Boards and stakeholders, whether corporate or nonprofit, have long recognized the need to assess their organizations and more recently themselves to see if they are on the right track (Gill, Flynn, & Reissing, 2005; Lawler & Finegold, 2005; Leblanc, 2005; Carver & Carver, 1997).

Lawler and Finegold (2005) state “Boards that assess their members and themselves tend to be more effective than those that don’t” (p. 70). Taking a corporate perspective their study sought to determine if practices within three particular areas of board performance would determine the overall effectiveness of the board over the long term. Of particular interest to this review are their findings on board evaluation. Their data reveals that out of the areas of evaluation, which included evaluating the ED, the board, and individual board members, only the evaluations of the board and individual board members showed significant relation to board effectiveness. These findings confirm Chait et al. (1996) in recognizing the need for governance volunteers to analyze themselves both individually and collectively in order to define opportunities for further development and improved effectiveness.

Leblanc (2005), in his paper *Assessing Board Leadership*, identifies the board chair as the individual who has the most influence on board leadership and effectiveness. Presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Corporate Board Governance and Board Leadership this paper speaks to the policy recommendation of the Canadian Securities Administrators’ for June 2005. It recommends that boards begin developing detailed job descriptions and evaluations specific to the role of the chair of the board and individual board directors. Reinforcing Lawler and Finegold (2005) Leblanc states that “Board leadership is critical to board effectiveness...” and further refines this by adding “...and warrants explicit articulation in the form of a position description for the chair that forms the basis for future assessment (p. 656).” Not only does Leblanc give voice to the necessity for board assessment but he also includes as an appendix a board chair assessment tool he developed. Of interest to this review is his recognition of the

need for behavioural perspectives to be included within the assessment which affirms the need for leadership development to be included in board development goals.

Included within this assessment tool are the usual assessment of process questions as well as questions surrounding competencies and behaviours; relations with committees; relations with individual directors; and integrity and ethical conduct. This form of assessment allows for what Chait et al. (2005) identify as, the need for boards to include the “expressive” aspects of governance, such as “values, judgements, and insights” (p. 30), while providing some concrete examples of how to assess these. Chait et al. (1996) provides the following trustee quote, “For board development to be effective you have to relate the soft stuff to the hard stuff” (p. 21). This reveals that assessment needs to include these areas as well so that the opportunity for pertinent development can follow.

In contrast Gill, Flynn and Reissing (2005) developed the Governance Self-Assessment Checklist which “was designed to assist boards of directors of non-profit and public-sector organizations to identify strengths and weaknesses in the governance of their organizations, educate board members about the essentials of good governance, and improve their governance practices” (p. 1). Gill et al. (2005) address process and best practices and provide an overview of similar board assessment tools available for the evaluation of effective governance. However, leadership measurements on an individual or behavioural level seem to be missing. Developed to provide quick feedback to boards on their effectiveness using 15 questions based on a rating scale; only one question appears to address the relational aspect of governance. In fact the process for determining further areas for leadership development seems to be missing completely from this assessment instrument.

The NLI (2003c) produced a document which contains human resource tools which NPO boards could adapt to assess leadership competencies within their organization. This document provides information and samples of “What to Measure and How”; “Sample Appraisal Policy”; “Sample Appraisal Procedure”; “Self-Assessment” (p. 46-56); for boards as they wade into the

task of hiring or evaluating an executive director. The NLI (2003a) research revealed 34 different leadership competencies and the human resource document provides a checklist which was developed as an evaluation tool based on these (NLI, 2003c). It is extensive and developed using a simple scale of measurement which contains three criteria; “Yes, I can do this; I need to work on this; and I cannot do this at all” (p. 65) for each question. Unlike Gill et al.’s (2005) checklist this is not an instrument which will be quick to complete. However, NPO boards could consider adapting and implementing this form of assessment on an annual basis as they work through the challenge of “self-reflection” as recommended by Chait et al. (1996).

Once the assessment process is completed; boards that have acknowledged their areas of strength and any areas of weakness may chose to pursue some of the various avenues of development available.

#### Avenues of Development

The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRI) of Calgary chose to use a model of development proposed by McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) (cited in Sonpal-Valias, 2005). This model is similar to Senge’s (1990) view of a learning organization where:

Leaders are people who create the systems and culture needed to achieve the organization’s mission (designer); see the mission of the organization in the context of its contribution to broader society and find personal meaning in this mission (steward); and are able to instill in others the inspiration to achieve the common vision (teacher). (cited in Sonpal-Valias, 2005, p.1).

This statement agrees with Chait et al. (1996) regarding the educational dimension in the sense that NPO boards have a responsibility to ensure that governance volunteers are knowledgeable and “consciously create opportunities for director education” (p. 7). Their view of a learning

organization is an organization where, “the institutions leaders, namely the board and senior management, have ample opportunities and a strong appetite to acquire knowledge” (p. 85).

Chait et al. (1996) view board development as an “intensive long-term process and not a quick fix” (p. 17) and as such propose that it must be embedded within the regular functions of the board. They state that “To be successful board development must satisfy the instrumental expectations of trustees. In other words, the process must create real advantages that enable the board to work better and to produce results that redound to the institution’s [organizations] benefit” (p. 16).

