

DEVELOPING HIGH-PERFORMANCE REGULATORY TEAMS

By

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We accept this Thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

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### **Abstract**

The British Columbia Utilities Commission (the Commission) is a quasi-judicial regulatory agency responsible for oversight of British Columbia's energy utilities and the province's compulsory automobile insurance requirements. As a regulator and administrative tribunal in British Columbia, the Commission operates in accordance with legislation that governs the organization's conduct and activities with respect to achieving its mandate. This qualitative inquiry identified practices that can contribute to development of sustainable high performance in the context of the Commission's interdisciplinary teams. The research undertaken for this project employed an appreciative stance and assumed that the Commission's professionals achieve high-quality results and the absence of intervention would not negatively impact the quality of work the Commission produces. The project was focused toward the ideal future state in which highest-performance regulatory teams contribute to larger organizational strategy and goals. The project was of minimal risk and adhered to Royal Roads University's ethical guidelines.

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## **Chapter One: Focus and Framing**

The British Columbia Utilities Commission (the Commission) is an independent regulatory agency of the provincial government; its function is quasijudicial and it has the power to make legally binding rulings. The Commission operates under and administers the Utilities Commission Act (1996) in its oversight of British Columbia's natural gas and electric utilities. In addition the Commission regulates intraprovincial pipelines as well as the Province's compulsory automobile insurance. The Commission's jurisdiction is exclusive in all cases and for all matters for which jurisdiction is conferred on it and decisions and orders can be appealed to the British Columbia (BC) Court of Appeal only on questions of law or jurisdiction.

The Commission's mission is to ensure utility customers receive safe and reliable services at fair rates and to ensure utilities have a reasonable opportunity to receive a fair return on investments (British Columbia Utilities Commission [BCUC], 2013b). The Commission is made up of several divisions of professional and administrative staff operating under the leadership of the organization's Chair and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Utilities Commission Act (1996) provides for appointment of independent commissioners by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on a merit-based process with one commissioner designated as the Chair and CEO and other commissioners appointed in consultation with that chair (s. 2[1]). Commissioners make rulings on applications as the Commission or as a division of the Commission and have all the jurisdiction of and may exercise and perform the powers and duties of the Commission (Utilities Commission Act, 1996, s. 4[4]).

Typically, applications filed with the Commission are heard through open public proceedings in which stakeholder participation is sought. Proceedings are conducted by written or oral methods as well as through routine meetings of the Commission to address small-scale

applications. Today, a number of alternate hearing methods are available, such as the negotiated settlement and streamlined review processes; these methods are designed to enhance procedural efficiency in appropriate circumstances.

To address the complexity and diversity of issues before it, the Commission takes an interdisciplinary approach to assigning professional staff to conduct reviews of utility applications. The staff team, as a portion of the 'hearing team', is responsible to build a complete record of evidence related to an application, while an independent panel of commissioners make all final decisions for the application. Members of hearing teams have diverse backgrounds and are skilled professionals in areas of business, economics, engineering, law, accounting, and administration (BCUC, 2012, p. 8).

In conducting this inquiry I sought to understand, from team members' perspectives (inclusive of professional staff, administration, and commissioners), what practices promote high-performance interdisciplinary teams within the Commission's quasijudicial structure. I strove to uncover the characteristics and design of high-performance teams, the team complexities within a regulatory environment, and how to identify success. In conducting this inquiry I ensured adequate consideration was given to the administrative and procedural fairness principles within which the Commission operates. I examined team leadership and organizational practices that are currently used, and practices that could otherwise be used.

The characteristics of action research are familiar and consistent with traditional practices used by the Commission in its approach to public hearings. The intent of action research is to engage others and develop understanding around what their intentions are, how they plan their actions, how they act, and how they measure outcomes (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 13). The similarities between qualitative action research and the Commission's quasijudicial processes



provide interesting context when considering what the Commission does and how it does it. Just as public hearings are expected to be consultative, transparent, and accessible, qualitative action research applies the same principles when exercising its conventions. In today's professional environment, practitioners demonstrate a greater tendency to engage others in decision-making processes (Stringer, 2007, p. 33).

Through this inquiry I studied the typical practices that contribute to high-performance teams in the conduct of the Commission's public hearings. The project's main inquiry question was: What practices support achievement of the BC Utilities Commission's high-performance hearing teams? I also utilized the following subquestions when undertaking this research:

1. What practices can the BC Utilities Commission formalize to support achievement and sustainability of high-performance teams?
2. How does the Commission's regulatory environment impact achievement of high performance?
3. What are the BC Utilities Commission's indicators of a high-performance team and how can performance be measured?

To answer these questions I begin by examining the relevant academic, professional, and business literature related to legislative responsibilities and within this context focus on leadership, team performance, and performance measurement. As the researcher, I appreciated the need to respect legislative responsibility and yet achieve "a democratic workplace where employees participate in decision making. This idea goes *beyond participation* [emphasis added], often viewed as a matter of style and climate rather than sharing authority" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 155). This research project examined the unique requirements for independence

and decision-making authority of commissioners, and how these impact and are impacted by the team practices within the Commission's complex interdisciplinary team structures.

### **Significance of the Inquiry**

In early 2014, the BC Government announced five priority projects, one being the "Regulatory Reform Refresh: a commitment to develop a plan to refresh the way government is tackling regulatory reform to ensure B.C. remains a national and global leader in minimizing regulatory burden and cutting red tape" (Government of British Columbia, 2014, para. 5). This project is intended to support anticipated changes to the regulatory environment by focusing on strengthened culture and team performance.

As a regulatory agency, the Commission's core function is to make decisions on energy utilities' applications. Teams brought together to assess an application need not only be technically competent, but also be cohesive in their goals and objectives that align with those of the organization. Team performance quality impacts day-to-day operations, and also overall organizational performance and climate. The Commission's hearing teams are dynamic; they assemble to examine an application, combine and critique their expert opinions, and make broad public interest decisions. The Commission's interdisciplinary team members disperse and join other teams to review other applications concurrently. This differs from conventional teams that typically work on projects sequentially. Only a subset of the team (commissioners) has the authority to make final evidence-based decisions.

The Commission's approximately 48 staff and commissioners organize as diverse teams of approximately 10 members to conduct reviews of applications. Individual team members may participate in several different teams concurrently. Application reviews can last from months to more than a year depending on the complexity of the utility's project and requests. Team

members participating in the review of a utility application rely extensively on one another's contributions and expertise, however, this study adopts a fundamental assumption that the regulatory team design results in issuance of fair, evidence-based decisions regardless of the performance levels of a team. In conducting this research, my sponsor and I assumed that poor team performance would not impact the final decisions that teams make, but may otherwise be linked to low team efficiency, negative effects on organizational climate, low individual engagement, and high staff turnover.

Commissioners are often short-term appointed members with varying professional backgrounds who rely heavily on the competence, knowledge, and judgement of staff. "In regulatory commissions inexperience is endemic" (Hempling, 2013, p. 30). Career staff have extensive experience, are therefore expressly responsible to inform commissioners' regulatory decision making (Beecher, 2008, p. 597). The relational success factor of these collective staff-commissioner teams goes beyond team members contributing to the best of their professional ability and requires high coordination and functionality of the team as a whole. The absence of formalized, consistent, and reliable team practices intended to support high performance may impede staff's ability to perform their duties to the highest level, which may also impact commissioners' decision-making processes.

In this inquiry, I acted upon an assertion that the Commission's hearing teams already operate at a level of high performance. However, given that the particular principles, practices, and procedures used to achieve high performance are not identified or formalized, I argue that clarifying and formalizing them will build a stronger base for future organizational initiatives. Without doing so, new staff and teams may take longer than necessary to achieve high performance. If the outcomes of this study are implemented, I believe organizational climate will

improve, teams and employee relationships will be strengthened, and opportunities for better performance measurement will be created. With improved organizational culture, we can reduce employee turnover and associated costs in resources in quality, and we may also make full-time or extended commissioner appointments more appealing. Conversely, the consequences of not implementing recommendations from this inquiry may result in less resilient teams over time, less engaged employees, higher turnover, and increased costs due to loss of efficiency.

Formalized practices that support high-performance teams will allow staff and commissioners to conduct their work with significant autonomy and due awareness and regard for one another's roles and responsibilities. These initiatives are not intended to affect the ultimate outcome of regulatory decision making, but rather, from an organizational perspective, are intended to foster strengthened organizational climate and opportunities to develop a sustainable learning culture. In this organization's context, dissenting professional views are inevitable, as people are involved in considering and analyzing a range of low- to high-impact projects. In situations in which views are explored proactively, teams can significantly enhance their critical analysis as well as their overall team dynamic. De Dreu and West (2001) expressed, "Team diversity is likely to have positive effects on the quality of team decision making when it gives rise to debate and disagreement" (p. 1191).

High-performing teams positively contribute to healthy relationships and organizational culture and provide opportunities for continued learning and development for all members through high levels of dialogue and openness. The absence of established practices aimed at achieving high performance means that even though team members may try their best to support and learn from each other, they may revert back to natural patterns that inhibit that learning (Short, 1998, p. 103). A regulatory system is complex, and the extent to which staff and

commissioners rely on one another's expertise means that digression from the team's overall high performance can impact the entire system. In circumstances of low team performance members are less likely to communicate and attempt to understand one another's views and opinions on all matters affecting the team.

### **Organizational Context**

As an independent regulatory agency, the Commission:

- regulates electric and gas utilities within [its] jurisdiction and in accordance with relevant legislation
- ensures ICBC's [the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia's] basic insurance rates are adequate, efficient, just and reasonable
- adopts mandatory reliability standards that are in the public interest and supervises compliance by utilities with these standards
- reviews questions and complaints about the actions of regulated utilities and ICBC, and adjudicates gas marketing disputes
- establishes tolls and conditions of service for intra-provincial oil pipelines
- reviews energy-related and basic automobile insurance matters referred to it by Cabinet
- encourages public participation in [its] public processes
- ensures stakeholders have the information they need to participate effectively by making all relevant materials publicly available. (BCUC, 2012, p. 7)

Independent regulation is described as a 20th-century movement emerging as governments learned that effective regulation required specialized expertise (Joskow, 2007). Joskow (2007) described effective regulatory commissions as having "a quasi-judicial structure that [applies] transparent administrative procedures to establish prices, review investment and financing plans, and to specify and monitor other terms and conditions of service" (p. 1272).

Located in Vancouver, BC, the Commission employs approximately 35 full-time staff (BCUC, 2013a; see Appendix A: Organizational Chart), relying on external consultants when additional resources or expertise is required. In addition to the staff complement, at any given time the Commission has 10–12 appointed full- and part-time commissioners. Commissioners are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council for terms typically ranging 3–5 years and

bring varying professional expertise and backgrounds. Commissioners may work individually or as a panel of two or more to make public interest decisions on utility applications. Also appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council is the Commission's chair who also serves as commissioner.

According to Section 2 of the Utilities Commission Act (1996), the Chair is also the CEO and has supervision over and direction of the work and of the staff of the Commission. There are some natural operational overlaps that exist between the chair and the commissioners. While commissioners' activities must align with the organization's operational requirements, in all other respects commissioners act as independent members. The organizational structure and associated reporting relationships only officially apply from staff to managers and from managers to the CEO.

In accordance with the Utilities Commission Act (1996) and the Administrative Tribunals Act (2004), commissioners review utility applications through public hearings and provide written decisions with reasons. The Commission is organized into seven divisions that either participate in or support this hearing process: three administrative and four regulatory (BCUC, 2013a; see Appendix A: Organizational Chart).

Most often, the Commission begins a public hearing upon receipt of an application by a utility, though it is empowered to undertake its own reviews. Hearings and inquiries must adhere to principles of procedural fairness and transparency, and the Commission has a number of procedural tools available to administer this process. A hearing team is assigned to each application that goes to a public hearing. Hearing teams are assembled and comprised of professional staff, who hold a variety of skills and expertise appropriate to the details of the application, as well as a panel of commissioners, who act as a division of the Commission and

make the necessary decisions in utility applications. Members of hearing teams have diverse backgrounds and are skilled professionals in business, economics, engineering, law, accounting, and administration (BCUC, 2012, p. 8). Application reviews are often undertaken by mimicking past team practices, particularly when practices are not formalized or otherwise mandated.

Energy regulation is becoming more complex and dynamic at the provincial level, and now is an opportune time to examine the organizational characteristics that contribute to effective regulation, celebrate the dedicated members of the organization, and establish as much organizational resilience as possible as change continues to push the organization forward. This inquiry was intended to suggest ways to formalize team practices that lead to regulatory decisions in order to match the efficiencies sought in the political context. As energy conservation and clean, renewable resources become more prominent in the framework of public interest, the Commission faces new challenges in its already complex balancing act. It is imperative that Commission members have the tools they need to sustain high performance so that teams are resilient and healthy.

