Changing of the Guard:
A Practical Guide for Non-Profits to Undertake Effectual Leadership Transitions
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Executive Summary

The process of Leadership Succession is complicated for any organization. The private sector has struggled with successful transitions despite research and innumerable consultant companies and advisors willing to assist. The third sector, non-profit organizations (NPOs), has struggled under a different set of limitations, including: lack of research in the NPO field, differing culture, and a flatter structure that results in more staff regularly interacting with the executive.

A NPO should have three main components involved in the transition process: Board, Leadership, and Staff. Two additional stakeholders play important but secondary roles in the transition process: Major Funders and Community Members served by the organization.

This project finds that better results are achieved when intentional planning is enacted long before the transition process takes effect. Preparing staff for resiliency to change must start before the change is on the doorstep. Continuously learning organizations that exercise a strong culture of “failure as part of the process”, autonomy, and higher order leadership skills will thrive better under the chaotic or rapidly changing conditions of a departing leader’s resignation and new leader search window.

In addition, this project presents ideas that will assist the board, staff and leadership coordinate efforts to take advantage of the transition as a positive opportunity for growth and improvement, rather than a limbo period of waiting for a new leader to dictate change once in office. Indeed, the change must come from the staff and board itself, and then include the new leader for enaction.

More research and exploration must be done to complete the picture of best practices for non-profit leadership transitions. Areas for further exploration include, non-profit culture and its implications, leadership contributions to mission and outcomes, board preparation for leadership transitions, and staff best practices during the Thrive Phase.
# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .............................................................................................................. 1

The Three Phases of the Transition ....................................................................................... 4

Pivot Phase ............................................................................................................................. 4
Pivot Phase ............................................................................................................................. 4
Pivot Phase ............................................................................................................................. 4

Board Transition Responsibilities ......................................................................................... 5

Pivot Phase ............................................................................................................................. 5
Selection Committee ................................................................................................................. 5
Decide on Potential Use of Interim Leader ............................................................................ 5
Identify Logistics Administrator ............................................................................................ 5
Staff Assessment .................................................................................................................... 6
Qualitative Data Collection .................................................................................................... 6
Candidate Profile ................................................................................................................... 6

Thrive Phase ........................................................................................................................... 7
Delineation of Duties ............................................................................................................... 7
Introduction of Board Advocates ............................................................................................. 7

Staff Transition Responsibilities ............................................................................................ 8

Prepare Phase .......................................................................................................................... 8
Skill Building ........................................................................................................................... 8
Culture Forming ...................................................................................................................... 8
Leadership Building .............................................................................................................. 8
Learning Organization Development ...................................................................................... 8
Resilience Practice .................................................................................................................. 9

Pivot Phase ............................................................................................................................. 9

Elect Representation on Selection Committee ........................................................................ 9
Stakeholder Survey ................................................................................................................ 9
Program Review ................................................................................................................... 10
Candidate Profile & Strategic Plan Review .......................................................................... 10
Meet Top Candidates ............................................................................................................ 10

Thrive Phase .......................................................................................................................... 10

Meet with new Executive ....................................................................................................... 10
Relational Building through Early Wins ............................................................................... 11
90 & 180 Day Reports .......................................................................................................... 11

Leader Transition Responsibilities .......................................................................................... 11

Prepare Phase .......................................................................................................................... 11
Level 5 Leadership ................................................................................................................. 11
Give Credit ............................................................................................................................ 12
Support Learning Org ............................................................................................................ 12
Lead Resilient Culture .......................................................................................................... 12

Pivot Phase ............................................................................................................................. 12
Meet with Staff .................................................................................................................. 12
Determine Role .................................................................................................................. 12
Finish Uncompleted Projects ............................................................................................. 12
Compile Institutional Knowledge ......................................................................................... 12
Prepare Office ..................................................................................................................... 13
Ceremonious Departure ...................................................................................................... 13

