

FOSTERING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT DURING ORGANIZATIONAL  
CHANGE

By

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In  
LEADERSHIP

We accept this Report as conforming  
to the required standard

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## ABSTRACT

The participants in the action research investigation validated the literature reviewed regarding engagement, organizational change, and organizational culture. Insights were gathered from the research participants on these topics with the research methods of face-to-face interview, small group interview, and survey. The participants' contributions reflected the engaging ability of environments that provide innovation, preferred tasks, trust, respect, effective communication, and empowerment. In addition, the feedback from participants indicates that certain conditions optimize an organization's chance to effectively develop and change. Both the literature and the research participants concluded that leaders play a significant role in creating and maintaining engagement and the environments that foster it, although the literature put more emphasis on this engagement driver. The literature and the research participants also describe that the perceptions that individuals and organizations have of change and development are instrumental in whether change is achieved successfully.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to caring and committed public servants everywhere.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Through this project I have learned much more about the power and joy of collaborating, and collaboration has been the essence of this research. I am fortunate to have had the support, encouragement, and assistance of many people, and I would like to acknowledge their contributions here.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables .....	ix
Chapter One: Focus and Framing.....	1
Introduction.....	1
The Opportunity and Its Significance.....	5
Engagement in the BC Public Service.....	5
Innovation in the BC Public Service.....	6
Systems Analysis of the Opportunity .....	9
Organizational Context.....	15
The Project Sponsor.....	19
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .....	22
Employee Engagement .....	22
The Evolution of Employee Engagement.....	23
Defining Employee Engagement.....	25
The Benefits of Employee Engagement .....	26
The Drivers of Engagement in the Workplace .....	28
Assessing Employee Engagement .....	32
Organizational Culture.....	33
Defining Organizational Culture.....	34
Understanding an Organization’s Culture .....	35
Schein’s Views on Organizational Culture.....	36
Cameron and Quinn’s and Leavitt’s Views on Organizational Culture .....	38
Wheatley’s Views on Organizational Culture .....	41
The Role of Leadership in Organizational Cultures .....	43
Organizational Development and Change .....	45
Factors that Facilitate Development, Change, and Engagement .....	45
Participation .....	46
High-functioning teams .....	49
The Learning Culture.....	51
Individual Factors in Reactions to Development and Change.....	54
Innovation .....	60
Chapter Three: Research Approach and Methodology.....	63
Research Question .....	63
Methodology and Approach .....	63
Project Participants .....	65
The Research Committee.....	65

The Research Team.....	66
The Research Participants.....	66
Research Tools.....	67
One-on-One Interviews.....	68
Survey.....	70
Small Group Interviews.....	71
Reflective Journaling.....	73
Research Conduct.....	73
Establishing a Research Team.....	74
Inviting Participants.....	74
General Information for the Methods.....	77
Survey.....	79
Small Group Interview.....	80
Reflective Journaling.....	83
Credibility, Transferability, and Dependability.....	83
Data Analysis.....	84
Reliability and Validity.....	86
Ethical Issues.....	88
Chapter Four: Findings and Conclusions.....	93
Finding and Conclusions.....	94
Conclusion One: Engagement is a Powerful Force that has Benefits for the Employee and the Employer.....	95
Conclusion Two: Organizational Change Impacts Engagement.....	98
Conclusion Three: There are Key Factors that can be Managed to Effectively Mitigate the Impacts of Change on Engagement.....	100
Individual Attitudes Towards Change.....	100
Communication.....	102
Trust and Integrity.....	105
Adequate Resources.....	106
Input.....	107
Coworkers and Team.....	108
Management Skills.....	111
Conclusion Four: Engagement Drivers Vary on Individual Basis.....	113
The Type of Tasks I do at Work.....	113
Respect.....	114
General Feedback Regarding Engagement Drivers.....	114
Scope and Limitations of the Research.....	118
Chapter Five: Recommendations.....	120
The Recommendations.....	120
Recommendation #1: Learn About People’s Passions and Interests, and Support People in Doing Tasks that they Enjoy at Work.....	121
Recommendation #2: Promote Work Environments that People Feel Positively Connected to and that Support Engagement.....	123
Recommendation #3: Promote Deeper Awareness in the Organization of the Concept and Benefits of Engagement.....	127

Recommendation #4: Strive to Balance Key Factors in Engagement .....	128
Recommendation #5: Plan Changes to Sustain Engagement .....	129
Organizational Implications.....	131
Implications for Future Research.....	131
Chapter Six: Lessons Learned .....	133
Learning About and From the Research Process .....	133
Personal Learning from The Research Process .....	136
Critical and Creative Thinking.....	136
Personal Leadership and Communication .....	137
Systems Thinking .....	137
Research and Inquiry and Organizational Change Leadership.....	138
References.....	139
Appendix A: Results From The 2009 WES Survey .....	146
Appendix B: Action Research Team Member Letter of Agreement .....	147
Appendix C: Food For Thought Handout.....	148
Appendix D: Engagement Survey .....	149
Appendix E: Engagement Survey Tally Sheet.....	151
Appendix F: Letter of Invitation.....	155
Appendix G: Informed Consent for One-on-One and/or Small Group Participants.....	156
Appendix H: Knowing Your Strengths Handout.....	158
Appendix I: Brief Survey Summary .....	159
Appendix J: E-Mail Update to Participants .....	161
Appendix K: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement .....	162
Appendix L: Additional Excerpts From Conversations.....	163
Appendix M: Full List of Engagement Strategies .....	167

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants Self-Rating on Engagement ..... 99

## CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING

## Introduction

An organization's ability to change and innovate is essential to its success (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Yukl, 2006). I work for the British Columbia (BC) Public Service, where the ability to effectively change and innovate is needed because organizations need to do more with less. The global economic downturn has affected the BC Government's budgets (Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Finance and Ministry responsible for the Olympics, 2009) and workforce (British Columbia Government and Services Employees' Union, 2009). The 2010 budget reflects a reining in of overall spending, and includes a net-zero-increase wage mandate (Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Housing and Social Development [MHSD], 2010b, p. 7). Budget cuts and job losses are involved (British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union, 2010). In addition, the BC Public Service expects to lose 35% of bargaining unit staff and 45% of management staff due to retirement by 2015. Yet, the BC Government believes that an effective public service is essential to serving British Columbians (Government of British Columbia, BC Public Service Agency [BC PSA], n.d.a).

Employee engagement is one factor in an organization's effectiveness. "Employee engagement is recognized by most leading employers as a key element in improving recruitment and retention as well as boosting overall productivity" (BC PSA, n.d.a, p. 22). Although there are numerous definitions in literature of the term employee engagement, in this research I chose to use Gibbon's (2006) definition: "Employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has

for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work” (p. 5). Thomas (2002) describes employee engagement as being linked to an intrinsic sense of commitment to the organization and a sense that one wants to perform the identified activities and pursue the identified purpose.

Fostering intrinsic engagement and participation could result in effective change. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1998) write, “It is possible to facilitate successful organizational change, where after the change effort people feel more committed to the organization, more confident of their contributions, and more prepared to deal with change as a continuous experience” (¶ 3). Empowering employees during change initiatives with such methods as participatory processes could result in successful change because “people support what they create” (¶ 24). Employees who make choices that affect an organization’s development are empowered as they are given “power or authority” (Neufeldt & Guralink, 1988, p. 445). According to Thomas (2002), the intrinsic rewards of being engaged in one’s work are a sense of choice, competence, meaningfulness, and progress, which results in innovativeness, commitment to the organization, and reduced stress. Thomas states that these are also factors in measuring empowerment and that interfering with these rewards leads to reduced energy. Change that promotes employee participation and intrinsic rewards may serve to sustain employee engagement, thus increasing employee innovation and commitment to the organization.

However, change may also undermine employee engagement. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1998) write that people who are not creatively involved in the process of

change, or “re-creation . . . [can be] dispirited, disaffected and lifeless” (¶ 19). Failed change can lead to valuable workers becoming frustrated and leaving organizations (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000).

My interest in studying the effects of organizational change on employee engagement stems from my experience as a case manager. A new case management software program had recently been introduced to our organization. The case managers had some input into the design of the program. However, there were concerns that the system would not serve its expressed purpose. Time and money invested into the change could have been used more effectively. Ultimately, the objectives of the case management system were not fully realized, and there were negative effects on employee engagement.

Yukl (2006) wrote, “The distribution and sharing of power over decisions has important implications for leadership effectiveness in groups and organizations, especially in cultures that value democracy” (p. 225). My own work experience made me aware that I value an organizational culture in which employees feel empowered, are engaged, and have input into their organization.

Therefore, my research explored the practices that have fostered and maintained employee engagement during change initiatives. The research was conducted with participants from the Government of BC, Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD). Originally, my intention was to invite participants from the Provincial Services Branch (PSB) which, until August 2009, was based in the Policy and Research Division and consisted of four units: the Health Assistance Branch, the Reconsideration Branch, the Contact Centre, and the Executive office. However, in August the PSB and the

Reconsideration Branch moved to the Regional Services division, the Reconsideration Branch was moved out of the PSB, and the Executive office staff was reduced. So the research participants are now from the units that used to form the PSB. From the conversations I had with project participants, factors were identified that participants had found most effective in positively impacting employee engagement during organizational change.

I have been an adjudicator in the ministry since 2002, first in the Health Assistance Branch and from 2004 to the present as a reconsideration officer in the Reconsideration Branch. My primary role is to adjudicate reconsiderations of denied requests for ministry financial assistance or supplements. I do not have any direct reports.

As with many organizations, in the MHSD change has been constant. For instance, there have been three ministry name changes since 2004, and the PSB alone has undergone numerous personnel and structural shifts. The current economic and demographic forecast is prompting a need for even more adaptation to increase efficiencies and cost-containment. Other research has demonstrated that promoting employee empowerment during small and large change initiatives could be an important aspect of maintaining an engaged and innovative workforce (Thomas, 2002; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998). Bolman and Deal (2003) find that the participation and involvement of human resources are essential strategies for organizational change. Yukl (2006) writes, “Extensive participation can result in better decisions when relevant information and ideas are distributed among people, they are willing to cooperate in finding a good solution, and ample time is available to use a participative process” (p. 225). Thomas writes that people who believe that they are “pawns” (p. 65) of external

events and forces, without the ability to make choices, lose their sense of self, shut down emotionally, and disengage from tasks.

My research question for this project was: What fosters and maintains employee engagement during organizational change in the Provincial Services Branch of the Ministry of Housing and Social Development? Subquestions related to this topic were:

1. What engages employees in the PSB?
2. How have organizational changes over the last year impacted employee engagement in the PSB?
3. What lessons learned about fostering and maintaining employee engagement could be applicable to other areas of the ministry that are implementing change?

#### The Opportunity and Its Significance

My research project explored ways to foster and maintain employee engagement during organizational change in the PSB. The results of this research were shared with my project sponsor, who is the Executive Director of the PSB.

#### *Engagement in the BC Public Service*

The Public Service Agency (PSA) of the BC Government states that employee engagement is important to recruitment, retention, and productivity (BC PSA, n.d.a.). “Public organizations with higher levels of employee engagement have less turnover, are more productive, and provide better service to citizens and businesses” (J. Munroe, personal communication, July 24, 2009), and a positive relationship exists between employee engagement scores and citizens’ service satisfaction scores.

In 2001 and 2003 the Officer of the Auditor General undertook studies of the BC government work environment, and after the first study the Auditor General reported “I believe a well performing government, one that meets the service expectations of British Columbians, can only be achieved through a strong, highly competent and committed public service” (J. Munroe, personal communication, July 24, 2009). The PSA began to annually examine its performance in this area in 2006, by inviting its employees to respond to a Work Environment Survey (WES). Based on the results of the WES, each ministry and division is evaluated in relation to employee engagement. A synopsis of the report was also shared with all employees (BC PSA, n.d.a). Information from the 2009 WES is in Appendix A.

The WES survey results show that there has been a strong improvement in employee engagement in the BC Public Service over the past 3 years (BC PSA, n.d.a). However, the PSA also acknowledges that there is room for continued improvement. Exit surveys also show that the engagement level of employees leaving the PSA for employment elsewhere is consistently lower than the corporate average (BC PSA, n.d.a, p. 22).

#### *Innovation in the BC Public Service*

To unleash their potential, people need a work environment that is supportive and empowering, where respect is the foundation and teamwork the norm, where communication is clear and honest, where diversity of perspective is welcomed, and where people are meaningfully recognized for the outcomes of their work. This is the kind of environment that the BC Public Service strives to create in each work unit, and in each ministry. (J. Munroe, personal communication, July 24, 2009)

The PSA has a desire to “build a true culture of innovation—one in which every employee feels the opportunity and responsibility to constantly seek better ways to do the work of the public service” (BC PSA, n.d a, p. 24). The goal is to empower employees

“at every level to bring forward ideas for improvement and requiring managers and executives to consider those ideas, . . . [which] in turn, will also help build employee engagement” (BC PSA, n.d.a, p. 24). The BC government comments, “We need to be a place where we mine the value found in failure as well as success . . . [and] we need to be a place where ideas can be freely exchanged, expanded and explored” (BC PSA, n.d.b, p. 2).

The PSA literature reflects a belief that the change and growth of the organization is enhanced when employees feel empowered to provide their innovative ideas. However, there is more to effective change than providing ideas: the organizational culture must facilitate the generation of these ideas and there needs to be support for implementation of the ideas. “Empowering also means reducing bureaucratic constraints that will impede [people’s] efforts and providing the resources necessary for them to implement change successfully” (Yukl, 2006, p. 180). Having processes that facilitate employee participation in all the stages of change promotes both the generation and the proffering of ideas as well as their implementation. However, there is no specific reference in the PSA’s resources to the value of empowerment on effective change, engagement, and innovation. This research project also examined the role of empowerment in the PSB through conversations with participants.

My research into change and employee engagement is significant because effective leadership is needed to “facilitate adaptation to a changing environment” (Yukl, 2006, p. 157). This project provides leaders in the PSB with information to assist them to effectively manage change. The BC PSA has stated that its primary goal is to increase the quality of service that is delivered to the public, and having engaged employees is seen as

integral to achieving this goal (BC PSA, n.d.a). This research project provided insight into the impact of change on employee engagement and the impact that employee engagement might have on change outcomes. This project also provided opportunities for new experiences, challenges, growth, and learning for all the research participants: the organization, its employees, and me.

The environment in the ministry where I work is ever changing, and the findings of the research will aid in supporting the effectiveness of leadership through times of organizational change. By agreeing to this evaluation of change initiatives using action research, my project sponsor demonstrated a commitment to reflection and continuous learning. Both the organization's representative and I participated in "intended self-study in action" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 49). Action research is "likely to produce insights that could not be gleaned in other ways" (p. 54). Action research has provided a view of what change experiences were like for the people participating in them. In turn, by gaining a deeper understanding of who people are and what is going on inside the organization (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998), the effectiveness of the organization's approach to change is better informed.

The findings of the project might also aid in developing systemic processes that support participation and employee engagement in my organization. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) refer to this as "second-person research" (p. 68), which is "of benefit to the organization" (p. 68). In addition, if the research contributes "to general theory for the broader academic community" (p. 68), it would then be considered "third-person research" (p. 68).

An added benefit of this research has been to support empowerment and participation in the organizational culture. Stringer (2007) wrote that empowerment and participation are fundamental to the action research approach, which gives research participants a voice.

This project has also provided opportunities for me to gain experience and knowledge in action research and the topics of organizational change and employee engagement. The PSB rated well in the 2009 WES, as demonstrated in WES results in Appendix A. PSB was a valuable place to learn what engages employees. In addition, I shared in the empowerment and professional development that were gained from the participatory approach of the research.

Through facilitating the research project I also gained experience in overcoming the resistance to concrete experimentation that was identified in my Kolb Learning Style Survey results (Experience Based Learning Systems, n.d.). The research experience has led to increased confidence, which will enable me to approach people about my ideas with less hesitation in the future. I have also had the opportunity to apply the knowledge I acquired through the Master of Arts in Leadership program to a workplace setting and see theories and skills in action. Without the insights provided by this research project, leaders in the PSB might be less prepared to effectively meet the demand for change and innovation, and I would not have had the opportunity to further develop my own leadership skills.

#### Systems Analysis of the Opportunity

The BC Government is currently experiencing changes that are arising from economic and demographic realities found on global, national, and provincial levels. The

government is facing pressures caused from reduced revenues and a growing number of citizens requesting services. This impacts every level of government, including the MHSD where my research project was set.

For instance, due to the international and domestic economic situation, the number of people applying for and receiving income assistance from the MHSD is rising. Also, the ministry's disability caseload has steadily increased in recent years. This trend is expected to continue due to an increasing proportion of the population being more prone to illness as it ages, longer life expectancies for individuals experiencing significant health issues, and the impact of serious conditions such as HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and drug and alcohol dependencies (Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance [MEIA], 2008).

In addition, the BC Government overall is expected to lose 35% of its bargaining unit staff and 45% of its management staff due to retirement by 2015 (BC PSA, n.d.a). It is predicted that by 2015, approximately 60% of the senior leaders in the BC PSA will have fewer than 5 years experience, compared to an average of 16 years experience today (BC PSA, n.d.a, p. 25). Owing to its interest in maintaining services to the BC public, the BC PSA in its *Human Resources Plan 2008/2009–2010/2011* is looking at the role of employee engagement in employee recruitment and retention, with the primary goal of improving engagement being to improve service delivery to citizens.

Adapting to these increased caseloads and demographic factors will require changes in MHSD, a ministry that has already undergone a significant degree of structural, staffing, and legislative change in recent years. As my research related to the impact of ministry changes on employee engagement, it is important to have an

understanding of factors that are related to decision-making and change in the ministry's system as outlined in this section.

The BC Government has a defined hierarchical structure and, as a ministry within the BC Government, the MHSD follows this structure. Decisions are typically made from the top downwards with input being considered from all levels. When a change directive is given from higher up in the hierarchy, a way is generally found to bring that direction to fruition. It is not always easy for the people who are impacted by these changes to understand or appreciate the reasoning behind the direction. The ability to do this is often referred to as seeing the big picture, which involves understanding that external system considerations influence the government's decision-making. Some of the external considerations that influence the activities of the MHSD are described below.

In 2005, the BC Government identified five "Great Goals for a Golden Decade" (Government of British Columbia, Office of the Premier, 2005, ¶ 3) that direct the government's work. The goals are:

1. Make B.C. the best-educated, most literate place in North America.
2. Make B.C. a model for healthy living and physical fitness.
3. Build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk, and seniors.
4. Lead the world in sustainable environmental management.
5. Lead Canada in job creation. (¶ 4)

The work of BC Government ministries are aligned with the five goals, and the MHSD plays a leadership role in developing the cross-ministry Disability Strategy that supports Great Goal number three (MEIA, 2008). This goal influences many decisions made by the MHSD.

In addition, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (1996) directs the government's privacy and access obligations in relation to information

(Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Labour and Citizen's Services, 2009).

These obligations impact on all the activities of the MHSD and were also a factor in my research. Awareness of this legislation was necessary when it came to using ministry documents and reporting on research findings.

The BC PSA espouses the values of curiosity, teamwork, passion, service, accountability, innovation, with an overarching commitment to integrity, to make the public service better in our responsibilities to the people of BC (BC PSA, n.d a): "These are the values we expect ourselves and each other to demonstrate and apply, no matter what our role is in the BC Public Service" (p. 26). MHSD also espouses the principle of active employee participation (MHSD, 2005). Therefore, it was important to frame my major project in terms of its relationship to these values and their purpose so that my project sponsor saw the research as congruent with, and promoting, these espoused values.

Considerations also arose that were related to following the appropriate protocols, building trust, having access to information, relationship dynamics, and being aware of biases that I have. The hierarchical structure of the government and MHSD results in protocols regarding contacting people and obtaining permissions for research-related activities. I built trust with my project sponsor by demonstrating that I am aware of and sensitive to the boundaries, roles, and responsibilities of different positions and divisions.

As Block (2000) writes, the client's primary question is often:

Is this . . . someone that I can trust? Is this someone I can trust not to hurt me, not to con me—someone who can both help solve the organizational or technical problems I have and, at the same time, be considerate of my position and person? (p. 38)

Being ignorant of protocols, or not following protocols for some other reason, has the potential to make people distrustful about what other norms the researcher may not be aware of or may not be willing to challenge.

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) indicate that as an insider action researcher there are also some advantages to having a relationship and a degree of trust already established within the organization. They go on to suggest that this may impact on accessibility, credibility, commitment, and familiarity with the research context and personnel. Barriers and difficulties are also connected to the insider research position. Glesne (2006) writes that ethical dilemmas may arise from the researcher being in a privileged position in the organization. This may lead to temptations of crossing ethical boundaries, such as obtaining information as a covert observer. Glesne also writes about political dilemmas, such as negotiating with colleagues and superiors about what data could be collected and reported and “dangerous knowledge” (p. 32), information that “is politically risky to hold, particularly for an insider” (p. 32).

I encountered ethical and political issues in my project because I was conducting research with work colleagues and because I was dealing with topics that are considered sensitive by the employer. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) write that the researcher could be caught between the different roles that he or she plays (i.e., employee, researcher, and coworker) and that the detachment of each role could increase and decrease as the research progresses. When confronted with such issues I responded in a self-differentiated way. Elizur (as cited in Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 65) uses the term self-differentiation to describe how he, as an insider consultant, managed: (a) to contain emotions and to relate to emotionally charged issues in a balanced way, and (b) to

maintain his own autonomy and self-identity in these situations. Coghlan and Brannick describe advantages and disadvantages that arise from wanting to influence and change the organization and from having empathy for colleagues. They write that this interest could sustain the researcher's energy, but may also lead to erroneous conclusions (p. 66). Coghlan and Brannick also identify the dilemma of the researcher reporting what has been found. The researcher may have to deal with the aftermath of the report with superiors and colleagues or may choose to doctor the report to save his or her job (p. 66).

An employer's hierarchical structure could lead to competition for resources, jobs, titles, and prestige (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 197), which may result in issues that the researcher has to deal with. In my research, I was aware that competitiveness in the culture could lead to sensitivity around perceptions of favouritism. For instance, I anticipated that peers might wonder if my work time was being spent on the research project, which would impact their workloads. In addition, I considered that there might be some resentment if anyone felt that I had been unfairly given an opportunity to work on a project that may result in an opportunity for career advancement.

I dealt with these system-related issues and concerns by promoting open and authentic communication with the people involved in the research about what we were experiencing and by communicating the needs and the benefits of the research project. Block (2000) writes, "Authentic behaviour leads to higher trust, higher leverage, and higher client commitment" (p. 38), as well as having the advantage of being incredibly simple, in that it means putting "into words what you are experiencing" (p. 38). In addition, I was very clear in my invitation to participate that the research was not a

ministry initiative, so people understood that this was not being done as part of my employment.

### Organizational Context

This project was an examination of change and its impact on employee engagement in the PSB of the MHSD. To describe the organizational context, which framed this research inquiry, some details are provided about the BC Government, the MHSD, and the PSB.

The BC Government is the province's largest corporate employer, with approximately 30,000 employees in the BC PSA. There are approximately 200 different types of jobs in 280 communities in BC (BC PSA, n.d.a). For the last 2 consecutive years, the BC PSA has been named one of BC's Top 50 employers (BC PSA, n.d.a, p. 35). The government points to the impact that the BC PSA has in BC by highlighting such achievements throughout the province as:

- Overseeing the maintenance and improvement of more than 42,000 kilometres of provincial roads and 2,750 bridges, tunnels and snowsheds.
- Managing more than 850 provincial parks and protected areas.
- Providing 166,000 hours of trials and hearings a year in 26 Supreme Court and 87 Provincial Court locations.
- Development of strategies to reduce BC's greenhouse gas emissions by one third by 2020, and making the BC Public Service carbon neutral by 2010. (BC PSA, n.d.a, p. 20)

The BC Government's structure is hierarchical, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The senior public servant in the PSA is the Deputy Minister to the Premier, and the senior politician is the Premier. Within the government there are 19 ministries, each headed by a deputy minister. Each deputy minister is accountable to a minister and to the Deputy Minister of the PSA (MHSD, 2010c).

The MHSD was created in June 2008 with a cabinet restructuring that combined the Government of BC, Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) with other ministries and divisions from other ministries (Government of British Columbia, Office of the Premier, 2008). Before becoming MHSD, MEIA had approximately 2,000 staff. The MHSD *2010/2011-2012/2013 Service Plan* of March 2010 is on the ministry's public website (MHSD, 2010a).

The service plan sets out the MHSD goals and related objectives and strategies (MHSD, 2010a). As described in the plan, “the Ministry of Housing and Social Development is responsible for delivering an integrated continuum of housing and social development programs, while safeguarding public interest in its areas of responsibility” (p. 6). The service plan explains that the ministry's programs, services, and areas of responsibility contribute to two primary goals: (a) provide an integrated system of housing and social development supports, and (b) safeguard public interest (p. 9). The service plan also sets out the objectives and performance measures that will be used to meet these goals. Two objectives that are closely linked to the work of the PSB are to (a) provide income assistance for those in need, and (b) provide an effective system of supports and services for adults with disabilities (pp. 9–11).

The following vision and mission statements are found on the ministry's website (MHSD, 2005). The ministry's vision statement is: “A province in which British Columbians in need are assisted to achieve their social and economic potential” (Vision section, ¶ 1). The ministry's mission is: “To focus on the customer by transforming the way we deliver services in employment and assistance, using effective and outcome based practices, and working in collaboration with ministries, other levels of government

and service agencies” (Mission section, ¶ 1). In carrying out its mission, MHSD is guided by the following principles:

- Personal responsibility
- Active participation
- Innovative partnerships
- Citizen confidence
- Fairness and transparency
- Clear outcomes; and
- Accountability for results. (MHSD, 2005, Principles section, ¶ 2)

In 2008, the BC PSA values of “courage, passion, service, teamwork, accountability and curiosity” (BC PSA, n.d.a, p. 26) were adopted throughout the BC Public Service, and these superseded the previously specified MHSD values of people, personal responsibility, respect and empathy, equity and fairness, accountability, and transparency and open communication (R. Willows, personal communication, January 12, 2007).