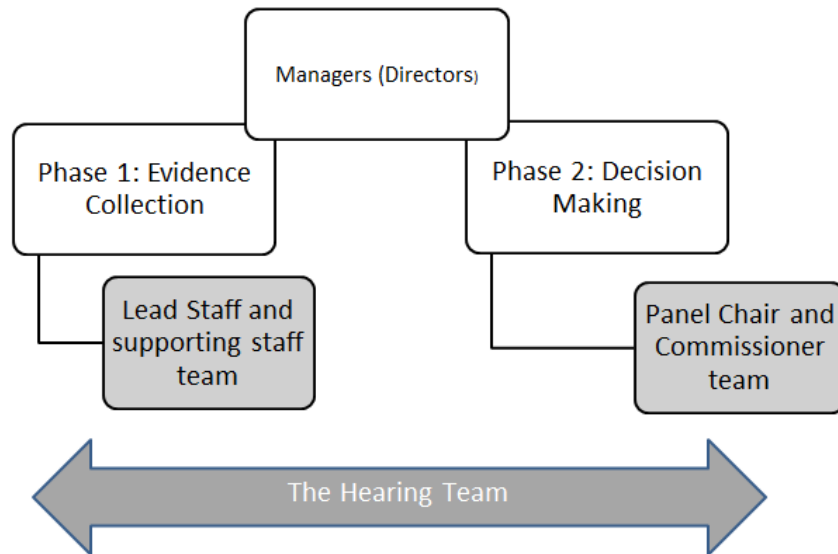
### **Systems Analysis of the Inquiry**

The Commission is part of a larger system of government as well as a part of systems related to energy provision and motor vehicle insurance. Within these systems are archetypes that describe how these structures operate with each other. The systems archetypes reveal an elegant simplicity underlying the complexity of management issues. As leaders learn how to recognize more of these kinds of archetypes, it becomes possible to see more opportunities to leverage in facing difficult challenges and to explain these opportunities to others (Senge, 2006, p. 93).

The structure of the Commission is flat, particularly as it relates to the roles within a public hearing. A hearing team consists of interdisciplinary professional staff, who explicitly report to directors (managers) and implicitly report to the commissioners as the final decision makers. This study allows the Commission to examine the components and features of the team roles and relationships that make Commission teams successful. By understanding the components of these team interactions and formalizing some of them, leadership can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission as an organizational entity. This clarity may also allow the leadership to leverage the supporting role of the managers to create sustainable, productive, and healthy change. The role of the manager is to “have the big picture and look out for their organizations’ overall health and productivity” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 9). When managers maintain a broad understanding and perspective of the system in which they work, they can accomplish organizational goals that have a much longer-term impact.

Figure 1 depicts the typical interdisciplinary team that convenes to conduct hearings. It illustrates that although the hearing team is considered inclusive of staff and commissioners, they undertake key taskwork at different phases of the overall process. The figure also establishes the role of the directors as an essential role and resource throughout the life of the team.





*Figure 1.* The hearing team.

The purpose in undertaking this study was to provide the organization with a broad understanding of the relevant strategies and practices that can contribute to high-performance teams. The regulator's challenge is to foster a sense of collaboration in teams while respecting legislative requirements and preserving fairness and transparency in a public proceeding. Successful hearing teams rely on practices that further a sense of togetherness without compromising the integrity of the system.

The Commission's chair is the final authority on implementation of organizational change and has oversight of the organization's human resources (staff and directors) as well as the organization's effectiveness in carrying out its mandate (through the commissioners). The target population of this inquiry included the members of the hearing teams who are supported by management and administration. Staff, commissioners, and managers are the key stakeholders in establishing or formalizing any practices used in the conduct of a public hearing. As is the case in most public organizations, the architecture of the Commission is not only well established, it has fundamental roots that are intended to preserve fairness and accountability in

achieving its mandate. An essential consideration in this project inquiry is that the legislative framework makes up a large portion of the systems architecture of the organization. This framework is an essential consideration for the organization within all future dialogue related to organizational practices.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the nature of the work of the Commission in regulating the province's energy utilities and mandatory automobile insurance. As a quasijudicial tribunal in BC, the Commission's structural interdisciplinary team design and legislative obligations are the main factors that make achievement of high-performance teams a worthy initiative to study. The nature of the work and of the roles of those undertaking the work contributes to the complexity of the undertaking and the complexity of achieving high performance. I will discuss this in greater detail in the next chapter, with supporting research undertaken to inform the study. In addition to high-performance team design and other legislative contemplations, the next chapter will examine literature related to public sector performance management.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This literature review was undertaken in support of the theory that when people engage in significant matters, it is often necessary to commence extensive research to identify underlying complexities (Stringer, 2007, p. 107). The systems architecture of a quasijudicial public agency requires that areas of independence, government processes and protocols, natural justice, and administrative law be considered in the course of change activities. The literature review presented in this chapter aided in exploring the main inquiry question: What practices support achievement of the BC Utilities Commission's high-performance hearing teams? The first literature review topic examines the characteristics of high-performance teams, the second topic examines regulatory procedural fairness, and the third topic looks at effective public sector performance measurement.

### **High-Performance Teams**

Organizational growth occurs through thoughtful, mindful ways of leading teams to excellence (Wing, 2005, p. 5). Team projects and high-performance goals are standard characteristics identified in most business and profit growth objectives; however, in public sector organizations, objectives and targets aimed at developing high-performance teams may be overlooked in the absence of traditional profitability metrics. In both public and private sectors, achieving high performance is an attractive and innovative business objective, particularly as "increases in organizational complexity have brought new structures and processes such as flatter organizations, participatory dynamics and empowered teams" (Laszlo, Laszlo, & Johnsen, 2009, p. 30). This section reviews the organization's role in developing high performance and explores the design of teams that achieve high performance.

**Teams as an organizational strategy.** Teams are ubiquitous in prosecuting the purpose of organizations, and while some may be naturally high performing, in other cases, organizations continue fervently to understand how to achieve the highest level of performance from teams. Confronting work in a team brings many benefits to an organization, when the team performs well. Teams exist in a context, develop over time, and evolve and adapt as situational contingencies evolve (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 78). They are “central and vital to everything we do in modern life” (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 78), and there is no debate that no matter the organization or project, teams are complex.

The convergence of individual human behaviours within intricate organizational systems makes achieving high-performance teams a challenging but not impossible feat. The modern world faces increasing degrees of individuality, yet people continue to “pull [themselves] back in to organization to accomplish great things together” (Wing, 2005, p. 11). Teamwork is an almost universal feature of organizational performance management that is considered essential to an organization meeting its objectives (Rowland, 2013, p. 38). To achieve the most from teams, organizations require a higher purpose—an organizational strategy that goes beyond simply meeting business needs (Laszlo et al., 2009). In addition, organizations need to be clear about why teamwork is espoused (Rowland, 2013). Organizations that develop strategy aimed solely at increasing output from teams risk “seeking ways to continue to engineer faster and more powerful caterpillars rather than striving to create the conditions that favor the emergence of butterflies” (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 42).

In pursuing high performance as an organizational strategy, public sector agencies must assess whether the nature of strict procedures and protocols may result in the characteristics of high-performance teams being in conflict with the culture and purpose of the organization

(Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 41). Without appropriate assessment of alignment between the organization's purpose and its ability to cultivate high-performances teams, some public sector agencies will experience tension between culture and high performance, particularly in situations in which autonomy or shared leadership generates unsustainable risk. Despite these considerations, research does not conclude that the systematic nature of public sector work impacts specifically the achievement of high-performance teams. Every organization has the ability to develop and sustain high-performance teams within its context, should it choose such a pursuit; "there are possibilities for empowered teams to thrive even within highly constrained hierarchical organizations" (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 45). The challenge for organizations is to allow the health and wellbeing of the team to be of equal importance as the tasks it undertakes.

In order to be effective, teams require members who can manage both taskwork and teamwork (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009, p. 90). High output is automatically related to high team effectiveness, but high-performance teams also display "trust, good communication, high commitment and good time management amongst team members" (Chong, 2007, p. 212), as opposed to "mistrust, a lack of commitment, and poor leadership" (p. 212) demonstrated in lower-performing teams. Not only can high-performance teams bring strategic advantages to businesses through superior results and quality service, teams with these characteristics also build strong community and friendship within an organization (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 46). High-performance teams exhibit the positive and trusting environment required to support a sustainable learning culture (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 44). Strengthened collective culture relates "to the performance, member satisfaction, and viability facets of individual, team, and unit effectiveness" (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 82), and will improve employee turnover rates and overall organizational efficiency.

**Leadership in high-performance teams.** There is a strong relationship in research between leader effectiveness and high-performance teams; the “leader’s behaviour has a powerful and pervasive role in determining the feelings of success and actual success from teams” (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 34). Team leaders carry several responsibilities that contribute to team health and performance. The leaders can establish the vision and mission of the team and empower those “who are good at what they do to perform at their highest and most proficient levels” (Wing, 2005, p. 6). Communication of the organization’s vision and shared goals as it relates to the team is the inherent responsibility of the team leader (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 35). If the team’s vision and goals are not yet formulated and ready to be communicated, then the leader must work to establish them (Wing, 2005, p. 6).

The team leader’s role includes finding ways to add value for members without directing them in areas they already know (Wing, 2005, p. 8). Autonomy is an important characteristic of high-performance teams (Laszlo et al., 2009). It is the team leader who determines the appropriate level of such autonomy. Autonomy within the group is affected by the degree to which the leader wants to approve, observe, or support activities of the members. If the leader needs to know and be involved in everything, it is less likely the team will achieve high performance (Wing, 2005, p. 8). When team members’ autonomy is high, they are empowered to find solutions to problems without the extra step of seeking approval from the team leader (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 34). Autonomy also reflects trust in members, which in turn supports members’ trust in leaders. This creates a relationship between leader and member in which potential problems are likely to be brought forward before they become significant, and teams can handle them effectively (Wing, 2005, p. 8).

High-powered teams with effective leadership often exercise shared leadership. In an engaged and empowered team, each person takes on a leadership role to some extent, as each member leads his own contributions and communications with others and chooses to do so effectively or otherwise. The high performance of each member's individual role contributes to collective team success (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001, p. 451). Multiple layers of effective leadership are required within the team in order to achieve high performance; this illuminates the importance for team leaders to continuously model effective leadership (Wing, 2005, pp. 5–6). Combined with the team leader functioning as a supportive member, autonomy creates an opportunity for shared leadership (Lazlo et al., 2009, p. 34) and highlights that “the leader is not the apex of the team” (Wing, 2005, p. 8).

Although members of high-performance teams work autonomously and share leadership among the team, the role of the team leader remains crucial in keeping the team together and focused on strategy and objectives. Strong communication is required in teams, and despite establishing a high level of autonomy, the leader remains responsible for bringing the members together regularly for significant interaction (Wing, 2005, p. 11). The absence of effective leadership may do more harm to the overall performance of the team. Low-performing teams are characterized by “forming” (Chong, 2007, p. 212) group behaviours that included poor leadership, among several other factors. Valuing and establishing the team leader role at the organizational level prevents voluntary emergence of de facto leadership within teams. De facto leadership can negatively impact performance, particularly when the voluntary leader appoints others to the management of certain project aspects (Chong, 2007, p. 212).

The leadership role is a “promising leverage point for enhancing team effectiveness” (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 107), but it is more than just existence of the role that impacts the

team performance. Team leaders need to be provided the tools and organizational support to effectively lead teams. A team leader who is not accountable to providing effective team leadership is likely to do more harm, as poor leadership is linked with low-performance teams (Chong, 2007, p. 212). However, literature on team members' views on leader effectiveness and its actual impact on team performance vary. This difference is because leader effectiveness rests with the team's perception of the leader, not with particular measures of team performance (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 107). Effective leadership is often based on individual performance and leadership evaluations within a team, rather than from a whole-team perspective (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 114). In any event, while many factors contribute to the team's overall performance, an effective team leader will, at a minimum, create an opportunity for teams to take performance to the next level.

**The design of the high-performance team.** Certain team characteristics appear to mediate high performance, although it seems that no single characteristic can prevail on its own. A high-performance team is a blended mixture of the right and exact ingredients, the variation of which becomes a new, unpredictable experiment. Wing (2005) referred to designing such a team as the "careful crafting" (p. 7) of organization, assignment, and vision articulation. In achieving a high-performance team, leaders must ensure that each ingredient understands the recipe to which it contributes. First, the organization must understand its own set of circumstances when deciding to empower teams (Lazlo et al., 2009, p. 41). Once this is established and communicated, organizations can build the infrastructure of the team to support the accomplishment of the goals (Wing, 2005, p. 7).