Thrive Phase, with New Leader .......................................................................................... 13
Board Advocate Interaction ................................................................................................. 13
Review Documents .............................................................................................................. 13
Meet with Staff ..................................................................................................................... 13
Conduct Resource Review & Develop Near Term Goals ................................................... 14
90 & 180 Day Report to Board ........................................................................................... 14

The Commencement ........................................................................................................... 14
Readings ................................................................................................................................. 16
Appendices ............................................................................................................................ 17
The Three Phases of the Transition

Preparing for the succession of a non-profit leader can be naturally divided into three phases:

**Prepare Phase**
This is the normal day-to-day life of an organization. The leader has not announced any change, and the organization is going about its mission as usual. In addition to its normal functions, model organizations should be increasing the capacity of its staff, skill building, developing leaders, and increasing staff resilience to change.

**Pivot Phase**
This is the stage immediately following a leader announcing he/she is stepping down or retiring. For the purposes of this project, we are assuming the organization has time to plan and prepare for the eventual departure. Organizations facing an unplanned departure require a heightened preparedness and shortened timeline that must still meet many of the requirements of this plan, but in a prioritized, hastened window.

Within this phase, the board, staff, and departing leader must focus on accomplishing all three of these tasks well:

- The New Executive Search
- Organizational Development
- Staff & Culture Support (Wolfred, 2009)

During the Pivot phase, it can be easy for the board to immediately turn to Action Mode: writing job descriptions, hiring head hunters, posting the new positions, and planning for interviews. Boards that ignore the internal consequences to staff often suffer the penalties of not supporting and including them in the process through the staff members’ lack of investment, a disconnect to the changes, and cold relationship with the new leader. Just as important, the organization can miss a rare opportunity to evolve and update their strategic plan, finances, funder sources, and staffing capabilities. The Pivot offers an opportunity to examine and modify all aspects of the organization with a wide angle lens of staff investment, departing leader advisement, and community input on what the organization will need from their future leader.

**Thrive Phase**
This phase begins on Day One of the new leader’s tenure. The transition phase is not over on this day. Indeed, it lasts until the new leader is fully integrated into the culture, mission, and staffing of the organization. The Thrive Phase can be thought of as the “follow through”. Certain maintenance and integration steps need to be taken to improve the chances of success for the staff, board, and leader. This is the relationship building section that will need fostered to encourage growth between the staff and the new leader, even beyond the limits of the timeline proposed.
Board Transition Responsibilities

Each major component has several responsibilities throughout the transition process. The organization’s board will have the herculean task of leading the transition effort. This can be a major change for most NPO boards. Pointed leadership will need to quickly ramp up to speed and capacity to immediately begin the Pivot Phase after the leader makes their announcement.

Side note: Often times, members of the board’s executive committee may have insider knowledge about the timing of the leader’s departure. This information should not be acted on any more than offering those board members an opportunity to do individual research on the transition process. A conversation or two can happen between members in the know, but no further action should be taken lest it leak information the leader isn’t prepared to defend yet.

Appendix A outlines the Board Responsibilities during the transition. These guidelines are meant to encourage the board to dig deeper than just their own desires, to inspire their organization to a broader definition of leadership than they may form in isolation, and discover the hidden talents their future leader may need in collaboration with those that will put them to use. Major events from the timeline are described below.

Pivot Phase

Selection Committee
The first major job for the board after congratulating the departing leader on his/her service is to form a Selection Committee. This group will be responsible for the entire candidate selection process as outlined by volumes of research on the subject. Because so many others have researched and written about the hiring process, this project will not dive into it other than to suggest the organization follow best practices for hiring. The Selection Committee should be comprised of well-respected members of the board, the Board President, an ample staff representation, and even members of the wider stakeholder pool if so desired.

Decide on Potential Use of Interim Leader
The board must then decide on the potential use of an interim. Several factors are at play in this decision.