In contrast McNamara (2002) states that, “Effective board development might take anywhere from 3-6 months, or even a year, depending on the current extent of the development of the organization and its Board” (p. 119). McNamara distinguishes board training from board development and advises that board training should be implemented once a year and recommends a “fast paced, highly condensed, 2-hour training” session as a way for board members to “ground and integrate their current knowledge” (p. 118).

Several researchers agree with Chait et al. (1996) and view board development as a priority (Auditor General Alberta, 2005; Lee et al., 2005; NLI, 2003 a & b; Pointer & Orlikoff, 2002; Widmer & Houchin, 2000; Muttart Foundation & Alberta Community Development (MFACD), 1999). In fact, the Auditor General’s (2005) report, which was based on research within the public sector within Alberta, states the following, “The lack of continuous training by directors increases the risks of inadequate governance and a lack of credibility in a board’s decisions” (p. 14). Chait et al. also caution that the “price of ignorance” is high and that consequences include;

- an over reliance on the professional staff to develop policies, formulate strategies, and evaluate implications.
- an inability to independently monitor and interpret results, and
- a limitation on the board’s sphere of concern to financial and related fiduciary responsibilities, to the exclusion of policy and strategy decisions in other domains. (p. 87)

These views on the priority of board development are reflected within the avenues of development which they propose regarding orientation and ongoing education.

### *Orientation Programs*

Chait et al. (1996) view orientation programs as the “core curriculum or general education component of a board's edification” (p. 90). They recommend that they should include information regarding the,

- mission and history of the organization
- the hallmarks of the organizations culture (especially as contrasted with corporate culture)
- nature of the competitive environment
- institution's [organization's] comparative advantages
- sources and uses of funds
- distribution of power and authority
- dynamics and economics of institutional [organizational] productivity (p. 90)

Chait et al. (1996) also discuss a process for determining what new trustees need to know. They propose that as well as listening to what present board members identify as pertinent information, asking new members what they would like to learn is vital. Included in their recommendations is the idea that *all* members of the board may benefit from the orientation process in that newcomers are made to feel welcome and regeneration and rejuvenation can occur for returning members as well. They suggest that this fosters a “sense of community and continuity within the board” (p. 91).

Format for the implementation of the orientation process can take several forms according to Chait et al. (1996). These can include “face to face” delivery or audiovisual methods and electronic formats or a combination of these.

Pointer and Orlikoff (2002) express similar views on new member orientation and the delivery of this. They propose that orientation is a process that should occur over the course of the first year of service on the board for all new members. This is accomplished through a variety of ways such as:

One on one discussions and meetings (with the CEO, other executives, board chair, board committee chairs); tours of facilities, where appropriate; organization specific written materials; books and articles; in service programs and briefings; attendance at extramural governance education programs. (p. 103)

Further to this they suggest a mentoring process “where the new member is paired with an experienced one”. The mentor’s role is to come alongside the new member and “act as guide, adviser and coach” and this process is stressed as being “one of the most high-leverage orientation strategies” (p. 104).

Pointer and Orlikoff believe that the process provides a welcome and motivation to serve for the new member while providing them with the foundational knowledge and skills needed. They also recommend that new members receive information regarding the organizations vision, mission, goals, characteristics (i.e.: facilities, core competencies, challenges etc.), and an introduction to the climate and culture of the board and organization.

The MFACD (1999) also advocate that new members to nonprofit organizations should understand the “purpose and mission”; “major activities and issues”; and “how the board operates” (p. 74) specific to their new role and organization. The methods they suggest for delivery include, “group sessions; board orientation manual; audiovisual and multimedia materials; mentors; and a three month check-up” (p. 75). The first item within the checklist they provide is the discussion of the values and beliefs of the organization as it relates to the programs and services of the organization. Interesting in that this is the only document (within the literature examined for this article) where values and beliefs were mentioned specifically as part of the orientation process.

Gill (2005) suggests that the orientation of new members begins during recruitment and Widmer & Houchin (2000) agree and state that “trustee orientation actually begins during candidate interviews, but once board members have been officially elected, a more formal orientation is in order” (p. 134-135). The methods these authors suggest for orientation seems condensed in comparison to the previous suggestions with the key methods including; an

orientation workshop; board manual; mentors; tour of the facilities; and introductions to key staff. The bulk of the information these authors provide is focused on the “board manual” with suggestions on what should be included within it; i.e. mission and purpose; bylaws; policies; organizational charts and the like.

Carver and Carver (1997) agree with this focus and suggest the first meeting is where the information should be provided. The board policy manual is suggested as the main resource with an observance that some boards use a mentoring system as well. They state that this process “can be very helpful, as it compels the experienced board member to be as knowledgeable as possible in order to accurately teach the new one” (p. 182).

Chait et al. (1996) and Pointer and Orlikoff (2002) caution that brief orientations which only focus on the facilities, bylaws and organizational charts, limit the development and future performance of new nonprofit board members. Viewed as “precious assets”, Pointer and Orlikoff state that new members “must start off on the right foot and be nurtured to achieve their full potential” (p. 104).