The participants in the research are employed in units that were all formerly in the PSB. Due to reorganizing over the past year, Region 1 of the Regional Services Division now also includes some provincial services. The PSB is composed of the Health Assistance Branch, the Contact Centre, and the Executive office. The Reconsideration Branch is also part of the Regional Services Division, but not the PSB. The Regional Services Division’s primary responsibility is the delivery of programs and services throughout the province. The division has five regions with approximately 65 MHSD Offices and 24 additional service outlets located within those regions. The division’s services include: Employment Programs, Temporary Assistance, Disability Assistance, and Supplementary Assistance (MHSD, 2010d). The Regional Services Division has approximately 1,500 employees (M. Moccia, personal communication, January 29, 2010).

The research participants work in one of four units: the Health Assistance Branch, the Reconsideration Branch, and the Contact Centre. Each of the units has a hierarchical structure and is headed by a manager or director. The Executive office is headed by the Executive Director, and also has an administrative assistant, and a project officer. Positions in the other units include senior adjudicators, adjudicators, branch administrators, and other administrative support staff. Following is a synopsis of the four units.

The Health Assistance Branch is a large branch, with 38 employees. The primary function of the Health Assistance Branch is the processing and adjudication of a high volume of requests from ministry clients for the disability designation and health supplements such as medical supplies, medical equipment, and nutritional supplements. Most of the employees are in adjudicator and administrative positions. There is also a director, an adjudication supervisor, senior adjudicators, and an administrative supervisor. The age of employees in the Health Assistance Branch range from early 30s to near retirement, and the staff has a number of female employees: 8 of the 36 employees are men. There is also a range of governmental experience. The director has government, non-government agency, and armed forces experience, and he has been with the PSB for two years. In terms of recent change initiatives, over the past 4 years the Health Assistance Branch has had significant changes in management and structure.

The Reconsideration Branch has 12 employees: a branch administrator, a senior reconsideration officer, eight reconsideration officers, and two reconsideration clerks. All the employees are women. Management of the branch is one of the duties of the Region 1 program and policy implementation manager, who is male. The role of the

Reconsideration Branch is to reconsider denial decisions made by the ministry when a request for a reconsideration is made by a ministry client. Until March 2009, the Reconsideration Branch was responsible for reconsidering the Health Assistance Branch's denial decisions, and applications for qualification as a person with persistent multiple barriers. Beginning in March 2009 the Reconsideration Branch also began reconsidering denial decisions that are made by ministry offices throughout the province for other ministry services, which has approximately doubled the annual number of reconsiderations conducted by the branch.

The Contact Centre has 32 staff, including the manager, the call centre acting supervisor, a supervisor of administration, and 29 employment and assistance workers. Of these staff, 7 are men. The centre doubled in size when two teams merged. There was a change in the scope of services, a change in location, and changes in position titles and duties. Currently, the Contact Centre deals with over 10,000 telephone calls a month from people asking for information regarding the Healthy Kids program, the dental program, the Seniors Supplement program, the Bus Pass program, personal supports information, people living in Regions 4 and 5 applying for hardship assistance while awaiting employment insurance, and enquiries from people receiving income assistance program who are in Region 1 of the MHSD.

#### The Project Sponsor

The organizational sponsor for my major research project was Debi Upton, the executive director of the PSB. Debi responded enthusiastically to my enquiry into whether she would be the sponsor for my major project, and she believed in the potential benefit of the study for the organization. My sponsor arranged for me to have access to

internal documentation that I needed for my research, and, although she has a very busy schedule, she was committed to our learner–sponsor relationship.

There were a number of advantages to having Debi as my project sponsor. For instance, her straightforwardness and openness, her background in a variety of government roles, and her comfort with change resulted in a generative learning experience for me. She helped me to navigate some of the ethical and political dilemmas that I encountered as a “backyard researcher” (Glesne, 2006, p. 32), some of which are outlined below.

The questioning that is fundamental to action research may have been “threatening to existing organizational norms, particularly in those organizations that lean towards a hierarchical control structure” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 70). Coghlan and Brannick write, “Gaining access, using data, disseminating and publishing reports are intensely political acts” (p. 70).

To promote openness and trust in these areas, I demonstrated political astuteness and worked in ways that were “in keeping with the political conditions without compromising the project or [my] own career” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 71). To alleviate any concerns that my project sponsor might have had regarding my research, I demonstrated that I was aware of the sensitivity of the issues that I was examining, and that I am reasonable and considerate of my employer’s interests, concerns, and constraints (including the fact that people’s time is at a premium). I communicated clearly and negotiated authentically with my sponsor in terms of my research needs and the needs of the organization, the benefits of the research to the organization, the scope of the research and who participates in it (Royal Roads University, 2009b). Block (2000)

writes that authentic behaviour, “putting into words what you are experiencing with the client as you work” (p. 37), increases trust and commitment. Therefore, my authenticity in my interactions with my sponsor was one key to the success of the project.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of my research was based around the research question: What fosters and maintains employee engagement during organizational change in the Provincial Services Branch (PSB) of the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD)?

The following research subquestions also guided this research:

1. What engages PSB employees?
2. How have organizational changes over the last year impacted employee engagement in the PSB?
3. What lessons learned about fostering and maintaining employee engagement could be applicable to other areas of the ministry that are implementing change?

To conduct the investigation of these questions, I needed to have a thorough understanding of three relevant topics: employee engagement, organizational culture, and organizational development and change. I became familiar with the topics by reviewing related literature, and my key findings are outlined in this chapter.

### Employee Engagement

Effective leaders understand that engaged employees are an important factor in effective organizations (Ahlrichs, 2007; Rutledge, 2005; Welbourne, 2003). This section explains the concept of employee engagement as it is used in my research by presenting an overview of the evolution of employee engagement, definitions of employee engagement, the benefits of employee engagement, the factors that drive engagement, and information on assessing employee engagement.

*The Evolution of Employee Engagement*

In this section, I explain the evolution of employee engagement and why it will continue to be relevant as organizations move into the future. Employee engagement is a relatively new term representing an idea that was developed “by consultancies and survey houses, rather than academia” (Rafferty et al., as cited in 4-consulting, 2007, p. 6). However, the study of employee engagement is now found in organizations throughout the world (Dulye, 2007). Melcrum Publishing (as cited in 4-consulting, 2007) conducted a global survey of over 1,000 communication and human resources practitioners and found that 74% of them began to formally focus on employee engagement between 2000 and 2004 (p. 6). In its 2007/2008 survey of 1,625 communication and human resources practitioners, Melcrum Publishing (2008) found that 81% of organizations worldwide now have employee engagement on their agenda.

The concept of employee engagement evolved from other human resources research. Bernthal (2004) proposes that the concept of engagement has naturally evolved from research on high involvement, empowerment, job motivation, organizational commitment, and trust (p. 1). Bernthal finds that “all these research streams relate to the employees’ perceptions and attitudes about the work environment . . . [and] in some ways are all variations on the same fundamental issues” (p. 1).

Employee commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) are two well-researched precursors to the concept of employee engagement. OCBs are positive behaviours that employees exhibit within the organization. Three OCBs have been identified as leading in performance: helping behaviours, sportsmanship, and civic virtue (4-consulting, 2007, p. 8). The focus of OCBs is on securing commitment and

involvement which lies outside contractual parameters, often referred to as the individual “going the extra mile” (p. 8). This is also a focus shared by employee engagement.

The underpinnings of employee engagement also reflect a mind shift from the expectation of the one-employer career that existed before the 1980s (Rutledge, 2005, p. 54). As the expectations of continuous employment are now often unfounded, employees expect that their careers will be characterized by several employment experiences of relatively short duration. The long-term hierarchical view is being replaced by the need for short-term negotiation. Since organizations still need to take a long-term view, this results in some misalignment between the interests of the employer and the employees (Rutledge, 2005).

In terms of the future of employee engagement, “The level of interest generated indicates that it is more than a passing management fad” (4-consulting, 2007, p. 6). Welbourne (2003) asserts that the difference between employee engagement as a human resources fad and a useful process is movement from ownership by corporate human resources to ownership by managers and employees. This involves engagement by “leadership through example” (Welbourne, 2003, p. 3).

You can't have engaged employees without having super engaged managers. Engagement improving efforts must start at the top and work their way down. . . . Because this process of top-down engagement is owned by each level of management, each manager benefits from the process, and they share the benefits with their own employees. In this learning process, managers “own” employee engagement. (Welbourne, 2003, p. 3)

In addition, Rutledge (2005) proposes that engaged organizations create engaged managers (p. 56). The field of employee engagement continues to evolve. One emerging area in employee engagement research is that of generational factors and the benefits of

reigniting engagement in long-term employees rather than having staff coast to retirement (Ahlrichs, 2007).

### *Defining Employee Engagement*

The essence of employee engagement is captured in this quote from Maxim Gorky (as cited in Rutledge, 2005): “When work is a pleasure, life is a joy. When work is a duty, life is slavery” (p. 4). Although there are many basic and complex definitions of employee engagement, there are common themes contained within them.

Engagement, motivation, and commitment are interwoven. As defined in the Webster’s New World Dictionary (Neufeldt & Guralink, 1988), to motivate is to incite or impel (p. 887), to be committed is “to bind as by a promise; pledge; engage” (p. 281), and being engaged is to be “voluntarily committed or personally involved” (p. 450).

Voluntary involvement is key to engagement. Wheatley (2005) states that accountability, focus, teamwork, and quality are behaviours that people choose, depending on how connected they feel to the organization: “People can’t be punished or paid into these behaviors. Either they are contributed or withheld by individuals as they choose whether and how they will work with us. Every employee, in this sense, is a volunteer” (p. 157).

As described in *Employee Engagement in the Public Sector* (4-consulting, 2007), “Engagement is a two-way interaction between the employee and the organisation, and ... employees can be motivated and committed without necessarily being engaged” (p. 5).

Grensing-Pophal (2002) writes, “Today’s employers and managers need to find ways of engaging employees so that they feel a part of the workplace and will be committed and loyal to the company” (p. 154). Grensing-Pophal goes on to say that employees become engaged “by being provided with opportunities to participate in decision-making, and by

seeing ways in which they can advance in the company, increasing the impact that they, individually, have on the organization” (p. 155).

The terms engagement, motivation, and commitment in the literature are somewhat interchangeable. Authors refer to engaging employees (Rutledge, 2005; Vanstone, 2007), and motivating employees (Thomas, 2002; Gensing-Pophal, 2002). Bruce (2006) writes about motivating employees to become engaged. However, as described by Gensing-Pophal, one of the desirable outcomes of motivating employees is having employees who work harder, and this also describes one of the desirable outcomes of having engaged employees. Engaged employees are motivated to “give it their all” (Bernthal, 2004, p. 1), to exert discretionary effort, and achieve results for the good of the organization (4-consulting, 2007). Engaged employees show care and pride in the organization and act as though they own it (Sheppard, Canning, Tuchinsky, & Campbell, 2006, p. 66); they do more than the job description requires, and they stay with the organization (Ahlrichs, 2007, p. 25). In *Essential Techniques for Employee Engagement* (Vanstone, 2007), engagement is described as meaning “excitement, anxiety, ideas, disagreements, diversity, discontinuity, innovation, experimentation, localized decision making, [and] power-sharing across all levels of the organization” (p. 29).

#### *The Benefits of Employee Engagement*

Rutledge (2005) presents that “organizations [that] provide engaging employment experiences will be tomorrow’s winners” (p. 124). The engaged employee is happy to do more and is committed to the employer (Ahlrichs, 2007; Gibbons, 2006). The Corporate Leadership Council 2004 study (as cited in Ahlrichs, 2007) of 50,000 employees in 100 organizations showed that with higher employee engagement:

Discretionary effort increased by 60%  
Performance increased by 20%  
Intent to stay with the organization increased five-fold. (p. 13)

There is also research indicating that engaged employees are likely to have reduced absenteeism and accidents and higher customer loyalty, profitability of sales per employee, market value, and gross return on capital (Schaffer, as cited in Ahlrichs, 2007, p. 14).

Conversely, bored, frustrated, or disengaged employees achieve only a minimum performance and have the potential to bring the rest of the team down as well (Sheppard et al., 2006, p. 3). As there is a greater focus in today's organizations on doing more with less, there is a requirement for increased innovation and productivity (Ahlrichs, 2007). Ahlrichs posits that, in these times, the engaged employee is the only sustainable competitive advantage for any organization.

Greising-Pophal (2002) also makes the point that motivating employees is still important when an economy is poor, and there is an employer's market:

Motivation isn't only a recruitment and retention issue. It's a performance issue. Remember, motivation is a tool to generate high performance that will result in the accomplishment of the organization's objectives. Regardless of how well the economy is doing, what company doesn't want to perform at higher levels than expected? (p. 20)

Another benefit of engagement is that it can involve low, or no, costs. Greising-Pophal (2002) writes, "Employees often cite the intangible or soft aspects of corporate culture as having a strong influence on their commitment" (p. 146). "Money may make a position seem very attractive, but in the absence of other non-monetary aspects of a job, it won't be enough to keep an employee happy" (p. 17). Motivators of engagement are examined in the following section.

*The Drivers of Engagement in the Workplace*

To promote and sustain engagement, it is necessary to understand what drives individuals to be engaged. There are many potential engagement drivers for employees in the workplace, and what engages each person varies on an individual basis (Ahlrichs, 2007; Grensing-Pophal, 2002). Rather than going into depth regarding specific workplace drivers, this section provides general understanding of the topic.

Employee engagement is considered “a two-way interaction between the employee and the employer” (4-consulting, 2007, p. 5). Before the 2000s, organizational loyalty was considered a significant motivator of employees. However, through such phenomena as downsizing, it became apparent to most people that the concept of organizational loyalty was based on a one-way relationship, and that “loyalty to the organization was not a long-term secure prospect” (Quinlan, 2007, p. 90).

Engagement is a two-way contract. And while our organizations are very keen to ensure people are engaged, how engaged is the organization with people?

Until the organization becomes engaged and concerned about the well-being of its employees, engagement is going to be a limited concept – and one doomed to fail in the same manner as “loyalty” did.

To borrow a truism from knowledge management, “Engagement can only be volunteered, not conscripted.” But before that can happen, there must be a level of trust, which itself only arises through a sense of being seen and heard. (Quinlan, 2007, p. 90)

There are many factors that may drive engagement, for instance: (a) financial interest, professional self-interest, and valuing, enjoying, and believing in one’s work (Buchanan, as cited in 4-consulting, 2007, p. 11); (b) trust and integrity, work–life balance, decision-making authority, teamwork, recognition, fairness and equality, and shared values with the organization (Gibbons, 2006); (c) feeling connected to the results, and having the possibility of innovating and achievement (Ahlrichs, 2007); (d) operating in an efficient work environment; and (e) receiving interpersonal support (Bernthal,

2004). Rainey and Steinbauer (as cited in Vandenabeele, 2008) define public service motivation as “a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation or humankind” (p. 5). This was also reflected in the literature review conducted for the Scottish Executive (4-consulting, 2007). More public sector workers found their work worthwhile and personally meaningful. The review also found,

There is a surprisingly limited amount of research commenting on variances in employee engagement between the public and private sectors. This may relate to the fact that there is more in common between the public and private sectors than there is variation and the principles of engagement tend to be generic across both sectors. (4-consulting, 2007, p. 16)

Although there are general commonalities in what motivates and engages employees, this will vary with each individual (4-consulting, 2007). For instance, a manager may be motivated differently than someone she supervises.

One manager tells of the insights she obtained after a department meeting in which she encouraged employees to share with her examples of what made them feel motivated. While her staff was motivated by recognition, hand-written notes, feedback on doing a good job, she was motivated by the opportunity to take on a new project or being assigned a new challenge. Guess how she was attempting to motivate her staff. Guess how that was working! (Grensing-Pophal, 2002, p. 17)

In addition, Gibbons (2006) states that the engagement of the employee might be based on either, or both of, an emotional or an intellectual connection. Buchanan (2004) describes the results of the Corporate Leadership Council survey of 50,000 employees in 2004. The survey found that emotional commitment, which arises when employees value, enjoy and believe in what they do, has four times the power to affect performance than rational commitment, which relates to the employees’ financial, developmental, or professional self-interest. As reported by Buchanan, the survey also found,

About 11% of the workforce, called “true believers” by the [Corporate Leadership Council] demonstrate very high degrees of both commitment types; another 13% demonstrate depressingly little. Workers on the bad end of the bell curve are four times more likely to leave the organization than average employees, says the

report, which dubs this group “the disaffected.” The remaining 76% are moderates, who generally exhibit a strong commitment to one person or element of their jobs but can take or leave the rest. This group neither shirks nor strives; its intent to leave is variable. (¶ 3)

Gibbons (2006) also contends that employees may be engaged in one or more of the following: their jobs, their co-workers, the organization, or a manager. All of these involve the organization and its leadership in some way: the organization provides the jobs that people do and determines what tasks they will do; the organization hires the co-workers and managers and has an influence on the nature of the relationships that develop; and the organization decides on its identity, its values, and the nature of the work that is done.

The workplace environment influences engagement, and leadership plays a role in creating the environment. Ahlrichs (2007) states that an organization’s treatment of its employees has the greatest impact in forming employee engagement, and she states that the manager sets the stage for an engaged workforce. Rutledge (2005) suggests that engagement takes place on macro- and micro-levels, with the macro-level representing what the organizations do to promote employee engagement, and the micro-level being what managers do to foster engagement, whether or not macro-engagement is present. Rutledge states that the manager is the most important factor in an employee’s willingness to engage, and that employees engage first with the work environment, and then with the work.

Melcrum Publishing (2008) conducted a worldwide survey of 1,625 communication and human resource professionals. Of the organizations that conduct a key driver analysis 33%, senior leadership and direct supervisors were most commonly cited as key drivers, with 23% of the large organizations identifying senior leadership as

a key driver, and 25% identifying direct supervisors as key drivers. Compensation and benefits were identified as a key driver by 11% of the larger organizations. Other authors also emphasize a strong correlation between managerial talent and employee engagement (Welbourne, 2003; Vandenabeele, 2008).

Welbourne (2003) contends that, to effectively engage people in the workplace, leaders must ask themselves, “What are we doing to engage employees” (p. 2)?

Engagement cannot be a corporate initiative. Employee engagement happens only when you remove barriers to work, and those barriers are unique to every work group. We often think that super important corporate initiatives will transform our organizations into places where everyone will come to work and want to be more engaged. Corporate initiatives can’t make the magic. (p. 2)

Welbourne goes on to say, “In order for engagement to be something other than a fad, we need to be specific in helping managers, and our solutions have to be customized to help each individual manager” (p. 2). She also writes, “Engagement will happen when each individual manager learns what is getting in the way of his/her employees’ performance, and each manager chooses to take action” (p. 4).

When we don’t give managers something specific to do about engagement that is within their control, then the owners of the engagement process are corporate [human resources]. If corporate [human resources] owns employee engagement, it will be a fad. If you tie engagement to day-to-day management work, then managers and employees themselves own engagement. Only when managers own engagement will it not be a fad. (Welbourne, 2003, pp. 2–3)

Bruce (2006) suggests that managers uncover the reasons that employees do things, their purposes and causes. “It’s your responsibility to find out what your employees’ motives are, then help them connect those motives to your organization’s goals and objectives. When you do this, you will also be positively affecting each worker’s performance on the job” (p. 9). One tool to facilitate this is the Retention Risk

Assessment (as cited in Grensing-Pophal, 2002), which asks managers 15 questions about their employees, such as,

Do you know why this person works for the company and not somewhere else? . . .  
 . Do you have an open, trusting, respectful relationship with this person? . . .  
 Managers who cannot answer “yes” to the . . . questions are at an increased risk of losing employees. (p. 30)

### *Assessing Employee Engagement*

To foster and maintain employee engagement, organizations need to assess the engagement levels of employees. Identifying strengths and weaknesses related to employee engagement is important so that corrective action can be taken (4-consulting, 2007, p. 3). Input from employees will expose disengagement factors in the culture that interfere with productivity and innovation (Ahlrichs, 2007). However, continuous measurement of employee engagement is seen as only one of four factors in the process of engagement; the organization also needs continuous learning, continuous improvement, and continuous action processes to maximize productivity (Ahlrichs, 2007).

There are numerous ways to assess employee engagement. The organization may use surveys, focus groups, and online communication (4-consulting, 2007), as well as regular retention interviews using open-questions that discover why well-performing employee’s are staying (Rutledge, 2005). Ahlrichs (2007) recommends conducting a cultural audit before beginning an engagement effort and then every 6 to 12 months thereafter to measure progress. She also suggests that, because the manager sets the stage for an engaged workforce, employee engagement should be used as a metric for manager selection, development, and recognition.

Ahlichs (2007) cautions that it is important to focus on results-oriented metrics, rather than on measuring activity. Relevant metrics are developed with input from employees and focus on the outcomes that result from employee engagement: customer satisfaction; employee contributions to the organization's strategic goals via employee, vendor, or other referrals or ideas; and delivery of quality and quantity while adhering to the organizations values and branding statement.

Welbourne's (2003) view is that organizations try to measure engagement without necessarily helping individual managers affect engagement in their day-to-day work. "We are good at providing managers with engagement scores, but we are not quite so good at giving them things that they can use to change engagement" (p. 2).

### Organizational Culture

The nature of an organization influences its ability to cope with organizational development and change, and to engage employees. The literature reviewed in this section presents the work of several authors whose perspectives on organizational culture are relevant to my research on engagement and change in a government organization. Schein (1992) provides a general view of organizational culture, and Cameron and Quinn (2006) and Leavitt (2005) discuss how hierarchy-based cultures work with other types of organizational cultures. Wheatley (2005) proposes that self-organizing, which is used by natural living systems, results in organizations that are experts in the process of change. Outlined in the section are definitions of organizational culture, approaches to understanding and analyzing an organization's culture, and the role of leadership in forming and sustaining the culture in an organization.

### *Defining Organizational Culture*

There are many descriptions of organizational culture in the literature. Schein (1992) states, “The word culture has many meanings and connotations. . . . Most people have a connotative sense of what culture is but have difficulty defining it abstractly” (pp. 7–8). Deal and Kennedy (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2003) describe that, at its most basic, organizational culture can be described as “the way we do things around here” (p. 4). Schein’s formal definition of the culture of a group is:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 12)

Cameron and Quinn (2006) write,

[Organizational culture] reflects the prevailing ideology that people carry inside their heads. It conveys a sense of identity to employees, provides unwritten and often unspoken guidelines for how to get along in the organization, and it enhances the stability of the social system. (p. 16)

Wheatley (2005) does not use the term organizational culture in *Finding Our Way*, but her description of an organization’s “self” (p. 37) and identity resemble the concept of organizational culture as described by Schein (1992).

All organization efforts begin with an intent, a belief that something more is possible now that the group is together. Organizing occurs around an identity—there is a “self” that gets organized. Once this identity is set in motion, it becomes the sense-making process of the organization. In deciding what to do, a system will refer back to its sense of self. We all interpret events and data according to who we think we are. (Wheatley, 2005, p. 37)

Wheatley goes on to say,

The self the organization references includes its vision, mission, and values. But there is more. An organization’s identity includes current interpretations of its history, present decisions and activities, and its sense of its future. Identity is both what we want to believe is true and what we want to believe is true and what our actions show to be true about ourselves. (p. 38)

Although these authors may not wholly agree on the terminology involved with the definition of organizational culture, there are themes that are common to the concept. The roots of an organization's culture are deep within the organization, and difficult to recognize. However, they are visibly reflected throughout the organization in several ways, such as language, reactions to events, and processes. To affect engagement or change in an organization, it is important to acknowledge and understand its cultural foundation.

### *Understanding an Organization's Culture*

Varying perspectives on how to analyze an organization's culture and understand the impact of its culture on an organization's effectiveness are linked to the definitions outlined in the previous section. Schein (1992) provides a general understanding of the concept of organizational culture and a description of the difference between organizational culture and organizational structure. Cameron and Quinn (2006) propose that an organization's culture can be analyzed using four cultural views: the clan culture, the adhocracy culture, the market culture, and the hierarchy culture. Leavitt (2005) argues that hierarchy will continue to be a fixture in our organizations. Wheatley (2005) asserts that humanity needs a self-organizing approach that is rooted in living systems rather than control and imposition.

Organization culture is instrumental in an organization's overall effectiveness (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). It influences an organization's leadership style (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Leavitt, 2005; Wheatley, 2005), as well as its ability to change (Cameron & Quinn, 2006) and to innovate (Estrin, 2009; Zoghi, Mohr, & Meyer, 2007). To enhance effectiveness in an organization, it is important to understand its culture. Schein (1992)

concludes, “Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but is essential to leaders if they are to lead” (p. 15). An individual’s mental models can be brought to the surface and challenged so that they can be improved and this is also true of an organization’s mental models (Senge, 2006): “If mental models can impede learning—freezing companies and industries in outmoded practices—why can’t they also help to accelerate learning” (p. 167)? Wheatley (2005) describes,

In organizations, problems show up in behaviors, processes, or structures. . . . The problems that we see in organizations are artifacts of much deeper dynamics occurring in the domains of information, relationships, or identity. If we can inquire at this deeper level, if we can inquire into the dynamic heart of organization, both the problem and the solution will be discovered. (p. 42)

Cameron and Quinn write, “Several studies reported that the most frequently cited reason given for failure [of planned organizational change initiatives] was a neglect of the organization’s culture” (p. 1). Chartier (2004) finds that “real change in organizations is most effective when it is structural change” (p. 58).

#### *Schein’s Views on Organizational Culture*

Schein (1992) describes that an organization’s culture is based in the shared assumptions of the organization, and that these assumptions manifest in the organization’s values and structures. He views organizational culture as having three levels. Culture is based on the level of the underlying assumptions: the unconscious perceptions, thoughts, and feeling that are the ultimate source of values and action. Next is the level of the organization’s espoused values, which are the strategies, goals, and philosophies—the espoused justifications. Schein writes that espoused values are often inconsistent with observed behaviour: “Large areas of behavior are often left unexplained, leaving us with a feeling that we understand a piece of the culture but still

do not have the culture as such in hand” (p. 21). The third level encompasses the culture’s artifacts.