• Length of time until current leader leaves
• Projected length of time in hiring process
• Complexity of organization and its reliance on a central leader
• Level of staff experience and independence
• Board tolerance for filling vacuum of mandatory functions like financial governance, etc...
• Nearby source for an appropriate interim that can be placed quickly
• Financial ability

Identify Logistics Administrator
The board must select a person to handle all the logistics for the hiring process. This person can be the head of the selection committee if so inclined. More often than not they will be a staff person carrying out the recruitment plan: manage the application process, publicizing the position, organizing and disseminating resumes, scheduling top candidates for visits and interviews, sending acceptance and rejection letters, etc.
Staff Assessment
Because this is an opportunity for the board to review and modify their current strategy, framework, staffing, and performance, the staff should be involved in this decision. The quickest way to assess staff perspective and opinion on this is to send them a series of questions asking for quantitative and qualitative information. It is also a great opportunity to see what the staff find important in a new leader. Time should be allowed to analyze this data and prepare usable information into a report. This information should be closely reviewed when changing the strategic plan and especially the candidate profile. Topics to survey include:

- Important traits and accomplishments of the departing leader
- Preferred changes to improve both staff and the organization
- Top traits and strengths in next leader

Qualitative Data Collection
Though the Staff Assessment should be considered a requirement for thoughtful transition planning, Qualitative Data Collection is a section that can be adjusted for budget, time, and capacity. If the organization is able, the board should form the mechanisms for collecting data from other stakeholders through available means: community member interviews, stakeholder round table discussions, observation of programs, focus groups, and surveys. The board should consider including representatives of all external stakeholders, such as: community members, program/intervention users, funders, long-standing partner organizations, and success cases.

The board may choose to create these surveys and host the events themselves, or hire consultants to handle this for them. Time to analyze this data, compile, and prepare a report to the board should be accounted for (Russ-Eft, 2009). This information is used to modify the strategic plan as well as the candidate profile. Topics for surveys and interviews can be similar as asked of the staff, but focus on the needs of those served by the organization, as well as the desires of the funders.

- Their experiences with the organization and its programs/interventions/mission fulfillment
- The organization’s SWOT from a user’s perspective
- Important priorities for the next leadership

Candidate Profile
Building the Candidate Profile should take place by the board in early stages, compiling skills and experiences the board demands in their new executive. Prioritizing them in a simple three tier system (Required, Desirable, Additional) can help the board later, when making a difficult decision between three top candidates. Input should be included from other sources than just board discussions. Information and results analyzed from the research surveys, community interviews, program reviews may all give insight into the content of the profile. The framework can be unique to the organization, from a narrative to bullet format. The profile should reflect any changes in the mission, vision, values, or strategic plan the board makes during this phase. The profile should cover items needed in their Attributes, Skills, and Experience (Wolfred, 2009).
Thrive Phase

Delineation of Duties
Many authors have written extensively about the need to delineate duties between the board and new executive leader. While the board’s main responsibility is governance, and the executive’s is one of management, these concepts can often get entangled by an aggressive board member, an agenda-driven executive, or to the opposite issue - apathy - on either side. This is especially true for organizations that are transitioning from the founding director, or growing rapidly. This clarity will serve the efforts of both parties, while lowering the chances for a toe to be stepped on, confusion, or duties to be missed. Items to cover include: fundraising and development duties, grant research & submission, hiring/firing, financial planning, endowment, capital projects, and mission changes (Bachman, lecture, 2011).

Introduction of Board Advocates
This is a new idea offered by this project to fill the need many NPOs simply don’t have the staff or budget for: executive coach, advisor, and onboarding assistant. Board Advocates are introduced to assist in the transition in two different stages of this plan, each representing a different leader. They are appointed from the board to work directly with the executive; assisting, counseling, and communicating as a liaison between the board and the leader. The similarities end there, as they require different skills and experiences in their duties, based on which leaders they represent.