## **Interpersonal Dimension**

Previously within the discussion of the educational dimension Pointer and Orlikoff (2000) viewed the nurturance of new members of NPO board as important. Chait et al. (1996) expand on this idea of nurturance within their description of the Interpersonal Dimension as,

The board nurtures the development of directors as a working group, attends to the board’s collective welfare, and fosters a sense of cohesiveness. The board:

- Creates a sense of inclusiveness among trustees
- Develops group goals and recognizes group achievements
- Identifies and cultivates leadership within the board. (p. 7)

This section of the literature review is tied to the educational dimension which precedes it in that the methods of ongoing development for NPO governors, such as mentoring, retreats, and succession planning, could be viewed as opportunities to develop individuals as well as “foster a

sense of cohesiveness” and the “development of directors as a working group” (Chait et al., 1996, p. 7).

Carver and Carver (1997) mention that retreats have value in relation to the development of policy and state that, depending on the outside legislative demands that have direct influence on the organization, they may be conducted within as little as one to three days. This approach, while not explicit, could be viewed as “developing group goals” through the development of the NPO board’s policies.

Pointer and Orlikoff (2002) recommend that retreats be held “out of town” and that they provide the opportunity for an escape from the “over packed and harried day-to-day work environment to a less frantic and distracting pace” while providing NPO board members with an opportunity to “relax, focus their attention, and release their creativity” (p. 137). One way that they feel encourages interaction between attendees (board, management and invited stakeholders) is to plan all meals as communal events. They state that “this maximises inclusion and interaction” (p. 137) which is in direct agreement with Chait et al.’s (1996) interpersonal dimension in that the board “creates a sense of inclusiveness among trustees” (p. 7). Pointer and Orlikoff agree with Chait et al. where they propose that boards “seize the opportunity” afforded through a retreat to “celebrate organizational and board accomplishments” (p. 137).

McNamara (2002) agrees with the concept that retreats should be held somewhere other than the “nonprofits’ place of business or operation” and suggests that they be held in “board member’s houses; corporate boardrooms; community centers; public libraries or retreat centers” (p. 118). McNamara states that retreats are typically held in order to “conduct board member orientation and training; team building; strategic planning and to deal with any specific challenges the board/organization may be facing” (p. 117). Team building is identified as the opportunity to “build stronger relationships among Board and also to get acquainted with staff members” (p. 117).

Leblanc (2005) quotes several authors regarding the impact that interpersonal relationships can have on the effectiveness of a corporate board. Sonnenfeld (2002, cited in Leblanc, 2005) states that “what distinguishes exemplary boards is that they are robust, effective social systems” (p. 654). Bernhut (2004, cited in Leblanc, 2005, p. 654) quotes Lorsch as saying, “it’s what happens around the table – how people talk to each other, how they interact” that contributes to board effectiveness. Nadler (2004) is in agreement and states that, “the key to better corporate governance lies in the working relationships between boards and managers, in the social dynamics of board interaction, and in the competence, integrity and constructive involvement of individual directors” (cited in Leblanc, 2005, p. 654).

Gill (2005) agrees with these principles and states that,

Recent research on innovation in governance identified the attributes common to boards whose members believed they were very successful in governing their organizations. These attributes included (a) a family feeling on the board, (b) sense of pleasure and fun, (c) an executive director who helped to maintain a culture of learning on the board, (d) careful selection of board members, and (e) receptivity to change in their culture and practice as the organization evolves (or key actors are replaced) (p. 113).

The idea of family relates to Chait et al.’s (1996) discussion on “becoming a board” where they declare, “Cohesive and inclusive boards are inherently untidy and frequently unpredictable. Involving more people and being susceptible to their influence requires a tolerance for tension, conflict, error and ambiguity” (p. 60). Gill proposes that “people, not organizations, learn” and provides a further link to the idea of family with the assertion that “people learn best when their personal needs and views are recognized and appreciated and their many roles inside and outside of the organization are respected and valued” (p. 112). Gill also states that a “safe learning environment that includes open dialogue, reflection and inquiry encourages people to share their personal assumptions and to consider changing those assumptions” (p. 112).

While retreats provide the opportunity for the development of the board as a whole, the mentoring process provides the opportunity for individual development through relationships and interaction which reinforce the group learning. The NLI (2003c) states that “because the

focus in effective mentoring relationships is on learning, both the mentor and the mentee are continuously challenged to reflect on beliefs, values, and actions. The benefit, therefore, accrues to both parties” (p. 62).

Terry (1993) discusses whether leadership can be taught and declares that “in leadership circles, a refrain echoes: leadership cannot be taught; it can be learned” and proposes that “to set up a real-life experience and reflect on it *is* teaching leadership” (p. 217). Mentoring relationships provide that opportunity for the governance volunteer to engage in the “real-life experience” of governance and then reflect on it in the “safe learning environment” (Gill, 2005, p. 112) with their mentor. The discussion and reflection then benefits both parties and incorporates the “cultivation of leadership within the board” (Chait et al., 1996, p. 7).