At an organizational level, shared vision is an initial condition that high-performance teams require. There is a logical linkage between the autonomy that high-performance teams



require and the need for all members to understand the vision they work toward (Lazlo et al., 2009, pp. 33–35). At the fundamental level, the team must be “aligned with its organization’s context and [have] adequate resources to perform its task and fulfill its mission” (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 99). A team must understand what it is attempting to accomplish, and the high-performance team will demonstrate that the goals and objectives are well understood (Wing, 2005, p. 6). Chong’s (2007) study showed, “Teams that were more creative, had clear goals, coordinated activities and members who were generally more cooperative achieved better results” (p. 212).

Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) suggested, as teams form, “individuals should be focused on fitting into the team and understanding their role in its mission” (p. 106). Organizations in which teams may function together over extended periods of time will have a greater opportunity for deeper exploration and development of the characteristics that will lead to high performance, including values and culture (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 115). Without clearly identifying the team’s values and mission, members will undoubtedly bring their own mental models that may or may not contribute effectively to their taskwork. Digression or diversity in goals can impede a team’s ability to meet its objectives, particularly in situations in which “diversity in goal orientation might induce in the team a strong disagreement with regard to goals pursued, tasks performed, and strategies adopted” (Russo, 2012, p. 136).

Teams can be an effective means for dealing with complex tasks, but it need be considered that a team’s high performance relies on success in both the taskwork and the teamwork (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009, p. 90). Teams that can produce both high-quality teamwork and taskwork will demonstrate better patterns of performance over time (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009, p. 90). Team processes have an important influence on leader and organizational effectiveness

and should be considered carefully (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 477). Teams need their organizations “to develop team-centric policies and practices to support team processes” (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 115). In the absence of focusing equally on achieving success in both taskwork and teamwork, an organization may find that jobs are being performed by independent individuals without any true existence of team (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 99).

### **Procedural Fairness**

Sedikides, Hart, and De Cremer (2008) described procedural fairness as “perceptions of the way in which decisions are made in an organization” (p. 2107). The Commission, as a quasijudicial regulatory agency, must make evidence-based decisions in the public interest. As a public body, accountability to external stakeholders may overshadow accountability to one another within teams when procedural fairness is only considered in an external context. This literature review provides context for procedural fairness from an organizational and team perspective and addresses its engagement impacts, particularly regarding fairness at the team level.

**Team decision making.** Within the Commission, the regulatory team is made up of two key subgroups, namely staff and commissioners. The roles of staff and managers in judiciary settings are integral to natural fairness and justice; “regulation depends not only on independent commissioners, but an independent staff in the tradition of professional civil service” (Beecher, 2008, p. 595). The complex environment of quasijudicial decision making requires careful consideration of the roles and relationships within regulatory teams, for “regulatory commissioners and their professional staff are entrusted by the public, with the expectation that they will be *relatively independent* from each other” (Beecher, 2008, p. 596). The tension that can exist between expert staff and independent decision makers is “institutionally inherent,

administratively complex, but *mostly healthy*” (Beecher, 2008, p. 596). Some amount of tension can contribute to a positive team environment, but too much tension can “shut down the system” (De Dreu & West, 2001, p. 1199) and result in poor team performance.

Perceiving a decision or procedure as fair regardless of being advantaged or disadvantaged by the outcome describes the general understanding of procedural fairness (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 2107). However, in a regulatory agency, final decision making is not a team undertaking; it is preserved and undertaken by commissioners, independently. Preservation of this independence is important because in contributing significant efforts toward the process of decision making, staff are embedded in voluminous facts as well as historical context. Reasonably, individual observations cannot be detached from one’s own normative values and beliefs: “Human knowers cannot divest themselves of all of their normative values, beliefs, goals, and concerns as they participate in epistemic projects” (Meghani & Kuzma, 2010, p. 587). Given the distinct responsibility for decision making by commissioners, the pre-decision dialogue between staff and commissioners is the only likely opportunity for engagement in decision making and also the phase in which perceptions of inclusivity are formed by individual team members.

Dialogue in advance of decision making provides opportunity to test views and theories without any binding obligations of decision makers. Existence of normative elements is essential in the shaping of high-impact projects; however, failure to identify and scrutinize these beliefs leaves them unchallenged (Meghani & Kuzma, 2010, p. 590). Bias within teams must be legitimized and discussed so that balanced decisions can be reached (Beecher, 2008 p. 595). In the exploration and dialogue of views on important matters, the expected diversity in interdisciplinary groups is likely to result in debate and disagreement, which can ultimately have

positive effects on the quality of decision making (De Dreu & West, 2001, p. 1191).

Organizations can benefit from diverging views, but in order to do so, they must ensure some degree of exposure to decision making (De Dreu & West, 2001, p. 1200). This is not to suggest that regulatory agencies should encourage staff participation in final decision making. Beecher's (2008) description of relative independence remains germane. However, the extent to which staff are engaged in understanding rather than participating in decision making may have some positive impact on team performance and individual engagement in team activities.

**Engagement.** Teams that demonstrate intent to reasonably involve all members in integral phases of the group work, such as decision making, create higher levels of engagement among employees. Engagement is a directly observable behaviour in the work context (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 14) and can be distinguished from organizational commitment and from job involvement in that it "is not an attitude; it is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles" (Saks, 2006, p. 602). In some respects, the "meaning of employee engagement concept remains unclear" (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 3), it can also refer to one's state of commitment, performance effort, disposition, and social and organizational behaviour (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 5). However when it is described conceptually, the most "productive and functional" (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014, p. 71) organizations are made up of employees who are entirely engaged.

Engagement is fostered by team members' perceptions of being valued members of the team. In the regulatory team context, members contribute significant effort toward what ultimately becomes a decision on a regulatory matter. The varying ways that people within the team interact with one another, particularly when a decision must be made, may influence an individual's interpersonal experience of a procedure (Tyler & Blader, 2003, p. 350), and the

degree to which he feels it was fair. In the regulatory agency's context, too much effort toward team fairness and shared decision making for the purpose of fostering engagement may give the team a false sense of its members sharing responsibility for otherwise legislated requirements. Nevertheless, a sense of procedural fairness is central to how people form their identity within groups (Tyler & Blader, 2003, p. 357). Team members who feel heard and respected are given an opportunity to understand the decision makers' procedures and are, thus, more likely to find them fair.

The absence of being provided an opportunity to understand procedures and decisions may result in members feeling disrespected within their team. Intragroup respect is an important factor that may influence team members' levels of engagement (Sleeboos, Ellemers, & de Gilder, 2006, p. 413). Tyler and Blader (2003) emphasized the development that has occurred in research related to procedural justice and its effects on social constructs, such as teams (p. 350). They stated, "People have considerable discretion about the degree to which they invest themselves in their groups by working on behalf of the group" (Tyler & Blader, 2003, p. 353). Fairness in teams is now understood to include the quality of people's interpersonal interactions with others, not only fairness of decisions and outcomes (Tyler & Blader, 2003, p. 357). However, in this regard it is not a "foregone conclusion" (Sleeboos et al., 2006, p. 414) that people disrespected in teams will be less committed to the group.

Establishing efforts to identify team-level engagement will be valuable in diagnosing issues in team performance. Where people stand in their teams (i.e., their identity security) shapes team members' attitudes, values, and behaviours (Tyler & Blader, 2003, p. 352). It is imperative that team members foster a strong sense of identity security and fairness in the team's procedures, which will then communicate information that allows members to "make inferences

about the nature of their future connection to the group” (Tyler & Blader, 2003, p. 359) and thereby influence their engagement in the group. Identifying team-level engagement might be difficult if there is no team leader to reflect on the team’s interpersonal interactions.

Engagement occurs at the individual level—before engagement impacts overall team performance, it first impacts individual performance (Saks, 2006, p. 606). However, if identity security is low, members may remain engaged in their group’s work, but their motivation may be personal self-worth rather than whole group interest (Sleebos et al., 2006, p. 420). While this might not affect the measurable outcomes or performance of the team, it can impact the effectiveness of the overall team and may indicate a cycle of interpersonal behaviour that is not reflective of the state of engagement needed to achieve high-performance teams.

It is the organization’s responsibility to cultivate an environment that supports employees and keeps them motivated beyond their own jobs, for the interest of the groups and the organization as a whole (Strom et al., 2014, p. 71). The regulatory team environment is a “complex coexistence” (Beecher, 2008, p. 592) of staff and commissioners that cannot be disentangled without losing more than would otherwise be gained. Given the heightened degree of responsibility at different stages of the proceeding, it is likely that individual engagement will fluctuate for different team members at different times. Team members may undertake taskwork and achieve high levels of performance individually, regardless of their levels of engagement. However, engaged team members may contribute more to the health of the team, particularly when they feel that team procedures are fair and they are respected. The healthy team can reach higher levels of performance than can the individual.

Sedikides et al. (2008) concluded, within the organization, “the extent to which people perceive that they are treated fairly or unfairly in a group or organizational setting has

remarkable effects on thinking, feeling, and behaving” (p. 2118). In the course of decision making, commissioners would be prudent to consider professional staff who “add substantially to the value and quality of the regulatory process” (Beecher, 2008, p. 595). Team members are likely to “feel aggrieved when their positions do not prevail in a major proceeding or policymaking process to which substantial effort has been devoted” (Beecher, 2008, p. 507). Ensuring clear lines of communication and recognition of team member efforts while preserving the responsibilities of team members’ roles should positively influence team performance and organizational culture.

### **Performance Measurement**

A major goal in this study was to determine how does a quasijudicial regulatory agency develop and maintain high-performance teams. What the organization needs to know is not only how to build the right circumstances for high performance, but also how to know to what degree it is achieved. An organization that wishes to continuously develop requires the relevant feedback that will allow it to make effective decisions in a timely manner. Continuous learning requires control systems that are flexible enough to meet changing organizational needs, and for organizations that decide to apply a continuous learning philosophy, leaders need to nurture and encourage learning and practices adopted in the organization (Oliver, 2009, p. 551). Teams want feedback that allows them to be nimble, and to know when to celebrate their success.

**Measuring performance in the public sector.** Performance measurement is a component of the organization’s total management control strategy that has its roots deep in the manufacturing sector but that possesses principles relevant to most service agencies (Chenhall & Langfield-Smith, 2007, p. 267). Financial performance is an important condition for success. Arguably, in the public sector, the organization’s ability to “achieve its goals within the

constraints imposed” (Young, 2012, p. 312) might be equally important. Success in the public sector is most often measured by the volume and quality of the service provided, although these factors are often difficult to quantify (Young, 2012, pp. 20, 29). Organizations that pursue performance measurement for service- and process-related factors will be more likely to create opportunities for positive change. Particularly in the public sector, when managers make decisions based mainly on the tangible factors they can easily measure, they are often missing important process factors that are responsible for the actual outcomes (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, p. 60).

Performance measurement systems provide organizations with the knowledge required to support effective decision making as it relates to the organization’s strategy and operations and its ability to achieve its goals. Performance measures are designed, tested, and agreed upon as organizational standards (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, p. 51), and then used to monitor activities, support strategic decision making, legitimize actions, and focus attention (Henri, 2006, p. 80). Management has a responsibility to contribute to the organization’s productiveness, successfulness, and sustainability, and an effective performance measurement system provides a resource to support real-time decision making (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, p. 51).

Performance measurement can be applied at many levels within organizations, from departments, teams, and even at the individual level (Ukko, Tenhunen, & Rantanen, 2007, p. 39). Measuring processes allows employees, including managers, to monitor activities while performing them (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, p. 51). Beyond traditional operational impacts, performance measurement can impact behaviours within an organization (Ukko et al., 2007, p. 39). Particularly, when operative-level decisions are made based on information from the



performance measurement system, “the system may have effects on leadership and further on the management” (Ukko et al., 2007, p. 39).

**Designing the performance measurement system.** In order to be effective, performance measurement systems need to align with the culture of the organization; “culture is an omnipresent factor which affects practically all aspects of organizational interactions” (Henri, 2006, p. 97). Understanding the organization’s culture is a mediating factor for successful performance measurement systems, and this requires high awareness of the values on which the organization relies prior to attempting to engage in performance measuring activities (Henri, 2006, p. 97). Performance measurement can create significant learning opportunities through continuous improvement, but this requires organizations to create shared values that encourage learning (Oliver, 2009, p. 554). Organizations also need to create and sustain an environment in which everyone can contribute to the organization’s success (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, p. 51); performance measurement systems will only influence behaviours to the extent that “the culture of the organization is conducive to their doing so” (Young, 2012, p. 142).