The first Board Advocate is introduced soon after the announcement is made in the Pivot Phase and is appointed to counsel and advise the departing leader. Many articles have been written about the difficulty executives have while counting down the days until they leave their post. While the departing leader may be ready for a change, retirement, or a new job, often the prospect of giving up the reins can be difficult. Differing expectations between the board and leader during this demanding time may need someone to serve as mediator as well. The advocate serves to ease the transition for the executive by being a friendly voice as well as a willing confederate to assist the leader in the manual labor and psychological preparedness.

A model Board Advocate will have an established friendship with the departing executive and both will feel comfortable working together. His/her specific task is to assist in collecting institutional knowledge for the organization, serve as a sounding board and advocate for the leader if discrepancies occur with the board, and arrange with the staff for important events to happen. Secondary tasks could fall under the categories of executive coach and career counselor.

The second Board Advocate is appointed soon after the new leader is chosen and serves as counsel and advocate to the arriving executive. Their role shifts over time, starting with assisting the executive in their efforts to learn and investigate the workings of the organization. This person may also expand their “get acquainted” role to the city if the leader is moving from out of town to take the position.

The second Board Advocate assists the executive in reviewing materials the board and staff have prepared for the new executive, including; a performance plan, research results, and the strategic plan. This data is used to support the new executive’s efforts to design their near term goals. The advocate is responsible for presenting a 90 and 180-day report to the board on the progress made.
Staff Transition Responsibilities
Staff should not be left out of the transition process. Indeed, they may need numerous kinds of support and should be included at all stages of the transition. The Prepare Phase consists of examining traits the organization should have that will prepare the staff before the leadership transition is even a possibility. The Pivot Phase is then examined for the psychological and professional support they will need, the influence they should bear on the process, and the outcomes desired when the new leader is hired and at their desk.

In a healthy, functioning organization, progress in the Prepare Phase begins long before the leader turns in his/her resignation letter. During the normal life of an organization, five main factors will build resilience and prepare the staff to continue their success throughout the Pivot Phase.

Appendix B shows the main functions of the staff during the transition to contribute to both candidate selection and organizational development.

Prepare Phase

Skill Building
Where appropriate, the staff and leader should examine where a staff member may be struggling in his/her skills and if there are opportunities for growth. Professional conferences, workshops, observing colleagues or external resources can all be applied to skill building. NPOs should be aware, though; skill building is often a hasty go-to solution that is ineffective in correcting underlying issues not connected to skill. A closer look at their accomplishments and skill application is needed.

Culture Forming
Building and maintaining a healthy workplace culture is a continuous process. Organizations have a large toolbox available to them. Incentivizing values that help everyone achieve their goals is important. The soft skills of teamwork, conflict management, motivation, and communication should be considered just as important as the hard skills your staff are asked to conduct every day in the course of their work. Psychological safety is also an important consideration, especially for a NPO. Staff members are sensitive to changes. Thereby, clearly and respectfully communicating plans and intent is critical to the feeling of safety.

Leadership Building
A leader need not just be the person at the top. A truly dynamic, outcome-focused NPO will build independent, thoughtful, responsive leaders throughout their organization. Providing opportunities for creativity, self-reliance, success under pressure, recovery from failure, autonomy, and accountability builds the kind of employees a non-profit needs at all levels to succeed under leadership transition times.

Learning Organization Development
In Peter Garvin’s book, *Learning in Action*, he describes a Learning Organization as an “organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting, transferring, and retaining knowledge, and at purposefully modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin, 2003). Organizations that strive to remain learning organizations will naturally find they are full of resilient, change-ready staff.
Resilience Practice
Resilience is a tough characteristic to nail down. It has few, if any, clear leading indicators. But it does have root traits that when added together, can increase an employee’s resilience through times of transition and change. This is important because the quality of resilience is what lends hardiness to a person’s mental attitude about the stress, extra effort, and sense of loss and starting over that can come with a new leader in office (Haugen, 2007). Resilience is hard to predict in an applicant or an employee. Most understand their resilience only in hindsight, after going through terrible personal or professional trials. Despite this, all staff can be groomed for improvement.