The “development of directors as working group” (Chait et al, 1996, p. 7) relates to the need for succession planning. Succession planning relates to three areas, recruitment, selection of a new board chair and selection of an ED. Hechinger (2005) states that “great governance doesn’t happen by accident; it takes the right people in the right place at the right time” (p. 51). Hechinger provides this example of succession planning:

For example, the board and head of an independent school worked together to create a leadership succession plan a few years before the head of school was to retire. This board and staff participated in a collaborative, holistic review process that included articulating the institutions’ values, evaluating the schools’ internal infrastructure needs, and assessing the board itself – all before the executive search officially began. The whole scenario was as beneficial to the school as it was unusual. Many CEOs don’t want to discuss a succession plan, especially a few years in advance of their departure. And holistic reviews can seem threatening to *everyone*, including board members themselves. But this organization was able to accomplish these goals in part because of the mutual respect that existed within its leadership. (p. 51)

Other researchers recommend similar steps prior to filling vacancies on the NPO board of governors or within the organization.

Sonpal-Valias (2005) reflects on the process that the VRRRI is planning to implement as they seek to provide leadership development within their NPO organization and states, “We need to clearly identify how many formal leadership positions are expected to change in the next 5, 10

and 15 years, and ensure that we develop a pool of new leaders through properly articulated and supported individual and organizational learning paths” (p. 2).

The MFACD (1999) propose that, “Renewing the board begins with assessing current board members’ qualities and contributions” (p. 12). They recommend determining which governance volunteers will be leaving the organization within the current and proceeding years. The process of assessing the current board members is to identify “What qualities, experience ...will be missing” and “What is required to restore the balance of qualities, experiences ...on the board” (p. 12).

A compilation of the criteria identified in some of the literature (Gill, 2005; McNamara, 2002; Pointer & Orlikoff, 2000) focus on skills and knowledge as being the important pieces to identify and replace such as:

- specific expertise
- resources
- skills
- diversity (e.g. gender, ethnic, racial, disabled etc.)
- demographic characteristics
- community representation
- general competencies

While all of these are important Zauderer (2005) proposes that adding “high character” to the list would provide “a pool of candidates with both high character and managerial competence would emerge from the competitive selection process” (p.44). Zauderer’s research revealed “that many employees hold their leaders in low regard and feel they do not generate high levels of motivation and commitment” (p. 44). This article is of interest to the interpersonal dimension as Zauderer provides some provocative questions that governance volunteers might ask in the process of assessing leadership potential in candidates being considered during succession planning in order to facilitate balance within the working group of the board i.e. qualities, experience as identified by MFACD (1999) and the other skills and knowledge identified by Gill (2005); McNamara (2002); and Pointer and Orlikoff (2000). Zauderer suggests asking, “Does this candidate have a record of selfless commitment to others and to larger goals

and purposes” and “Do they have the kind of tenacious drive and perseverance to build something larger and more lasting than themselves” (p. 48). Zauderer’s view is that these assets would be important when NPO boards are “developing group goals” and “attending to the collective welfare of the board” as proposed by Chait et al. (1996, p. 7).

As NPO boards seek to “identify and cultivate leadership” and “develop group goals” in order to “attend to the board’s [and organization’s] welfare” the process of identifying the values and characteristics of the individuals and the board itself as well as the methods used to further nurture their development as a working group will be crucial to ensuring a “sense of cohesiveness” as proposed by Chait et al. (1996, p. 7). This is an area where further attention to the development of leadership skills of NPO board members needs to be directed. Lewin and Regine (2000, cited in Fullan, 2001) identify that it is time for the perspective of leadership to change to include “pay[ing] as much attention to how we treat people – co-workers, subordinates, customers - as we now typically pay to structure, strategies, and statistics” (p. 53).

## **Political Dimension**

The research of Martin and Ernst (2005) identified the need for the leadership skills of “building and mending relationships” to be developed within future leaders of organizations. The interpersonal dimension of Chait et al. (1996) supports this skill set on the personal/group level with their proposal that the NPO board work at “identifying and cultivating leadership” and “developing group goals” (p. 7). Together these concepts support what Chait et al. (1996) identify as the “political dimension” as governance volunteers and their NPO boards are also required to consider their professional and organizational interactions with multiple stakeholders internal to the organization and across the sector including other organizations, funders and clients. Working from policy, including the organization’s mission statement, the NPO board seeks to consult with the stakeholders in order to identify areas of policy or procedure which may need to be; a) adapted to address emergent issues; b) prepare for opportunities or

challenges which may be appearing on the horizon that involve others within the community; and c) promoted to effect desired social changes.

Chait et al. (1996) define the “political dimension” in the following way:

The board accepts as a primary responsibility the need to develop and maintain healthy relationships among major constituencies. The board:

- Respects the integrity of the governance process and the legitimate roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders
- Consults often and communicates directly with key constituencies
- Attempts to minimize conflict and win/lose situations (p. 8)

The political dimension as presented by Chait et al. is complicated by ongoing challenges in three main areas:

- Internal stakeholders such as staff and volunteers
- External stakeholders such as financial supporters (individuals, government, corporations, and foundations), and the internal dynamics of;
- A board of directors drawn from the community (Seel et al., 2001, p. 642)

Seel et al. also recognize that further to this, governance volunteers have to respond to a variety of pressures emergent in the nonprofit sector:

- Reduced funding from governments;
- Aggressive competition with other NPOs for support from funding agencies and private donors;
- Being pushed to assume or augment many of the services traditionally provided by government;
- NPOs themselves becoming increasingly complex and sophisticated entities, with all the inherent challenges of managing large organizations;
- Responsibility to a wide variety of stakeholders (unlike profit-oriented companies whose primary responsibility is to the shareholders) who often have different and even conflicting expectations of the NPO (p. 643).