[This] includes all the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a new group in an unfamiliar culture. Artifacts . . . include the visible products of the group such as the architecture of its physical environment, its language, its technology and products, its artistic creations, and its style as embodied in clothing, manners of address, emotional displays, myths and stories told about the organization, published lists of values, observable rituals and ceremonies, and so on. For the purposes of cultural analysis this level also includes the visible group and the organizational processes into which such behavior is made routine. (p. 17)

Schein (1992) also makes a distinction between an organization’s culture, and its structure. He proposes that structure is a clear, visible artifact of the culture, but its meaning and significance cannot be determined without further data.

The problem with inferring culture from an existing structure is that one cannot decipher what underlying assumptions initially led to that structure. . . . For example, a highly centralized structure in an organization could result from any of the following assumptions: (1) this is the right way to organize for the primary task; or (2) the leaders believe they have a monopoly on truth, or (3) key positions have to be protected for the leader’s friends and relatives, or (4) people cannot really be trusted (Theory X) and therefore must be tightly controlled, or (5) only hierarchical relationships and clear lines of authority make it possible to run any organization. Such a structure could also result from earlier leaders’ assumptions that have simply become a historical tradition. (p. 181)

An analysis of an organization’s culture may demonstrate that it is not clearly delineated. Schein (1992) posits that subcultures may exist in organizations when they reach a certain size. He writes that the subcultures may be in conflict with each other, such as higher management and union groups. “Yet in spite of such conflict one will find that organizations have common assumptions that come into play when a crisis occurs or when a common enemy is found” (pp. 14–15). Schein also describes the lack of influence that a subculture may have on the larger culture:

Having an innovative subculture within the larger subculture does not guarantee will reexamine or change its culture. The innovative subculture helps in

disconfirming some of the core assumptions, but . . . unless there is sufficient anxiety, guilt, or psychological safety, the top-management culture may remain impervious to the very innovations it has created. (p. 325)

Using Schein's (1992) approach, engagement can be explained as being born out of the unconscious perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that are fundamental to the organization. From this level emerge the values that engage employees, such as recognition, empowerment, innovation, trust, and integrity. These values manifest at a third level as the processes and other artifacts that the organization uses to promote engagement.

*Cameron and Quinn's and Leavitt's Views on Organizational Culture*

Cameron and Quinn (2006) have developed the competing values framework model to analyze organizational culture. Essential to the model are four cultural identities that represent basic assumptions, orientations, and values: the clan culture, the adhocracy culture, the market culture, and the hierarchy culture. Each culture is defined by its emphasis on the following effectiveness criteria: flexibility, discretion, and dynamism; stability, order, and control; an internal orientation, integration, and unity; and an external orientation, differentiation, and rivalry. Values represented by the four cultures differ. For instance, in the hierarchical culture the organizational glue is the formal rules and policies that hold the organization together, and the resulting stability and predictability are desirable for organizations such as government agencies and universities. However, in the adhocracy culture the glue that holds the organization together is commitment to innovation and development, with an emphasis on being cutting edge. In the clan culture, the organization is held together by loyalty and mutual trust, with commitment to the organization running high.

Cameron and Quinn (2006) write that one or more of these culture types dominate an organization (p. 54). The following passage provides a description of the four culture types, and the role of each in a cultural life cycle that Cameron and Quinn suggest new or small organizations tend to progress through.

In the earliest stages of the organizational life cycle, organizations tend to be dominated by the adhocracy quadrant—without formal structure and characterized by entrepreneurship. They are largely devoid of formal policies and structures, and they are often led by a single, powerful, visionary leader. As they develop over time, they supplement that orientation with a clan culture—a family feeling, a strong sense of belonging, and personal identification with the organization. Organization members get many of their social and emotional needs fulfilled in the organization, and a sense of community and personal friendship exists. A potential crisis frequently arises . . . as the organization grows. It eventually finds itself faced with the need to emphasize structure and standard procedures in order to control the expanding responsibilities. Order and predictability are needed, so a shift to a hierarchy culture occurs. That reorientation frequently makes organization members feel that the organization has lost the friendly, personal feeling that once characterized the workplace, and personal satisfaction decreases. The hierarchy orientation is eventually supplemented by a focus on the market culture—competitiveness, achieving results, and an emphasis on external relationships. The focus shifts from impersonality and formal control inside the organization to a customer orientation and competition outside the organization. It is the case . . . that mature and highly effective organizations tend to develop subunits or segments that represent each of these four culture types. [Research and development] may be adhocratic, for example, whereas accounting may be hierarchical in culture emphasis. Almost always . . . one or more of the culture types dominate an organization. (pp. 53–54)

As described above, Cameron and Quinn (2006) believe that, over time, companies tend to gravitate toward an emphasis on the hierarchy and market culture types, and that it takes a great deal of effort and leadership to make the change to a clan or adhocracy culture. Leavitt (2005) also writes about the resilience of hierarchies. He describes that “hierarchies are, as they have been for centuries, ‘normal’ and prevalent everywhere . . . Hierarchies pervade democracies, theocracies, oligarchies, monarchies, and autocracies” (p. 2). Leavitt goes on to say that, although “the authoritarian character of the hierarchy does not jibe with our egalitarian societal values” (p. x), hierarchies

persist for several reasons. Leavitt suggests that hierarchies fulfill certain human psychological needs; for instance, they provide a demarcated route of achievement, grant an illusion of security, and provide structure and help us to define ourselves. Leavitt also posits that hierarchies are an excellent mechanism for coping with complexity and keeping a reasonably ordered state. However, Leavitt also suggests that “as hierarchy creeps in” (p. 46), passion, enthusiasm, and humanism “creep out” (p. 46).

Cameron and Quinn (2006) and Leavitt (2005) agree that organizations need more than one type of approach to be effective. Each of the four culture types described by Cameron and Quinn are seen as valuable and necessary, with none being better or worse than the others. In addition, Cameron and Quinn note, “The highest performing leaders, those rated by their peers, superiors, and subordinates as the most highly effective, have developed capabilities and skills that allow them to succeed in each of the [four culture types]” (p. 47). Leavitt writes, “Top down, hierarchical organizations may be inevitable, but they needn’t be toxic” (p. 176). He urges hierarchical organizations to introduce more democratic approaches and to

travel the humanizing route . . . [because] it’s just the right thing, the decent way to go. . . . Let’s behave like responsible, civilized human beings. Let’s make our organizations . . . more enriching habitats for other responsible, civilized human beings. (p. 176)

Shifts and changes in an organization’s culture can be implemented, and Cameron and Quinn (2006) and Schein (1992) outline strategies that can be used for effecting cultural change. Cameron and Quinn write, “Without personal behavior change on the part of the organization’s members, organizational culture will be frustrated” (p. 117). Cameron and Quinn also present a process that can be used to change managerial behaviours and reinforce the culture change process. Leavitt (2005) suggests that change

will result from the development of connected “manager/leaders” (p. 143), who demonstrate vertical, diagonal, and horizontal influence and action, connectivity, persuasion, and collaboration inside and outside the organization.

The cultural model that Cameron and Quinn (2006) present is relevant to understanding the organization where my research study took place. As is typical of a government agency, there is a hierarchical culture underlying the organization, which provides order, stability, and reliability. However, Cameron and Quinn describe that organizations require more than one type of approach to be effective, and the clan culture and adhocracy culture are also evident in the PSB. Cameron and Quinn and Leavitt (2005) also discuss the hardness and dominance of the hierarchy, which may resist aspects of other cultures that promote important engagement drivers such as the humanistic emphasis of the clan culture.

#### *Wheatley's Views on Organizational Culture*

Wheatley (2005) writes that for centuries it has been assumed that organizations are machines, where “organizations and people [can] be engineered into efficient solutions” (p. 32). She contends that Western cultural views of effective organization and leadership attempt to dominate life, and use control and imposition. The reaction to uncertainty and chaos is “tightening feeble controls” (p. 2). Wheatley advocates compliance with “life’s dynamics” (p. 1) and self-organizing processes.

Why would we want an organization to behave like a machine? Machines have no intelligence; they follow the instructions given to them. They work in the specific conditions predicted by their engineers. Changes in environment wreak havoc because they have no capacity to adapt. (p. 32)

In contrast, self-organizing, living systems are adaptive, flexible, self renewing, resilient, learning, and intelligent. “Self-organizing systems have what all leaders crave:

the capacity to respond continuously to change” (p. 33). Wheatley goes on to describe that in a living system “change is the organizing force, not a problematic intrusion” (p. 33). People come together as needed, there are fewer levels of management, and “leaders emerge from the needs of the moment. . . . Experimentation is the norm. Local solutions predominate but are kept local” (p. 40).

Wheatley (2005) identifies three primary domains as being essential to organizing: identity, information, and relationships (p. 37), and she suggests that these domains operate in a dynamic cycle so intertwined that it becomes difficult to distinguish among the three elements (p. 41).

As described earlier in this section, Wheatley (2005) describes that identity, the first domain, is the self of the organization that becomes the sense-making process of the organization. The second domain, information, is the

medium of the organization . . . [that] lies at the heart of life. . . . New information can enter, but the organization retains its identity. . . . If a system has too much order, it atrophies and dies. Yet if it lives in chaos, it has no memory. (p. 39)

Wheatley writes that information is the nutrient of self-organization: We can’t live without it; everyone feeds off of it. It has to be everywhere in the organization to sustain us. . . . It is information—unplanned, uncontrolled, abundant, superfluous—that creates the conditions for the emergence of fast, well-integrated, effective responses. (p. 40)

The third domain, relationships, are described by Wheatley (2005) as the “pathways to the intelligence of the system” (p. 40). Relationships create and transform information: “Without connections, nothing happens” (p. 40). According to Wheatley,

most people know which relationships will bolster their effectiveness, although this awareness may be voiced only as complaints. And as they do their work and make decisions, employees reference the organizational identity that they see and feel—the organization’s norms, unspoken expectations, the values that get rewarded. (p. 42)

*The Role of Leadership in Organizational Cultures*

Leaders are key to the formation, maintenance, and evolution of organizational cultures. Schein (1992) describes the role of leaders in organizational culture:

“Organizational cultures are created in part by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership is the creation, the management, and sometimes even the destruction of culture” (p. 5). Schein views cultures as springing from three sources: (a) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the founders of organizations; (b) the learning experiences of group members as their organization evolves; and (c) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders (p. 211). Of these, founders have the most impact:

Founders not only choose the basic mission and the environmental context in which the new group will operate, but they choose the group members and bias the original responses that the group makes in its efforts to succeed in its environment and to integrate itself. (pp. 211–212)

Leadership influences culture because “what once was only the leader’s assumption gradually becomes a shared assumption” (Schein, 1992, p. 27). However, Schein cautions, “If leaders do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them” (p. 15).

Cameron and Quinn (2006) write that leadership is essential to an organization’s ability to change its fundamental culture, and that such a change will not be possible without “an alteration in the managerial competencies demonstrated in the organization” (p. 117). Cameron and Quinn consider the ability to effect cultural change important, and they write, “Several studies reported that the most frequently cited reason given for failure [of planned organizational change initiatives] was a neglect of the organization’s culture” (p. 1). Chartier (2004) finds that “real change in organizations is most effective

when it is structural change” (p. 58). Cameron and Quinn also describe what skills and competencies that are related to each of the four cultures they describe, and which are required to enhance a culture change effort.

Wheatley (2005) finds that leaders are an essential element in the move toward self-organizing organizations, although their role in this environment, where the traditional activities of planning and control are excluded, differs from typical change management. Wheatley states,

Leaders begin with a strong *intention*, not a set of action plans. (Plans do emerge, but locally, from responses to needs and contingencies.) Leaders . . . must have confidence in the organization’s intelligence. The future is unknown, but they believe the system is talented enough to organize in whatever ways the future requires. (p. 43)

Wheatley asserts that self-organizing offers the opportunity for leaders to demonstrate their trust of their employees, by entrusting them with decisions, sensitive information, communication with other organizations. She writes,

Employees earn trust, but leaders create the circumstances in which such trust can be earned.

Because dependency runs so deep in most organizations these days, employees often have to be encouraged to exercise initiative and explore new areas of competence. Not only do leaders have to let go and watch as employees figure out their own solutions, but they also have to shore up their self-confidence and encourage them to do more. And leaders need to refrain from taking credit for their employees’ good work—not always an easy task. (p. 44)

Leaders play an important role in organizations. Not only are leaders critical in the determination of an organization’s environment, they are also vital to successful development, and change implementation. Environment and change are central to the engagement of an organization’s employees. The following section examines further the nature of organizational development and change.

## Organizational Development and Change

The term organizational change conjures up the idea of an activity that a workplace has to gear up for, an event that is out of the norm. In this chapter, development and change describe the organization's constant evolution. In this development, some of the initiatives within an organization are small, and incremental; others are changes of on a larger scale; and many are in between. However, the ability to effectively process this development, no matter what the scale, is crucial to an organization's success. One reason to be effective in this area is that change initiatives can impact employee engagement. In this section, literature is reviewed that examines what organizational change is and how to effectively develop and change while promoting and sustaining employee engagement. Included in the topics are factors that are significant to effective organizational change: participation, teamwork, individual factors in development and change, the learning culture, and innovation.

### *Factors that Facilitate Development, Change, and Engagement*

An organization changes every day. The changes an organization encompasses can be on a small scale, such as the start of a new employee; or on a larger scale, such as a fundamental cultural change or a ministry-wide strategic initiative; or somewhere in between, such as a gradual development or culture shift. Chartier (2004) and Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1998) assert that change is constant and that we have always had to deal with it. Chartier imagines that people have always feared change. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers observe it is ironic that organizations struggle with change when we live in a universe of continuous creation, where the creativity and adaptability are beyond comprehension, and we adapt and change all the time in our personal lives (¶ 6).

Many authors believe that embracing development and change is crucial to the survival of an organization (Ahlrichs, 2007; Leavitt, 2005; Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Senge, 2006; Schein, 1992; Wheatley, 2005). Cameron and Quinn write that, in today's world,

Stability is interpreted more often as stagnation than steadiness, and organizations that are not in the business of change and transition are generally considered recalcitrant. The frightening uncertainty that traditionally accompanied major organizational change is now associated with staying the same. (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 1)

One essential success is to foster employee engagement during organizational change, to maintain a productive and innovative workforce.

There are a number of factors that are referred to in the literature that influence how an organization embraces development and change. These factors include:

(a) participation (Chartier, 2004; Leavitt, 2005; Marrow, Bowers, & Seashore, 1967; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998); (b) teamwork (Kotter, 1998; Lencioni, 2005; Marrow et al., 1967); (c) individual factors in development and change (Dweck, 2008; Kinsey Goman, n.d.a, n.d.e; Quenk, 2000; Wheatley, 2006); and (d) the learning culture approach (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001; Schein, 1992; Senge, 2006). This section provides information on each of these factors.

### *Participation*

Many authors affirm the essential nature of participation and empowerment to effective organizations (Byham, 1988; Leavitt, 2005; Marrow et al., 1967; Purser & Cabana, 1998; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998). Marrow et al. describe the evolution of employee expectations in terms of influence in the workplace:

Young men and women have grown up in a period where independence from parental authority has been permitted, if not encouraged. They have been reared in homes where children have had more freedom to plan their activities and make

more important decisions than ever before in history. . . . They demand jobs where they will be more than a number on a punched card. (pp. 249–250)

Marrow et al. go on to say,

Today, executives acknowledge the increasing importance of changing the relationship of internal social environment. This requires equal concern for the human as for the technical needs of the enterprise and a search for better ways of integrating individual needs with organizational goals. (p. 250)

Other writers (Byham, 1988; Leavitt, 2005; Purser & Cabana, 1998; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998) suggest that “people support what they create” (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998, ¶ 22), and that people will be engaged when they feel ownership, and so have a personal interest in improving the performance of the organization.

Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers write, “We ignore people’s need to participate at our own peril. If they are involved, they will create a future that already has them in it” (¶ 22). In writing about participative design, Purser and Cabana contend.

Because no designs are ever imposed, employees are more inclined to participate and take an active part in the design process. As their interests are taken into account, and as people become more directly involved in the design work, powerful feelings of psychological ownership are evoked. In this respect, Participative Design goes a long way toward overcoming the problems of resistance and diffusion of the self-managing work systems to the whole corporation. (pp. 57–66)

In the framework that Cameron and Quinn (2006) propose, the clan culture emphasizes more participation and involvement of employees, and the adhocracy culture emphasizes having more employee suggestions.

Increased engagement and innovation are not the only benefits from employee participation. According to a 1997 study, empowerment may also benefit employee health (Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada, 1997). The data collected were from 36% of all executives in the Public Service of Canada. One of the workplace factors examined was “job control” (p. 4), representing task and

decision authority. The study found that workload, role conflict, job future ambiguity and intragroup conflict significantly increased individuals' likelihood of having higher levels of distress, while higher levels of job control and supervisor support decreased the likelihood of distress (p. 8). In addition, "the data were consistent across all variables in demonstrating that control was the most effective buffer on the negative effects of work stressors on either psychological distress or health outcomes" (p. 7).

Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph (1996) present steps for increasing empowerment in the workplace, and they contend that "empowerment isn't magic. It consists of a few simple steps and a lot of persistence" (p. 115). The three proposed keys to an empowerment game plan are identified as sharing information with everyone, then creating autonomy through boundaries, and, finally, replacing the old hierarchy with self-directed teams (p. 114).

The literature also discusses that in a participative environment traditional roles may need to change, which may not always go smoothly. For instance, Purser and Cabana (1998) describe that the traditional roles of the steward and the union hierarchy change in the self-managing organization, as do the roles of front-line supervisors. "Managers and union representatives, at all levels, need productive justification for their existence with new roles and responsibilities and a new set of values" (p. 49). Purser and Cabana state that although many modern business leaders have grown up expecting unions to thwart management's efforts for innovative change, this doesn't have to be the case. The company Global Experience Specialists is used to give an example of the union in the self-managing organization.

At [Global Experience Specialists], a permanent union-management steering committee was formed to tackle bold bottom-line competitive initiatives one at a

time. For example, an onerous set of twenty-six narrow job classifications was compressed down to four bands, with cross-training within bands to facilitate broader skill sets and greater flexibility. (Purser & Cabana, 1998, p. 49)

However, Purser and Cabana (1998) acknowledge,

The traumas and travails of getting the union-management cooperation going could fill an entire book . . . [with] lots of pitfalls and missteps along the way. . . . High-level coverage had to be provided for both camps. . . . To help work together, the former adversaries searched for unions and managers who were already getting along to find out how in the hell they did it. (p. 50)

As outlined in this section, an empowered, participative approach can benefit both organizations and individuals, by supporting engagement, ownership, and health.

Empowerment, and participation are also fundamental to high functioning teams, the next factor in the effective facilitation of development, and change explored in this chapter.

### *High-functioning teams*

High-functioning teams are recognized for their ability to effectively facilitate change (Lencioni, 2005) and support engagement (Dulye, 2007). Lencioni is convinced of the importance of strong, healthy, effective, cohesive teams to organizations; he states, “I can say confidently that teamwork is almost always lacking within organizations that fail, and often present within those that succeed” (p. 3). Lencioni states that the power of teamwork cannot be denied, and that teamwork gives people a sense of connection and belonging (p. 3). He proposes that more is not heard about the competitive importance of teamwork from business scholars and journalists because it is hard to measure, and it is extremely hard to achieve. Lencioni’s model for building high-functioning teams involves five elements: trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and results. Lencioni also states, “Based on my experience working with teams during the past ten years or so, I’ve come to one inescapable conclusion: no quality or characteristic is more important than trust” (p. 13). Lencioni describes trust as being about vulnerability: “Team members

who trust one another learn to be comfortable being open, even exposed, to one another around their weaknesses, failures, even fears” (p. 14).

Kotter (1998) contends that one of the key tasks for change leaders is building coalitions, and this is done by working as a team, rather than a collection of individuals (p. 3). Kotter writes that the pressures of change make strong teams essential, when leaders need to draw on reserves of energy, expertise and trust. He also describes that during times of change personnel problems that have lurked beneath the surface of a team may come to the fore (p. 3). In describing why teams are important, Adair (2009) states, “A new idea almost invariably comes from an individual. But it takes a team to turn it into something really useful” (p. 85). Senge (2006) refers to the power that emerges when efforts are aligned in a high functioning team:

The fundamental characteristic of the relatively unaligned team is wasted energy. Individuals may work extraordinarily hard, but their efforts do not efficiently translate to team effort. By contrast, when a team becomes more aligned, a commonality of direction emerges, and individuals’ energies harmonize. . . . There is commonality of purpose, a shared vision, and understanding of how to complement one another’s efforts. . . . Empowering the individual when there is a relatively low level of alignment worsens the chaos and makes managing the team even more difficult. (pp. 217–218)

To support effective team functioning, Wheatley (2005) believes that teamwork needs to be measured by the organization. However, she distinguishes between measurement that is a “numbers game” (p. 158) used as a means of motivation, and measurement as feedback that is essential to growth in a living system. Wheatley describes that measurement and feedback differ in several significant ways, and her description of feedback includes the following points: (a) feedback is self-generated, with the system determining what is important to it, and ignoring everything else; (b) feedback depends on context, and is generated in the present, rather than being based on past

assumptions; (c) with feedback, new and surprising information can get in through permeable boundaries; and (d) feedback is life sustaining, in that it provides essential information about how to maintain one's existence (pp. 158–159).

### *The Learning Culture*

The learning culture represents a generative environment that encourages engagement, innovation and development. The learning culture and learning organization are concepts that have developed to address the need for organizations that will truly excel by discovering “how to tap people's commitment to learn at all levels in an organization” (Senge, 2006, p. 4). Included in the key characteristics of a learning culture that Schein (1992) identifies are:

(1) it is appropriate for people to be proactive problem solvers, (2) that both individualism and groupism are appropriate, (3) that both authoritarian and participative systems are appropriate provided that they are based on trust, and (4) that accurate and relevant information must be capable of flowing freely in a fully connected network that diverse but connected units are desirable. (p. 373)

Senge (2006) presents five disciplines which “represent approaches (theories and methods) for developing three core learning capabilities: fostering aspiration, developing reflective conversation, and understanding complexity” (p. xii). The fifth discipline, systems thinking, is the cornerstone of the learning organization. The core disciplines for building the learning organization are: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. At the heart of the learning organization is the shift to seeing ourselves as connected to the world, and seeing our ability to create our reality, and change it (p. 12). Following is a brief description of each of the disciplines, as identified by Senge. Systems thinking involves seeing the connections, patterns and influences between the parts of an organizational system, and the realization that a system can only be

understood by contemplating the whole, not any individual part” (p. 6). This discipline integrates all the disciplines, and it is the motivation to see how the disciplines interrelate.

Personal mastery is concerned with the individual’s commitment to learning, and this learning involves deepening one’s personal vision, and “clarifying the things that matter to us, and living our lives in the service of our highest aspirations” (Senge, 2006, p. 8). Senge describes this discipline as “the learning organization’s spiritual foundation” (p. 7), and he also writes that “an organization’s commitment to and capacity for learning can be no greater than that of its members” (p. 7).

The next discipline is mental models, which refer to “the deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, . . . [and] pictures and images that influence how we understand the world, and how we take action” (Senge, 2006, p. 9). To unearth our mental models we look inwards, bring them to the surface, and scrutinize them. “It also includes the ability to carry on ‘learning’ conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others” (p. 9).

The discipline of building shared vision is a set of principles and guidelines to translate individual visions into shared visions that galvanize organizations. “The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrollment [in the vision] rather than compliance” (p. 9).

The last discipline is team learning, which is based in the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations. This discipline recognizes that teams can produce extraordinary results with coordinated action. This occurs when teams are truly learning and “individual members are growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise

(Senge, 2006, p. 9). In the learning team, “the intelligence of the team may exceed the intelligence of the individual members of the team” (p. 9). A key element in team learning is dialogue, when members suspend their assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together.

Senge (2006) describes that each discipline “provides a vital dimension in building organizations that can truly ‘learn,’ that can continually enhance their capacity to realize their highest aspirations” (p. 6).

In a learning organization, all members of the organization are involved in creating the culture. Chartier (2004) asserts that learning organizations require everyone to think, which involves taking responsibility:

Above all, you must take responsibility for the application of common sense. Don’t wring your hands at bad managers. Speak up. Don’t bellyache at coffee about ineffectiveness or red tape: speak up or organize a workout. Don’t accept substandard work. Pull the team together and boost the service standards in your team charter.

Don’t moan about the lack of communication, take responsibility and get people talking. . . . The public sector workplace is there to serve citizens. No more and no less! Strive to provide better and better service every year and do not expect the workplace to help you straighten out your kid, organize your husband or make you feel better about getting old.

Do good work, take responsibility to improve that work, and hold onto your rights. (p. 117)

Learning organizations are made possible by having leaders who “encourage feedback, new information, and two-way communication, as well as [making] it clear where to send this information and how it will be used to influence either the outcome or the change process” (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001, p. 47). Schein (1992) proposes that it is intriguing for leaders to develop a learning organization that “will be able to make its own perpetual diagnosis and self-manage whatever transformations are needed as the environment changes” (p. 363). Schein also acknowledges that while there

is some paradox involved in creating a stable element of perpetual learning within a culture, “nevertheless, some leaders are attempting to institutionalize and stabilize learning and innovation itself” (p. 363).

Senge (2006) believes that, when we remove the barriers, learning organizations are possible because it is our nature to learn, and we love to learn: “No one has to teach an infant to learn. In fact, no one has to teach infants anything. They are intrinsically inquisitive, masterful learners” (p. 4).