The root traits of hardiness and resilience can be based on three essential elements: staunch acceptance of reality, a deep belief that their life and work are meaningful, and an ability to improvise (Coutu, 2000). Supporting employees’ resilience means making a pointed effort to connect the work they do to the mission and outcomes the organization sees. In conjunction with the leadership skill of Giving Credit, this supports the employee’s sense of themselves and their place in the organization and world. Communicating and sharing the successes of the organization will gain respect for the leader and the staff who carry out the frontline efforts.

Pivot Phase
If the board’s theme for the Pivot Phase is “investigation”, the staff’s theme for the Pivot Phase is “inclusion”. When appropriate and acceptable, the staff should be included and communicated with on the board’s work in the selection process. There are differing perspectives in this sector as to the extent and limits of staff participation, but all agree that some levels are necessary.

It’s obvious to many that the NPO staff members are the eyes and ears of the organization, directly seeing the daily work in action. Their knowledge base as well as needs cannot be ignored in the selection process. Their buy-in and acceptance of the new leader is imperative to the success of both their efforts (Bridges, 2009). As such, this study recommends several inclusion points for staff, and responsibilities they must carry in this phase.

Elect Representation on Selection Committee
This is a somewhat contentious suggestion. Experts disagree on the merits of having staff represented on the committee (F. Parsons, personal communication, 2013). But the tide of evolving leadership styles, the expectations of a younger generation of workers, and the motivational rewards of their inclusion are all important and evidence-based reasons for allowing staff representation throughout the process.

NPOs are typically flat organizations compared to the private sector. Often there is the executive level, little to no middle management, professional level program directors, and front line/support staff at the bottom. This plan calls for the inclusion of professional level staff to represent all levels. Professional level staff members should select their own representative(s).

Stakeholder Survey
This is information the staff members gather about those that use their programs or interventions. Each head of the program or department within the organization conducts some data collection specific to their clientele. Organizations with one focused program can appoint a few people to collaborate and deepen the knowledge collected. NPOs with multiple programs must rely on the head and any support staff to dispense and collect. The content should reflect a few main ideas: the end user’s perspective of the mission delivery, quality of service, changes or improvements, strengths, opportunities for growth,
and vision of the future (Wolfred, 2009). This information is aggregated and reported to the board alongside the program review.

**Program Review**
While the board and selection committee are collecting their own data, the staff should prepare their own data collection and report. After they complete the board’s survey, the staff members should prepare a forward-looking report on their departments or programs. The report should focus on their knowledge of the market, competition, funding history, community needs, new ideas, opportunities for improvement and expansion, and possible miss-steps that can be avoided. This report should be aggregated and given to the board for review. A presentation to the board and selection committee outlining the major findings of the report could be beneficial. This document is also given to the new leader for review and future discussions.

**Candidate Profile & Strategic Plan Review**
The staff should be given some time to review the board’s Candidate Profile and redrawn Strategic Plan. The Candidate Profile should be reviewed first and returned to the board with notes, so the recruitment process can begin immediately. The board should make every effort to include reasonable requests from the staff.

The Strategic Plan review by staff allows for comments from the ones who will be executing the document, and can also result in better buy-in from the inclusion. Clear expectations and due dates from the board should be communicated to the staff.

**Meet Top Candidates**
In addition to the selection committee meeting the top candidates, the staff should have *ample time* in small groups to meet with the candidates. Board members should not be present for these meetings. They will have lots of questions, and will need to feel psychologically safe to ask them. Written feedback should be collected and used by the selection committee. Multiple opportunities can be planned in correlation to the complexity of the organization.