They propose that these complexities and pressures have resulted in the need for governance volunteers to “demonstrate leadership and accountability” (p. 643).

The Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (PAGVS) (1999) recognize the complexity and political dimensions of accountability within the NPO sector and assists in the identity of constituencies within the following:

Voluntary organizations have accountabilities downward, outward and upward. They are accountable to their beneficiaries or clients, members, volunteers, staff, partners and affiliates, donors and funders, and governments, as well as to the general public. But they are accountable in different ways to these different constituencies (p. 11).

Beyond the idea of identifying constituency is the underlying challenge to the view of the accountability process being politic in nature. The dictionary definition of politic includes “Using, displaying, or proceeding from policy” (Blackboard, 2005); such as a politic decision. The work and decisions of governance boards should be guided by the policies and procedures which define their roles and responsibilities; the roles and responsibilities of their staff; and the organizational vision and goals based on the identified needs of the community it serves and operates within (Carver & Carver, 1997; Pointer & Orlikoff, 2002; Gill, 2005). Therefore, the fact that governors of NPO organizations base their decisions on policy and recommend procedures or strategies based on these, makes their work, and the accountability process around this, political in nature.

Governance volunteers accept the duty to be accountable as soon as they accept their position on the NPO board. The recognition of the different constituents; the legal requirements for accountability; and the recognition that decisions proceed from policy are all components of “respecting the integrity of the governance process and the legitimate roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders” (Chait et al., 1996, p. 8).

One demonstration of accountability that a board can undertake is consulting with stakeholders or constituents to assess the board’s performance. Chait et al. (1996) propose that avenues be established to allow this kind of input and engagement of those external to the governance of the organization to participate in. They note that this can be a “high risk” process (p. 34) for constituents without the established avenues in place.

BoardSource (2005) also recognizes the political dimension of governance within accountability measures of the board and states that:

Exceptional boards, understanding their accountability to community and constituent needs, give voice to the enduring values, stories, and aspirations that shape the organization. They translate these elements into a compelling articulation of mission, vision, and core values that guides major decisions and everyday activities. (p. 6)

By being accountable, the board forms the identity of the organization which becomes the central guide for each of the three components of the political dimension (Chait et al., 1996). Cooke's (2001) work also recognizes the political aspects of governance when she proposes that if nonprofit organizations "want to be successful in the pursuit of [their] vision [they] will want to increase the number of people it inspires and serves" (p. 12). In order to accomplish this board members will want to "share their vision widely" and in the process become "more accountable and responsive to a constituency that forms around the vision" (p. 12).

Miller-Millesen (2003) refers to resource dependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, cited in Miller-Millesen, 2003) and institutional theories (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, cited in Miller-Millesen, 2003) in order to explain why NPO governance volunteers and their boards would look outside the organization in order to enhance its capacity to fulfill its vision. Miller-Millesen proposes that, "the types of boundary-spanning activities and functions performed by nonprofit boards is likely to be influenced by the degree to which the organization is dependent on external sources of funding, environmental complexity, and the need for information" (p. 534). Boundary-spanning activities are those undertakings of the board that build relationships with the broader community including other organizations.

This process will not be free of challenges however. Miller-Millesen provides the following example,

...fundors may, as a condition of funding, mandate organizations to diversify their boards in ways that are proportionally representative of the community served regardless of whether these boards actually govern better or not (p. 537).

Guo and Acar (2005) concur and recognize that while collaborations between NPO's "help acquire critical resources and reduce uncertainty, these relationships are not without costs" (p. 345). One of the main costs which they identify is the "loss of operating autonomy" (p. 345).

Within the political dimension Chait et al. (1996) propose that one of the NPO boards' main responsibilities is to build healthy relationships among constituencies. Guo and Acar (2005) propose that NPO "linkages with other nonprofit organizations help an organization gain access

to more nonprofit organizations that may become potential partners for a higher degree of collaboration, thus eventually leading to more formal types of collaborative activities” (p. 348). While their results did not necessarily support their hypothesis they do note that “the threat to organizational independence inherent in formal alliances is balanced by organizational efforts to create more formal linkages across boards and management teams” (p. 356).

As NPO governors engage in the process of determining which other agencies or organizations it needs to interact with, and balance the risks with the gains, they are engaging in the process which Chait et al. (1996) define as attempting to “minimize conflict and win/lose situations” (p. 8).

Purdue (2001) states that when governors act as leaders there is “a constant bargaining between leaders and followers, in which each side attempts to maximise the benefits and reduce the costs of involvement”. While recognizing that “the leader does not create the constituency, but responds to it” (p. 2215). Purdue proposes that leaders earn “goodwill trust” which is transformed into credits which are “earned by competence, conformity to group norms, length of participation or a prior good reputation” (p. 2215). This relates to Chait et al.’s recommendation that the board work with their major constituencies to develop and maintain healthy relationships. If the relationships are healthy and the “good reputation” of the NPO board is intact the relationship has the opportunity to benefit both parties through “reciprocity” (Putnam, 2000, cited in Cooke, 2001, p. 15).