#### *Individual Factors in Reactions to Development and Change*

People react differently to development and change. Dweck (2008) describes that people have always “thought differently, acted differently, and fared differently from each other” (p. 4), and that experts claim this is due to physical differences, differences in background, experiences, training or ways of learning, genetic endowment, temperaments, aptitudes, and intelligence (pp. 4–5). Subsequently, the impact that change has on an individual’s engagement will also vary. Therefore, effectively facilitating organizational change and employee engagement involves an understanding of how people may react to change, and what factors influence these reactions. In this section I present an overview of some of the factors that may influence an individual’s reaction to change: physiological factors (Kinsey Goman, n.d.a, n.d.e); and individual psychology and characteristics (Dweck, 2008; Goleman, 1998; Kinsey Goman, n.d.a; Quenk & Kummerow, 2009).

#### *Physiological factors.*

There are links between change and an individual’s physical being, and some of these relationships are described in this section. Kinsey Goman (n.d.d, n.d.e) contends that our reactions to change are influenced by responses from our brains. She

recommends face-to-face communication when communicating change, because “our brains process a continual cascade of nonverbal cues that are used as the basis for building trust and professional empathy - both of which are critical to the ‘human side’ of organizational change” (Kinsey Goman, n.d.d, ¶ 7). Kinsey Goman (n.d.e) also asserts that most daily tasks are controlled by the brain’s basal ganglia. She reports that we become comfortable with habitual tasks that take less mental energy because we do not need to give them much conscious thought. However, change stimulates the prefrontal cortex, which is linked in the amygdala. This is the most primitive part of the brain, which controls our “flight or fight” (Kinsey Goman, n.d.e, ¶ 5) response. When the prefrontal cortex is overwhelmed with complex and unfamiliar concepts, the amygdala connection goes into action. We are then subject to “the physical and psychological disorientation and pain that can manifest in anxiety, fear, depression, sadness, fatigue or anger” (Kinsey Goman, n.d.e, ¶ 4–5).

To counteract these effects, Kinsey Goman (n.d.e) identifies six strategies to use when facilitating change. First, she suggests making change familiar with an ongoing communication strategy. “Continually talking about change and focusing on key aspects will eventually allow the novel to become familiar and less threatening” (¶ 9). The second strategy is to let people create change. “When people solve a problem by themselves, the brain releases a rush of neurotransmitters like adrenaline, and this natural ‘high’ becomes associated positively with the change experience” (¶ 10). The third strategy is to use “KISS [Keep it simple stupid] communication” (¶ 12) in the organization by helping people “make sense of complexity by condensing it into two or three critical goals they can understand and absorb” (¶ 12). The fourth strategy is to never

underestimate the power of a vision. “If the mental pictures employees hold are of happier times in the ‘good old days’ or the painful reminders of unsuccessful change efforts of the past, they will naturally resist the next announced change” (¶ 13). The fifth strategy that Kinsey Goman suggests is: “Don’t sugar coat the truth” (¶ 13). She writes,

The prefrontal cortex is always on guard for signals of danger. When overly optimistic outcomes or unrealistic expectations are exposed, the prefrontal cortex switches to high alert, looking for other signs of deception and triggering the primitive brain to respond with feelings of heightened anxiety. (Kinsey Goman, n.d.e, ¶ 15)

Finally, the sixth strategy is to help people pay attention:

Attention is continually reshaping brain patterns. Concentrating attention on a thought or an insight or a fear will, over time, keep the relevant circuitry open and dynamically alive. With enough focus, these circuits become stable, physical links to the brain’s structure. (Kinsey Goman, n.d.e, ¶ 16)

Kinsey Goman (n.d.a) also relates aspects of an individual’s physical well being to their change adeptness. This is an individual’s proficiency at “dealing with transition and transformation” (Kinsey Goman, n.d.d, Thriving on Change section, ¶ 1). Her questionnaire, includes questions concerning the individual’s exercise, sleep, diet, smoking, and other health-related areas.

Individual factors that influence an individual’s reaction to change may be related to their physical functioning. However, personality and psychological aspects may also affect an individual’s perception of change.

*Individual psychology and characteristics.*

Each person reacts to change differently, and authors contend that an individual’s personality type, psychological state and mindset, and emotional state will influence these reactions (Dweck, 2008; Goleman, 1998; Kinsey Goman, n.d.a; Quenk & Kummerow, 2009).

People's responses to change can range from excitement through to fear and even depression, and awareness of a person's psychological type can help to understand and address those responses (Pearlman, n.d.). The Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator is:

A type theory that emphasizes the 16 unique categories of personality created by the four type pairs (Extraversion-Introversion [EI], Sensing-Intuition [SN], Thinking-Feeling [TF], and Judging-Perceiving [JP]). The EI, SN, and TF dimensions derive from [Carl] Jung's . . . theory of personality. The JP scale is an embellishment that Myers and Briggs added to their interpretation of the theory. (Pittenger, 2005, p. 212)

The interpretation of the results of the testing centres around the four-letter classification that emerges from the test for each individual. This classification is then linked how the individual may experience various dimensions of life, such as communication, conflict, and change (Quenk, 2000). People who have taken the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator are given an interpretive report that presents general ideas to assist with change (Quenk & Kummerow, 2009). In addition, the report outlines the individual's change management style, based on the results of their personality testing, and suggests ways to enhance change management.

Kinsey Goman (n.d.a) also looks at psychological factors in the questionnaire that she developed to help individuals gauge their own change adeptness. The questionnaire is presented as a tool that can help a person recognize their "current strengths and develop strategies for overcoming potential weaknesses" (¶ 2). The factors examined are: confidence, attitudes towards challenge, ability to cope with change, ability to collaborate, and creativity. Kinsey Goman proposes that an individual can assess their "current attitudes, aptitudes and skills for thriving on change" (¶ 2) by rating, on a scale of 1 to 8, the personal truth of 48 statements. Each psychological factor has eight

statements attached to it, and examples of the statements are: (a) I focus on my strengths more than I focus on my weaknesses; (b) I look for positive aspects in negative circumstances; and (c) I often redesign my job to be more efficient, productive, and fun. A person's score in each factor gives them a low, medium, or high score in terms of their strength in that area. Overall, the strength in each psychological factor gives an indication of the person's adeptness at change.

The factors that Goman (1998) identifies share some similarities with the emotional competencies, which he suggests are needed to successfully deal with change. He asserts that emotional intelligence is needed to deal with the emotions involved with organizational change. He explains that organizational change necessitates the questioning of basic assumptions, visions, strategies and identities. However, people may hold emotional attachments to these elements of their work lives, and this can make the change harder (p. 97). Goleman defines emotional intelligence as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and the feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (p. 317). Goleman also describes what is needed to successfully deal with change, and facilitate change within an organization. He contends that in these times, organizations put a premium on people who are competent “change catalysts” (p. 193) and who are able to “recognize the need for change and remove barriers, challenge the status quo to acknowledge the need for change, champion the change and enlist others in its pursuit, and model the change expected of others” (p. 193). Goleman describes the emotional competencies that are needed to be a successful change catalyst: “self-confidence,

influence, commitment, motivation, initiative, and optimism” (p. 195) an instinct for organizational politics, and perseverance. Goleman also supposes,

At the individual level, elements of emotional intelligence can be identified, assessed, and upgraded. At the group level, it means fine-tuning the interpersonal dynamics that make groups smarter. At the organizational level, it means revising the value hierarchy to make emotional intelligence a priority—in the concrete terms of hiring, training and development, performance evaluation, and promotions. (p. 315)

Dweck (2008) contends that people’s reactions to change are derived from psychological mindsets. She presents that her 20 years of research has shown that “the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life” (p. 6). Dweck describes that people have one of two mindsets: The fixed mindset represents a personal belief that your qualities are set in stone, which creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over again; and the growth mindset, which “is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things that you can cultivate through your efforts ... [and that] everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (p. 7). Dweck writes, “The belief that cherished qualities can be developed creates a passion for learning” (p. 7).

The idea that age influences reaction to change is refuted by some authors (Ahlrichs, 2007; Kinsey Goman, n.d.b). Ahlrichs suggests that it cannot be assumed that characteristics such as age and gender affect our attitudes to change:

It is a myth that near-retirement employees no longer desire change, career growth, learning, or achievement. Learning is a lifelong need. . . . According to a Center for Creative Leadership study, no differences emerge by generation, gender, race, or national origin in the importance of on-the-job learning. Employees of all ages want continuous learning and they prefer on-the-job training and one-to-one coaching and feedback rather than online or computer-based learning. (pp. 43-44)

Kinsey Goman also contends that being resilient to change does not depend on age or gender. She proposes that instead, people’s adeptness at change is based on whether they

take care of themselves and have outside interests. Kinsey Goman describes this as counterbalancing:

Compensating for the demands and pressures of business by developing counterbalancing activities in other areas of their lives. They engage in exercise programs and healthful eating habits, they cultivate interests outside of the workplace—sports, hobbies, art, music, etc.—that are personally fulfilling, and they have sources of emotional support. Because employees with counterbalance have fuller, richer lives, they handle business-related stress better and are more effective on the job. (¶ 4)

Finally, Wheatley (2006) finds that having a psychological connection with the change by believing in it and finding it meaningful also affects an individual's reaction to it. She describes that people do not accept change only because a leader tells us it is necessary: “We choose to accept it if, and only if, we see how this new design enables us to contribute more to what we've defined as meaningful” (p. 149).

### *Innovation*

Innovation is included in this section because it is considered a very desirable organizational attribute (Adair, 2009; Chartier, 2004; Wheatley, 2006) that is related to change, and it is an engagement driver (Ahlrichs, 2007; Chartier, 2004). Chartier describes innovation as an engagement driver that is “the cheesecake in a meat-and-potatoes work world . . . [and is] where a lot of the attraction to work lives” (p. 64). Chartier also proposes, “If you want to attract and keep young people in public service, then perhaps, instead of organizing a conference once in a while, we should give them innovative changes . . . every day” (p. 67). However, Chartier also cautions, “Please don't ask for [innovation] if you won't listen to what you may hear with an open mind and a willingness to follow through” (p. 67). Ahlrichs writes, “Only engaged employees in an organization that places a high value on productivity and innovation will deliver, no matter what stage of their career” (p. 23).

Adair (2009) states that innovation “combines two major overlapping processes: having new ideas and implementing them” (p. 5). He also describes five conditions for successful innovation: management commitment, a long-term perspective, responsiveness to change, acceptance of risk, and the right internal environment (pp. 15–25).

Adair (2009) and other authors contend that organizations that promote innovation have fewer hierarchical processes (Estrin, 2009; Zoghi et al., 2007), and they also describe other factors to encourage innovation. Adair suggests that an organization that wants to be innovative should keep its structures as flat as possible, and its relationships as informal as possible, with less definition of roles and responsibilities. In their 2007 study, Zoghi et al. found that “establishments with decentralized decision-making, information-sharing programs, or incentive pay plans are significantly more likely to innovate than other establishments” (p. 12). Estrin describes that to be innovative, organizations need to be flexible and open, encourage questions and openness, with less hierarchical processes, and with leaders who see their role as being supportive rather than directive (p. 104). Estrin also states, “Innovators need to be critically optimistic – enthusiastic about their projects, but also open to spotting potential problems and making necessary course corrections” (p. 132).

In addition, Adair (2009) reveals factors that encourage creativity in people, and also factors that are present in creative leadership. He states that research indicates that creative people expect recognition and appreciation, the freedom to work in areas of greatest interest, contacts with stimulating colleagues, and encouragement to take risks (pp. 76–79). Adair proposes that creative leadership has a willingness to accept risk, an

ability to work with half-baked ideas, a willingness to bend rules, an ability to respond quickly, and personal enthusiasm (pp. 80–82).

While Adair (2009) and the other authors (Ahlrichs, 2007; Chartier, 2004; Estrin, 2009; Wheatley, 2006; Zoghi et al., 2007) in this section do not leave a step-by-step blueprint that will guarantee innovation in organizations, they present many ideas to guide how innovation can be supported. Estrin (2009) proposes that there are five core values to establishing sustainable innovation: questioning, risk taking, openness, patience, and trust (p. 11), and I suggest that examining how these values exist within an organization is one aspect of identifying an organization's current level of innovation, and its potential for sustainable innovation.

This concludes the literature review on the topics of engagement, organizational culture, and organizational development and change. The relationship between these complex concepts is closely intertwined, and creates a feedback loop, such as is described by Senge (2006). Although it can be said that an organization's culture influences how able it is to engage employees, and successfully develop and change, it can also be said that engaged employees can develop and change an organization's culture. I also find that many of the ideas presented by the literature are reflected in the research findings outlined in chapter 4.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Question

In this chapter I have described the processes used to capture the insights and experiences the Government of BC, Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD) employees have had in relation to the research question: What fosters and maintains employee engagement during organizational change in the Provincial Services Branch (PSB) of the Ministry of Housing and Social Development? The research subquestions were:

1. What engages PSB employees?
2. How have organizational changes over the last year impacted employee engagement in the PSB?
3. What lessons learned about fostering and maintaining employee engagement could be applicable to other areas of the ministry that are implementing change?

### Methodology and Approach

In action research, the researcher is a catalyst for change that enables people in a community to recognize and address a problem as they see it (Stringer, 2007). This purpose guided my research.

Research “always involves philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge and of the world and about what the point of knowledge and research are in the first place” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 31). Therefore, as “an applied philosopher” (p. 31), the researcher needs to consciously consider the epistemological and ontological grounds of his or her inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

Epistemology is defined as “the study or theory of the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge” (Neufeldt & Guralink, 1988, p. 458), and ontology is defined as “the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being, reality, or ultimate substance” (p. 947).

“Action researchers work on the epistemological assumption that the purpose of academic research is not just to describe, understand and explain the world but also to change it” (Reason & Torbert, as cited in Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 7) and are guided by principles of democratic engagement and a commitment to change. There is active participation by the organization and the researcher (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

The researcher also acts as a facilitator who moves the research through the cycles of diagnosing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2006, p. 40). Using these cycles, action research aims to produce “practical knowing, the knowing that shapes the quality of your moment-to-moment action” (p. 32). At the same time, the researcher is engaging in her own learning cycle activities of experiencing, reflecting, interpreting, and taking action (p. 34).

Action research is grounded in qualitative research, although “this does not mean that quantitative research is necessarily excluded from a study” (Stringer, 2007, p. 19). The qualitative approach assumes that reality is socially constructed, and its variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure. However, these realities become known through interaction and subjectivist explorations with participants about their perceptions. The researcher’s role includes personal involvement and empathic understanding (Glesne, 2006).

Action research aligns with my values, and this is important because a credible leader has to fully comprehend the values, principles, standards, ethics, and ideals that

drive him or her and must also be able to authentically communicate them (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). “The implicit values and underlying assumptions embedded in action research provide a set of guiding principles that can facilitate a democratic, participatory, liberating, and life-enhancing approach to research” (Stringer, 2007, p. 10). This research project is an expression of my beliefs.

Action research also meets the needs of the organization where my research has taken place. As identified in the BC Public Service Agency’s (PSA’s) professional values, courage, passion, service, teamwork, accountability, and curiosity shape the organization (BC PSA, n.d.a.). The self-inquiry and striving for growth that is inherent in action research reflects courage, passion, service, and accountability. In addition, the project sponsor expressed a preference for a project that involves action rather than only study, and she supported an inquiry that involved participation and empowerment (D. Upton, personal communication, May 21, 2009).

### Project Participants

This section introduces the groups of people who were involved in the research project. The groups are: the research committee, the research team, and the research participants.

#### *The Research Committee*

The project research committee included: Wendy Rowe, the acting director of the School of Leadership Studies; Debi Upton, the project sponsor; and Jim Force, the faculty supervisor.

### *The Research Team*

The project research team consisted of Arla Swift and Lorraine Ward, two co-workers who acted as advisors to the research process and me. They tested questions, gave feedback on the planned research approaches, and shared their insights on the topics studied. Arla and Lorraine signed the Action Research Team Member Letter of Agreement (see Appendix B), which described the role of a team member, and outlined the confidentiality expectations of the project.

### *The Research Participants*

“Research design involves stating a game plan through which one can gather information that addresses one’s research purpose in a simple, elegant, and systematic way” (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 39). Overall, my project was influenced by an objective described by Coghlan and Brannick (2005): Research is a collaborative relationship between the organization and the researcher, aimed at solution-seeking and generating new knowledge.

One of the first tasks in research design is to decide who will provide the data upon which the research findings will be based. In action research a selection process for participation that is often used is “purposeful sampling” (Stringer, 2007, p. 43), which involves consciously selecting people on the basis of the extent that the group or individual is affected by, or has an effect on, the issue of interest.

The 16 participants in my research were employees from four MHSD branches that over the past year had been part of the PSB: the Executive office, the Health Assistance Branch, the Reconsideration Branch, and the Contact Centre. The ages of the participants ranged from their early 20s to their late 50s. There were 12 women and 4

men. The length of service with the BC Government ranged from 1 year to more than 30 years. The employment roles represented included adjudicators, administrative support, executives, project officers, and supervisors. All the participants had worked in the MHSD during significant organizational changes and were working in the ministry during the period that they participated in the research.

### Research Tools

The methods used for data collection in my research were one-on-one interviews, small group interviews, a survey questionnaire, and a reflective journal. Through the collaborative process of action research, qualitative researchers develop relationships with research participants (Glesne, 2006). The interactive methods of one-on-one interviews and small group interviews in my research project promoted relationship-building, open communication, and collaboration.

I began data gathering with one-on-one interviews because I thought this method would give me an opportunity to establish rapport and a foundation of trust relationships with the participants. When there is rapport, people “can feel sufficiently comfortable to disclose information” (Glesne, 2006, p. 109). It is a “distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism” (p. 110). From my first contact with people in the invitation to participate and throughout the data gathering process, I consciously and genuinely endeavoured to demonstrate that I am friendly, empathetic, approachable, non-threatening, appreciative, and reliable.

After the one-on-one interviews, I asked participants to complete a six-question survey. The small group interview was the final data-gathering event.

All of the research methods involved open-ended questions to encourage the sharing of information that would enrich the exploration (Palys & Atchison, 2008): “Qualitative researchers view the data-gathering process itself as informative, maintaining that one must be open to any new directions that may emerge in the context of the interview because of the unique perspective of the participant(s)” (p. 157). I emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. Samples of the questions are in the Food for Thought handout (see Appendix C), and the research survey (see Appendix D).

#### *One-on-One Interviews*

The data gathering began with one-on-one interviews, as I thought it would be a good rapport-building tool and that it would establish a foundation of trust for the research that followed. It was also easier to arrange individual meetings than group meetings because of people’s disparate work schedules, locations, and situations. In the course of the research, 13 people participated in a total of 15 interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. The first interview was October 23, 2009, and the last one was on December 23, 2009.

Palys and Atchison (2008) wrote that the one-on-one interview method provides advantages in terms of participation, quality of data, time, and cost, and this was certainly true in my experience. I found the interviews to be very engaging with a wealth of information shared. A number of the participants commented that they enjoyed the sessions, and it was often difficult to end an interview on time because of the generative nature of the conversation. In terms of cost, my plan had been to provide refreshments for

participants at our meetings; in the course of the 15 one-on-one interviews I bought two cups of coffee and a lunch.

I have often interviewed people in my work, and I am conscious of a power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. Gubrium and Holstein (2003) write that in a traditional interview approach the respondent is the passive vessel of answers for the interviewer. However, the hierarchical nature of the interview process is undergoing challenge (Stringer, 2007). Mischler (as cited in Gubrium & Holstein, 2003) advocates that respondents be brought more fully and actively into the picture and be made more of an equal partner in the interview conversation. In the active interview, respondents are “constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 68). In addition, “interviewers can show their human side and answer questions and express feelings” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 137).

My aim in the interviews was to make participants feel comfortable with the process, not intimidated by it. Stringer (2007) writes, “Interviews should be characterized as informal conversations” (p. 69), and in my project, the interviews were referred to as conversations. However, even though the conversations were collaborative, I wanted the participants to do most of the talking, and I was pleased to see that this was reflected in the conversation transcripts. In addition, I tried to maintain “a neutral stance that neither affirms nor disputes, verbally or non-verbally, the information that emerge[d]” (Stringer, 2007, p. 72).

In an effort to help participants feel comfortable, I gave the participants the Food for Thought handout (see Appendix C), so that they could have a clear idea of what we might talk about. However, my goal was to promote open communication, and I

presented the questions as possible areas for exploration and emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers. Mischler (as cited in Gubrium & Holstein, 2003) claims that interview respondents are empowered by providing them with the opportunity to convey their own stories on their own terms rather than deploying pre designated categories or other structured formats. I realize that it is not possible to “fragment people’s experiences into thematic (codable) categories . . . attempts, in effect, to control meaning” (Reissman, 2001, p. 695).

I had planned to ask the research team members to be interviewers; however, this was not possible due to their time constraints. As the sole interviewer, I was able to be consistent in terms of the interview questions and the approach to the interviews. The one-on-one interviews centred on what engaged participants in the workplace and on their experiences of the impact of organizational change on engagement.

#### *Survey*

I had not planned to use the survey method in my research because I considered a survey to be a quantitative method, even though a dominantly qualitative approach may include quantitative methods and vice versa (Glesne, 2006; Palys & Atchison, 2008). However, Palys and Atchison describe the survey as an interactive method with the survey questionnaire being a very similar device to the interview and without the “ongoing question-and-answer dialogue between researcher and respondent” (p. 153). In my research, the survey questionnaire became an extension of the one-on-one interviews. I sent the survey out to all 16 research participants and received 14 responses (see Appendices D and E for the survey questions and results respectively). The survey respondents included the 12 of the people I had interviewed as well as two others. The

purpose of the survey was to further investigate information that the interviewees had shared with me in our conversations. I realized that the sample group used was not large enough or homogenous enough to make the survey results statistically significant for a larger population.

The Food for Thought handout that I sent out to interviewees listed drivers to engagement (see Appendix C), and these generated interesting dialogue in the interviews. I decided to offer a questionnaire to survey participants for more specific data regarding engagement drivers, and I modified the list to include drivers that had been identified in our conversations. After designing the survey I asked the two research team members if they would complete it and give me feedback.

#### *Small Group Interviews*

The third research method used in the project was the small group interview, which is a version of a focus group (Palys & Atchison, 2008). Focus groups can range in the number of participants and are “characterized by homogeneity but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 71). The focus group method provides the researcher with an opportunity “to ‘witness’ extensive interactions on a topic within a relatively limited time frame ... [and allows participants to] embellish on positions, discuss related dynamics, and articulate the rationale(s) underlying their perspective” (Morgan, as cited in Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 159).

Unlike one-on-one interviews . . . discussion does not rely on turn-taking between interviewer and participants. Instead, it depends on interaction within the group, stimulated by the researcher’s question(s). The researcher becomes the moderator or discussion facilitator who helps the group set up ground rules at the beginning (only one person talking at the time, allowing others to have their say, etc.) and

then may only have to pose or redirect a question from time to time, keeping track of time so that the various items are addressed. (Glesne, 2006, pp. 102–103)

A smaller group fit the time commitment that I thought participants could make.

My plan was to have a small group of 3 to 6 participants, and 5 people attended. Four of the group participants were people that I had interviews with, and the fifth person completed a survey. They were from three different work units. As I had hoped, the group was generative, with the sharing of experiences, thoughts, and energy between the participants. In the 2-hour session I was able to hear from 5 people and the participants heard from each other.

The research team also participated in the group, and it was helpful to get their feedback on the proceedings to increase “both the total accumulation of information and the validity of the analysis” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 101). Their insights also gave me an opportunity to learn for future group interview experiences.

One possible offshoot advantage of the small group interview method is that it could promote open communication between participants when they are outside the group and therefore support a sense of community, and it might develop commitment, capacity, and talents (Krueger & Casey, 2000). As such, it is not only a research data collecting technique, but also an organizational change intervention. I do not know whether this is the true as a result of this research, and this is not something that I have asked participants about. However, I have noted that engagement, change, and organizational culture have more often been a topic of conversation in my branch since I have undertaken this research. In addition, I noticed that research participants now use terminology in the workplace that I had used in the one-on-one interviews, such as Short’s (1998) concept of stories. I have also received positive feedback from participants

about the thought-provoking nature of the questions that were asked and the benefit of participation in terms of helping people process their own thoughts on work situations.

### *Reflective Journaling*

From the beginning of my project I have used a notebook to keep my reflections and ideas in, and I carried it with me daily. It does not contain identifying participant information.

This book has been a useful tool in a number of ways. It has helped me to keep organized: a place for my to-do lists, my ideas, and questions that I want to think about or that I want to ask someone else. The book is also my reflective journal, although I did not make entries every day. I noted my feelings, reactions, observations, and judgements as they arose from my research. As Coghlan and Brannick (2005) suggest, the journaling helped me to learn in action and to realize what and how I am learning. Journal keeping “enables you to integrate information and experiences which, when understood, help you understand your reasoning processes and consequent behaviour and so anticipate experiences before embarking on them” (p. 36). In addition, the notebook provides data for my participation in the research, giving my perspectives and interpretations of the research questions.

### Research Conduct

This section describes the steps that were involved in the data gathering: establishing the research team, inviting participation, and implementing the research methods.

After identifying whom to approach to participate in the research, the researcher must engage people by obtaining permission to enter the territory (Stringer, 2007). One

step towards achieving participation is to “establish a stance that is perceived as legitimate and nonthreatening by all major stakeholding groups” (p. 47). This may be facilitated by being an insider and by having a working knowledge of how the group is organized, how they talk, how to gain their trust, and how to interact with them (Palys & Atchison, 2008). I found that it was an advantage to be an insider in a number of ways. I was aware of scheduling limits that people may have. I had worked with some participants already, which facilitated building rapport. Being familiar with the ministry work, terminology, events, and personnel gave the participants and I something to chat about as we got to know each other better and prepared to dialogue. In our conversations there was also a common knowledge base: I often had some knowledge about a situation that someone was referring to without them having to describe it. However, I also had to be careful about making assumptions and putting words in people’s mouths because of my own experiences of the same situations.