An effective performance management system is developed by leaders “who understand who they are serving and continually develop better ways to meet [stakeholders] needs” (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, p. 59). There may be differences in opinions within the organization on what actions and measures will support organizational goals, and these are bound to challenge identification of the right metrics (Hanson, Melnyk, & Calantone, 2011, p. 1099). Organizational leaders should strive to effectively connect strategies to actions with measures that are clear and accepted by workers (Oliver, 2009, p. 549), particularly if they want employees to align their behaviours with the strategy (Hanson et al., 2011, p. 1104).

Leaders should expect that to some extent people within the organization will resist efforts that measure performance (Young, 2012, p. 310). However, there are certain significant positive influences on measurement systems, including top management commitment, decision-making authority, and training for managers (Cavalluzzo & Ittner, 2004, pp. 244). Thus, at each level where this positive opportunity exists, levels of collaboration should be high. Overall, developing performance measures is a significant change effort for an organization that requires meaningful input from all impacted members. Young (2012) suggested that a central group of core believers form the coalition that will then move its efforts toward others in the organization (p. 310).

**Performance measurement risks.** A number of practical factors will also affect the usefulness of a performance measurement system such as data limitations and technology, which will play a role in how easy or difficult it is to evaluate the “hard-to-measure” activities (Cavalluzzo & Ittner, 2004, p. 244). However, at the organizational level, if employees do not fundamentally believe in the organization’s strategy, they are not likely to align their behaviours and actions to support it; in fact, they are even less likely to support the strategy than the person who simply does not understand it (Hanson et al., 2011, p. 1105). If an organization does not take a collaborative approach in establishing performance measurements, it may end up with measures that do not accurately reflect the organization’s cultural environment or strategy and may do more harm than good.

When designing performance measurement systems, there can be a tendency to focus on mandated measurements or measurements that are easily quantified; however, systems intended to primarily or only satisfy external requirements may completely neglect the organization’s own needs (Cavalluzzo & Ittner, 2004, p. 244), and straightforward, tangible variables usually do not

adequately account for the processes that drive the outcomes (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, pp. 52, 60). Difficulties selecting the right metrics are “a major impediment to measurement system innovation” (Cavalluzzo & Ittner, 2004, p. 244). Identifying the right performance metrics may be particularly difficult in organizations experiencing significant change. When new objectives are established, old metrics need to be evaluated to ensure consistent alignment with the organization’s strategy. Organizational leaders must understand, however, that they may experience resistance to dropping measures that indicated past successes (Hanson et al., 2011, p. 1089).

Performance measurement systems affect all levels of the organization, and users who do not know how the information will be interpreted will experience difficulty aligning with the organization’s strategy (Hanson et al., 2011, p. 1098). Organizations that do not adequately ensure performance metrics align with strategy and strategy aligns with culture will have greater difficulty in encouraging employee behaviours that support either. Employees often cannot reliably infer the strategy from the performance measures that are provided to them, and this can impede behavioural alignment (Hanson et al., 2011, p. 1104); in addition, employees who attempt to do so may further perpetuate inefficiencies if they do not sufficiently understand how to achieve the existing strategic goals. These employees will have greater difficulty using judgement to determine how to make trade-offs or prioritize actions (Hanson et al., 2011, p. 1106).

The effectiveness of performance measurements relies on the extent to which the organization uses the information received by the system in order to affect change. When management receives information from the performance management system but does not use it effectively, the entire system is not likely to garner much support from employees. If

performance measurement is used to take corrective action only, or to make incremental changes to the standards, it is not likely to affect significant organizational change (Hanson et al., 2011, p. 1099).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature that supported effective design of high-performance teams, including the important role of leadership in successful teams. It demonstrated that high-performance objectives bring positive value to the environment and culture of organizations, in addition to the anticipated potential task efficiencies. Literature illuminated the complexities of the regulatory team design compounded with the intricacies of the high-performance team design. The literature supported that team members can perform well and achieve tasks at the group and individual levels and to a high degree without being a high-performance team. The research illustrated that common values can engage team members to perform high-quality work; however, to achieve high performance, common values and shared goals must be viewed from a much broader systems perspective. These factors mediate high performance. The literature also shows that it is the team leader who moderates the degree of success of these teams. Research has placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the team leader in creating the occasions that engage and support team members to achieve high performance. Finally, the research recognized that performance measures are imperative for a team's own sense of fluidity, worthiness, and accomplishment, but that the organization must align that which it will measure with that which will motivate. The following chapter details the methodology and approach used to conduct this inquiry.

### **Chapter Three: Inquiry Approach and Methodology**

This chapter describes the research approach and the methods selected to conduct the inquiry into what practices support the BC Utilities Commission's achievement of high-performance hearing teams. The logistical and ethical considerations in planning and conducting the action research inquiry are outlined below and were undertaken in consideration of the main inquiry question, which were also informed by the following subquestions:

1. What practices can the BC Utilities Commission formalize to support achievement and sustainability of high-performance teams?
2. How does the Commission's regulatory environment impact achievement of high performance?
3. What are the BC Utilities Commission's indicators of a high-performance team and how can performance be measured?

#### **Inquiry Approach**

I undertook this research project using participatory action research grounded in a qualitative research paradigm to gain clarity and understanding of organizational circumstances related to the value, purpose and development of high performing teams at the Commission (Stringer, 2007, p. 19). The research design took an appreciative stance through qualitative data collection. Insider action research is designed to allow a practitioner to undertake research within his own organization (Kumar, 2013, p. 169), allowing the researcher to study both the theoretical implications of the study undertaken as well as the practical and logistical implications within the organization. The action research approach "seeks to change the social and personal dynamics of the research situation so that the research process enhances the lives of all those who participate" (Stringer, 2007, p. 20). This participatory approach enhances a study by explaining the actual

circumstances inside the organization that are relevant to the research topic (Avison, Lau, Myers, & Nielsen, 1999, p. 94).

Like most action research efforts, this inquiry started “with a notion . . . that a change in practice is justified” (French, 2009, p. 187). In my role as a director and the organization’s secretary, I do not form a member of the hearing teams described throughout this study. I lead an information services division and holistically strive to ensure that hearing teams have the resources and support they need to contribute to the organization achieving its mandate. As a result, I am exposed to a broad range of both individual and team frustrations as well as successes. Reflecting on my time working with the Commission, I observed that the Commission executed its mandate effectively, but that communication breakdowns and uncertainty around roles and responsibilities within interdisciplinary teams occasionally occurred, possibly perpetuated by increased turnover rates in recent years. In consultation with the organization, I felt that exploration of team collective performance could provide an opportunity for the organization to increase efficiency and strengthen organizational culture.

The research project was framed as a learning opportunity, not an improvement opportunity, for the researcher, inquiry team members, and participants (Kumar, 2013, p. 176). By undertaking and facilitating this kind of participatory learning, organizational change activities can begin immediately and long before any final actions are taken, simply through generation and sharing of ideas and knowledge for the purpose of data collection. Theoretically, action research is said to “share many of the same roots as employee empowerment, involvement, and participation” (Wooddell, 2009, p. 14).

The purpose of the inquiry was to study the organization’s practices and their efficacy within the context of an interdisciplinary team responsible for the procedural conduct and

decision making within a public hearing context. Consistent with Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) interpretivist view, which requires gaining a better understanding of the multiple perspectives of those involved (p. 47), this research project engaged team members through qualitative action research to identify and describe their own experiences and practical viewpoints in support of the inquiry topic. The research design required some interpretation and reliance on literature, particularly in the context of procedural fairness and regulatory teams to ensure that "the research informs the practice, and the practice informs the research synergistically" (Avison et al., 1999, p. 94).

Action research emphasizes practice in the field and involves the researcher seeking ways to improve their approach (Wooddell, 2009, p. 14). This research approach "combines theory and practice (and researchers and practitioners) through change and reflection in an immediate problematic situation within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (Avison et al., 1999, p. 94). Action research allows mutual exploration of organizational circumstances and a holistic emergence of potential change activities, unlike scientific research, in which the researcher is expected to provide answers to social questions (Stringer, 2007, p. 193). However, in the course of this research project, I contributed to discussions and framing by informing some of the inquiry design with established scientific research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 136).

This research project studied team practices used by interdisciplinary teams and associated measures of success. Through literature and participatory engagement, this project developed an explanation of team events in order to support future achievement of high performance, which is, ultimately, the organizational change initiative. Scientific research can contribute to an organizational change influence, but lacks the "routines and recipes that compose professional practice [that] are imbedded with concepts, constructs, values, and

perceptions” (Stringer, 2007, p. 193). In the context of the Commission, qualitative participatory research allowed (a) teams to describe their own perceptions of team performance and what impacts it, (b) participants to gain mutual understanding immediately and throughout the duration of the research, and (c) those charged with sustaining and measuring ongoing change to be a part its development.

In conjunction with action research, a higher-level theoretical interpreter’s approach provides the researcher the opportunity to observe, ask questions, and interact with the research participants (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Institutionalized practices, particularly within a regulatory framework, can seem pervasive and normal (Stringer, 2007, p. 190), and individually, people simply may not be able to see opportunity to change. The collectivity and collaboration required of action research provides exploration of a multiple perspective system. This inquiry required participants to collectively identify practices that contribute to high performance based on their own experiences and preferences while working through the complexity of the issues they confront (Stringer, 2007, p. 1).

### **Project Participants**

The Commission is a relatively flat organization, comprised of 36 staff and 11 appointed part-time commissioners, in addition to the CEO (BCUC, 2013a; see Appendix A). To conduct public hearings on utility applications, dynamic interdisciplinary teams are formed. It is common for individuals to participate in or support one or more interdisciplinary hearing teams concurrently. Participants were selected in a way that provided as much variation as possible within the organization’s population. Every subset of the Commission’s population could bring forward different issues and priorities in the examination of overall team performance; as such, I designed the research methods to garner a broad range of participation. The approach represents



an ideology that including various participants equally supports qualitative research in a quest to accentuate “*complexity, not the norm*” (Glesne, 2011, p. 273).

Using action research maximized the opportunity to involve all relevant individuals in the inquiry (Stringer, 2007, p. 35). To achieve this I used a multimethod approach in order to gather broad and deep data. The first stage of the research involved a survey, with no participant exclusions. The survey involved all Commission members, including those who have a primary function that serves the organization’s internal operations rather than the organizational activities that involve hearing utility applications. Administrative and other organizational support members were also invited to take part in the survey because their support is required to effect future change initiatives resulting from this research. I moved forward on the premise that all members could provide insight based on their individual experiences and observations. I also assumed that employees who did not have any contribution would simply not participate. Therefore, asking for their input presented the first opportunity to begin engagement in the change initiative process.

The second stage of this multimethod data collection approach was a focus group. For this I utilized a purposive quota sample of Commission members to ensure equal representation of parties from commissioners, directors, and professional staff groups to participate in expanding the data garnered through the survey. Although all members of the organization were considered relevant participants in this second stage, the primary focus of this study was the performance of teams responsible for the conduct of a regulator proceeding; as such, the focus group excluded administrative and operational support staff and also excluded the Chair and CEO, due to his power over other participants. Inclusion criteria for the focus group were directors, professional staff, and commissioners eligible to participate in a hearing team. The

quota sample meant that two spaces were available for commissioners, directors, and professional staff, respectively ( $N = 6$ ). Consideration was given to the potential power over scenarios of the focus group participants and participants received full explanation of the purpose and conduct of the study and that they were free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

### **Inquiry Team**

An inquiry team supported the logistical and academic needs of the inquiry, as well as the successful completion of the inquiry goals. From within the organization, the project sponsor formed a part of the inquiry team, enabling me to seek clarity and direction on engaging employees, scheduling and use of work time for the purposes of the data collection, and for the post inquiry planning phase. An organizational manager and a classmate in the Master of Arts in Leadership program at Royal Roads University also made up the inquiry team. I chose these members to provide support and critique through the data collection and analysis phases; these team members also assisted with editing, administrative support, inquiry question formation and selection, and focus group facilitation. All members signed an inquiry team member letter of agreement prior to assisting in the research (see Appendix B).

### **Inquiry Methods**

Two inquiry methods were used to collect data for this research inquiry: a survey and a focus group. I developed both the survey and focus group questions (see Appendices C and D) with the help of an inquiry team member and tested questions on members of the organization at opportune moments to confirm that the questions were clear, free of suggestive language and prompted their thinking on the intended issue.