Putnam defines “generalized reciprocity” as “I’ll do this for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road” (Putnam, 2000, cited in Cooke, 2001, p. 15). The development of generalized reciprocity through relationship building as part of the political activity of a board requires the determined effort of governors and their nonprofit organizations.

The disenchantment of the Canadian public with any form of political entity presents a challenge to the efforts of NPOs and their governance volunteers that must be overcome if they

are to relate effectively with their constituencies (PAGVS, 1999). Governance volunteers and the NPO's they represent need to be effective leaders who are attentive listeners, purposeful planners and intentional advocates both of themselves and the constituencies they interact with in order to break through this barrier. Cooke (2001) proposes some processes or strategies which NPO governance volunteers can incorporate in order to initiate dialogue and extend the invitation to constituents to participate such as:

If your board wants to develop a relationship with families on a low income, your organization could offer childcare with a complementary pizza lunch while hosting a short discussion about the ideas and needs of the families attending and the services your organization offers and could develop (p. 18).

Working within the political dimension of governance raises issues of ethics and morals. Thompson (2004) addresses the moral aspect of leadership and states that, "Leadership, the exercise of social power (and often attendant economic and political power), is fundamentally a moral endeavour. There is an inescapable moral dimension to the exercise of power, whether or not it is formally acknowledged" (p. 28). Thompson proposes the "moral compass" as a framework from which organizations can engage in the sensitive process of determining "moral solidarity" within the complex, diverse and spiritually controversial environment that boards can encounter. Thompson suggests that, "Effective leaders are able to engage with others in building, by example and constructive effort, an environment within which individuals and groups are free and encouraged to discern and actualize the right and good in fulfillment of shared goals, values and purpose" (p. 28).

Thompson's moral compass helps provide an understanding of what Chait et al. (1996) saw as "healthy relationships among major constituencies" with which the board was working (p. 8). Purdue's (2001) notion of the board's need to build "good will trust" is also supported by Thompson's work.

Zauderer (2005) lists several principles of integrity that are also helpful in understanding the skills required by governors operating within the political dimension of governance. Three of these that pertain to Chait et al.'s (1996) political dimension are;

- Communicate truthfully, especially on matters about which individuals have a right to know.
- Deal fairly to avoid providing special advantage or disadvantage because of affiliations or positions.
- Honour agreements by following through on commitments. (p. 47)

Zauderer expands this in his discussion of “displaying humility” when he states that “Humble leaders recognize that enlightened solutions to complex problems evolve when leaders listen and engage in active inquiry with different stakeholders. Listening with an open mind is an act of respect that engenders loyalty and followership” (p. 48).

If NPO organizations, boards and the governance volunteers that represent them are willing to engage in this political dimension then the disenchantment of the public with the governance process may begin to be reversed. Cooke (2001) sums it up well with these words:

It is through the relationship between the nonprofit organization and its constituency that much of the criticism and doubting of the sector can be addressed. A vibrant and involved constituency with a committed and respectful board and staff of a nonprofit organization will do much to dispel the questions that hover like a damp mist over the sector (p. 16).

## **Strategic Dimension**

The strategic approach required in the governance process may seem overwhelming to the novice governance volunteer. Even the experienced board member may feel frustrated or at a loss with certain situations or problems arising from the challenges of the nonprofit sector (Fullan, 2001). Chait et al. (2005) believe that before NPO boards can:

use various forms of management expertise to solve problems, organizations need to figure out which problems need solving. Before they figure out the best strategy for getting from the present to a preferred future, organizations need to figure out what that preferred future is. Before they can dedicate resources to the things they consider important, they have to figure out what things are important (p. 30).

Much of the process used to figure these things out requires the NPO board and its governors to operate within the strategic dimension. Chait et al. (1996) describe the strategic dimension as,

The board helps the organization envision a direction and shape a strategy. The board:

- Cultivates and concentrates on processes that sharpen institutional [organizational] priorities
  - Organizes itself and conducts its business in light of the institution's [organization's] strategic priorities
  - Anticipates potential problems and acts before issues become crises
  - Anticipates potential problems and acts before matters become urgent.
- (p. 8)

Pointer and Orlikoff (2000) caution that “the board does not become directly involved in developing organizational strategies; it delegates this task to management” (p. 28). They recommend that boards be “strategically focused” as they examine organizational strategies proposed by the ED based on the analysis of whether the strategies; align with the vision and key goals of the organization; are based on sound rationale; lead to accomplishing key goals; or contribute to the fulfillment of the organizations vision (Pointer & Orlikoff, 2000, p. 28).

Recognizing that boards may need to engage in determining where the line between governance and management lie (Pointer & Orlikoff, 2000), Chait et al. (1996) recommend that the board consider that the most value is added to their NPO's through “decisions and actions that enhance the long-term quality, vitality, and stability of the institution [organization]” (p. 9). In other words, to be strategic at the board level means that governors are making decisions and taking action focused on the long term rather than the short term. This suggests that the current emphasis on fiscal accountability determined on an annual basis runs counter to the board's strategic responsibilities.