**Thrive Phase**

**Meet with new Executive**
The initial good feelings, relief that the process is over, and anticipation for the future will be palpable immediately after the executive is selected. These feelings may be tempered by the recent or upcoming departure of the current leader. Ceremonies and celebrations should accompany both milestones. After the cake has been eaten, the proclamations given, toasts and welcoming speeches are delivered, the job of the board and staff are not over. Indeed, this is where many organizations fail to continue the transition process. Mistakenly assuming their job is done, the board often returns to its normal functions, conversation slips back to financial matters or other new business, and the staff is left to their own devises to craft a new relationship with the selected leader.

Responsibility for relationship building, conveying institutional knowledge of their program, reviewing operations, and communicating is shared by the staff as well as the leader. It is human nature to want to bond and connect with the new leader. A feeling of “being understood and valued” is important to establish early. The staff must feel the effects of small group and individual time with the new leader. They will need to express their perspective and talk about their programs, issues, successes, and even have personal discussions about where they came from, similarities they have with the executive, and find common ground with early wins to ease the anxiety of having a new boss.
Relational Building through Early Wins
Early wins for both staff and leader are important. The responsibility to form these should not fall on just the leader. Staff must contribute to the discussion, improvement, and execution of programs and ideas that lead to more success. Indeed, a ballast of early wins will hold many organizations upright as they navigate the Thrive Phase to a more comfortable integration with the new leader.

90 & 180 Day Reports
Just as the board will want information from the advocate and the executive, the staff should have an opportunity to report out on their progress with the new leader. This should be done with just the board present. The report should focus on progress the staff has made together with the new leader, developments in programming or funding as a result of their combined efforts, relationship status and their perspective on future success with the executive. A written report and small presentation is appropriate.

Leader Transition Responsibilities
This section will cover the responsibilities of both the departing leader in the Prepare & Pivot Phases, and incoming leader in the Thrive Phase, known in HR as “Onboarding”.

Appendix C shows both leaders’ responsibilities during their respective phases.

Prepare Phase
The Prepare Phase is defined as the normal function of the organization, when a leadership turnover is beyond the horizon. This relatively calm phase is the best opportunity for the current leader to build an organization that remains resilient during inevitable change and eventually thrives when the new leader takes their post.

Level 5 Leadership
The Level 5 Theory of Leadership is complex and cannot possibly be covered in the scope of this project. The basic tenets remain valuable though, and a leader would do well for both him/her and the organization to study and use this model. In addition to basic leadership and managerial skills, Level 5 Leaders:

• Exhibit personal humility with intense professional will
• Know how to get the right people on the bus
• Attend to people first and strategy second
• Confront reality, have faith in the future
• Do a few things really well
• Carefully select people, technologies and resources for the organization
• Discipline (Collins, 2001)

These traits help focus achievements on the lower ranks, bolstering their abilities and mean-making. They attend to the realities of the situation, without drama or hopes for a wishful outcome that might never occur. Most importantly, Level 5 leaders let their work speak for them, with no smoke and mirrors, false promises, drama, or cult of personality getting in the way. Further reading is recommended in this topic, as it is a deep well of leadership information.
Give Credit
Sharing the successes of the organization does more than just show humility and teamwork. Giving credit enables mean-making for the staff members, builds investment in the mission, and can improve the discretionary work employees provide through the promise of reward through recognition (Northouse, 2009).

Support Learning Org
As defined in the Prep Phase, this cycle must start over again with the new leader in place. Aspects of successful leadership, psychological safety, system of continuous improvement, accounting for failure and risk taking, incentivizing values, preparing for non-planned happenstance, and building relational support are just a few of the factors the leader must contribute to support the Learning Organization (Garvin, 2003).