**Data collection methods.** Action research works through a cyclical four-step process to plan, act, evaluate, and further plan (Glesne, 2011, p. 5). This research project formed the first

cycle of the design and dealt with the constructing and planning phases, which are presented as the recommendations in Chapter 5 of this report. The project sponsor, who has the authority to proceed with the larger initiative, considered all actions included in the recommendations that will guide the future stages of the action research cycle. The action research design I employed involved a qualitative multimethod approach that included both convergent and sequential priorities methods (Morgan, 2014). The first method (survey) was intended specifically to provide a basic understanding of how those involved in the regulatory team activities perceive their efficacy. This data were used then to reframe and refine topics and language for the second method (focus group), in a way that catered to the participants' world (Stringer, 2007, p. 106).

*Survey.* Stringer (2007) viewed surveys of limited utility as a first phase action research approach; however, survey questionnaires have advantages and disadvantages, and in this case, I found the advantages to be greater. Surveys are administered quickly, individually, and anonymously, and do not require any face-to-face interaction. I determined this to be a comfortable first introduction to the project within the Commission's very analytical, low-interaction environment. The benefit of the survey for this research and participants alike was that it could quickly reach a broad demographic resulting in an immediate and legitimate sense of inclusion in the inquiry project. Survey development also required the discipline of providing a broad range of options and free participant text that prevented interviewer bias (Staples, 1999, p. 259). The survey allowed participants an initial opportunity to anonymously express their own common-sense knowledge (Stringer, 2007, p. 80).

The accuracy, validity, and trustworthiness of the data collected from the survey questionnaire were affected by the quality of the questions and the overall response rate. I designed the questions without any repetition because the survey was process rather than self-

oriented and required participants to provide their general understanding of the scenarios presented, rather than repetitive confirmed responses. Staples (1999) suggested that attempting to measure the same subject more than once may compromise the data in that the person may have thought more about it since the first ask, or may carelessly answer having already responded once (p. 260).

Only 15 Commission members out of a sample population of 45 people responded to the survey questionnaire. Notably, only two participants identified themselves as commissioners, the remaining participants being a mixture of professional and administrative staff. While the response rate was within an expected range, the responses did not provide ample voice of commissioners. Having said that, the purpose for which the data was used was not to draw significant conclusions, rather it was to inform themes of discourse for the focus group. I did not consider who said what to be as relevant as what was said.

***Focus group.*** Through the focus group method, I sought to identify and expand on contextually relevant practices that support high performance, as well as deliberate the usefulness and applicability of the practices for future use. Following the survey, I employed a focus group as a tool to provoke deeper dialogue about the survey results as well as to describe an ideal future state as it relates to high-performance teams.

I invited focus group participants to take part in the inquiry on a voluntary basis. I utilized a quota sample selection process to ensure a manageable number of participants. The selection required participants from the three key groups involved in conducting public hearings: directors, commissioners, and professional staff. I purposely conducted the focus group after the survey in order to gain deeper understanding of the survey responses and to consider if some practices are reasonable for implementation the Commission.

During the invitation and introduction of the focus group, I explained that the purpose of the project was positive and future looking to ensure that the dialogue was not accusatory and was positively productive (Stringer, 2007, p. 87). The focus group questions were produced with the assistance of an inquiry team member and tested on volunteers within the organization based on availability and willingness. Focus group questions were developed after the data were collected from the surveys and were generally focused on the applicability and relevance of certain practices that were identified within the survey data. In general, focus group questions were divided into goals, organizational practices, and regulatory practices.

The focus group was semistructured and allowed open dialogue. I moderated the focus group and an inquiry team member displayed the questions and took point form notes on a flip chart for visual cues throughout the two-hours of dialogue. During the focus group, participants offered some responses in turn and took part in participant-to-participant discussions and questioning. The discourse among participants demonstrated immediate progress toward shared learning and understanding, while also creating a solution-focussed camaraderie. The open dialogue brought forward multiple perspectives and also provided deeper insight on the survey data and added new perspectives from the interactive dialogue.

The focus group provided an opportunity for participants to “express multiple perspectives on a similar experience” (Glesne, 2011, p. 130). The focus group was beneficial in that it allowed the participants of the hearing teams to use their own language, norms, and customs (Glesne, 2011, p. 131), providing deep and broad insight into the complexity the teams being researched.

**Study conduct.** Action research focuses on simultaneous action and research in a collaborative manner (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 43). The development and conduct of the participatory research phase are described in the following subsections.

**Survey.** The first method of data collection was a survey. I developed the survey questions based on my organizational experience and curiosity as well as what I had learned from reviewing relevant literature. I tested the survey questions on an inquiry team member and made minor modifications as a result (see Appendix C). I sent an invitation to participate (see Appendix E) to the entire organization, inviting all staff to participate in the survey, which was linked within the email. The information letter and survey preamble (see Appendices F and G) both explained the objective and intention of the project and of the survey.

I set the survey's technical features to (a) allow respondents to edit their survey responses up to the completion of the final page, (b) allow only one response per computer, (c) collect data anonymously, and (d) not store IP addresses. No participant names or proceedings were required, thus no further assurance of anonymity was required. The primary purpose of the survey was to create the parameters of the focus group dialogue; as such, I used the responses from the survey data to inform the focus group questions.

**Focus group.** I framed the focus group questions around an ideal future state and logistics of any implementation or formalization of organizational practices, new or current. The focus group discussion generally focused on applicability and relevance certain practices that were identified within the survey data. Members of the inquiry team reviewed the focus group questions; I then tested the questions with volunteers from within the organization on the basis of availability and willingness. I made modifications to the questions as a result.

I based the focus group questions on key themes from the survey responses, which I identified from the data where responses drew in a sweeping majority response rate, or where participants were equally divided in their responses. These became the key themes of the focus group. I interpreted those responses that garnered high majority responses as reflecting widespread beliefs that could easily be affirmed and split responses as beliefs that needed deeper exploration at the focus group, respectively. I considered those categories to be areas that could be effectively formalized (majority responses) or areas that required clarity (split responses) as a result of the research project.

I provided an invitation to participate in the focus group (see Appendix H) as well as an information letter (see Appendix I) to all eligible participants. The invitation provided detail of the inquiry project as well as logistics of the event and requested registration via email. I invited focus group participants on a voluntary basis and used a quota sample selection to ensure a manageable number of participants. The selection sought participants from the three key groups involved in conducting public hearings: directors, commissioners, and professional staff. The quota sampling ensured two volunteers were received from each group, subsequent volunteers were held in reserve in the event a participant withdrew. No reserve participants were required.

The focus group was held at the Commission's offsite hearing room with six participants: two directors, two commissioners, and two professional staff. The focus group was recorded and transcribed and lunch and refreshments were provided. The event was scheduled for two hours. Participants signed a research consent form (see Appendix J) upon arrival. I opened the focus group by outlining the objectives and intentions of the inquiry project and provided information on the questions, the discussion format and subsequent theming of the questions. A member of the inquiry team supported facilitation of the focus group by writing the questions down on a flip

chart and noting in point form the remarks participants made during the session. I facilitated the focus group and took notes during the conversation, which was also recorded and transcribed verbatim without attribution. The focus group was semistructured and allowed open dialogue.

Upon closing of the focus group, I reminded participants that the transcript and use of data within the final report would be nonattributable. Participants were invited to provide any follow up information or clarification via email within two business days of the event. No further information was received.

**Data analysis.** For data analysis, I used the techniques of thematic analysis followed by framework analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) described the thematic approach as a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). Thematic analysis is used in the survey data collected to enable effective framing of the focus group based on actual themes from within the participant responses. Thematic analysis required adequate coding techniques, a mindset of looking for how the data varied from case to case, and taking note of obvious and subtle differences (Glesne, 2011, p. 187).

Although the survey data were primarily gathered for the purpose of supporting focus group dialogue, I retained the survey responses for a secondary purpose of triangulating and adding context to the data that arose in the focus group. The framework approach following the focus group, such as that described by Smith and Firth (2011), allowed for cross referencing of the thematic dataset from both phases of data collection. This practice consisted of a coding matrix from each phase of data collection, and, upon completion of both phases, data were combined within the framework as a way to inform the best recommendations possible.

I applied Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) techniques of identifying themes in qualitative data research to identify themes within my data. I printed data collected from both methods, and in



the first instance “paw[ed] through” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88) data units to highlight and make note of common elements, expected information, and unexpected information. In pawing through the focus group data, the themes that I sought were primarily informed by the extant literature. Themes are abstract constructs that link expressions found in text (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). Theming provided a high level of familiarity of the data collected before delving deeper into the theming and coding. The data from the survey were, to some extent, themed by design.

I compared and contrasted the data collected from the survey questionnaires with one another to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in participant responses. Members of the inquiry team supported the data analysis process to ensure that the meaning inherent in participants’ responses was maintained as much as possible (Stringer, 2007, p. 99). Inference and conjecture are mainstays of the interpretive process (Glesne, 2011, p. 220); thus, the data set collected was analyzed and compared against itself as well as against the literature. It was within this analysis and the extent to which survey responses were reflecting congruent (or incongruent) viewpoints with the literature research that the focus group questions and intentions began to form. Braun and Clarke (2006) cautioned that theming is not just a collection of extracts strung together; actual analysis must also occur (p. 94). The analysis is in identifying “the significant features and elements that *make up* [emphasis added] the experience and perception” (Stringer, 2007, p. 98) of those involved. Beyond these literature-informed themes, I searched the data for practices that were organizationally specific and supported the inquiry project.

Once themed, the data from the focus group were coded to inform the subsequent recommendations. Categorizing the data was driven by word repetitions and keywords in context (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 96). Comparing and contrasting data from the surveys with the intent

to identify missing information was effective in identifying relevant topics for the focus group. Data analysis from the focus group method also required identification of connectors. As expected, when rationalizing current or future practices, participants either agreed or disagreed and provided an explanation with a previous factor already addressed (i.e., if this practice, then that result). From an interpretivist perspective I did not seek one truth in the data; rather, I attempted to understand the multiple perspectives available (Glesne, 2011, p. 47). I tested the theories that emerged from my interpretations of the data with my inquiry team to the extent that these theories informed the project inquiry recommendations.

### **Ethical Issues**

This inquiry research included humans; as such, I used the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [TCPS2], 2010) as a guiding measure to safeguard the welfare of those involved in the inquiry. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement* asserted that researchers must be mindful of the perspectives of their participants and are required to consider such in various contexts (TCPS2, 2010, p. 12). A potential power-relationship dynamic existed due to my role, as I report to the Chair and CEO; I mitigated this through confidentiality and nonattribution of the data to individual participants as well as in the context of relationships and credibility. I ensured participants were fully aware of the project intentions and their rights to anonymity and provided free and informed consent as the basis of participants' contributions. In each phase I provided participants with detailed explanations of their right to withdraw from the study.

**Respect for persons.** While this inquiry project was considered minimal risk for participants, respect for persons was nonetheless considered imperative throughout the duration

of the research project. The invitations to participate and the ongoing willingness to participate were described as entirely voluntary, and all data provided for use in this project remained, and will continue to remain, nonattributable, and will be destroyed upon acceptance of the final project report by Royal Roads University. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2, 2010, p. 61) outlined that appropriate data retention varies depending on the research discipline, purpose, and nature of the data. The data for this research did not serve any secondary purpose and future initiatives that may be undertaken based on the recommendations provided in this report should be initiated with further participatory activities, not based solely on the data garnered for this inquiry. All identifiers collected through this inquiry were removed, and identifiable data versions (transcripts) remain with the third-party transcriptionist who operated under the standard confidentiality agreement with the Commission and who confirmed that the data would not be retained in their records.

**Concern for welfare.** Participants in this inquiry project were not exposed to risk in the course of either participating in the study nor in the eventual recommendations resulting from the study. In the context of this inquiry, I respected the welfare of participants by ensuring that they clearly understood the intentions and the objectives of the inquiry project, in that it sought to evaluate the Commission's current procedures around team performance, while assessing potential modernization tools that would support the high performance of the organization's interdisciplinary teams. I reiterated that all of these activities would respect our legislative responsibilities. I found the literature supporting the project inquiry as well as the framing of the possible future state to be congruent with all legislative principles that guide the organization in carrying out its mandate. Concern for welfare beyond individual participants extended to the integrity of the work of the organization as a decision-making body. I mitigated this risk through

reviewing supporting literature and framing of initiatives and evaluations within the spirit of the organization's governing legislation.

**Justice.** Participation in this study was entirely voluntary and was extended to any current employee or appointed individuals who may be, or may have been, a member of an interdisciplinary team formed for the purposes of hearing a utility application. My inquiry team members and I treated all members fairly and without prejudice. Prior to conducting the inquiry, I made no presuppositions of the outcome of the data or the recommendations that would result from the inquiry.