Communication between the board and the ED becomes crucial at the point of determining the line between what the organization believes is governance and what it sees to be management. The literature agrees with this as it indicates that the involvement of the ED

directly relates to the implementation rather than the development of the policies, strategies or goals of the NPO (Chait et al., 1996; Pointer & Orlikoff, 2000; Widmer & Houchin, 2000; BoardSource, 2005; Gill, 2005).

McNamara (2002) proposes that “the Board should take a strong role in strategic planning because the Board is formally responsible for setting the purpose and direction of the organization” (p. 53). Rather than view McNamara’s (2002) and Pointer and Orlikoff’s (2000) as the only kind of relationship between the board and ED, BoardSource (2005) proposes that “Exceptional boards are active partners with staff in framing and assessing the strategic plan” (p. 6). Strategy development from this view point is a collaborative activity between the ED and the board.

Board and staff working together with a “shared sense of direction” (Widmer & Houchin, 2000, p. 12) prevents fracturing from occurring where the board and ED have differing goals or objectives in mind. Without open communication or joint understanding developed by working together on strategy about the future of the NPO, the chances of fracture would be high (Lipshitz & Mann, 2005).

Chait et al. (1996) propose boards provide opportunities for their ED’s to “think aloud” at times (p. 11). Chait et al. suggest that this allows the ED to “frame problems, to contemplate the basic values, tradeoffs and ambiguities that underlie and may eventually inform a policy recommendation” (p. 11). These thinking aloud sessions provide the ED with the “benefit of the informed counsel of respected and trusted board members” before either “problems or solutions” are solidified (p. 12). BoardSource (2005) supports this idea and addresses this reciprocal process because; the board encourages “a strong, honest, chief executive to pose questions and offer answers, and to share bad news early and openly. In turn, chief executives provide boards with tools and information to govern exceptionally” (p. 2). The opportunity for boards to hear and process “bad news early and openly” is a direct example of what Chait et al.

(1996) describe as “anticipating problems and acting before issues/ matters become crises/ urgent” within the strategic dimension (p. 8).

Pointer and Orlikoff (2000) propose that some of the tools and information boards need from their EDs are, “all matters that might affect the organization’s ability to fulfill its vision, accomplish its goals and achieve its financial objectives” (p. 34). McNamara (2002) boldly states that “all else flows from strategic planning” (p. 53). Widmer and Houchin (2000) agree and state that, “strategic planning strongly influences the other work of the board and staff” (p. 11). While not disputing these views, BoardSource (2005) breaks these views down further, proposing that exceptional boards receive and “draw on quantitative data and informed opinion and in concert with management, they affirm the organization’s mission, chart a future course and articulate priorities” (p. 8). Chait et al.’s (1996) suggestion that the board cultivate processes which sharpen organizational priorities becomes important in the face of these broad overarching expectations of both the ED (Pointer & Orlikoff, 2000) and the strategic process (McNamara, 2002; Widmer & Houchin, 2000).

Within their investigation of strategy and board structure Brown and Iverson (2004) highlight the work of Miles and Snow (1978) who “broke down the process of understanding strategy into how organizations interpret and respond to three problems: entrepreneurial, engineering and administrative” (Brown & Iverson, 2004, p. 379).

Miles and Snow (1978) identified the “entrepreneurial problem” as how organizations define their “product or service and target market” (cited in Brown & Iverson, 2004, p. 379). Brown and Iverson suggest that this could include how NPO’s view their “community responsibility” i.e. who they serve; partner with; and what services they will provide (p. 379). Their interpretation of the entrepreneurial problem ties to how the board “conducts its business in light of the institution’s [organization’s] strategic priorities” of the strategic dimension of Chait et al. (1996, p. 8) and the statement of Chait et al. (2005) regarding board’s “figuring out what things are important” (p. 30).

Miles and Snow (1978) proposed that boards and NPOs operate from one of “four different strategic perspectives or styles” which they identify as either “defender, prospector, analyzer or reactor” (cited in Brown & Iverson, 2004, p. 380).

The main characteristics of the four styles are condensed in the following chart:

Defender	Prospector	Analyzer	Reactor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have a set service area</li> <li>- Do not look for new opportunities</li> <li>- Rarely look at changing customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continually look for new opportunities</li> <li>- Regularly experimented with potential responses to emerging environmental trends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defenders during stable environments</li> <li>- Adapt to temporary prospectors during turbulent environments in order to adopt new ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack a consistent strategy-structure relationship</li> <li>- Adjust because of constraints imposed by environmental pressures</li> </ul>

Although Brown and Iverson (2004) provide insight into the effect of strategy on the structure of organizations through Miles and Snow’s (1978) theory, their research was limited in its application to this literature review as they only considered the perspectives of EDs. Further application or investigation of Miles and Snow’s theory to board members could bring further understanding of what it means to be a governor and whether the strategic style of the individual governor then affects the overall strategic style of the board and organization. Brown and Iverson verify the possibilities for further research with “additional leadership voices could validate or contradict proclamations by senior executives and might, as well, inform contradictions in structural pattern and performance” (p. 397). Overall though their conclusions affirmed the necessity of boards and NPOs “attending to governance patterns that reinforce the strategic direction of the organization” (p. 397) which speaks to the role of the board as it “helps the organization envision a direction and shape a strategy” as proposed by Chait et al. (1996, p. 8).