Lead Resilient Culture
Supporting and leading the root traits of resilience can be most easily directed by the leader through incentivizing ingenuity. Bricolage is the term Claude Levi-Strauss termed to describe the ability to use whatever is at hand to provide a solution. (Quinn-Tran, lecture, 2011) Bricolage comes from the Latin, “to bounce back”, and is the foundation of building hardiness and resilience. Incentivizing creativity & risk-taking, supplying meaning to their work through recognition, and communicating the reality of the organization’s environment will all work to build resilience over time.

Pivot Phase
This is the last era of the departing leader’s tenure. This transition can be tough for some leaders, easy for others. Communication, clarity, transfer of knowledge, and celebration are the key objectives of the departing leader during this time.

Meet with Staff
The executive should meet in small groups and one-on-one when appropriate to discuss his/her impending departure. This is a great opportunity to allay fears, support the staff, further their involvement in the change process, exude confidence and optimism, and is important to minimize the negative effects of the stages of grief they may be going through upon hearing the news. Informal conversations are the order of the day, with an emphasis on privacy and listening.

Determine Role
The departing executive will need to determine their role for the remainder of their tenure. The Board Advocate serves handsomely as an advisor and confidante during this phase. The executive should feel free to discuss their desires with the advocate, and come to an understanding of what must be done and how they would like to advise the board and organization in the remaining time. The advocate should send an email follow up to the executive, outlining their discussion and what they agreed upon.

Finish Uncompleted Projects
The executive will undoubtedly have projects, grants, budgets, or other paperwork to finish. Prioritizing and completing these projects is often important to funding, consistency, and a show of continuous leadership. The executive should work hard to complete these projects in a timely manner.

Compile Institutional Knowledge
In addition to uncompleted projects, the executive should begin to compile knowledge they will need to pass on to the next executive. Start with simple things like important account information, passwords, contact lists, vendor information, and major partner organizations. If possible, they should then
continue to compile information related to the organization they might have learned over the years. Successful funding efforts, copies of grants and budget worksheets, job descriptions for all staff, utilities and facility information, insurance and other regular bills, and responsibilities the executive took care of that others might not be aware. Refrain from comments or opinion of staff, board or community members.

**Prepare Office**
Organizing the office can be daunting and overwhelming, but undoubtedly it will need to be done. Personal effects need to be cleared out. Unnecessary items need to be thrown away, and documents gathered and organized. The board advocate can be a great assistant to this process if asked.

**Ceremonious Departure**
A celebration of some sort is always welcome in any healthy organization. A dysfunctional tenure, departure, or staff may temper the extent of the party. Opportunities for accolades from the board, executive, community, and staff should be planned for and is a healthy part of the professional grieving process.

**Thrive Phase, with New Leader**
An HR Director might refer to this phase as “onboarding”, but we are proposing more than just payroll paperwork and some orientation workshops. The Thrive Phase is primarily a learning phase for the new leader. Their main goal is to study important aspects of the organization, from as many voices as they can collect. In addition to informal conversations, lunches, and coffees, the executive should interview staff members, board members they haven’t yet met, major funders, and community members. They are, in essence, conducting their own data collection. This begins with the surveys and review other documents submitted to the board in the previous phase. It continues with the leader asking clarifying questions, holding town halls if possible, surveying stakeholders, and building relationships with the important players key to the organization’s survival and growth.

**Board Advocate Interaction**
The Second Board Advocate should interact with the new executive early in this phase. Their role is dependent on the leader’s experience, and desires for an advocate. Generally, the advocate should make themself available, and plan for a regular check-in. The advocate should work with the board to serve as a communication avenue, but also know when discussions should be held in confidence with the executive, as they adjust to their new position. The advocate will prepare a report to the board after 180 days, and 90 if desired.

**Review Documents**
As mentioned in the intro to this section, the new executive leader must collect and review all the documents prepared in the Pivot Phase, and others. A general list would include: the Mission, Vision, Values, Strategic Plan, SWOT, Program Review, Staff Survey, community data collection, Board Survey, financial history and forecasts, grants, major donor databases, websites & social media, and all marketing materials.