#### *Establishing a Research Team*

My first step in the data gathering process was to approach four work colleagues about becoming members of the research team. Deciding whom to approach was based on whether I thought they would be interested in the experience and if I thought that we could have a positive, collaborative relationship. Of the four people approached, two peers from my work unit agreed to be on the team.

#### *Inviting Participants*

My second step was to engage participants in the research methods by sending out an invitation to participate (see Appendix F). Stringer (2007) writes that in establishing

their role researchers must “first establish a stance that is perceived as legitimate and nonthreatening” (p. 47).

I asked the managers of each branch to let staff know that I would be sending an invitation out. Bringing the research forward served a dual purpose. It let the managers know that I was conducting the research and also gave them an opportunity to share with me any questions or concerns. In addition, this addressed any concerns that staff may have that the research was being done without the knowledge of the managers.

I was conscious that the invitation would create a first impression of my research project and me. I aimed to be positive, non-threatening, purposeful, inquiring, and unpretentious by using non-technical language in a straightforward and open manner. I was clear that the purpose of the research was to focus on what was working and on solutions, rather than dwelling on problems. “The all-knowing stance of the expert . . . or the swagger of the achiever is likely to be detrimental to participatory investigation” (Stringer, 2007, p. 48). However, Bellman (1990) cautions that taking a down-to-earth approach can be a shortcoming at first, with people wondering if someone without an expert aura can bring anything new to the organization.

My goal was that the invitation be short in length to encourage people to read it and that it gave accurate information about the purpose of the research, the adherence to ethics and confidentiality, the time commitment involved with participation, and the inducements involved. My message was presented in a relaxed, conversational tone, and I presented that participants would be treated with flexibility and respect. I gave options for different ways that people could choose to participate, and I offered to answer any questions. Participants were informed that the PSB Executive Director was the project

sponsor, although I also emphasized that participation was voluntary, and would not negatively or positively impact their employment. A deadline date for responding was set for one week's time.

Before sending out the invitation I asked my research team for feedback on the draft of my invitation. After making changes, I e-mailed the invitation out to the work e-mail addresses of approximately 80 staff members in the four branches, including managers and supervisors.

In designing the research, the goal had been that participants would be of various ages and roles within the organization. I received 16 responses to my invitation and there was a good representation from each branch. My previous history with the participants ranged from having worked with some of them directly to people I had never met or spoken with previously.

When I received a response I immediately wrote back to the person, thanking him or her for the interest and advising that I would be in touch soon regarding next steps. I also asked people for their preferences in terms of their availability and which methods they were interested in. Most people responded that they would be interested in participating in one-on-one interviews, and small group interviews. In addition, I asked if I could have home e-mail addresses to decrease the amount of correspondence that I sent to people at work. This served to separate the connection between the project and the organization. Informed consents were sent to all participants (see Appendix G) and were returned either in hard copy or by e-mail.

*General Information for the Methods*

I realized that people's time is precious and limited due to work and other life demands. Stringer (2007) cautions the researcher that "you are not necessarily unwanted, but, because you are not integral to the lives of your others, you are dispensable" (p. 39). My goal was to encourage maximum participation by making arrangements that facilitated involvement. For instance, in arranging interviews with participants who were located at the other side of the city I offered to meet people in locations near them. Location and setting were also considerations in terms of being conducive to creating a relaxed and comfortable environment (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

To protect the identification of the participants, meeting times were set so that participants did not have to ask for time from their supervisors to attend. I considered the alternative to anonymity suggested by Zeni (1998): to seek full participation and give credit to participants, as co-researchers. However, the choice was made not to go that route because of the ethical implications involved.

Permission was requested from each participant to audio-record both types of interview with a digital recorder, and I also advised participants that I would take handwritten notes to keep track of details to assist me the interviews. As described by Stringer (2007), audio-recorded data are detailed and accurate. Another advantage with audio-recording was that I was able to focus on what was being said and maintain eye contact with the other person; the flow of the conversation was not interrupted by note taking. One participant was hesitant to have our conversation recorded, and I reassured the person that this was optional. However, the participant felt comfortable with the recorder when she understood the purpose of the recording and that there would have a

transcript of the conversation to review after the conversation. All participants were provided with transcripts of the one-on-one interviews so that accuracy and intent could be checked and revised if desired. The conversations that I transcribed were written to capture the ideas and the flow of the conversation. The transcripts from the transcribing service were word-for-word transcriptions. A number of participants noted that the transcripts of their interviews were surprisingly inarticulate. It was evident that ideas expressed in conversation do not smoothly go from A to B in the same way that they do in writing, and I discussed this with participants.

#### *One-on-One Interviews*

Due to the limited time that I had to conduct my study (October to December), as soon as I received a response to my invitation I began setting up an interview time. I conducted one-on-one interviews with 13 participants. The interview lengths ranged from half an hour to one and a half hours. Some meetings took place over a coffee break, one was over lunch during the workweek, one meeting was after work on a weeknight, two were on a weekend, and one was conducted over the phone after work.

Before each interview, I sent out two handouts that outlined questions that might be covered in our conversations (see Appendices C and H). This was done in recognition of the power relations involved in interviewing, as referred to by Briggs (2001). I hoped that participants would feel more comfortable about the interview process by having a sense of the topics that we might cover. Two participants mentioned that this had made them feel more comfortable, as they preferred being able to give the subject some thought in advance rather than coming up with spur-of-the-moment responses. One person chose

to respond to the handouts in writing, and then participated in the group interview and completed a survey.

In scheduling the interviews, I was careful to protect the identity of each participant and suggested locations for interviews that were not frequented by other staff. However, many participants were not concerned about people knowing that they were participating and shared with co-workers that they were coming to see me. I was always conscious of the time that was spent at work day interviews so that participants would not have to explain to their supervisors where they had been if absent from work. At the outset of each interview I set a time with the participant that we would finish and worked within this time, in appreciation that their time is valuable.

Participants in the one-on-one interviews had an idea of what we would discuss due to the invitation and the handouts. However, I did not want the questions to dictate the content of the interview, and I was careful to approach each interview so that the participant had control over the direction that it went in. Prompts and additional questions were used to further explore the information that emerged. I also encouraged the interviewees to get in touch with me after the interview if they had further thoughts or questions to share. At the end of interviews we talked about next steps. At a later date participants were sent a transcript of the data to check over for accuracy.

### *Survey*

Part way through the interviewing process I decided to develop a survey questionnaire to gather more specific information on engagement drivers from the participants. As well as the list of drivers that I used in the handout (see Appendix C), I included drivers that had been repeatedly mentioned by participants in the interviews.

The topic of generational issues also emerged from the interviews, so a question specific to generation was included in the survey. I let the respondents know that all survey questions were optional.

The survey began with a simple generational question. The second question involved rating the importance of 25 engagement drivers. Third was an open-ended question about positive challenge. The fourth and fifth questions asked the respondent to rate his or her current degree of engagement at work and general comfort with change, and also asked for an explanation of the rating. The sixth question asked how long the participant had worked for the BC Government (see Appendix D for survey questions).

I e-mailed the final draft of the survey out to the 16 participants with a suggested date for responding, and I received 14 completed surveys back. I think that there was a high response rate at least in part because I had already established a degree of relationship with the participants. In addition, many of the respondents used the narrative sections of the survey to provide detailed responses to the questions.

The survey results were then tallied and put in a summary table (see Appendix E). A shorter version of the summary was sent to participants who had completed the survey. The narrative responses were included with the conversation notes for the data analysis and the most popular drivers were considered in terms of areas for recommendations.

#### *Small Group Interview*

After the survey responses were tallied, I began planning the small group interview to garner recommendations from participants regarding organizational change and engagement. I sent out e-mails to the research participants to gauge interest. The e-mail suggested two questions that might be the focus of the group discussion and

included options for when the group could be held (see Appendix J). I also resent out the survey summary with the details of the time and location of the group interview, asking participants to consider the three most popular drivers in relation to recommendations.

As it was getting close to Christmas, I asked people to respond by December 6 so that I could arrange the group session before December 15. Five people were able to attend. Some others advised that they could not participate because of other commitments.

As the facilitator, I arranged, set-up, and conducted the small group interview. I considered asking the research members to assist in these capacities; however, due to time constraints they participated as group members instead. The five employees in the group were in three different roles in the organization and from three different branches. It was not necessary to arrange the group so that no direct report would be in the same group as his or her supervisor.

I wanted to hold the group in a non-work setting to reinforce that the research was separate from the organization. The session was scheduled for 2 hours on a Saturday afternoon in December at a centrally located community recreation centre. It was held over lunch hour and pizza, chips, and refreshments were provided.

The group focused on two questions that were developed in consultation with my faculty supervisor:

1. What will you do to support your own engagement during the current times change in the workplace?

2. If you were sitting down with an assistant deputy minister what would you recommend to help promote and maintain employee engagement during these current times of change in the workplace?

These questions were given to participants in advance of the session, and I reminded people of the top categories that had been identified as drivers in the survey. I had some additional questions developed in case we had time left at the end.

At the outset of the session, I asked everyone to introduce themselves, and I went over the agenda and asked if there were any questions. Krueger and Casey (2000) also wrote about using introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and ending questions. However, in 2 hours there was not enough time to go through all these stages. I put the two questions and the back-up questions up on the wall where people could see them.

The smaller size of the group made it easier to hear from each participant. I wrote the input from the group on a flipchart as people talked, and I checked the data with participants as we went along. As I wanted the atmosphere to be inviting and relaxed, I approached my role as supporting open communication rather than getting through an agenda. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to hear all the thoughts that people had about the second question and there was not enough time to do a check-out, to provide participants with an opportunity to debrief on the emotions and feelings that may have arisen in the sessions. Participants were encouraged to send thoughts, feedback, and recommendations to me that we did not have time to discuss in the group.

After completing the theming and analysis of the data, I sent a draft of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the research team and other research

participants to check for accuracy and intent. I also met with the project sponsor to discuss the results of the data analysis, and the recommendations.

### *Reflective Journaling*

My final research method was to keep data in a notebook. Since the beginning of my project I kept notes and reflections in this book, which I carried with me daily. This notebook did not contain any identifying participant information. Before I began my data analysis I went through the notebook to gather relevant data from it.

### *Credibility, Transferability, and Dependability*

The use of multiple data gathering methods in the research enhances the credibility of the study by including perspectives from diverse sources and provides triangulation of the data (Stringer, 2007). This was evident in my research, as the results of the survey reflected the data from the conversations.

Stringer (2007) outlines several factors in establishing credibility and participants' trust in the integrity of the research processes: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member checking, participant debriefing, diverse case analysis, and referential adequacy. In this research project, interviews with participants provided prolonged engagement and were of sufficient length to create deep-seated understandings. To provide persistent observation I constantly and consciously observed events and activities and used a journal for noting and reflection. Participants were given the opportunity to review the data they had provided as well as the subsequent analysis in order to clarify and extend their information. The diversity of the participants represented a spectrum of employees in the MHSD. In addition, the reporting of the participants'

contributions reflects their experiences and perspectives and is grounded in their terminology and language.

One of the goals for the project was to “explore the possibility that the outcomes of [this] action research study may be relevant elsewhere” (Stringer, 2007, p. 59). This has been done by providing detailed descriptions of the contexts, activities, and events so that “people who were not part of the study [can] make judgments about whether or not the situation is sufficiently similar to their own for the outcomes to be applied” (p. 59).

Dependable research tools and processes have been used to conduct the research. An inquiry audit would demonstrate the dependability of the project, which “provides a detailed description of the procedures that have been followed and provides the basis for judging the extent to which they are dependable” (Stringer, 2007, p. 59). Evidence such as the data collected, journals, notes, and tapes could establish the veracity of the study (p. 59). Participants were given opportunities to ensure that I have accurately and fully captured their contributions and recommendations by being sent conversation transcripts and drafts of chapters 4 and 5 of this final report.

#### Data Analysis

Qualitative research uses the inductive process of reasoning, which begins with specifics and uses these to generate general principles with the theory emerging from, or being grounded in, everyday life (Palys & Atchison, 2008). While quantitative analysis primarily takes place after the data is collected, qualitative analysis “applies from the very start and continues throughout the data collection process, as well as after it is completed” (p. 673). For my research question, the meaning emerged from the

participants, by engaging them in the research inquiry and actively listening to their contributions.

The data gathered from the participants were kept in the form of transcripts of the interactions, narrative responses to survey questions, and my written observations as the researcher. I transcribed half the conversations, and half were transcribed by a paid transcriber who had signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix K). From the content of the data I made inferences “by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (Hosti, as cited in Berg, 2004, p. 267). I used the two major processes that Stringer (2007) states provide the means to distill data that arise from the qualitative research inquiry: (a) categorizing and coding, and (b) selecting key experiences and unpacking them to identify the elements that compose them to illuminate the nature of the experiences.

In categorizing and coding, the first steps are to review the data and then to unitize them by identifying units of meaning with a pencil. The units of meaning are then sorted into related groups or categories that typify or summarize the experiences and perspectives of participants. Themes that are held in common across the stakeholder groups are then identified, and, finally, the categories are recorded in an organized system (Stringer, 2007). This method of content analysis was used for the proceedings of the one-on-one interviews and the small group interview.

Due to the fact that the topics of engagement and change are broad, I had given participants two handouts in advance of the interviews so they could better understand what my research was investigating (see Appendices C and H). The content of the handouts did give some direction to the responses, and six themes underlying the

conversations were related to the research question and the handout questions: defining engagement, the results of engagement, drivers of engagement, change, personal experiences, and innovations. Following the completion of the data gathering, I went through the data transcripts with each of the themes represented by different coloured highlighters and matching coloured flags. I then took key comments from the transcripts and wrote them into notebooks that were divided up into the themes. For the next step, I created an outline of chapter 4, which details the findings and conclusions of this study, and attached the data in the notebooks to the sections in the outline. This data were summarized into the findings and conclusions.

In addition, I examined the key experiences that participants talked about. Stringer (2007) wrote that in the analysis of key experiences, the focus is on events that seem to have had a marked impact on the experience of major stakeholders. Unpacking of these events is done to understand why the experiences have special significance for the participants. The process for this method is to review the data, identify any key experiences that the participants have recounted, identify the main features of each experience, identify the elements that compose the experience, and then identify themes and list them. Insights from the key experiences were then incorporated into this research report. The results of the data analysis were shared with the research team and participants to check the accuracy of the analysis.

#### Reliability and Validity

Berg (2004) writes that data are subject to two kinds of evaluations or criticisms: it must be determined whether a document or artifact is authentic, “which is sometimes referred to as external criticism or validity” (p. 240); and the accuracy of meaning in the

material must be determined, “which is called internal criticism and is related to the document’s reliability” (p. 240). The basis for establishing the reliability and validity in qualitative research uses a different set of criteria than is used in traditional experimental research (Stringer, 2007).

Rigor in action research is based on checks to ensure that the outcomes of research are trustworthy—that they do not merely reflect the particular perspectives, biases, or worldview of the researcher and that they are not based solely on superficial or simplistic analysis of the issues investigated. . . . Checks for trustworthiness . . . are designed to ensure that researchers have rigorously established the veracity, truthfulness, or validity of the information and analyses that have emerged from the research process. (Stringer, 2007, p. 57)

One method of ensuring the reliability and validity of the data in my research was to send transcripts of the one-on-one conversations to the participants to confirm that I had accurately captured and understood what they said. The content of the group interview was captured on flipcharts and as the group proceeded I asked participants whether what I had written down was accurate. The session was also taped so that I could check on what I had written. The themes and data analysis were also checked with the research team and research participants.

One element in the reliability of content analysis is the use of explicit rules called the criteria of selection, which are formally established before the analysis of the data (Berg, 2004). The goal of the criteria of selection is that other researchers or readers will obtain the same or comparable results from analysis of the content. Holsti (as cited in Berg, 2004) wrote that the inclusion or exclusion of content according to consistently applied criteria “eliminates analysis in which only material supporting the investigator’s hypotheses are examined” (p. 268).

Prior to beginning the content analysis of the data gathered from the participants I developed the criteria of selection rules. My first rule was that I would record and

consider everything that was collected. In addition, I made it clear to participants that I welcomed all perspectives. For instance, one person stated that I would not want him or her to participate because he or she held what might be considered controversial opinions on the topic of engagement. I responded that hearing his or her thoughts would really benefit the research, and the person subsequently did choose to participate. As another measure, all original and transcribed notes and audio recordings from the data gathering processes have been saved so that the data could be verified if necessary.

### Ethical Issues

Without research participants “the progress and promise of research in advancing the human condition” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Tri-Council], 1998, p. i.7) would not be possible. In the course of research, people cannot be used immorally as a means towards even legitimate ends (Tri-Council, 1998, p. i.4). Following is a brief outline of the eight principles that guide ethical reviews at Royal Roads University (2009a), and the applicability of each principle to my research project.

The purpose of the Royal Roads University *Research Ethics Policy* (Royal Roads University, 2007) is “to establish principles, practices and procedures to guide and ensure the ethical conduct of research and scholarship carried out under the auspices of the university” (Purpose section, ¶ 1). One of the publications that guide ethical reviews at Royal Roads University is the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Tri-Council, 1998). The policy statement sets out eight ethical principles that have been widely adopted by diverse research disciplines, and that

express common standards, values and aspirations of the research community (Tri-Council, 1998, p. i.5).

The eight principles in the policy statement are: respect for human dignity, maximizing benefits, balancing harms and benefits, minimizing harm, respect for free and informed consent, respect for privacy and confidentiality, respect for vulnerable persons, and respect for justice and inclusiveness (Tri-Council, 1998). The statement also notes that development and refinement of ethical norms are ever-evolving in a societal context, and conflicts may arise when principles are applied in isolation from one another (pp. i.4–i.5).

Respect for human dignity is fundamental to the other seven principles. It “forms the basis of the ethical obligations in research” (Tri-Council, 1998, p. i.5) and aspires to protect the research participant’s bodily, psychological, and cultural integrity (p. i.5). The dignity of the research participants is protected by adherence to the tenets of the other seven principles and by considering the physical, psychological, and cultural aspects of each participant. As such, these principles and considerations guided the planning of my project as well as all interactions with participants.

Three of the principles are essential to the initial determination of whether a research project is justified: maximizing benefits, balancing harms and benefits, and minimizing harm (Tri-Council, 1998). These principles involve anticipating and considering the potential benefits to be gained from the research and potential negative outcomes of the research for participants and organizations.

Human research is intended to produce benefits for participants, other individuals or society as a whole, or for the advancement of knowledge, and in most research “the

primary benefits produced are for society and the advancement of knowledge” (Tri-Council, 1998, p. i.6). One duty of my project was to maximize the net benefits of the research (p. i.6). The benefits are that: the organization will gain information on any relationship between organizational change and employee engagement, which will help inform future change initiatives; there will be an opportunity for collaboration between different hierarchical levels in the organization during the small group interviews; research participants had the opportunity to contribute their insights and learn from each other; and other organizations will be able to determine whether the research is relevant to their situations and gain insight from the lessons learned section that could assist when planning their own research. During the project I also examined whether these benefits could be increased by amendments to the purpose or the design of the project.

Balancing harms and benefits dictates that the foreseeable harms to participants should not outweigh the anticipated benefits (Tri-Council, 1998, p. i.6). For my project, I identified the potential risks and harms associated with the research for participants and assess whether these are greater than the knowledge and growth that is anticipated for both the organization and the participants.

I also minimized harm in my research with a design that avoids, prevents, or minimizes harm to the research participants (Tri-Council, 1998, p. i.6). This included ensuring that the methods were used in a manner that provided confidentiality and privacy to the participants, and that treated them respectfully. For instance, power imbalance can result in an actual or a perceived risk when information is shared. None of the one-on-one interviews or groups interviews included participants who report directly or indirectly to me. However, I was aware that people may have been concerned that the

information they provided would be shared in a way that identifies them as the source to supervisors in the organization, and I made every effort to reassure them that this would not be the case.

Respect for free and informed consent and respect for privacy and confidentiality (Tri-Council, 1998) are two principles that exist to minimize harm to research participants. Informed consent

suggests you should not do things to people unless they say it's alright to do so and only when their consent is given on the basis of knowing all aspects of the situation and the possible outcomes that might affect their willingness to participate. (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 420).

Respect for privacy and confidentiality protects the research participant's mental and psychological integrity by governing the access, control, and dissemination of personal information (Tri-Council, 1998, p. i.5). To ensure free and informed consent of my participants I advised each participant of any actual or potential risks involved with participating in the research, and that he or she could discontinue participation at any time. These points were identified in the research invitation letter and the informed consent form. Access and dissemination of information about participants and the information provided by participants was controlled to protect their confidentiality. The informed consents for both the one-on-one interviews and the small group interviews set out that the anonymity of the research participants would be insured in the final report and any other discussion of the data.

The principle of respect for vulnerable persons is also related to minimizing harm to research participants. It represents an ethical obligation to protect people whose diminished competence or decision-making capacity make them vulnerable, such as children, or people in institutions. This "often translate[s] into special procedures" (Tri-

Council, 1998, p. i.5), which protect the vulnerable person's interests. However, my research project did not involve the participation of people who were vulnerable in the way that is described above.

Finally, respect for justice and inclusiveness governs the research ethical review process (Tri-Council, 1998). This principle requires that "fair methods, standards and procedures [are used] for reviewing research protocols, and that the process be effectively independent" (p. i.6). The principle is also concerned with the distribution of the benefits and burdens of research, which means that "no segment of the population shall be unfairly burdened with the harms of research" (p. i.6) and individuals and groups who may benefit from advances from the research are not neglected or discriminated against. To fulfill this principle, the Royal Roads University ethical review committee reviewed the research protocols of my project before my research commenced. This process was independent from me, and has fair methods, standards, and procedures. In addition, my research did not involve exploitation of, and neglect or discrimination against, a segment of the population, and vulnerable individuals who are unable to protect their own interests.

Glesne (2006) wrote that in qualitative research ethical considerations are largely concerned with the nature of the researcher's relationships with the participants (p. 126). Action research is empowering (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Glesne, 2006; Stringer, 2007), and the eight ethical principles in the *Tri-council Policy Statement* (Tri-Council, 1998) serve to support and promote empowering relationships.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

My project focused on the following research question: What fosters and maintains engagement during organizational change in the Provincial Services Branch (PSB) of the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD) ? The subquestions were:

1. What engages PSB employees?
2. How have organizational changes over the past year impacted engagement in the PSB?
3. What lessons learned about fostering and maintaining engagement could be applicable to other areas of the ministry that are implementing change?

Chapter 4 describes the four conclusions that arose from the data analysis and shows the findings that support these conclusions. The data demonstrated a link between engagement and organizational change and pointed to key factors that strengthen or weaken this link. In chapter 5, recommendations are made that emerge from the conclusions.

Data were gathered from 16 participants: 12 women and 4 men. To support confidentiality, each participant has been given a pseudonym and, as there were no significant gender-based differences in the participants' responses, a randomly assigned gender. Minor details have also been changed to make events less identifiable.

The participants in the research came from leadership, administrative support, and client service delivery positions. People's participation in the research methods varied. Kelly, Riley, Quinn, and Taylor had an interview, completed a survey, and attended the small group interview. Devon, Chris, Drew, Dale, Barrie, Jessie, and Morgan had an

interview and completed a survey. Pat completed the survey and attended the small group interview. Jordan had an introductory chat with me, and then completed the survey.

Casey and Lee had an interview (Lee's was by phone). Jamie completed the survey.

The powerful words and experiences of the participants have been used to share their insights on engagement and change. Additional excerpts from the conversations and survey data are in Appendix L.

### Finding and Conclusions

After analysing the data, I arrived at the four conclusions, which are given in this section. The research participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback on the analysis and the conclusions, and the participants that provided feedback were in agreement with my analysis. Each conclusion is shown with the supporting data from the research.

The four conclusions are:

1. Conclusion one: Engagement is a powerful force that has benefits for the employee and the employer.
2. Conclusion two: Organizational change impacts engagement.
3. Conclusion three: Effective management of key factors will mitigate the impacts of change on engagement.
4. Conclusion four: Engagement drivers vary on an individual basis, but nearly all participants in the research identified the type of tasks they do at work, respect, and communication as being very important.

*Conclusion One: Engagement is a Powerful Force that has Benefits for the Employee  
and the Employer*

People benefit from being engaged, because engagement makes being at work a positive experience. When the research participants talked about being engaged they used words like excited, happy, hopeful, optimistic, energized, creative, passionate, and focused. Barrie described the experience of waking up enthusiastically in the morning and looking forward to another day at work when she is engaged.

The employer also benefits from the greater productivity of engaged employees. Research participants described wanting to do more when they are engaged. As Drew described, “You put in your own time and you sacrifice personal matters, because you are involved and you don’t mind doing more.” Chris said that she knows when she is engaged because she chooses to think outside work hours about creating solutions to work situations. Lee commented, “If you’re not engaged, you’re not innovating.”

As the researcher, I noticed the liveliness generated when people talked about being engaged. The energy was contagious, and I felt invigorated and engaged by these discussions. Participants also commented that being around engaged people is engaging. For instance, in the group interview Taylor related that one strategy that helps to keep him engaged during an organizational change is to surround himself by engaged people. Riley said that the commitment and engagement of team members help him to stay engaged.

The converse was also true: there was a decrease in energy when people talked about being disengaged. The words used to describe disengagement included bored, frustrated, uncertain, unmotivated, and drained. Drew shared his experience of being

disengaged, he said, “The connection is decreased and that affects my energy.” Casey commented, “If you’re not engaged, you work not a minute more than you have to, you take all your breaks, you’re not happy about your work and it shows.” Barrie described that when she is disengaged time goes slowly and she “tunes out.”

People want to be engaged because, as Casey pointed out, “Who wouldn’t want to come to work, rather than be uninspired?” In addition, I found that each research participant had significant insight into what engages him or her. They were able to identify the engagement drivers that they found important and their individual preferences for the types of tasks that they like to do at work. The employer can benefit from this desire for engagement and this self-awareness by using it to facilitate engagement in the organization.