Fullan (2001) suggests an additional strategic element of leadership that governors need to demonstrate in the rapidly changing, complex environment of the nonprofit sector. He proposes that “in a culture of complexity, the chief role of leadership is to mobilize the *collective capacity* to change difficult circumstances” (p. 136). Mobilizing the collective capacity of an organization

and those it interacts with requires forward thinking and a strategy in order to produce beneficial outcomes. Perceived by Fullan to represent “many individuals working in concert in order to become as complex as the society they live in” this idea of collective capacity fits nicely within the strategic dimension of Chait et al. (1996) and BoardSource’s (2005) view of the “board being an active partner with staff” where the board as leadership along with the ED “helps the organization envision a direction and shape a strategy”. Rather than trying to make decisions as rapidly as the environment changes, Fullan advises that governors engage in “slow knowing” (Claxton, 1997, cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 122) which he interprets as “absorbing disturbances and drawing out new patterns”.

Both Fullan’s (2001) and Brown and Iverson’s (2004) research relates to how governors might view or deliberate on information which would affect their decisions regarding strategies or proposals received from their EDs that “address potential problems before they act on them” or create new patterns of “conducting business” as identified by Chait et al.’s (1996, p. 8) strategic dimension. Both reflect the possible results affected by how “the board organizes itself” through structure and “conducts its business” through leadership “in light of institutional strategies” (Chait et al., 1996, p. 8).

In conclusion the examples, theories and proposals presented in the strategic dimension section of this literature review could be used by governors as they work to “cultivate and concentrate on processes” that they, in conjunction with their ED, use to “sharpen their organizational priorities” in their effort to add value to their NPOs through “decisions and actions that enhance the long-term quality, vitality, and stability of their organization” (Chait et al., 1996, pp. 8 & 9).

## Conclusion

Much of the research reported, within the articles for this review, focused on the board as a whole or the executive directors (EDs) or managers of the organizations who took part in a variety of studies examining governance or leadership. Very little of the research, beyond Chait et al. (1996, 2005) focused at all on the NPO governors as key participants or informants for the research.

It is generally recognized that the policy governance model is designed with the idea that boards, and the board members who comprise them, lead their organizations through the development of policies which their ED or staff then implement under the watchful eye of the board. It is interesting to note that the importance of these individuals and their leadership qualities and contributions to their organizations has not been more widely studied. Much of the research discussed within this review could be expanded to provide further insight into what it means to be a governor of a NPO and if that affects the decisions, policies and ultimately the performance and existence of the organizations they govern.

If the “nature of leadership is changing” as identified by Martin and Ernst (2005, p. 91) and confirmed by the Canadian National Learning Initiative (2003) this could lead to further complexities within the already challenging role of the NPO governor.

Reacting to change is recognized by several researchers within the review including Sonpal-Valias (2005), Brown and Iverson (2004), Miller-Millesen (2003) and Fullan (2001). Based on their collective research it appears that different reactions relate to the direction and development of policies (i.e., the strategic dimension, Chait et al., 1996), boundary spanning activities (i.e., the political dimension, Chait et al., 1996) and leadership development (i.e., the education dimension, Chait et al., 1996) of NPOs.

The identification of the characteristics of “slow knowing” (Claxton, 1997, cited in Fullan, 2001) or qualities of the “defender, prospector, analyzer or reactor” (Miles & Snow, 1978, cited in Brown & Iverson, 2004) may prove vital to boards as they plan for succession and seek board

members who will work within the culture and norms (i.e., the contextual dimension, Chait et al., 1996) of the board and organization. This is represented by Chait et al. (1996) within the “interpersonal dimension” as well as “nurturing the development of directors as a working group” and “attending to the board’s collective welfare” (p. 7).

Chait et al. (2005) believe that before NPO boards can:

use various forms of management expertise to solve problems, organizations need to figure out which problems need solving. Before they figure out the best strategy for getting from the present to a preferred future, organizations need to figure out what that preferred future is. Before they can dedicate resources to the things they consider important, they have to figure out what things are important. (p. 30)

Lawler and Finegold (2005) found that only the evaluations of the board and individual board members showed a significant relation to board effectiveness and other research shows that boards and stakeholders recognize the need to assess their organizations and themselves to see if they are on the right track (Gill et al., 2005; Leblanc, 2005; Carver & Carver, 1997). It seems then, that in order to dissect and examine all aspects of the governor role, which is a multifaceted issue, (see the analytical dimension, Chait et al., 1996) it would be important for researchers and governance boards of NPOs to hear from the governance volunteers themselves about what their construct of leadership is and what it means to be a governor within the context of governing a nonprofit organization. The results from such research could enhance the capacity of governance volunteers as they endeavour to add value to their NPOs through “decisions and actions that enhance the long-term quality, vitality, and stability of their organization” (Chait et al., 1996, pp. 8 & 9).

Finally, Chait et al. (2005) propose that boards engage in what they term “generative governing”. The mind set required for this form of governing is as concerned with the softer aspects such as the “values, judgements and insights” as well as the “productivity and logic” of the organizations they lead (p. 30). Combined with strategy and fiduciary thinking; boards who can determine when and where each is applicable will be practicing “governance as leadership” (p. 31).

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