**Conflict of interest.** Some invitees of the survey report to me and may have had a perceived conflict of interest in that they would feel duly obliged to participate. For this reason, the survey was administered anonymously and voluntarily. In the interest of inclusivity, my own staff were invited to participate in the survey. However, they were aware that the results of the research project would have minimal impact on the context or the performance of their specific work responsibility. Thus conflict of interest was mitigated in that there would be no significant benefit to me personally in influencing administrative employees to participate. Participation in this project has no direct benefit or harm to me, as the researcher, or to any employee individually. The inquiry did not require participation from any particular individuals in order to create the necessary focus group dialogue. I had no reason to attempt to coerce my own staff into participating; or for those who do not report to me, I do not have the implicit or explicit authority that would permit such coercion.

In the context of the focus group, I was sensitive to the conditions whereby all of the volunteers have an either implicit or explicit hierarchical relationship. This potential conflict was mitigated mainly in two ways: by clearly stating the purpose of the inquiry prior to participant

involvement and through disclosure statements. I designed the focus group to gather data related to an ideal future state. I made sure that the dialogue had an appreciative stance, and that no negative personal or professional attributions were surfaced. I was careful to ensure that the dialogue did not criticize or challenge people or circumstances. I invited the participants, who are professional members of the organization, with full disclosure; none of the participants were considered to be vulnerable participants. The invitation to participate described the desired quota sample intended for the focus group and outlined participants' right to remove themselves from the study at any time with no repercussions. Participation was entirely voluntary, and at any time during the focus group, members were permitted to excuse themselves from participation.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the approach I took to achieve findings, conclusions, and recommendations related to the overarching research topic of high-performance teams. I explained through this chapter that qualitative action research was the appropriate method to pursue this study, and I outlined the tools used to obtain participation and to analyze the results of the two research methodologies selected. This chapter described considerations for participants, standards of ethics, justice, and conflicts. The subsequent chapter addresses the findings and conclusions of the research approach undertaken as well as the scope and limitations of the inquiry.

## **Chapter Four: Project Results and Conclusions**

I conducted this study to answer the following inquiry question: What practices support achievement of the BC Utilities Commission's high-performance hearing teams? The following subquestions were also used to guide the inquiry:

1. What practices can the BC Utilities Commission formalize to support achievement and sustainability of high-performance teams?
2. How does the Commission's regulatory environment impact achievement of high performance?
3. What are the BC Utilities Commission's indicators of a high-performance team and how can performance be measured?

This chapter describes the main research findings drawn from the data collected in the study. The findings surfaced through analysis of the data derived from both the survey and the focus group. The findings were then triangulated with the literature (see Chapter 2), and with my own experiences and context within the Commission. The findings and conclusions are detailed based on the most noteworthy themes that emerged from study participants and are contextualized by my own understanding of the organizational circumstances. The findings and conclusions described in this section form the basis of the recommendations that follow.

### **Study Findings**

Two methods were used to collect data to support the study related to the practices that the Commission uses to achieve and sustain high-performance teams: a survey questionnaire and a focus group. The findings below are mainly driven from the focus group data, given that the survey data were used primarily for the purpose of planning focus group dialogue. However, the survey data are referred to as supplemental in some instances, such as those in which themes

emerged unexpectedly in the focus group or when uncertainty or inconsistency arose in the focus group data analysis. In such cases, utilizing the survey data enabled me to inform and contextualize the data. To maintain participant anonymity, excerpts from the focus group sessions are coded FG, and quoted or paraphrased material from the survey data are coded SQ.

As a researcher studying my own organization, the findings are prioritized by my own sense of noteworthiness and systems significance based on my experience and understanding of the organizational environment and context. Each finding is discussed in greater detail below.

The study findings are as follows:

1. Throughout the Commission a strong and common set of core values and beliefs drive micro and macro activities.
2. Commissioners feel that they are responsible for the perception of procedural fairness, and staff feel that they are responsible for the quality of the proceeding.
3. Variation in team practices reduces team efficiency and contributes to resourcing challenges.
4. All participants favour performance measures, but the current measures are limited and sometimes conflict with team goals.

**Finding 1: Throughout the Commission a strong and common set of core values and beliefs drive micro and macro activities.** Across the survey and the focus group, participants reflected consistent, values-based goals when describing their individual goals and contributions to a proceeding. Little variance occurred among focus group participants when describing that when they undertake a key role (panel chair, lead staff, or if they are the director of the person assigned as lead staff) in a proceeding, they strive to achieve fair procedures (compliance with legislative requirements), fairness to team members (consensus and agreement), and fair

decisions (consistent and well-reasoned). Among other values-based goals such as team communication, collaboration, and inclusivity, the repetition and reiteration primarily of fairness suggested that the Commission members possess a keen understanding of the organization's purpose and legislative governance structure and are morally driven to undertake their work to the highest professional standards. While these high standards are sure to produce high-quality outcomes, they may also make identifying low-performing teams difficult if measures are task oriented exclusively.

It is noteworthy that all focus group participants considered one of their main goals on a hearing team as "to ensure a fair process is followed" (FG). Participants conceptualize the meaning of fairness in different ways depending on how it related to their particular role in a hearing team. Specifically, when describing fairness goals, commissioners stated they make a "decision that's in the public interest" (FG), ensure decisions "comply with [legislation]" (FG) and ensure "that the proceeding is fair" (FG). Similarly, staff strive to ensure proceedings are "consistent with fairness, justice, and the public interest" (FG).

When addressing challenges participants face in achieving goals, participants briefly raised logistical considerations such as resources and time pressures, but beyond those two considerations, participants mainly expressed empathy toward the challenges that other roles within the team face, rather than their own (FG). For example, commissioners recognized that staff's efforts to identify issues in the absence of commissioners is a "huge burden" (FG) to carry alone. None of the focus group participants identified any significant hindrance preventing them from achieving goals, and all participants acknowledged that it is difficult to know in real time whether or not goals are being achieved; more often, an issue that arises is the first indicator of not being on target with goals.



Staff are empowered to make their major contributions through the initial phase of the proceeding, often without a great amount of intervention by commissioners. In the early phase of the proceeding staff select the issues to be canvassed and attempt to understand the scope of the evidence as it evolves through the process. Commissioners noted uncertainty of their role in supporting that process, but expressed a strong desire to support staff success even though they don't "completely understand whether we should do that or not" (FG). Commissioners are the major contributors during the decision writing stage. Staff acknowledged the burden on commissioners during the decision-writing phase, as staff are familiar with the technical substance of the decision and could support the writing process. Again, staff were uncertain what their role should be in that writing phase, but expressed a desire to support commissioners.

During the conversation around participants' ability to meet individual level goals and objectives, participants placed emphasis on acknowledging one another's challenges and difficulties and expressed an exceptional desire to support one another (FG). This reflects two likely motivators: (a) self-interest—members are hugely reliant on one another and are impacted by others' abilities to achieve their goals and (b) organizational affinity—members reflect values congruency and strong organizational commitment. While the desire to support one another was expressed frequently and in several different contexts in the focus group, participants also reflected uncertainty in terms of what others are doing and how they can be supported. All participants expressed that they wanted to support other members, but were "unsure of what [their] role should be during a particular phase of the proceeding" (FG).

**Finding 2: Commissioners feel that they are responsible for the perception of procedural fairness, and staff feel they are responsible for the quality of the proceeding.**

The question of overall responsibility was raised in the focus group based on the data that presented in the survey. However, both the survey and focus group data supported this finding.

Just over half of the survey respondents noted that the panel chair is “ultimately responsible for leading the hearing to successful and timely completion” (SQ). However, four of four survey comments on this question noted that the panel chair and the lead staff are both responsible at different times. One respondent eloquently called achievement of success a “dance between staff and commissioners” (SQ). Despite a slight majority toward the panel chair, there appeared to be a lot of uncertainty as to who is leading total team success.

In the survey data used to support this finding, only two respondents identified themselves as commissioners, and only one of whom selected panel chair as carrying overall responsibility for a proceeding, which means that the majority of respondents who selected panel chair as responsible are staff. The topic of overall responsibility was raised during the focus group because the survey response indicated that professional and administrative staff perceive the commissioners as responsible for the proceeding; however, due to low commissioner responses, it is not known whether or not the commissioners also understood that to be their role. The survey data also raised uncertainty as to whether staff responses reflected a more simplistic “it’s not me, so it must be them” scenario.

The focus group data presented similar results to those found in the survey with respect to overall responsibility, leadership, and accountability for the team. The focus group data presented that staff carry responsibility at the front end of the proceeding (up to the close of the evidentiary record), and that commissioner responsibility is at the back end of the proceeding

(decision writing). In describing the phases of responsibility, participants' responses specifically reflected that it is the panel chair's responsibility to "ensure that the proceeding is fair" (FG), while the responsibility of the lead staff is generally one of ensuring high-quality technical analysis and evidentiary canvassing. A participant affirmed, "The panel chair, as a matter of fact, does have responsibility for the proceeding . . . and certainly for the decision" (FG) but that "successful completion is teamwork" (FG). Participants also stated that the burden in decision making is eased if the operation of the proceeding is smooth and if, from panel through staff, everyone is responsible (FG).

Participants provided several suggested activities to increase collaboration and communication, but without attributing coordination of the activities to a single role. Participants stated that it is "teamwork that determines success" (FG) and that "collegiality and informality is critical" (FG), but that "formality enhances role clarity" (FG). Therefore, while job descriptions provide the technical clarity on individual responsibilities, participants demonstrated that members lack formal and informal understanding of who coordinates activities that improve team success and promotes collegiality and informality among the team. Participants demonstrated clear understanding of their technical contributions toward individual goals in the context of a hearing team and expressed a desire to have the entire team working together more collaboratively throughout both phases of the proceeding. However, it remains unclear who is responsible for initiating these activities.

**Finding 3: Variation in team practices reduces team efficiency and contributes to resourcing challenges.** This finding is divided into two subthemes: the relationship between collaboration and team efficiency and the relationship between varying team practices and resourcing challenges. Each of these subthemes is discussed in the sections below.

*Relationship between collaboration and team efficiency.* How team members understand each other and one another's roles was not central to this research topic, yet how they relate to one another within the team surfaced in several areas of the data. Focus group participants felt that early communication and collaboration as a practice would achieve several outcomes, including (a) establishment of the team and subsequent resource planning, (b) development of issues, (c) development of evidentiary questioning, (d) and decision-making. Participants consistently asserted that communication at the team level enhances team and individual efficiency.

Staff view their most successful team experiences as those in which "the panel [is] more involved and involved earlier on" (FG). For efficiency, at the initial phase of issues identification staff noted a desire to "get consensus from the team members and the panel members for which issues are important" (FG), and commissioners and directors both expressed a desire to support staff in issues identification. Likewise, commissioners acknowledged their dependency on staff in order to successfully achieve their own goals (FG). One participant described the team's hierarchy as "a circular model where everyone is driving towards a single goal" (FG). Earlier findings described that individual team members appear to be working toward the same goals; however, the data suggested that the identified absence of collaboration and communication appears to prevent teams from establishing and communicating shared goals at the team level.

The data suggested, that periodically, the desired communication does occur at the team level, but not consistently. Perhaps because individual engagement and role certainty is high, participants did not suggest that the limited amount or absence of collaboration negatively impacts the team outcomes; however, positive results were acknowledged with a minimal amount of collaboration. For example, at the most basic and informal level, participants stated

that if lead staff reaches out to commissioners and “brings them up to speed” (FG) on the key issues, it is “enormously helpful” (FG) and prevents commissioners spending too much time on noncritical issues. Similarly during the decision-writing phase, all participants agreed that some increased form of communication should occur, if only to plan the decision-writing activities, or to discuss and provide oral analysis of issues and alternatives that would support commissioners’ decision-making activities.

Participants expressed uncertainty about their involvement in areas that are not their designated areas of responsibility; questions and statements were raised, such as “Should we do that or not?” (FG), “Would you like us to?” (FG), and “I’m often unsure of what our role should be during that phase” (FG). Where uncertainty was expressed through the focus group, the tone was genuine and inquisitive and participants expressed a strong desire to be more involved to support team members in achieving their goals. The dialogue between participants in this context reflected a strong desire to work together more collaboratively throughout all phases of the proceeding.

Participants agreed that, at least, the panel chair and the lead staff should undertake planned communication early in the proceeding. In some cases, participants also felt the director should be present for that initial dialogue in which the parties discuss scope and issues for the review of the application. Participants agreed that at the initial phase of the proceeding, a broader group than those three parties is inefficient (FG).

***Relationship between varying team practices and resourcing challenges.*** Key responsibilities are described in lead staff and panel chair job descriptions (see Appendices K and L), and data analysis affirmed that team members understand these responsibilities. However, how to use the team construct to successfully achieve team goals remains somewhat

ambiguous. Participants voiced some uncertainty about the organization's tightly controlled procedures; especially those that govern fair process. This uncertainty may reduce efficiency in the team practices as members focus energy on what to do, rather than how to do it.