The employer and the employee can also benefit from people’s willingness to put effort into promoting their own engagement and engaging environments. In the small group interview participants were asked, “What will you do to support your own engagement during the current times of change in the workplace?” Numerous practical suggestions were made. The strategies identified include: (a) engage yourself by becoming part of the change and involving yourself in it, (b) set individual goals to focus on, (c) use mentoring to learn the big picture and understand leadership motivators, (d) celebrate your successes, and (e) use the forums that are available to have input (see Appendix M for the full list of strategies). Jessie described her own proactive approach to engagement: “I make my life happen, I don’t wait for it to happen to me. It depends on how persistent you are about engagement: sometimes you have to do the work, rather than let your manager do it for you.”

The MHSD also benefits because people are engaged by the work that the ministry offers. The ministry attracted Chris, who described that she was excited when she read the ministry's values two years ago: "I was at another ministry, but there was nothing personal keeping me there. I liked the idea of making a difference to a person's health and wellness, making a difference in someone's life." Barrie said, "When [I] returned to the ministry I felt like I was coming home. This is where I'm meant to be." Drew described that he gets enjoyment from his job because the goals of the ministry match his interest in humanity and serving others. Participants also commented that they work with caring, compassionate people. In addition, my experience in the research was that the participants were dedicated to supporting the ministry's effectiveness. Throughout our conversations, people demonstrated that they were interested in identifying the positive in situations and generating ideas, rather than dwelling on negative thoughts and complaining.

However, participants also talked about how they can become disengaged when their personal values are in conflict with the values demonstrated by the organization.

Quinn said that he is becoming disengaged from the organization:

It used to be easy to see where your work fit into the big picture. The ministry's values were directly related to our work: equity and fairness, openness and transparency, client centricity. However, when we became a bigger ministry it was like a whale gobbled us up and assimilated us into an amorphous mass that I can't quite relate to yet. And now our values are more like competencies. The Open Space [activity we did] with the people from Baldy Hughes and Linda Cavanagh was fantastic—we saw what the ministry really does.

Devon described that values are "huge" for him, and he also said that it is possible to be engaged in his work, but not his organization: "If the larger organization doesn't care in the same way that I do, no matter how much I care, whatever my ability is, and however much I might am engaged, it might be futile."

*Conclusion Two: Organizational Change Impacts Engagement*

Participants described that organizational change has the potential to be both engaging and disengaging. In the feedback gathered through the conversations and the survey, participants described some of the effects that change has had on them and the effects that they have observed. The challenge of organizational change excited and engaged people. However, people also described that organizational change has impacted absenteeism and has led to insecurity, stress, fear, anxiety, paranoia, weeping, withdrawal, burn-out, feeling vulnerable, narrowing sightlines, and resignations. Taylor commented,

The worst and the best can come out at times of change—when people are pushed to the max relationships are tested. People may rise to the challenge, get upset, or get sick. This can happen in both small and large changes.

In the research survey, 14 research participants rated their current level of engagement at work, with a 10 being very engaged, 5 being somewhat engaged, and 1 being not engaged at all. Nearly all responses were between somewhat engaged and very engaged (see Table 1). This participant commented on how changes have impacted on his engagement:

I had been highly engaged, at a ten level. However, since changes in leadership and the tasks I do, my engagement has dropped to a four. I no longer feel as valued as I did, and there is a serious lack of open communication and trust.

Riley described how a change has positively impacted his engagement: “Having recently joined a team of competent co-workers I want to learn fast, contribute, and belong. I feel engaged at work.”

Table 1. *Participants Self-Rating on Engagement*

Engagement Level	No. of Participants
10 (very engaged)	1
9	1
8	3
7	5
6	1
5 (somewhat engaged)	2
4	1

*Note.*  $n = 14$ . Participants were asked to rate themselves from a scale of very engaged (10), to somewhat engaged (5), to not at all engaged (1).

Taylor observed that some people seem to react in the same way, no matter what the size of the change:

Some people won't become engaged, and won't contribute. Others start out engaged then become semi-engaged—they're distressed, and they're the people who may get sick, and who can't cope. Over-engaged people can begin on a high energy level, and some of them get burned out too.

Another participant said that the level of uncertainty she experienced during a time of change, with the possibility of not having a job, made it hard to stay engaged in her work every day.

Some participants thought that, no matter how well a change is managed, there would always be some degree of negative impact, some inconvenience, some fear, and some resistance, at least in the short term. With changes in the ministry, employees may also be concerned about the well being of clients of the ministry. Riley described a radical change that had been proposed to service delivery some years ago that felt like “a kick in the teeth,” because of the affects he anticipated it would have on the clients, as well as on the work he did.

The research participants also commented on the degree of change in the ministry. Over the past 2 years, there have been many changes to the PSB and to the ministry as a whole. Two participants described the pace of change in the ministry over the past year and a half as “non-stop” (Morgan, Taylor). Quinn said that the constant pace of change has left him feeling numb. Jamie described his engagement level as being 10 on most days; however, he also commented, “As I get older, and the pace of change continues at high levels. I feel some fatigue that reduces my engagement.” Riley cautioned that organizational change could be like metal fatigue: “Bend it a few times and it will become stronger. But overbend it, and it breaks.”

*Conclusion Three: There are Key Factors that can be Managed to Effectively Mitigate the Impacts of Change on Engagement*

In our conversations, participants identified several factors that can be managed to effectively mitigate the impacts of change on engagement. These include: (a) people’s individual attitudes towards change, (b) communication, (c) trust and integrity, (d) having input, (e) adequate resources, (f) coworkers and team, and (g) management skills. It is indicative of the relationship between change and engagement that all of these, except people’s individual attitudes towards change, are considered engagement drivers. Information on these factors is provided in the section that follows. Additional excerpts from the research data are in Appendix L.

*Individual Attitudes Towards Change*

In our conversations and in the research survey, participants described their different attitudes to change. Some participants thought of change as great, and Pat commented that he is uncomfortable with a lack of change. Drew talked about accepting that change is inevitable, and said, “Without change there is no progress.” Devon

described change as a given in any area of life, including work: “Being able to work with change, see its value and understand and work with its negative aspects is fundamental to being happy and productive in all areas of life. Change also facilitates learning, including learning about oneself.” Riley wrote that his comfort level with change is in direct ratio to how much information he is given about the change, and he commented, “I always find that entering into change is a good time to take stock and make personal adjustments.” Participants also cautioned against change for change’s sake. Kelly used the example of a new supervisor making changes to the way things were done when they started and it seemed that the change was made just to make a difference, not an improvement.

Overall, the research participants reported being comfortable with change. In the survey, participants were asked to rate their comfort level with change on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not comfortable at all, 5 being somewhat comfortable, and 10 being very comfortable. Of the 14 respondents, 10 indicated that their general comfort level with change was from 8 to 10. The remainder rated themselves from 5 to 7. The survey summary in Appendix I shows all the ratings with a generational breakdown.

Jessie described her observations of how individuals respond differently to change:

Some people sit back and wait and see where dust settles. Rather than being in the whirlwind of things, they take a step back rather than taking a step forward, and instead of raising their hand they’ll shy away from things. I think they’re likely to do this if they’re not getting a secure feeling that everything’s going to be okay—you need buy-in to have that. But I say, “Bring it on!” because I like new things.

Experience seems to influence people’s attitudes towards change. Kelly, who was born before 1961, described that his family moved a lot because his father was in the military, and he feels open to change. Dale was also born before 1961, and on the survey she rated her comfort level as 6.

I grew up in an environment where things were very much the same from one year to the next. Generally, the younger generations are okay with the fact that things are constantly in motion and nothing is really stable, and I think that comes from growing up with technology and in an environment where things change so quickly. They have a theme song of change.

However, Dale also describes that her attitude has changed in recent years:

I've come to realize that whatever is here today may not be here tomorrow, and it's also changed my attitude towards my own life. In order to take advantage of the opportunities that are there, you have to let go of a whole lot of stuff.

### *Communication*

Through information sharing and inspiration, communication facilitates organizational change and growth and aids in building the relationships that support changes. Many participants identified communication as a key factor in effectively making changes, and in the research survey respondents rated communication as the third most important engagement driver.

Communication was also named in connection with several other engagement drivers: leadership, respect, trust, empowerment, recognition, and coworkers and team. Participants talked about the role that communication plays in building trust and acknowledging people's contributions, and in establishing relationships with leaders and other coworkers, and within teams. Devon found that leadership demonstrates respect by communicating with staff, "Even if you're being told, 'I can't share everything at this time.'"

In terms of communication in relation to change and engagement, as Jessie straightforwardly put it, "If you don't have communication, you're not going to have any engagement because employees aren't going to know what's going on." At its most basic, one-way communication is needed to relay information from the people planning to the people implementing it. Casey described that communication can counter the insecurity,

speculation, anxiety, and stress that may be related to change. She went on to say that an employee might not be able to engage in what they are working on when their time and effort are diverted into speculation and sometimes paranoia.

Leaders may feel that they are shielding employees from anxiety and fear by not sharing information. However, a common idea expressed by the participants is that they appreciate being told “I don’t know” or “Don’t hold me to this, but this may be what is going to happen” rather than being told nothing at all. Devon described a time in his workplace when there were a lot of meetings being held behind closed doors, information was coming informally through the grapevine, and people could sense from the energy of the directors that something was going on; however, no information was being shared with the employees. “That created disengagement, because we were feeling cut-off from the reality of what was going on” (Devon).

Another thought was that the executive might believe that staff is given adequate opportunities to ask questions; however, Pat suggested that rather than waiting to be asked, executives could be proactive about sharing information. Participants also hoped for information to be shared as early as possible, so that time is given to digest the changes.

The need for confidentiality was acknowledged because of the potential impacts that might result if information is given out prematurely; for instance, when policy and legislative changes or human resources issues are involved. Again, participants identified that they understand if they are told that this is the reason that information cannot be shared. It was suggested that a decision to withhold information be made with careful consideration, because of the risk to trust and relationship building that is created when

information is withheld. Participants thought that people understand when leaders tell staff that they cannot share everything with them.

Participants shared examples of positive communication by people in leadership roles. This description was given of a director whose approach was appreciated.

She was really good at communicating. Her approach was: “I will always tell you as much as I can, and keep everybody in the loop.” And the way she delivered information was really comforting. Not just telling us that change is coming and you’re going to have to deal with it, whether you like it or not. It was coming from the perspective that change is coming, and it’s going to be exciting. Some of it will be good, some of it may not be, but we’ll deal with it as it comes, and we’ll do the best we can. (Chris)

She had informal coffee meetings, and you felt that it was okay to say what you wanted to say. (Taylor)

Lee pointed out that effective communication could not happen automatically:

“There has to be an environment for communication first, and difficulties may arise if you are not already using feedback.” Morgan described a team that she had been on where a safe environment for honest and open communication had been established:

The supervisor was very comfortable with you telling him how things were going. He encouraged that, and it didn’t impact what he thought of you. Nobody felt silly putting out an idea in a meeting. We had healthy debate, but it was always respectful. And people were not afraid to be themselves. You could be a little bit funny and even a little sarcastic but no one took it to an extreme where someone was offended. Or if you had a problem with what someone said, you could go and say, “Look, I understand that’s part of your sense of humour, but it’s just something that didn’t make me feel valued, it made me feel a little uncomfortable.” And we could talk about it. There were very few barriers.

Participants also identified the value of using a variety of ways to communicate.

Several participants expressed satisfaction at the type of communication forums that are available to them, such as team meetings, the Cross-Branch Connection committee, branch newsletters, and opportunities to forward ideas to managers. However, participants cautioned that e-mail communication is not always advisable because people

can be too busy to keep up with the e-mails they are receiving. Participants also observed that some people may have something to say but are not comfortable speaking up in meetings, especially if there are people present in positions of higher authority. Drew thought that being able to send your ideas to managers and directors without solicitation and without fear of reprisal or reproach would be one way of flattening the hierarchy. Face-to-face, two-way connections were thought to help build trusting relationships. Jessie said that big changes are best communicated face-to-face. Electronic methods, such as Microsoft Live Meetings (2010) and Microsoft SharePoint (2007), were identified as being useful in helping employees to stay connected.

Devon suggested that directors could come to branch meetings to discuss what is going on in the workplace. Taylor thought it would be beneficial if members of the executive would sit down with staff at a meeting once a year to have conversations and to obtain feedback: “Executive may think that you’re going to ‘get’ what they’re communicating when they send out their messages. But if you don’t know them, and you don’t have that trust, how can you really?”

### *Trust and Integrity*

Trust was another factor that frequently arose in the conversations. The participants shared that trust in workplace relationships helps to facilitate change and promote engagement. Trust supports open communication, and trust in the leadership helps to gain buy-in for changes.

Participants described a number of ways that help to build trust and to demonstrate trust, including: demonstrating integrity; standing by what you say you are going to do; being honest; not trying to play the middle ground; delegating responsibility; having a warm and friendly manner; being real, not presenting yourself as a perfect

person; exposing your vulnerabilities, being candid; and laughing at your own mistakes.

Taylor commented,

Some leadership is naturally trusting. With others, it feels like a job to try and earn trust. Some leadership makes it very safe to go out on a limb and give an idea, even if it's not a good one. Then there can be full engagement—everyone on board wanting to feel safe and going for it; to do whatever, going above and beyond.

In the conversations we also discussed ways that can inhibit trust: demonstrating disrespectful behaviours that lead to tension, having a rigid style, and showing lack of mutual understanding. If a foundation of trust has not been established, the actions of leaders may be perceived as demonstrating a lack of trust in staff, even when that is not the case.

#### *Adequate Resources*

Several participants commented that changes are enhanced by having adequate resources to support it, enough skills and person-power to facilitate the change, along with the time and staff available to provide training, if needed. Dale described that “Patience, adequate resources to do the job and an understanding staff help to make any challenge a more positive experience.”

Some participants voiced the concern that the ministry seems to be faced by the issue of having inadequate resources. One participant commented that the ministry seems chronically understaffed and underfunded. Jessie observed, “People seem so pressed for time, overworked, underpaid. And at some point, people stop being motivated.” Lee commented that our technology does not support her being innovative: “Adequate resources are a big one. We have technology that is good, but it seems antiquated in comparison to what we have even on our computers at home. My creativity is constrained by technology, and that is short-sighted.”

*Input*

Research participants often talked about the difference that having the opportunity to provide feedback made to them in terms of their engagement with a change. In the engagement drivers, this was categorized as empowerment. The feedback from participants indicated that they would, at the least, like to have their opinions heard and responded to, even if they do not influence the decisions. To Drew engagement means being involved in decision-making, being asked about his concerns and his feelings about changes: “It doesn’t matter how much control I have over the decision, but I would at least like to have the opportunity to voice my opinion”. Numerous participants expressed this concern and also said that they like to find out what happened with an idea that they offered: “I feel frustrated when it appears that my concerns and suggestions are being ignored” (Chris). Riley described,

When a supervisor told everyone, “This is what we’re going to do and this is how we’re going to do it,” some people’s backs would go up. However, if the supervisor said, “This is our goal, how are we going to achieve it,” then people would jump on the problem and get it done.

Taylor talked about having meetings “to talk about how we might make a situation better,” as compared to supervisors or managers taking an approach of, “We’re in charge here, so we will do our job, and we’ll let you know what that’s going to mean.” Jessie said,

It’s hard for some people not to ask why, and everyone has the right to ask why. I think we’ve been lucky to have the CBC [Cross Branch Connection] and other committees where we can bring ideas together. I know some other organizations don’t.

Chris shared the experience she had on a high functioning team where the hierarchy had been flattened:

There were weekly meetings to discuss concerns and changes, and rotating duties. The supervisor came to every other meeting and the manager dropped in every once in a while. People appreciated that everyone's opinion was valuable. There was no negative tone, and although there were heated discussions that were passionate, respect was always there. Openness and respect were supported. The senior worker was not always at the meeting, but she had set the tone. Although the rules weren't expressed, everyone really knew what was expected.

Morgan also described an engaging team experience:

The leadership created the space where we were allowed to participate without the fear of reproach or repercussion, and we knew that they really did value our input. The supervisor would come to us and say "I have a problem we need to resolve, do you have any suggestions?" and he may have already had an idea of what that answer might be, but he still threw it out to the team to look at. And he'd always give us a response. He might say "Okay guys, that's great, but we're going to go in this direction for these reasons" and we'd all understand that. The communication was right there. And in other ways, we lead ourselves, and he was there to direct and support.

### *Coworkers and Team*

In this ministry the word team is applied to various levels. For instance, a team may consist of three people within a branch, or an entire ministry, such as is evidenced by the concept used informally in the ministry of "One ministry, one team" (L. Chabot, personal communication, April 1, 2009). The elements that support engagement in a small team environment, such as respect, communication, trust, and integrity, also support engagement in a larger team environment.

Participants talked about the value of having a high-functioning team during organizational changes. Quinn described that high functioning teams can be a reliable source of strength and stability for team members at times of change. Morgan described her experiences on both a high-functioning team and a struggling team during times of extreme change. She said that it was interesting to observe the difference: on the high-

functioning team “it was very busy but people maintained a positive attitude;” however, her experience on the other team was very stressful, and the response “was more like ‘Yikes!’”

In describing the relationships in the high-functioning team, Morgan said that the interactions were always very real and sincere:

There was never any pretense, nobody was trying to step over somebody to get somewhere. It was just the unique nature of that team. We had a diverse group, and people’s interests were different. And even if there were three people wanting two positions, it would all be worked out. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly what makes that—I’d never been on a team that was so well-matched. There were lots of opportunities for participation because our supervisor involved us so much in the things that were going on.

Morgan also finds that there is more personal and social interaction in smaller groups.

She described how interactions with her team kept her engaged:

If you become isolated, and don’t take time to make the connection, it’s like being alone on an island. You forget that you have a whole team of people that are going through the same thing as you are, and you don’t know what they’re going through. Maybe a coworker had an amazing day at work, everything went well with clients, and he feels great. But you don’t get the benefit of sharing that if you don’t hear about them feeling that way. Sharing positive stories helps you feed off other people’s energies. And it’s important to meet with each other, so you can have a visual idea of who your team is.

Lee described how interactive technology could support team interaction by encouraging constant dialogue. She also made the point that it is important to make time for everyone to get involved with the team, face-to-face. Jessie recognized that introverted and extroverted people might have different needs in terms of the level of interaction with coworkers: “I’m extroverted, and I like being on a team because I need to interact with people. I also like interacting with co-workers outside of work hours. However, an introverted person may not enjoy that to the same degree.”

Changes to a team's personnel can affect engagement. Quinn talked about the team as being a kind of extended family, and he described being on a team during a time when several personnel changes were going on:

People were coming and going, and it was also a difficult time because there were some sad things happening that we had to deal with. When people first come on a team, you have to find your way with them. It takes a while to find out "who is this person, how do they interact and what are their strengths?"

Morgan observed that a clash could occur when people who have experienced a different type of organizational culture first join a team because their attitudes and ways of dealing with things may be different.

In the conversations we also discussed that a team can be stronger when it shares its members' strengths. Casey described a manager who promoted the approach of "know your strengths and then find competent people who have strengths that are your weaknesses." Casey said, "We can all work together without having to be the same. Normal is that everyone is different, and we should recognise that we have differences and use that to our advantage."

Participants also recounted stories of their inspirational experiences with the immediate supervisors on their teams. Riley described going through a difficult period of change in his workplace:

I got really good support from my supervisor during the reorganization and afterwards. That really, really helped me I could say almost anything to her. I didn't see her very often, and at first I didn't know if I could trust her. Sometimes we would go for lunch together, and I would find that I was telling her all my worries about the office. Because I'm usually a pretty quiet person and I had gone out of my comfort zone, I would think, "Maybe I've burdened her too much, maybe I've said too much, perhaps she'll think that I'm weak and that I don't know what I'm doing." But that didn't happen, and through it all she was really supportive. She helped to keep me engaged, and she backed me up when I had to talk to someone about disciplinary matters.

Taylor described how the engagement of team members with the supervisor was instrumental to a successful change:

When we started with a new initiative that was under Bob's direction, even the people that weren't sold on it allowed themselves to be engaged in the change because of him. So as a team we ploughed forward to stand behind Bob. Somehow he elicited engagement with his personal touches and just the way he behaved. Bob made mistakes and he admitted that he made the mistakes. He acted on my suggestion once, and it turned out that I had made a mistake. We acted on it, and later it was pointed out that we should have gone a different way. But Bob took full responsibility and still thanked me for participating. I remember feeling really bad because I had influenced the decision and pointed him in that direction but when I talked to him about it, he said that he had agreed with me totally and acted on his own. His admitting that he could make mistakes, telling stories that made him seem human and not perfect, made me trust him even more. And Bob did his job; I mean, you can't just be really cool and funny and not do anything.

Kelly simply said, "I need to get feedback from a supervisor that I trust and admire. I need to value their qualities."

### *Management Skills*

As many participants identified, effective management skills also influence the experience of a change. The feedback from participants indicated that part of effective change management involves balancing several factors: open communication and confidentiality; stability and action; reliability, predictability, and innovation; and modelling engagement while honestly sharing their own experiences.

Jessie noted that who the leader is makes a difference, and many participants expanded on their ideas on how the leader's role guides the tone of the workplace. Participants recognized that there are different leadership styles, and they talked about effective leadership being approachable and responsive, leading by example, and following through. An effective leader was seen as someone who (a) plans and prepares for change; (b) is flexible; (c) listens to staff and takes their suggestions into account; (d) shows support and understanding; (e) recognizes when there might be an issue that

needs to be dealt with; (f) is sensitive to team dynamics and able to see other people's perspectives; (g) encourages staff to be more connected to each other, to support one another, and to be respectful of each other; (h) is aware of people's different strengths and learning styles; (i) is enthusiastic; and (j) builds belief and trust in their leadership by demonstrating their honesty, integrity, ethics, and their commitment to change and the ministry's clients. Pat thought that a leader's role is "to remove barriers to get where you need to go; to steer the ship, not row the boat; and to battle the sea monsters and pirates along the way."

Taylor talked about leaders establishing credibility by giving believable feedback, and by having ethical standards in terms of the service that is provided:

You lose credibility if you're telling a group that they're doing a good job when they know that the service they could provide isn't even close to being as good as it could be. Instead of saying, "You're all amazing! You're doing such a good job!" I'd rather hear leadership acknowledge that something isn't working. You don't want to hear that it's not working over and over again, because that robs people, and de-motivates them. But the feedback and the ethics have to be credible.

It was Dale's perspective that people's motivations for becoming a leader varies:

Some people get into positions and they really feel that's where they want to be and where they can do the most good. However, I don't necessarily think they're in the majority; I think that most people have career goals and maybe they see being in a supervisor position or a manager position as being a stepping stone to other things. I've had some really great managers, and I think that if you approach your work, generally, with integrity, you do get respected for that.

Quinn also suggested, when an organization is going through a lot of systemic changes, leadership needs to keep the organizational values in front of people. The values become the constant, the foundation, and this puts the superficial changes in perspective, rather than exaggerating them.

It's like the view of a landscape and the horizon. In the fall, some of landscape changes; the deciduous trees change colour and lose their leaves. But the

backdrop of the evergreens and the mountains, and the horizon, stay constant. These would be our organizational values. (Quinn)

*Conclusion Four: Engagement Drivers Vary on Individual Basis*

Engagement drivers vary on an individual basis, but nearly all participants in the research identified the type of tasks they do at work, respect, and communication as being very important factors in their engagement. On an individual basis, people indicated in the conversations and the survey that different things engage them. In the survey, the 14 respondents identified a range of what was important to them from the 25 engagement drivers that were listed. However, there was some commonality among the participants. The results of the survey are in Appendix I. Almost all the survey respondents found that the tasks they do at work, respect, and communication were very important in helping them to feel engaged. The data gathered for communication were shared in conclusion three and more information from participants regarding the other two drivers follows in this section.

*The Type of Tasks I do at Work*

The type of tasks engagement driver was identified in the survey as being very important to the engagement of 11 of the 14 survey respondents. I think that this is understandable because, no matter what else is going on, this is what we spend most of our time doing.

Participants' opinions varied in the types of tasks they found engaging, and some of these were: concrete, fact-based work; projects; working with concepts, ideas and strategies; problem-solving; and research. A number of participants identified that they need diversity and flexibility to be engaged. The point was also made that high-stress roles need to be diversified to avoid crossing the line from engagement to burn out. Lee

was engaged by innovating on a common practice; being curious, creating, generating, and interacting; and “being more like an artist.” Many participants mentioned that they are engaged by meaningful work that makes a difference and helps people. Barrie talked about enjoying the creativity of responding to the requests of clients that she worked with.

### *Respect*

Respect was also identified as a very important factor in engagement, and a factor that was involved in other engagement drivers, including: communication, coworkers, and team; recognition; and fairness and equality. Drew commented that respect is very important in any type of relationship, and he can be “turned off” from a person when respect is not demonstrated. Drew noted that respect is two-way, and he described respect as being not just what a person says, but demonstrating it with body language, by listening carefully to show that you are thinking about the other person’s ideas, by not interrupting, and by taking suggestions seriously. Drew also felt that respect was demonstrated when a person responded to a suggestion that had been made. Taylor said that he feels valued and respected when people come and ask him for assistance, support, or come to share their ideas:

That makes me think that they either perceive that I might have ideas that they want to join in with, or that I might join with them on their idea. That makes me feel good. If I feel respected by my co-workers and leadership, that’s a good thing. Statistics are measurable, but I also like the non-measurable, the more subjective things.

### *General Feedback Regarding Engagement Drivers*

Many engagement drivers do not incur a monetary cost for the employer. In the research survey in this project, participants did not rate compensation and benefits as an important factor in increasing engagement, and this was reflected in the conversations.

Research participants made comments such as: “It’s not about money” (Chris), and “I’ll take less pay if I like the job, and this is also reflected in the WES [Work Environment Survey] scores” (Jessie).