**Meet with Staff**
In addition to the standard welcome party, the executive and staff members must make time to sit down in small groups and one-on-one. These meetings are initially a meet-and-greet of sorts, but the leader’s job is to find out as much as they can about the person, their professional background, strengths, and struggles. This time is also the building blocks to discovering more about the organization from those who know. Focusing on the work at hand that is done by people who need connection and
inclusion is the essence of *X-Teams*, a book that emphasizes the need for teams to quickly form and function together (Ancona, 2007).

**Conduct Resource Review & Develop Near Term Goals**

At this point in the process, the executive can develop two excellent tools: a review of the resources of the organization and their Near Term Goals. The Resource Review should begin with a SWOT and then dive deeper into a list or narrative outlining all the financial, professional, partnership, facility, tangible and intangible resources at the organization’s disposal. This document may or may not be shared with anyone, and serves best as a learning document for the executive.

The Near Term Goals are then built from all the documents and experiences of the leader thus far. This should serve as their action items for the next 6-24 months, depending on the organization and the experience of the leader. This report can then be submitted to the board for discussion and review.

**90 & 180 Day Report to Board**

The report should not be the only means of communication to the board, but should serve as an official report on progress. It can be compiled as a type of “State of the Organization” presentation, or simply serve as a dashboard, listing the action items being worked on and completed. The style and content should be left up to the executive, though the advocate can serve as a coach in preparation for this.

**The Commencement**

Meaning both the end and the beginning, the commencement of this project answers many questions, and asks more. Clearly, there is a dearth of research covering non-profit leadership transitions. Only a few articles and one book could be found on the subject. The rest of the found research touches on aspects of the process that must be assembled to form a grand view. A deeper dive is necessary to formulate a more useful guide to NPOs that applies more theories from HR, org development, change management, leadership style & efficacy, org design, board management, funding, and culture formation.

Indeed, there are places in this project for further research into: Effective board functions in the Prep Phase, new leader support in the Thrive Phase, *in media res* (latin, meaning “In the middle of”) research to study the effects of staff and leaders taking over for someone else, and the application of the stages of grief to a corporate change culture.

No organization is likely to enact all of the suggested steps. Capacity, economics, ability, and time will all uniquely erode or enable each NPO. This list is a best practice, and should be used as a guide and a level to stretch for, though attainment may be impossible.

That being said, the world is full of struggling organization, mediocre in outcomes, unremarkable in mission, and slipping into the red because of inadequate resources allocated to proper leadership planning and selection. In researching for this project, I frequently found themes revolving around “inclusion” and “preparation”. NPOs must take time to lean in to their organizations during a tenuous transition, to enable the staff members entrusted to carry out the mission work to have a voice in the selection of their flag bearer, and to make evidence-based decisions all the time. Following this plan pulls the remaining staff and board together in their purpose to evolve the organization, to reach further, and stresses that both bodies are working together towards the same end. Failure to include, however, denotes distrust and ignorance, even where no inference is meant. Exclusion breeds division.
breeds suspicion, which in turn can breed conspiracy theories, mistrust, accusations, and eventual breakdown. In this transition process, the board itself must channel their own leadership qualities of inclusion, magnanimity, accountability, continuous learning, and people-focused work during this process, so the organization can make the transition as smoothly as possible and return to focus on the mighty community-building tasks that lie ahead of them.
Readings
http://www.minnesotanonprofits.org/nonprofit-resources
Appendices

Appendix A

Board Transition Timeline

- Selection Comm. Formed
- Analyze Assessments & Data Collection
- Advocate & Leader Develop First 180 Plan
- Assessment Sent to Staff
- Board Reviews Strategic Plan
- Delineation of Duties
- Qualitative Data Collection
- Candidate Selection Window
- Advocate Reports on Progress after 180 Days
- Main Logistics Person Selected & Use of Interim Decided
- Candidate Profile Formed
- New Hire Advocate Selected

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