Data presented that team members understand what they need to do on an individual level, but not necessarily within the team, and when team process is too ambiguous, it becomes a planning and resourcing challenge. For example, while commissioners understand that they hold "the overall responsibility for the production and issuance of final decisions" (L. Kelsey, personal communication, November 15, 2014; see Appendix K), it is unclear how team resources are allocated to achieve that goal. Participants noted that some panels are more collaborative than others, which makes the staff role after the initial phase of the proceeding "highly variable" (FG). For both staff and directors, this irregularity makes resourcing and planning activities more difficult (FG). Further, if staff are participating in more than one proceeding at the same time, they may have different panels with distinct and separate intentions and expectations of the staff role, and this "dichotomy between different panels . . . gets confusing for staff" (FG).

The issue of resourcing was deliberated further in the context of collaboration. Beyond the staff and panel team assigning one another with specific responsibilities "who should do what" (FG), participants felt that collaboration should be addressed at a broader level in order to enhance efficiency. Participants acknowledged that directors are the first to receive an application and assign the staff team, and suggested that lead staff and panel chairs be selected based on principles of skills and availability with a clear understanding of the likely requirements and issues upfront. Staff also suggested, once a director assigns them as lead staff person, there may be value in the lead staff then having "some input into the team members" (FG).

Participants described that responsibility assignments should be somewhat flexible, recognizing that different members present different skill sets. Too much flexibility is a detriment to resourcing, but some flexibility, together with collaboration, allows for both assignment and clarity of responsibility based on skills. Participants stated that, beyond decision making, which is a panel responsibility that cannot be delegated, “everything else is fair game on how it could be structured” (FG). Participants felt that the “biggest stumbling block” (FG) is the question of “how do you use this mix of resources to get the best product out in a reasonable time and effort” (FG). Staff recommended that in situations in which uncertainty in role responsibility exists, which is most often during the decision-writing phase, expectations for responsibilities should be adopted by the Commission and then teams can modify and adjust to suit the needs of the team circumstances (FG).

**Finding 4: All participants favour performance measures, but current success measures are limited and sometimes conflict with goals.** Currently, the Commission tracks and reports on the amount of time it takes to review applications and to issue decisions (BCUC, 2012). This is the only reported metric that relates to hearing teams performance; therefore, survey respondents were asked to describe the indicators they use to determine team success.

Survey responses reflected consistency with the individual level goals described in greater detail in the focus group and also maintained the distribution of responsibility. Responsibility lies with staff at the front end with evidence collection, and commissioners at the back end with decision making. Measures of success, however, are limited and may even conflict with goals at times. Respondents’ comments provided in the survey questionnaire on success measures were split between suggesting that teams’ key success indicators are timely issuance of

the decision (but not necessarily within 60 days) and team collaboration (staff and commissioners having the opportunity to fully discuss the issues and options).

The dialogue around this topic in the focus group did not present any clear answers in terms of appropriate measures, but did present that standards need to correspond with the goals and values of the team and the organization. In fact, focus group participants had difficulty answering questions related to how team success can be measured or identified. They described a natural tension between timelines and quality, with participants indicating that quality is more important than timelines. Although there was general agreement that the 60-day deadline is a set standard, some participants felt that it may not be the appropriate measure for success (FG). Others acknowledged the organizational value in setting a deadline for decision making. They felt that a defined finish date creates more efficient work and prevents procrastination (FG). However, participants stated that they have never seen “anybody spinning their wheels to try to delay a decision” (FG). It was agreed that a firm 60-day deadline might be appropriate in some cases; however, in some instances, depending on the complexity of the matter and the circumstances of the stakeholders, the deadline may not be suitable.

Participants appeared to view achievement of the teams’ goals as relatively immeasurable and expressed concern about viewing performance metrics singularly, rather than looking at the whole story. Participant contributions in regards to performance measures shifted from the earlier solutions-oriented approach and became vague and contradictory, particularly as it related to timelines (i.e., the 60-day rule). Participants described the sense of urgency created by a deadline as “a good discipline” (FG), but also unnecessarily stressful on team members. Some participants viewed the measure as simply unnecessary, stating, “If you leave it open, people just do the best they can” (FG).



Ultimately, participants' responses appeared to reflect that performance measures need to be a marriage of qualitative and quantitative measures that tell the full story about the proceeding and the team's work within it. Participants were not prepared to address the value of one metric on its own, but raised measures similar to those options addressed in the survey. The dichotomy of opinion with many of the suggested measures appears to be caused by personal interpretation of the proposed measure. For example, one participant suggested the proceeding be considered a success "if [the decision] doesn't get reconsidered" (FG), whereas another viewed that "if there's a reconsideration, it indicates the complexity and the warring parties in many cases" (FG). The marriage of this then may be, as one suggested, rather than no reconsideration, "no *successful* [emphasis added] reconsideration . . . that's the key" (FG).

### **Study Conclusions**

The Commission's hearing teams demonstrated strong, shared values and goals that align with the organization's purpose and a high degree of organizational citizenship. As Laszlo et al. (2009) stated, "Acts of good organizational citizenship are more likely to occur among highly committed people" (p. 39). The strong values and goals of the participants of this study provide a reasonable explanation for individual quality and performance and provide the necessary foundation for the organization to move toward strategies designed to attain even higher team performance. The goals and values participants reflected are strongly oriented toward their own high professional standards, as well as their strong regard for one another. These conditions suggest that members are ready to receive the organizational support necessary to achieve even higher team performance. They are well positioned because of the interpersonal as well as professional relationships. As Chong's (2007) study showed, high-performance teams appear to be "people-centred" (p. 209).

The next level of team performance would include several features: (a) clearly designated team leadership, (b) effective communication within the team throughout the proceeding processes, and (c) an equal focus on teamwork and taskwork. Based on the findings described above, and in the context of the research undertaken, I present the following three conclusions, which are described in greater detail below.

1. Teams achieve high task quality through shared common goals that motivate and drive people to perform well at each stage of the proceeding.
2. The absence of a team leader increases role and relationship ambiguity that arises within teams and decreases team efficiency.
3. Despite the strong culture of quality throughout the Commission, sparse performance measures may overlook team and task quality.

**Conclusion 1: Teams achieve high task quality through shared common goals that motivate and drive people to perform well at each stage of the proceeding.** This inquiry sought to understand how the regulatory environment might impact achievement of high-performance teams, and found overwhelmingly that members of the organization share strong common goals of producing fair decisions that are in the public interest. These goals appear to motivate and drive individuals to perform well at each stage in the team process. However, commonality in goals does not, on its own, ensure efficiency and effectiveness, and may in the long run lead to increased pressure, stress, and turnover. Commonality in goals may be driven by commonality in values, or by commonality in understanding the mandate of the organization, or both. In any case, this goal commonality, when paired with other resources to support high-performance teams, provides a strong foundation for teams to exercise growth.

At the individual task level, study participants reflected commitment to achieving high-quality outcomes, but engagement at the organizational level requires cultivating a positive work environment beyond individual level tasks (Strom et al., 2014, p. 71). The congruence between staff personal goals and task goals is high. However, organizational engagement needs further consideration, even though the construct itself is not clearly defined. In their 2008 study, Macey and Schneider found concepts of engagement behaviours that reflect “effort” are “elusive and ill-defined in literature” (p. 14), but “people willingly contribute their time when their roles are consistent with their personal goals” (p. 15). Common goals identified by study participants suggested that, even if not openly shared among the team, members are likely to consistently contribute effort toward the outcomes.

Teams need to “integrate their individual actions” (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 451) to reach collective success, and sharing goals is the most certain way to identify congruency. In situations in which team members must balance and blend several roles and responsibilities, Beecher (2008) considered that the regulator can reconcile the tensions among these many roles individuals must play by maintaining a common focus on public interest (p. 592). Establishing and fostering common goals from a broader team and organizational perspective may also prevent members from carrying a heavy burden alone. Common goals, when intentionally shared among the team, will enhance team performance and help the team understand their identity as a group (Wing, 2005, p. 6).

The very nature of these common goals being strongly oriented toward fairness and fair procedures for the Commission’s external stakeholders may create even higher standards and expectations for fairness and fair procedures within the teams. Perceived unfairness in teams threatens self-esteem and self-integrity, certainty and status, and belongingness and respect

(Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 2118). Team members exert great effort to produce work that reflects fairness for all stakeholders. In light of the efforts members take to achieve fairness for stakeholders, it should be assumed that this would present as an important value for themselves, as well for their teams.

**Conclusion 2: The absence of a team leader increases role and relationship ambiguity that arises within teams and decreases team efficiency.** The study found that variances exist within procedures and practices of teams and this causes confusion, uncertainty, and some loss of direction including efficiency within the team. Two main team deficiencies appear to contribute to this conflict: (a) teams exert significant effort to work through areas of procedures that are outside the scope of their expertise and (b) the absence of team leadership to identify and resolve interpersonal uncertainty. Uncertainty over who is responsible and lack of coordinated team activities are perpetuating role and relational uncertainty, resulting in lost opportunity to increase overall team efficiency.

The data on this topic appear to reflect an understanding of the roles and responsibilities based on the organizational resources provided to the Commission members. The Commission relies on two detailed job descriptions to describe team members' key responsibilities when they join a hearing team as the panel chair or lead staff in a proceeding (see Appendices K and L). The panel chair's job description specifies the panel chair as holding "the overall responsibility for the production and issuance of final decisions, as well as for the proper conduct and execution of the hearing process" (L. Kelsey, personal communication, November 15, 2014; see Appendix K). Similar to the study findings, the lead staff job description states, "The lead staff directs and coordinates the work of the professional team assigned to a particular matter before the Commission" (L. Kelsey, personal communication, November 15, 2014; see Appendix L).

However, organizational documents do not acknowledge total team leadership. In this context of total team responsibility, participants may take a sense from security the vagueness of team leadership. While responsibility areas appear to be clearly understood and are described consistently with the lead staff and panel chair job descriptions, how to achieve these outcomes from a whole-team perspective remained unacknowledged by participants.

Laszlo et al. (2009) noted, “From a systems perspective, both control and autonomy can co-exist in a healthy organizational culture” (p. 31). Organizations can provide teams with specific and contextually relevant guidelines that define the team’s parameters and allow its members to work autonomously within those parameters. This would support team members’ quest for creativity and autonomy and also ensure protection of requirements for natural justice and procedural fairness. It is important to ensure members are provided adequate training and resources to navigate through the work tasks that the organization must tightly control. This will allow members to contribute greater efforts in areas that allow for more flexibility and creativity. Allowing members to focus on that which they can control provides the “intrinsic human need for learning, development, and meaningful work” (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 41).

Leadership influences four team processes that, when positively integrated into the teamwork, contribute to effective team performance; these are cognitive, motivational, affective, and coordination (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 457). The effective leader has a primary role to ensure that cognitive, motivational, affective, and coordination processes within the team lead to positive outcomes. In the absence of a leadership role for teams, members themselves take a primary focus on achieving their taskwork outcomes, and the important interpersonal dynamics among the team may be neglected. The absence of leadership within teams may also contribute to individual level uncertainty within the team. In a work context, lack of leadership “provokes a

focused attention on one's own needs and motives" (Strom et al., 2014, p. 77). This supports the theory that Commission teams are self-motivated to performing high-quality taskwork but with little demonstrable organizational impact through whole team performance. The literature indicated teams that produce high-quality teamwork and taskwork exhibit better performance over time (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009, p. 90).

In the absence of a designated leadership role responsible for more than technical contributions, teams rely on emergent leadership in teams. An emergent leadership role is not ideal for achieving high performance, and in some cases there is evidence that within these teams members appear to lack self-confidence as well as confidence in their leaders (Chong, 2007, p. 209). If the leadership emerges voluntarily from within the team, it may represent that the leader role is nothing more than setting out to get the job done, rather than to achieve the best from the team and its members. Chong (2007) found, "Poor team performance was attributed to reluctance to take on the leadership role, a lack of commitment of managers to their jobs, a lack of communication amongst members, and insufficient time and resources to get the job done" (p. 209).

Despite adequate technical competence, the absence of designated leadership is inhibiting the team from overcoming some naturally arising interteam challenges. Absence of designated leadership may also result in the team not adequately identifying whether members are contributing to the goals of the entire team or to individual goals, depending on existing levels of social identity and engagement of the members. The leadership role can help people identify more strongly with the team, resulting in more willingness to "act cooperatively in that group – investing their time and energy in working to see the group succeed" (Tyler & Blader, 2003, p. 356).