However, people were also realistic about the need for monetary compensation. Kelly also stated that compensation is important to him: “I’m not here because I want something to do with my time. I have things I want to do with that money: for instance, provide a home for my family.” Devon said,

In the end, no matter how engaged I may be with my work, if I’m not making enough to cover living expenses and support my family, then I will look for another job. This works in the opposite way too—I could be in a job with excellent compensation and benefits, but if I’m not engaged with the work, if I don’t care about what I’m doing, or if I feel that the organizational values are undermining the impact and capacity of my work to make positive change, I will look elsewhere, and this includes considering positions with less compensation and benefits.

Recognition is not only monetary compensation. To Morgan, it is important to have appreciation from your teammates: “If a coworker says, ‘Thanks, you were helpful to me yesterday when I was dealing with that issue,’ that’s more meaningful than getting a plaque. It’s the recognition from your teammates that you’re needed.”

Taylor finds that positive feedback from leadership and being appreciated for your work are good tools for encouraging engagement. Jessie identified a number of ways to demonstrate recognition: being taken out for coffee by a coworker or supervisor; simply saying, “You’ve done a great job”; and recognition of an employee at an event or in a newsletter. Jessie made the point that it is better to have quality recognition than “overloading on the same thing over and over again.” Participants also discussed that it can be welcome when someone recognizes that you have done a good job and they also let your supervisor or their supervisor know, because in the layers of a hierarchical

structure there might not be awareness outside of your unit of who you are and what you can do.

Recognition can be demonstrated by delegation. Taylor described his experience with being delegated to: “My supervisor could’ve done it herself, but I was engaged by the recognition that she thought I could do it—she wasn’t just telling me that I’d done a good job.”

Lack of appreciation can be disengaging, if you do not feel appreciated by your supervisors and if they do not seem to care what you can do: “If leaders don’t know what you’re doing and aren’t particularly interested, you function despite them, instead of because of them” (Quinn). Kelly said,

I don’t have a huge ego, but recognition is still important to me. It’s disengaging if you think you’re doing a good job but you never hear from anyone. And you can see the lifelong implications of what happens when kids don’t get recognition.

Another employee talked about his disengagement when he feels it is being implied that he is not working to capacity or as efficiently as he can, when he knows how hard he is working. Someone else mentioned that it is disengaging when it seems that your unit is only noticed if service standards are not being met.

Recognition is also linked to career development and recognition. Morgan talked about being on a team with coworkers who expressed their appreciation for help and ideas, and how that made her feel that she was contributing:

I actually had some ideas recognized by people higher up in other areas, and was invited to meetings to talk about those ideas. Development experiences and career opportunities are definitely important, because you want your career to go somewhere.

Chris said that she would have no problem going elsewhere if she is not recognized for her work. “Opportunities need to be presented to keep me here. Not

necessarily financial opportunities, but working on something that I'm passionate about." Other participants noted that career enhancement, interesting projects, a raise in pay, and a feeling that useful experience has been gained personally and organizationally help to make a challenge positive.

There were also some generational differences in terms of the importance of development. None of the 6 respondents born before 1961 identified employee development as being very important, although 4 respondents found it important, and 2 identified it as somewhat important. Kelly mentioned that he felt pressured by a supervisor in the Employee Performance and Development Plan process, because his supervisor wanted him to focus on career development goals, and this was not a focus at this point in his life. Taylor said that if she were in her 30s, she would be motivated differently:

I would have career goals, and I would be more concerned about how a workplace situation works out. Now there are other important things going on in my life. However, I see that some of the younger people get crushed by difficult work situations because that's what their future goals are.

I find that the rich insights of the research participants have validated the literature in areas related to engagement, organizational change, and organizational culture. The participant's contributions reflect the engaging ability of environments that provide innovation, preferred tasks, trust, respect, effective communication, and empowerment. In addition, the feedback from participants indicates that certain conditions facilitate organizational change. Marrow et al. (1967) also describes that satisfied employees and "a sizable fund of mutual trust and goodwill" (p. 239) are among the conditions that will optimize an organizations' chances to undertake change. Both the literature and the research participants conclude that leaders play a significant role in creating and

maintaining engagement and the environments that foster it. The literature and the research also describe that the perceptions that individuals and organizations have of change and development are instrumental in whether change is achieved successfully. Therefore, I assert that the action research in this project supports the literature that I reviewed. In the next section I outline the scope and the limitations of my action research investigation.

### Scope and Limitations of the Research

My action research investigation was conducted with sixteen participants who responded voluntarily to an invitation that was sent out to approximately 80 people who were, or had been, members of the PSB of the MHSD. The number of respondents represents approximately 18% of the total number of employees in the PSB.

The limitations of the research are related to the number of participants, the roles they hold in the organization, the localized nature of the work in the branch, and the time spent on the research. The number of participants is not significant enough to consider the contributions as representative of all employees in the branch. Also limiting was the fact that, although most types of positions in the PSB were represented, no managers participated. In addition, the work units of the PSB are all located in the same city. Therefore, there was no opportunity to investigate fostering engagement in remote teams. Finally, if I had more time I would have conducted one more small group interview, which may have captured additional suggestions to consider when I identified recommendations. However, despite these limitations, I am confident that the data gathering methods provided an opportunity to deeply examine people's experiences with engagement and change in the workplace.

This concludes the analysis of the data that were gathered through this research project. Chapter 5 identifies the recommendations that I identify as having emerged from the research. Some of the activities supporting the recommendations have been suggested by the research participants, and some were developed by me, the researcher.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter outlines the six recommendations that emerged from the research to facilitate engagement in the Provincial Services Branch (PSB) of the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD) as it moves into the future. The activities attached to the recommendations were either identified by the research participants or by me. These activities are based on the premise that an ongoing environment that fosters engagement and development will promote and sustain engagement during change events. Another key factor in these recommendations is that people want to be informed and involved (Dulye, 2007). The recommendations focus on fostering ongoing engagement in the organization by having an awareness of engagement, supporting the high-functioning of teams by providing environments that are conducive to engagement, providing leadership that supports engagement, and considering engagement when planning organizational changes. Several of the recommendations involve having generative conversations within teams and the branch about topics related to engagement and change.

### The Recommendations

The six recommendations are intended to support the engagement and functioning that are already present in the PSB. As demonstrated by the Work Environment Survey scores in Appendix A, there are positive engagement scores in the PSB. The respondents to the survey that was conducted as part of this research also indicated some high engagement scores and comfort with change. There are existing communication tools in the branch, including: the Cross Branch Committee, the Cross Branch Connector newsletter, and the PSB Microsoft Sharepoint (2007) website. The organization has also

demonstrated at least one aspect of a learning organization: by undertaking this research it is engaging in self-examination and learning.

These recommendations are made with insights I have gained into the nature of the work in the PSB and the resources that were available at the time. The recommendations involve low cost and low time commitment. Also taken to heart is the project sponsor's expressed interest in having practical recommendations. Within each recommendation, activities are identified to help reach the goal of that recommendation.

The recommendations to promote individual engagement in the PSB are:

1. Learn about people's passions and interests, and support people in doing tasks that they enjoy at work.
2. Promote work environments that people feel positively connected to and that support engagement.
3. Promote deeper awareness in the organization of the concept of engagement.
4. Strive to balance key factors in engagement.
5. Plan changes to sustain engagement.

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4 are for all staff that work in the PSB, and recommendations 4 and 5 are primarily for staff in leadership roles. However, many of the recommendations require the initiative of organizational leaders to be implemented.

*Recommendation #1: Learn About People's Passions and Interests, and Support People in Doing Tasks that they Enjoy at Work*

This recommendation builds on the research finding that the types of tasks that people do was very important to engagement according to nearly all the respondents to the research survey and in the research interviews. The recommendation also promotes

high-functioning in teams, where people are able to collaborate by sharing their strengths (Buckingham, 2006). A number of activities are suggested that can assist in increasing our knowledge of each other's passions and interests.

1. Have conversations about engagement. Generative, face-to-face conversations between co-workers, including supervisors, managers, and members of the executive, increases an understanding of what engages individuals and their team mates. This knowledge can also lead to the collaboration of strengths within teams. In addition, as identified in the research, the contagious nature of discussing engagement can raise the level of engagement within our organization.
2. Use tools to explore people's engagement drivers. Tools such as the Retention Risk Assessment (Grensing-Pophal, 2002, p. 33) facilitate the exploration of what engages individuals. This questionnaire asks 13 questions to gauge how much a supervisor knows about her or his employees. Examples of the questions are: (a) do you know why this person works for the company and not somewhere else, (b) does this person's values fit the corporate culture, (c) do you have an open, trusting, respectful relationship with this person, and (d) does this person have enthusiasm and passion for the work he or she is doing? The Myers Briggs Type Inventory (Quenk & Kummerow, 2009) could also be used to discuss which approaches engage individuals most at work. Completing the *Change-Adept Questionnaire* (Kinsey Goman, n.d.a) could help people explore their own comfort with change, and lead to conversations regarding how approaches to change can impact engagement.

3. Participate in the Employee Performance and Development Process—an established method for examining people’s skills and their engagement in their work. The process can generate dialogue about engagement and help to identify people’s engagement levels and goals.
4. Participate in the Pick Mine program in the PSB and in Region 1. The Pick Mine program invites informal applications from staff members to fill short-term skill needs that exist at a lateral level throughout the region. Participation would support engagement and cross training within the branch.
5. Create a talent inventory within the PSB. The inventory would focus on what people like to do and their background experience in these areas. The inventory would be shared within the PSB and would be used to engage people when short-term needs arise for particular skills, such as graphic design or work with a particular computer program.
6. Diversify high-stress tasks. Discuss in teams the value and possibility of diversifying high-stress tasks with other less stressful tasks in an effort to reduce disengagement that might occur due to stress levels.

*Recommendation #2: Promote Work Environments that People Feel Positively*

*Connected to and that Support Engagement*

As demonstrated in the literature (Grensing-Pophal, 2002; Vanstone, 2007) and by the participants in this research, work environments and high-functioning teams can promote engagement. Research participants described that they are engaged by trusting, respectful work environments where their contributions are recognized, and these environments also help to sustain engagement in the organization during change events,

in part by establishing “a fund of mutual trust and goodwill” (Marrow et al., 1967, p. 239). Below, five activities are suggested to support positive work environments and high-functioning teams.

1. Introduce workplace experience feedback sessions. In these sessions people would be encouraged to share feedback on their experience in the workplace. This recommendation is based on the following findings from the research project: employees understand what engages them, employees would like to have a variety of ways to share their ideas, employees like to be heard, and employees hope that leaders will demonstrate that they are listening.

The proposed method for this exploration involves holding sessions in work units that focus on the questions: (a) what is working well now, (b) what is tricky, (c) what would you like to see being done differently, and (d) what are you able to do to make these things happen? Employees would receive the questions before the session to help them to prepare. In addition, although the facilitator would work to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute their thoughts, people would also be able to submit their comments and ideas after the session, anonymously if desired. People would be advised that the next steps will be determined after all the responses are considered, and that they will be kept informed of the outcomes. It will be important to follow through to demonstrate that people’s contributions have been heard and are being taken seriously.

The sessions would also build skill capacity in the PSB by giving people facilitation experience. The sessions would be piloted with one work group first and would be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

2. Offer team-based communication skill sessions. Appropriate open communication promotes positive environments (Lencioni, 2005; Senge, 2006; Short, 1998). Offering communication workshops where skills such as active listening, giving feedback, and receiving feedback are covered to help to build teams as well as communication skills.
3. Use existing pathways to further promote effective communication. A key engagement factor identified in literature (Dulye, 2007; Gibbons, 2006) and in the research project was effective communication for sharing information and supporting relationships. The PSB already has tools that promote communication within the branch, such as the Cross Branch Committee group, the Cross Branch Connector newsletter, and the Sharepoint website. Periodic evaluation could be conducted to assess their continued effectiveness.
4. Consider establishing action teams. Dulye (2007) propose that forming action teams promotes engagement in the workplace by building communal ownership and accountability through an informed and involved workforce (p. 11). The purpose of the action team is to ensure that every leader and employee recognizes that they have a responsibility in communication and engagement. Action teams provide a means for engagement and collaboration between departments as well as horizontally and vertically between levels. An action team is described as a cross-functional, diverse advisory team of

employees, compiled of 8 to 10 non-management workers, which assumes a partnering role with executives to provide: (a) direct, unfiltered feedback on the effectiveness of messages and media; (b) repair when communication break-downs occur; and (c) suggestions for leadership communications, such as where to go and what to say during informal practices like workplace walkarounds (Dulye, 2007, p. 16).

Elements of the action team approach include: (a) advocate a spectator-free workforce, where no one watches from the sidelines; (b) ensure that every senior leadership agenda includes engagement as a standing topic; (c) clearly define the benefit of two-way communication and engagement; (d) listen to unfiltered feedback and then respond honestly to each and every person involved; (e) recognize people and progress and empower all levels to recognize contributions, big and small; and (f) the management team remains committed and willing to navigate in a bottom-up culture.

5. Use feedback processes to gain insight into communication practices. Simple tools can determine barriers and enablers to effective communication, such as Dulye's (2007) "pulse check format #2" (p. 23), which asks simply: "What is going well? What is not going well? How can we improve" (p. 23)?
6. Have conversations about the topic of collaboration in team work units. In this research project, participants indicated that they were engaged by being asked for their input in order to meet challenges that face the PSB. In addition, as identified in the literature (Grensing-Pophal, 2002) and in the findings from this research project, delegation of tasks by supervisors is an indicator of trust.

By discussing the practice of the collaboration within the team, teams explore what it looks like to have a collaborative approach in hierarchies that are somewhat flattened.

*Recommendation #3: Promote Deeper Awareness in the Organization of the Concept and Benefits of Engagement*

Based on what the participants have said, engagement in the organization could be promoted by people having a deeper awareness of the benefits of engagement and by employees having an awareness of how they could foster their own engagement. The term engagement is a familiar one in our organization; however, as Devon, a research participant, commented, “I’m realizing now that there are so many different ways that you can talk about employee engagement.” To raise awareness of engagement in the PSB, three activities are suggested.

1. Raise awareness of engagement by having conversations and information sessions. Awareness in the organization will be raised by encouraging conversations about engagement, by offering workshops around engagement, and by discussing the recommendations in this research.
2. Share strategies of engagement. Show people the techniques that the research participants identified that they use for self-promotion of engagement, and ask people to identify their own strategies. Participant’s strategies are listed in Appendix M.
3. Have teams view the Trombone Player Wanted DVD (Buckingham, 2006). In this video, Buckingham gives his perspective on activities that engage us. He considers strengths as activities that energize us, regardless of our competency

level in them. Weaknesses are activities that leave us dissatisfied and drained of energy, again, regardless of our competency level. The video is high paced and can generate conversations about what our individual strengths are, whether they engage us, and how a team can collaborate around its members' strengths.

*Recommendation #4: Strive to Balance Key Factors in Engagement*

Factors were identified in the literature that are key to engagement and high-functioning teams are: communication and empowerment (Dulye, 2007; Vanstone, 2007), innovation (Ahlrichs, 2007; Chartier, 2004), and authenticity (Lencioni, 2005; Senge, 2006). These factors were also reflected in the findings from this research project. In addition, some research participants referred to the effects of experiencing a constant state of significant changes. One challenge for people in leadership roles is to skilfully balance these key factors to create an organizational culture that embraces change and promotes engagement. Balance is needed between: (a) open communication and confidentiality, (b) action and stability, (c) participative decision making and giving direction, (d) innovation and reliability, and (e) authentically sharing experiences and modelling engagement. The activities below are suggested for people in leadership roles to help them as they achieve balance.

1. Reflect on how to balance the key factors. Leaders can continuously examine how they achieve these balances and examine their progress in achieving balance effectively. Discussion with teammates and colleagues about these issues is also suggested.

2. Obtain feedback to gain insight on the perception of how successfully these factors are being balanced. There are methods to obtain 360° feedback from work mates. The tools to do this do not have to be elaborate, but they should make provision for anonymity, ask direct questions, and include an appreciative approach. There should be an opportunity for mutual feedback between team members.

*Recommendation #5: Plan Changes to Sustain Engagement*

As demonstrated by participants in this research project, people have different comfort levels when it comes to change, and change can impact engagement both positively and negatively. The impact of change on engagement can be considered when a change is being planned. Following are six suggestions for planning changes to help to sustain engagement.

1. Promote an understanding in the PSB that development and change are natural in the evolution of an organization. Perceiving that development and change are the norm will assist people in being more familiar and comfortable with the notion of change (Kinsey Goman, n.d.e).
2. Communication demonstrates respect. This point was made both in the literature (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 100) and by participants in this research project. Whenever possible, communicate change in a face-to-face, informal manner (Dulye, 2007; Kinsey Goman, n.d.c). Communicate a clear vision, and give people as much information as is possible. Research participants commonly stated that they would prefer that leaders take an approach of “I will always give you as much information as I can, and I’ll let

you know if I can't tell you something" (Chris), rather than having nothing shared with them.

3. Identify engagement as an objective when planning a change initiative. This will ensure that activities such as communication, information sharing, and empowerment are built into the change process to help support engagement.
4. Values that are relevant to the ministry's work need to be kept in the forefront during a change. This helps people to understand the connection between the ministry's values and the changes (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Dulye, 2007) and to maintain engagement with these values.
5. Other suggested strategies for facilitating change that were suggested by research participants are: (a) present changes with a 6-month roll-out plan, with a shared understanding that the plan might change; (b) give people enough notice about changes for them to digest the ideas and contribute their ideas if possible; (c) implement changes in a way that sustains momentum; and (d) have adequate resources in place for implementing a change.

These recommendations have emerged from the literature I reviewed and from the insights that were shared by participants in this research project, and they support engagement as a fundamental aspect of operational success. Initiating many of the recommendations will require the support of organizational leaders, and the PSB may decide to undertake some or all of these recommendations, or none of them. The next section looks at the outcomes that could occur in the organization if it chooses to implement the recommendations.

### Organizational Implications

By accepting the recommendations in this research, the PSB will find an increase in the engagement of its employees and an increase engagement during organizational change. Implementing the recommendations will further demonstrate that the PSB is on the path of a learning organization. As described in the literature (Chartier, 2004; Schein, 1992; Senge, 2006) learning organizations are effective, empowering, engaging, and innovative, and the trusting and respectful environments that are an aspect of learning organizations support high-functioning teams (Lencioni, 2005; Senge, 2006). By using these recommendations to build on the culture in the PSB, the branch will continue to develop and maintain a culture that provides these characteristics. The MHSD could also benefit, if it sees that successes result from the recommendations implemented in the PSB and decides that the recommendations would be appropriate to implement on a wider scale.

### Implications for Future Research

By conducting this research I have gained insight into the complex interrelationships between engagement, change, and organizational culture. Each of these topics on its own is worthy of study, and the potential for further study is rich.

There were several issues that I became curious about during the course of the research project that were either out of the scope of the project, or there was not enough time to investigate further. Research that is relevant to the topic of engagement that I thought might benefit the PSB in its continued development would involve: an investigation of networks and network analysis (Cross & Parker, 2004; Helgesen, 1995), cultivating a culture of appreciation (Vanstone, 2007), fostering engagement during

change specifically in government agencies, and what engages people in leadership roles in the PSB (Welbourne, 2003). I would also suggest further investigation into the role of unions in the participative, innovative environment and on how to promote comfort with change in people.

Finally, in the research that I reviewed on engagement drivers, several authors identified that managers play the lead role in the promotion of engagement in the workplace (Ahlrichs, 2007; Melcrum Publishing, 2008; Rutledge, 2005; Welbourne, 2003), and the Work Environment Survey (J. Munroe, personal communication, July 24, 2009) places members of the executive, managers, and direct supervisors at the foundation of engagement. However, the survey that was conducted as part of my research identified the role of managers and supervisors as not being one of the most important engagement drivers (see Appendix D). I would like to investigate whether this is due to the indirect nature of influence that leadership has on other engagement drivers, which makes it seem less important, whether this is due to general satisfaction with the quality of the leadership in the PSB, or if there is some other explanation that is at the basis of this perceived difference between my research and some of the literature.

This concludes the reporting of the findings of my research of the literature and my research with the project's participants. Engagement, organizational change, and organizational culture and their intertwined relationships are complex, and I hope that in this report I have provided insight into how a better understanding of these topics and the relationships between them can facilitate the development of organizations.

## CHAPTER SIX: LESSONS LEARNED

One of the benefits of action research is the learning that emerges for the research participants (Stringer, 2007). In addition to the data findings reported in chapter 4, I learned on a professional level and a personal level from the research process itself.

## Learning About and From the Research Process

Overall, I was pleased with the way the research addressed the research questions and subquestions. Valuable information was obtained from the participants on their experiences with engagement and organizational change. The research also provided information that could be applied to other areas of the ministry, although the choice for further action is up to the ministry.

In terms of the research subquestions, I found that one was too narrow. The second subquestion was: How has organizational change impacted engagement in one area of the MHSD over the past year? The time period was in the question to try and ensure that the recollection of events was fresh in people's minds and accurate. However, it was not possible in the conversations to hear only significant engagement and change experiences that had occurred within the past year. If there had been a one year limit, the flow of the conversation would have been broken while people tried to recall when something happened, and the study would have lost valuable data from events that took place 18 months or 2 years ago. In addition, when I think of myself, I realize that it is possible to gain insight from other than only recent experiences.

If I worked with a similar question in the future, I would use a broader time limit of perhaps two years in the research question itself. When I gathered data from participants, I would ask people about their recent experiences while also collecting

feedback from them about older experiences that they thought were significant. Another thing I would do differently in the research process would be to try to anticipate disruptions to the research process, such as the Christmas holiday season, and I would plan for them.

In addition to the data that were gained from the interviews with participants, I gained a new perspective on the interviewing method. As a social worker, I had conducted many interviews with people to gather information of a factual or subjective nature. However, the action research approach provided me with an opportunity to have conversations with people, which was more mutual, egalitarian, and generative than the traditional style of interview. Facilitating the group interview provided me with valuable experience. In facilitating previous groups I had been efficient at getting through an identified course of events. For this group I wanted to try a more flexible approach, to facilitate the emergence of ideas. The result was that we ran overtime, without fully covering both the questions that were the basis of the discussion. This experience taught me that I need to better balance a task-oriented approach with flexibility to allow spontaneity.

The research process also emphasized the need for objectivity. I became cautious that my passion and preconceived notions of the concept of participatory decision-making did not lead to projecting my own beliefs on the participants' contributions. I let people's words emerge to define what was important to them, and from that a clearer definition than the vague term I had in my head.

I also learned more about the value of reflection in the research process. While I reflected, I was able to sense my intuition and the essence of a situation, from which

ideas emerged. Having a clear idea of what was going on also made it simpler to write about. I also had to practice patience; for instance, it took several tries to come up with the right strategy to approach the data analysis. I was feeling pressured by the deadline to submit my report but I had to slow down and take the time that was needed to come up with the right plan. This reaffirmed that doing a good job was the priority, not the deadline.

The final discovery about the research process covered in this section is that the approach to data gathering helped participants to engage in the research. I realized before asking people to participate in the research that employees in our organization are generally very busy, and are dealing with changes at work, as well as trying to balance work with the rest of their lives. I knew that I was asking people for a significant time investment and offering nothing tangible in return. Therefore, I had to effectively present the project and myself to engage people in the project, and then I had to sustain that engagement.

My hope was that I could establish that I was a trustworthy, approachable person who would value and honour the contributors and the information that I was given. I also hoped to engage participants and their curiosity in the purpose and value of the project itself. To do this, I carefully worded the invitation to balance professionalism and approachability.

The success of the data gathering was demonstrated by the number of people who responded to the invitation, the openness of people's sharing, their commitment to the process, and the positive feedback that I received from people about participating in the research. For instance, Taylor said, "I truly enjoyed our conversation. It helped me put a

few things in place in my mind about how I was feeling about some changes in my department, so I found it very productive.” Quinn said he found that the group interview was a sounding board where he could talk to people from work and channel his thoughts and emotions.

These priorities were key to my approach: (a) to establish respectful relationships, (b) to communicate regularly with participants to keep them connected and updated, (c) to do what I said I would do and follow up in a timely manner, (d) to demonstrate respect for people’s individual needs by being flexible and giving options for participation, (e) to listen actively to people as they voiced their opinions, and (f) to incorporate participants’ feedback.

#### Personal Learning from The Research Process

The personal learning covered in this section is presented in relationship to some of the leadership competencies in the Royal Roads University Master of Arts in Leadership program (Royal Roads University, 2009b). I have focused on key learning experiences that I had in the areas of personal leadership, commitment to change, critical and creative thinking, systems thinking, communication, and research and inquiry. However, the learning I gained from my involvement in the project is not limited to what is outlined in this section.

#### *Critical and Creative Thinking*

During the research I grew from the examination of my mental models, patterns of thought, and intuition. One of the most important areas of growth was learning to trust myself more, which in turn built my confidence and enabled me to take risks. Through the challenges of the research I came to trust my competence, and I discovered that I

could have success by trusting my judgment and intuition, without making the major mistakes that I had always thought were inevitable. My intuition regarding the fundamental importance of strong, positive relationships in organizations was validated through the research, as well as in the literature.

Another learning opportunity arose from reaching out to other people for assistance and support without receiving the rejection that I expected. I more fully understood that outcomes are improved with collaboration, and I also had to hone my decision-making skills. Along with the other research participants, I examined my attitude towards change and gained other perspectives on how to become more comfortable with change and how to work with my own engagement. I learned that when I did make a mistake it was not the end of the world

#### *Personal Leadership and Communication*

The success of the data gathering relied on me being able to create and maintain constructive and respectful relationships, establishing trust, and effectively communicating with the participants to establish trust and foster relationships with them. To do this I was clear in my objectives and respectful of people's concerns; I also communicated respectfully, listened actively, kept connected by giving people updates throughout the process, and communicated that I was trustworthy, approachable, friendly, and reliable. As a result, people remained committed to the research process and shared their thoughts and ideas openly.

#### *Systems Thinking*

Attention to the systems within my organization helped me to facilitate the successful completion of the research. This awareness was needed when I dealt with

changes in the organization that affected my proposed target group, when I needed to ask for approval for various aspects of the project, and to foresee any vulnerability that participants may have in participating in the research and plan to minimize their risk.

*Research and Inquiry and Organizational Change Leadership*

By effectively using the research skills taught in the Master of Arts in Leadership program, I successfully conducted a research project in which participants were able to share their many insights into engagement and change with the organization. The motivations for the project were a belief in positive change, and a desire to learn to become a more effective change agent. Through the research I also reaffirmed my commitment to ethical practices, as I conscientiously adhered to research processes that protected the confidentiality and contributions of the research participants. My involvement with the research project was a transformational experience for me, and the lessons I learned will serve me well in my future endeavours.

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## APPENDIX A: RESULTS FROM THE 2009 WES SURVEY

The Employee Engagement Model Framework has three parts:

- **Foundation:** The foundation of the model consists of both executive and supervisory-level management. The foundation supports all the building blocks and as such, has a large impact on overall employee engagement.
- **Building blocks:** The building blocks represent the various parts of the work environment that have the greatest impact on employee engagement. Each building block is developed from a cluster of survey questions that define a workplace concept.
- **Roof:** The roof of the house, supported by the foundation and building blocks, represents employee engagement. At its core, three characteristics define engagement: job satisfaction, organization satisfaction, and commitment to the BC Public Service.

AREA OF ORGANIZATION	PSB	MHSD	BC PS	PSB compared to	
				MHSD	BC PS
<b>ENGAGEMENT SCORE</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>+11</b>	<b>+6</b>
<b>ROOF</b>					
BC Public Service Commitment	76	67	70	+9	+6
Job satisfaction	71	63	69	+8	+2
Organization satisfaction	76	58	64	+18	+12
<b>BUILDING BLOCKS</b>					
Empowerment	74	61	67	+13	+7
Pay and benefits	59	51	55	+8	+4
Physical environment and tools	72	62	67	+10	+5
Professional Development	68	55	62	+13	+6
Recognition	68	56	61	+12	+7
Respectful environment	80	70	73	+10	+7
Staffing practices	72	54	60	+18	+12
Stress and workload	67	54	59	+13	+7
Teamwork	82	75	75	+7	+7
Vision, mission and goals	77	63	63	+14	+14
<b>FOUNDATION</b>					
Executive-level management	76	59	59	+17	+17
Supervisory-level management	74	64	68	+10	+6
WES response rate	95%	88%	87%		
Total completed surveys	70	2,283	23,574		

*Note.* PSB = Provincial Services Branch; MHSD = Ministry of Housing and Social Development; BC PS = BC Public Service.

The survey was distributed to all regular and auxiliary employees who were not on long-term leave and who were directly employed by a ministry, exempting agencies, boards or commissions.

Source: J. Munroe (personal communication, July 24, 2009).

## APPENDIX B: ACTION RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER LETTER OF AGREEMENT

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Caroline Covil (the Researcher) will be conducting an action research study at the Provincial Services Branch of the Ministry of Housing and Social Development into what engages employees during organizational change. The Researcher's credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Stan Amaladas, Acting Director, School of Leadership Studies, at (xxx) xxx-xxxx x/xxxx.

***Research Team Member Role Description:***

As a volunteer Research Team Member assisting the Researcher with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, interviewing and taking notes at one-on-one interviews or small group interviews, transcribing, or analyzing data, to assist the Researcher and the Provincial Services Branch organizational change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential research data.

***Confidentiality of Research Data:***

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

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

Action Research Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with Caroline Covil, the Researcher.

***Statement of Informed Consent:***

I have read and understand this agreement.

Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C: FOOD FOR THOUGHT HANDOUT

**Food for thought:**

This handout is just to give you an idea of some things we might talk about for the research into employee engagement and organizational change.....

1. What does the term “employee engagement” mean to you?
2. What engages you at work? What does that look like and feel like?
3. What helps you to feel comfortable with a change?
4. What are your experiences with employee engagement during organizational change?
5. What factors/drivers, if any, have been most important to your own engagement? Some examples of drivers are\*:
  - What a person does in their work
  - Trust and integrity
  - Career growth opportunities
  - Co-workers/team
  - Employee development
  - Relationship with the immediate supervisor
  - Decision-making authority
  - Management skills
  - Adequate resources
  - Compensation and benefits
  - Work/life balance
  - Fairness/Equality
  - Recognition
  - Values shared with the organization

(\*Adapted from *Employee Engagement: A review of current research and its implications*, The Conference Board of Canada, 2006)

Caroline Covil/October 2009

APPENDIX D: ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

<p><b>ENGAGEMENT SURVEY</b></p> <p><b>Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!</b>  <b>Please return to <a href="mailto:carelle@shaw.ca">carelle@shaw.ca</a> by Wednesday, November 18.</b></p>
---

Name:

Please use as much room for comments as you need - All questions are optional

<b>1. Where is your year of birth placed?</b>
---

- 1960 and before
- 1961 – 1979
- 1980 - 1999

<b>2. What helps to engage you in your work? You may choose as many, or as few, of these factors as you'd like. Please indicate your choice with an X.</b>
--

	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important
The type of tasks I do at work					
Being challenged					
Learning new skills that I'm interested in					
Being busy					
Communication					
Respect					
Trust and integrity					
Career growth opportunities					
Co-workers/team					
Employee development					
Loyalty to my employer					

	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important
My employer's loyalty to me					
Relationship with my immediate supervisor					
Degree of decision-making authority that I have in my day-to-day tasks					
Influence I have over how I am going to get my work done (schedule, work hours etc)					
Input I have into decisions that affect my					
Management skills					
Adequate resources					
Compensation and benefits					
Work/life balance					
Fairness/equality in the workplace					
Time for reflection (for example, to process information, innovate)					
Recognition of your contributions					
My values are shared with the organization					
The pace of the changes					

Comments, and other factors not listed:

3. What helps to make a challenge a positive experience for you?

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaged to you feel at work? *(With 10 being very engaged, 5 being somewhat engaged, and 1 being not engaged at all)*  
Please feel free to explain your response.

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, generally how comfortable are you with change? *(With 10 being very comfortable, 5 being somewhat comfortable, and 1 being not comfortable at all)*

6. How many years have you worked in the BC Government?

**Engagement Survey – November 2009:** This survey is being sent to people who have signed an Informed Consent form to participate in Caroline Covil's research into engagement and organizational change. By completing this survey you are indicating your consent for this information to be used for the project, with the same terms as are in the Informed Consent.

APPENDIX E: ENGAGEMENT SURVEY TALLY SHEET

**Tally Sheet for ENGAGEMENT SURVEY**

**TOTAL RESPONSES: 14**

**1. Where is your year of birth placed?**

- 6 -1960 and before
- 6 -1961 – 1979
- 2 -1980 – 1999

<b>2. What helps to engage you in your work?</b>		<b>Very Important</b>		<b>Somewhat Important</b>		<b>Not Important</b>	
<b>1. The type of tasks I do at work</b>	<b>1960 and before</b>	5	1				
	<b>1961 – 1979</b>	5	1				
	<b>1980 -1999</b>	1	1				
	<b>Totals</b>	11	3				
<b>2. Respect</b>	<b>1960 and before</b>	5		1			
	<b>1961 – 1979</b>	4	1			1	
	<b>1980 –1999</b>	2					
	<b>Totals</b>	11	1	1		1	
<b>3. Communication</b>	<b>1960 and before</b>	4		2			
	<b>1961 – 1979</b>	5				1	
	<b>1980 -1999</b>	2					
	<b>Totals</b>	11		2		1	
<b>4. Career growth opportunities</b>	<b>1960 and before</b>	2	2	2			
	<b>1961 – 1979</b>	6					
	<b>1980 –1999</b>	2					
	<b>Totals</b>	10	2	2			
<b>5. Trust and integrity</b>	<b>1960 and before</b>	5		1			
	<b>1961 – 1979</b>	4	1			1	
	<b>1980 –1999</b>	1	1				
	<b>Totals</b>	10	2	1		1	
<b>6. Work/life balance</b>	<b>1960 and before</b>	4	1	1			
	<b>1961 – 1979</b>	4		1	1		
	<b>1980 –1999</b>	1		1			
	<b>Totals</b>	9	1	3	1		

		Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important
7. Being busy	1960 and before	4	1	1		
	1961 – 1979	4		1		1
	1980 –1999	1			1	
	Totals	9	1	2	1	1
8. Fairness/equality in the workplace	1960 and before	2	2	2		
	1961 – 1979	5	1			
	1980 –1999	1		1		
	Totals	8	3	3		
9. Adequate resources	1960 and before	2	2	1		1
	1961 – 1979	5			1	
	1980 –1999	1	1			
	Totals	8	3	1	1	1
10. Degree of decision-making authority that I have in my day-to-day tasks	1960 and before	3	2	1		
	1961 – 1979	3	1	2		
	1980 –1999	1	1			
	Totals	7	4	3		
11. Time for reflection (for example, to process information, innovate)	1960 and before	3	1	1		1
	1961 – 1979	3	2	1		
	1980 – 1999	1	1			
	Totals	7	4	2		1
12. Learning new skills that I'm interested in	1960 and before	2	1	3		
	1961 – 1979	3	2	1		
	1980 – 1999	2				
	Totals	7	3	4		
13. Being challenged	1960 and before	1	3	2		
	1961 – 1979	4		1		1
	1980 – 1999	2				
	Totals	7	3	3		1
14. My values are shared with the organization	1960 and before	3	2	1		
	1961 – 1979	3		1		2
	1980 –1999	1	1			
	Totals	7	3	2		2

		Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important
15. Influence I have over how I am going to get my work done (schedule, work hours)	1960 and before	3		3		
	1961 – 1979	2	2	2		
	1980 –1999	2				
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>		
16. Recognition of your contributions	1960 and before	3	2			1
	1961 - 1979	2		3	1	
	1980 -1999	2				
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
17. Input I have into decisions that affect my workplace	1960 and before	1	1	4		
	1961 – 1979	4		2		
	1980 -1999	2				
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>		
18. Co-workers/team	1960 and before	3		3		
	1961 – 1979	3		2	1	
	1980 -1999	1	1			
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	
19. Compensation and benefits	1960 and before	2	4			
	1961 – 1979	3		3		
	1980 -1999	1	1			
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>		
20. Relationship with my immediate supervisor	1960 and before	2	3	1		
	1961 – 1979	2	2	1		1
	1980 -1999	2				
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>
21. Employee development	1960 and before		4	2		
	1961 – 1979	4		2		
	1980 -1999	2				
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>		
22. Management skills	1960 and before	1	3	1		1
	1961 – 1979	3	1	1		1
	1980 -1999	1	1			
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>2</b>

		Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important	
23. My employer's loyalty to me	1960 and before	3	2	1			
	1961 – 1979	2	1	2			1
	1980 –1999		1	1			
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>			<b>1</b>
24. Loyalty to my employer	1960 and before	3	1	2			
	1961 – 1979	2		2			2
	1980 –1999		1			1	
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>
25. The pace of the changes	1960 and before	1	2	1			2
	1961 – 1979	1		3		1	
	1980 –1999	1		1			
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>

**3. On a scale of 1-10, how engaged do you feel at work?**

1960 and before 10, 8, 8, 7, 7, 6

1961 – 1979 9, 8, 7, 7, 5, 5

1980 – 1999 7, 4

**4. On a scale of 1-10, generally how comfortable are you with change?**

1960 and before 10, 8, 8, 7, 6, 5

1961 – 1979 10, 10, 9, 9, 9, 5

1980 – 1999 10, 10

**5. How many years have you worked in the BC Government?**

1-5 yrs: 7      6-10 yrs: 1      11-20 yrs: 4      21-30 yrs: 1      31-35 yrs: 1

## APPENDIX F: LETTER OF INVITATION

### **An invitation to share your thoughts..... about organizational change and employee**

Hi, my name is Caroline Covil. I work at the Reconsideration Branch, and I'm also in the MA in Leadership Program at Royal Roads University. As part of this program I'm doing a project on employee engagement during organizational change. For my research I would like to talk with you about your experiences and insights. The time and assistance that you are able to provide for the research is greatly appreciated!

The final report will be shared with my project sponsor and may also be used for further study in this area. Your participation and contributions will be completely confidential. The project is not a ministry initiative; participation is voluntary and won't interfere with your work.

#### **What we'll talk about:**

'Engaged' boils down to being so involved in your work that you lose track of time and forget your troubles\* - This is only one of the many ways that employee engagement is described. The BC Government Public Service Agency recognizes employee engagement as a key element in improving recruitment, retention, and productivity.

Some questions that we might discuss include:

- What does the term "employee engagement" mean to you?
- What engages you at work?
- What helps you to feel comfortable with an organizational change?
- What is your experience with engagement during organizational change?
- What affects your engagement?

#### **Ways to participate:**

- One-on-one conversations, over coffee/beverage – Refreshments provided (20 – 30 mins)
- E-mail and telephone conversations
- Small group conversations, with 3 – 4 people – Refreshments and transportation provided (1 hr)

#### **Ethical research considerations include.....**

- Your participation is completely voluntary
- You can withdraw at any time
- Your contributions are treated confidentially
- Respect, dignity, confidentiality, privacy, and informed consent are prime considerations
- Your choice to participate or not participate will not positively or negatively impact your employment

**Project sponsor:** Debi Moreland, Executive Director, Provincial Services Branch.

Please contact me by *Friday, October 23, 2009* if you are interested in volunteering for this project, and then we can talk about how you'd like to participate. And also please let me know if you have any questions or comments!

**E-mail address:** xxxxx@xxxx.xx

**Home phone:** xxx-xxx-xxxx **Cell phone:** xxx-xxx-xxxx **Work phone:** xxx-xxx-xxxx

**Thanks very much for your time!**

APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FOR ONE-ON-ONE AND/OR SMALL  
GROUP PARTICIPANTS

**Research Project:** What fosters and maintains employee engagement during organizational change in the Ministry of Housing and Social Development?

**Researcher:** Caroline Covil

This project is a requirement of the Master of Arts in Leadership program and is being sponsored by Debi Moreland, Executive Director of the Provincial Services Branch. Ms. Covil's credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by Dr. Stan Amaladas, Acting Program Head, MA-Leadership, School of Leadership Studies at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research project concerning employee engagement and organizational change in the Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

I understand that my participation may consist of:

- One-on-one conversations (face-to-face, by e-mail or by telephone) with Caroline Covil that will take 15 minutes to 1 hour (as the participant's time allows). The in-person conversation may be audio-recorded by a recording device. The researcher may also make some handwritten notes during the meeting.

*And/or*

A small group conversation with up to four participants that will last for approximately 50 to 90 minutes. The conversation will be facilitated by Caroline Covil. The dialogue will be audio-recorded by a recording device.

- At a later date, checking the summary of the interview for accuracy.
- Providing any clarifying information that I wish to submit at any time during the research period.
- Follow-up review of a report of the data analysis.

I agree to participate in the described research with the following conditions:

- My name will not be disclosed in the research report, and any information I provide will not use identifiers that may enable the information to be attributed to me.
- I understand that I am not compelled to take part in this research.
- I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time for any reason, and to have information I provided removed from the project.
- The audio-recording of the conversation and any notes will subsequently be transcribed and used for analysis related to the study. The data may be transcribed by a paid transcriber, who has signed a confidentiality agreement.
- I understand that the research findings, without personal identifiers, may be used for purposes other than the specific research question where it may be of assistance in further presentations and reports relevant to the research question.

- The researcher will endeavour to ensure that no harm to me will result from my participation in this project. I understand that the benefits to participating in this study may provide a better understanding of the impacts of organizational change on employee engagement, and inform future organizational change processes.

By signing this form, I give free and informed consent to participate in this research project.

Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX H: KNOWING YOUR STRENGTHS HANDOUT

In this approach, strengths are those activities that make you feel strong and energize you; weaknesses are activities that leave you feeling drained, bored or frustrated.

There is an assumption that when you're working in a strength area, you're more likely to be engaged.

- *What do you think of that assumption?*

To help you identify your strengths, think about these questions.

1. *What are the activities at which you consistently excel?*
2. *How do you know if you are working in one of your areas of strength?*
  - *How do you feel?*
  - *What are the signs?*
3. *What percentage of a typical day do you spend doing things that play to your strengths?*

To help identify your weaknesses, think about these questions.

1. *What activities do you never look forward to?*
2. *Which activities bore you?*
3. *What activities leave you feeling frustrated?*
4. *What is it specifically about these activities that leave you feeling weaker?*

*(notes adapted from Marcus Buckingham, Trombone Player Wanted, 2007)*

APPENDIX I: BRIEF SURVEY SUMMARY

**TOTAL RESPONSES: 14**

**1. Where is your year of birth placed?**

**6** -1960 and before

**6** - 1961 – 1979

**2** -1980 – 1999

**2. What helps to engage you in your work?**

Factors	Very Important		Somewhat important		Not important
1. The type of tasks I do at work	11	3			
2. Respect	11	1	1		1
3. Communication	11		2		1
4. Career growth opportunities	10	2	2		
5. Trust and integrity	10	2	1		1
6. Work/life balance	9	1	3	1	
7. Being busy	9	1	2	1	1
8. Fairness/equality in the workplace	8	3	3		
9. Adequate resources	8	3	1	1	1
10. Degree of decision-making authority that I have in my day-to-day tasks	7	4	3		
11. Time for reflection (for example, to process information, innovate)	7	4	2		1
12. Learning new skills that I'm interested	7	3	4		
13. Being challenged	7	3	3		1
14. My values are shared with the organization	7	3	2		2
15. Influence I have over how I am going to get my work done (schedule, work hours)	7	2	5		

Factors	Very Important		Somewhat important		Not important
16. Recognition of your contributions	7	2	3	1	1
17. Input I have into decisions that affect my workplace (significant changes, workplace (significant changes, policies)	7	1	6		
18. Co-workers/team	7	1	5	1	
19. Compensation and benefits	6	5	3		
20. Relationship with my immediate supervisor	6	5	2		1
21. Employee development	6	4	4		
22. Management skills	5	5	2		2
23. My employer's loyalty to me	5	4	4		1
24. Loyalty to my employer	5	2	4	1	2
25. The pace of the changes	3	2	5	1	2

**3. On a scale of 1-10, how engaged do you feel at work?**

1960 and before      10, 8, 8, 7, 7, 6  
 1961 – 1979            9, 8, 7, 7, 5, 5  
 1980 – 1999            7, 4

**4. On a scale of 1-10, generally how comfortable are you with change?**

1960 and before      10, 8, 8, 7, 6, 5  
 1961 – 1979            10, 10, 9, 9, 9, 5  
 1980 – 1999            10, 10

**5. How many years have you worked in the BC Government?**

1-5 yrs: 7    6-10 yrs: 1    11-20 yrs: 4    21-30 yrs: 1    31-35 yrs: 1

## APPENDIX J: E-MAIL UPDATE TO PARTICIPANTS

This e-mail was sent to the 16 research participants on December 1, 2009

Hi - I hope all is well with everyone. Thanks for your participation, and all the amazing information that's been contributed - it's very helpful to my research.

A summary of the research will be sent to everyone who participated when the final report is completed in the Spring - plus the entire report will also be available for participants who want to look at it.

Now I'm working on organizing one or two group discussions. It's great that quite a number of people expressed interest in being in a group. Of course, participation is optional.

If a group activity is not for you at this time, thank you for all your help and input so far and for making the research such an enjoyable task! Please let me know if you have any questions, feedback, or comments.

If you would like to participate in a group please let me know which of the options below would work for you. Once I've gathered people's responses I'll be in touch to make further arrangements - **if you could get back to me by Friday Dec 4** that would be great. Because of the busy season that's already upon us, I'd like to have the groups run before **December 15** if possible. Then I can finish my analysis and begin writing it up.

### **Which question...**

Question 1: What will you do to support your own engagement during the current times of change in the workplace?

Question 2: If you were sitting down with an ADM, what would you recommend to help promote and maintain employee engagement during the current times of change in the workplace?

Discussion of Question 1 - 50 mins-1hr  
Discussion of Question 2 - 50 mins-1hr  
Discussion of both questions: 1 1/2 - 2 hrs

### **When.....**

Discussion over pizza at lunch time on a weekday  
Discussion over pizza after work  
Discussion on a weekday evening  
Discussion over lunch or some other time on the weekend

Want to participate, but *absolutely* can't before Christmas - I could participate in early January tho'.

Thanks! Caroline

APPENDIX K: TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Caroline Covil related to her graduate study on "Employee Engagement during Organizational Change". Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Caroline Covil;
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Caroline Covil in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices after successful transfer to Caroline's computer.

Transcriber's name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX L: ADDITIONAL EXCERPTS FROM CONVERSATIONS

### *The experience of engagement*

Taylor described being engaged as being fully involved and taking interest to the next level; caring about the job, not just caring that you do it well.

Barrie said that when she's engaged "I feel good, I start flying around getting things done". If she's engaged she doesn't mind putting in a little bit more time, going the extra mile and doing things on her own time if it's beneficial. If she checks her e-mails from home it's because she's interested in finding out what's going on.

Jessie commented that people do a better job when they're engaged: "They bring more to the table, help out and are willing to take on more."

Taylor explained that "I'm a pretty productive person anyway, but being engaged encourages me to be more productive".

One participant said that in terms of engaging himself, sometimes "Faking it until you make it works." Trying to engage other people helps him feel it.

### *The experience of disengagement*

Jordan states that "After years of trying to change the red tape and bureaucracy, I gave up when I realized how the government works. Now I just show up to get paid, because of the pension and benefits. I've never been in a position to handle fluctuating income."

### *The experience of change*

"What about if changes were gauged by stress at the executive level, and time was spent managing stress and engagement at the executive level?"

### *The type of tasks I do at work*

Taylor likes work that improves the branch's atmosphere, eases tension, and has people in a better mood and using their sense of humour.

Kelly said that self-worth and self-esteem are increased when you're working and doing a good job.

### *Being busy*

Chris commented that she found being busy and an increased workload engaging rather than disengaging.

*Adequate resources*

Barrie thought a person might think about this driver more if they were in a role where this is more of a factor; for instance, as a director.

One participant thought that there is not enough staff and resources in his unit, which creates a “tough time”. However, he also commented that if he was not there, it wouldn’t be any better.

*Fairness/equality in the workplace (8)*

Kelly talked about situations he has experienced where leaders have ignored the processes that are in place to appoint people to positions, without competition to put the best candidate in the job. He explained that he may understand that there are reasons for doing this at times, but he thinks that these are examples of changes that are not done in a fair way.

*Time for reflection*

Dale said that she realized the importance of having time for reflection when she looked at her EPDP and saw how much she had done, but had not taken the time to stop and look at that.

*My employer’s loyalty to me*

Dale thought that the Work Environment Survey has led to greater accountability to the employee, and that it made the allegiance from the employer to the employee a little bit stronger. From her understanding, it appears that concerns about WES scores may have actually influenced people’s behaviour.

Chris said “Loyalty from the employer is a nice secure thing to have, but I’m not pension focused right now”.

*Loyalty to my employer*

Chris described that she also does not feel very much loyalty to the employer. “I’ve felt more loyal in previous jobs where I worked in the private sector – I guess there are more personal connections. It’s the size of the organization. You feel like a piece of a big machine – you don’t feel integral. Loyalty for me down the road would be tied more to appreciation and acknowledgement that you receive from management.”

*Pace of change*

Dale said “I like time to consider an impending change and the impact it will have on the present work environment and on staff. Then, I want the change to be put into action so

that the transition will be over quickly and I can again feel knowledgeable about my skills. When a change occurs I feel more vulnerable and less secure with what I know.”

### *Employee development*

Participants noted that career enhancement, interesting projects, a raise in pay, and a feeling that useful experience has been gained personally and organizationally help to make a challenge positive.

### *Empowerment*

Quinn described being in a changing environment where he felt less in control of what was going on, with things “going beyond my sphere”, and the disengaging effect that this had on him.

### *Compensation and benefits*

In terms of compensation methods, Kelly said that he finds the piece-work approach most engaging, where you get paid for what you produce, rather than everyone getting paid the same amount no matter how hard they work.

### *Co-workers/team*

Morgan said that even a difficult job isn’t too bad if you have a together support network.

Participants described that it is hard to see co-workers going through difficult times that the team faces; getting sick and stressed, or leaving the team. “It can be terrible if your team is not in a positive place.”

Quinn remarked that one unwanted outcome of people losing their jobs is losing the social aspect of working.

### *Management skills*

One participant described: It didn’t help when the manager praised a team member who was not really connected to the team, someone who had their own career agenda, and was in it for themselves, not the team. The team perceived this, and it impacted how the co-workers trusted each other. This sent mixed messages from management, because other team members were focused on being leaders within the team, not leaders above the team.

### *Attitudes to change*

Riley finds that having co-workers share experience aids the change process, “so you’re not reinventing the wheel”.

Quinn described that he has gone through a lot of changes in his personal life. “I think it out, but at some point you have to jump off the cliff and work your way through it.”

*General Change*

Pat recommended that planners resist the temptation to be short-sighted when planning changes; consider long-term gains when choices are being made, rather than taking a route that will provide short-term gains but long-term losses.

## APPENDIX M: FULL LIST OF ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Suggested strategies for self-engagement identified in the small group interview:

- I become a part of the change, I involve myself in it.
- I identify processes that need to be worked on, and I look for inefficiencies.
- I touch base with both the naysayer group and the engaged group. I surround myself with the engaged group. I encourage people to be proactive.
- I try to find out what's missing and make sure that management is aware.
- I get on a committee or create one.
- I use forums that are there, for sharing information and my input.
- I set performance goals for myself (such as learning a particular skill, or increasing my production), and there is also a career development angle to this strategy.
- "Fake it until you make it." I project engagement to promote it, and doing this helps me feel it.
- Having self-awareness of my attitudes and reactions to change helps, particularly when there are massive changes. Be aware of how you feel about change.
- I've had a lot of changes in areas of my life recently, and I don't get too wound up about change now.
- Knowledge is power - that inspires me to get more knowledge.
- Don't get upset about things you can't do anything about.
- I keep my eyes open for challenges to take on.
- I get as much information as I can about the change.