**Conclusion 3: Despite the strong culture of quality throughout the Commission, sparse performance measures may overlook team and task quality.** Study participants identified that the Commission's current performance measures of team success are currently quantitative and limited to tangible outputs. The current measures, whether formally or informally established across the organization, are somewhat inconsistently applied and not likely seen to be effective for measuring team performance. The usefulness of various approaches to performance measurement depends significantly on the extent to which it impacts team members' behaviour (Chenhall & Langfield-Smith, 2007, p. 277). While measures that provide recognition of outputs will maintain significance in the organization, particularly for governmental reporting purposes, systems implemented mainly to satisfy external requirements are unlikely to positively influence personal and team behaviours (Cavalluzzo, & Ittner, 2004, p. 244). From a systems perspective, the organization will find greater success in behavioural influence by viewing and measuring performance in terms of its impacts on environment, social, and cultural aspects of the operations (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 43).

The findings from this study did not indicate that the quantitative measures being used by the Commission are not appropriate, nor is it to say that they should change. This study did, however, reveal that measures are perhaps inadequately formalized, inconsistently applied across the organization, or they are not providing the real-time quality information that would allow for changes in member behaviours. According to study participants, quality measurements are not currently, or at least formally, utilized at the Commission. These are the measurements that would involve examining interdependencies and relationships within teams, which can be generated at both the process and strategic levels (Chenhall & Langfield-Smith, 2007, p. 269). Teamwork measures have become a prominent feature of performance management in

organizations as an essential component of meeting organizational objectives (Rowland, 2013, p. 38). Such measures not only look at output data but also consider engagement and motivational factors, as well as factors that influence how employees view their employer and the likelihood of flight risk.

As stated earlier, Commission members are exerting a significant amount of effort to satisfy personal goals and values that drive them, either for themselves or for the organization. Performance measurement systems must be sensitive to the culture that affects the organizational interactions in order to be effective (Henri, 2006, p. 97). It is unclear if congruency can be found between the members' goals and the performance measurements typically used to identify individual or team level success. However, at this stage, study participants have demonstrated there is little certainty in how their success is measured and how their own goals relate to those of the entire organization (Ukko et al., 2007, p. 40).

### **Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry**

A number of factors impact the reliability of the data gathered as well as the usefulness of this inquiry project outside the realm of the subject organization. The study limitations that may impact completeness and applicability of the study include the study design, changes in organizational circumstances, and study participation and methods.

First, the focus of the study was on team dynamics and teamwork quality, rather than the specific types of tasks the teams undertake. As such, the research took an appreciative stance. It assumed that the interdisciplinary teams established in the organization already perform at a high-functioning level in undertaking taskwork. The study did not examine the nature of the specific taskwork that teams pursue; therefore, the findings do not contemplate influence of the task significance on the performance and engagement levels of teams and team members.



During the study, organizational circumstances changed to an extent that I felt were significant enough to adapt the focus of the study. The study initially set out to identify both regulatory and organizational practices that support high-performance teams; however, during the study, the provincial government initiated a review of the subject organization with objectives consistent with the intent of this study. An independent panel was established to review and make recommendations on (a) comparable utility regulators in other jurisdictions; (b) Commission processes; and (c) Commission structure, resource needs, and performance (Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Petroleum Resources, 2014). The external review mainly focussed on regulatory practices, whereas this study considered regulatory practices as a secondary focus with team functioning as primary. For this reason, I eliminated regulatory specific practices from the study. Data gathered inadvertently on regulatory practices were considered out of scope for this inquiry and, therefore, not considered in its findings. Having said that, regulatory practices that teams undertake are important and relevant factors to this study; therefore, it is important that findings from both this inquiry and the BC Government's review be considered together.

With respect to study participation and methods, the first iteration of the study was a survey questionnaire. Firstly, the survey brought in relatively low response rates that may not constitute an appropriate representative sample. This concern with representative sampling is considered a "hallmark of survey research" (Krosnick, 1999, p. 538). Further, while the survey was thought to be an effective means of reaching out broadly to the organization, as the researcher, I had also self-designed and administered the method, with little experience in survey design. Hindsight exposed that some selection responses were unclear or participants may have responded with varying interpretations to the questions. A second iteration of a survey

questionnaire would have clarified meanings and terms of the noteworthy first-phase survey results, resulting in more meaningful and focused discourse in the second iteration. It is noteworthy that only 15 Commission members out of a sample population of 45 people responded to the survey questionnaire. More notably, only two survey respondents identified themselves as commissioners, the remaining participants being a mixture of professional and administrative staff. A limitation of surveys is that poor response rates can result in generalized attribution and assertions to the larger population (Coughlan, Cronin, & Ryan, 2009, p. 10). The use of structured interviews in place of broad surveying may have provided a more useful method to establish the focus of the subsequent methods.

The second data collection method, a focus group, was held during work hours and deliberately tried to minimize the amount of time taken from taskwork. Nevertheless, a two-hour dialogue occurred that would have resulted in deeper and richer discourse among participants had it been longer in duration or held in conjunction with a second focus group session. However, the number of volunteers who came forward was only sufficient for conducting a single focus group session. As a result, the data retrieved, albeit consistent among participants and across study iterations, were relatively unrepresentative. New and unexpected themes that emerged at the focus group were, therefore, not afforded an opportunity for expanded discourse.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the inquiry findings, drawn from the two methods of data collection used to undertake this research, and the associated literature that supported the conclusions made. Overall the research participants described an overwhelmingly high sense of team and values-based organizational engagement. Participants appear to only lack some organizational resources that would support achieving higher level performance within

interdisciplinary teams. Participants demonstrated a keen sense of togetherness in the context of their teams, although a large degree of uncertainty exists around how they can most effectively support one another. This reflects the impact of an absence of formal team leaders. Teams also work in the absence of a performance measurement system that would encourage a greater climate of continuous learning and development. A sensitive performance measurement system would empower employees to ensure they constantly contribute to the organization's objectives. The final chapter of this report presents the inquiry recommendations as well as organizational implications and implications for future research.

## **Chapter Five: Inquiry Implications**

In this chapter, based upon the findings and conclusions drawn from the research undertaken, I put forth organizationally relevant recommendations that address the following inquiry question: What practices support achievement of the BC Utilities Commission's high-performance hearing teams? A number of subquestions also guided the research efforts:

1. What practices can the BC Utilities Commission formalize to support achievement and sustainability of high-performance teams?
2. How does the Commission's regulatory environment impact achievement of high performance?
3. What are the BC Utilities Commission's indicators of a high-performance team and how can performance be measured?

Since this inquiry project began, the organization has pursued significant initiatives toward organizational and team efficiency and moved forward a number of actions that reflect a strong awareness of the benefits of pursuing high-performance teams. The research undertaken in this inquiry demonstrated that team members work with congruent values and goals that can form the foundation for the Commission's continued efforts toward achieving high-performance teams. All recommendations made throughout this chapter rely on broader organizational establishment of those values and shared goals so as to promote greater connection of employees to the organization.

### **Study Recommendations**

I derived the study recommendations from the findings, my conclusions, and the related literature reviewed in Chapter 2. These recommendations are infused to some extent with my own bias as an employee and director with the Commission. In my role within the organization,

and as the researcher in this study, it is imperative to me that the recommendations are relevant and useful to the organization, while staying true to the data and literature on the topic of achieving high-performance in a complex organization such as the Commission. Each of the following six recommendations is detailed in the sections below and substantiated by the literature:

1. Incorporate a goal and development of high-performance teams into the organizational strategy and strategic plan.
2. Establish a role to lead Commission hearing teams.
3. Establish the director as the hearing team's leader
4. Encourage collaboration in skills-based team design.
5. Establish team processes and procedures.
6. Establish organizational metrics that would establish and track alignment of teamwork with the Commission's vision and goals.

**Recommendation 1: Incorporate a goal and development of high-performance teams into the organizational strategy and strategic plan.** Strategy and its concomitant components including performance recognition, and identity within the Commission mainly focuses at an individual level; however, teams are an essential construct for the organization to achieve its goals. The Commission should consider the value of its teams when contemplating broader organizational strategy. It is imperative that moving toward achieving high-performance teams be a much greater purpose than “augmenting business as usual” (Laszlo et al., 2009, p 45). High-performance teams can develop strong relationships and deep learning communities within an organization (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 46). Team learning in this context builds on the safe sharing of information and risk taking within the team and “captures the collective knowledge

pool, potential synergies among team members, and unique individual contributions (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 86).

A deliberate organizational shift and intentional focus toward teams will support initiatives intended to foster high-team performance. While promoting strong interpersonal relationships and organizational learning, deciding to shift how the Commission acknowledges teams recognizes that the organization can reach higher levels of team and organizational performance. This attention to the effectiveness and quality of teamwork will surpass what individuals can achieve independently. Collective success requires members to effectively integrate individual actions (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 451), and researchers have theorized that team cohesion is strongly related to high performance, particularly in environments like the Commission in which “members have to coordinate their knowledge, skill, and effort in complex and highly interdependent workflows” (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 88).

Members are committed to high-quality work based on their own goals and values, but overall team effectiveness is “grounded in its members being motivated to work on behalf of the team” (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 464). Intensely committed individual contributions can be burdensome without the strong and regular engagement of a team. Laszlo et al. (2009) suggested organizations that take a larger systems perspective of teams may prevent the risk of “a mindless rush toward the dead end of an unsustainable and unjust society” (pp. 42–43). This change in perspective, when held consistently and reflected within organizational reward structures, will support the shift in team members’ outlook of their individual contributions to team. It will reflect that, beyond high-quality taskwork, members are equally responsible for their contribution to quality of teamwork itself. Focusing organizational strategy on high-performance teams provides an opportunity to improve employee engagement and longevity within the

organization, and maintain an experienced workforce, which will ultimately contribute to overall organizational efficiency.

It is an opportune time at the Commission to initiate activities to revisit the organizational strategy and infuse a strong focus toward teamwork and team design. Further goals of continuous learning and development will also promote a sustainable shift toward high-performance teams, as members will need to be supported in their individual development areas in order to contribute to even greater success.

**Recommendation 2: Establish a role to lead Commission hearing teams.** This study revealed two important findings: that Commission members are striving to achieve higher degrees of strategic planning and collaboration in the interdisciplinary hearing team design, and that they are also seeking clarity on responsibility for overall team leadership, particularly as it relates to coordinating interpersonal activities, information sharing, and problem solving. The Commission should leverage these desires in a way that also supports achievement of high-performance teams by providing teams with support from a designated team role that is not heavily engaged in the team's taskwork.

The team leader can support the complex social structure of a hearing team and can enhance significantly the team's ability to achieve high levels of task and team performance (Zaccaro et al., 2001). The team leader has several responsibilities to the team; they create accountability by modelling "effective leadership for [the] team members" (Wing, 2005, p. 5) and are inherently responsible for ensuring that goals and objectives are well understood by the team (Wing, 2005, p. 6).

Zaccaro's (2001) review of components of teams and team leadership pointed out the value of effective team leadership on collective performance, reflecting that it is a worthy

undertaking to establish an effective leadership role responsible for ensuring teams “maintain high levels of collective performance” (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 457). A deliberate strategy to assign a leader within hearing teams validates the organization’s vision for teams and team effectiveness by providing members with the leadership resources needed to achieve high performance. The team leadership role should have a stated purpose and guiding set of expectations, similar to those that exist for the lead staff and panel chair (see Appendices K and L). However, unlike the lead staff and panel chair, the team leadership role should have a primary purpose and focus on teamwork, rather than exclusively on taskwork.

**Recommendation 3: Establish the director as the hearing team’s leader.** While the focus of this study led to significant emphasis on whether or not it is the panel chair’s role to lead a team to success, I suggest that the relatively unexplored role of the managing director (the director of the assigned lead staff person) is an appropriate current resource that can provide leadership for teams. The team leader plays a powerful role in determining the perceived and actual success of the team (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 34), and the managing director possesses many of the skills required for the job. The director has a significant interest in overall team success, as the lead staff is one of his direct reports. The director also has the first notice of the application or team undertaking, either in consultation with the applicant or upon first receipt of the application. The director possesses deep technical and historical knowledge and can support members through strategic issues. As such, the director can lead the team to success by defining directions and maximizing the team’s progress along those directions (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 452).

Both the lead staff and the panel chair assigned to a hearing team have established and documented responsibilities that guide their approach to managing proceedings and appear



rightly responsible for their respective portions of the proceeding (see Appendices K and L). The roles as designed carry significant responsibility for quality and control of tasks, which are currently undertaken with high quality and care. The roles are not, however, responsible for overall team success, in terms of how effectively the team integrates members' contributions and skills (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 451). For this, the managing director can be formally established similar to lead staff and panel chair, as the lead director.

This recommendation would mitigate some of the natural complexities of the roles and relationships within the regulatory team construct in that a team leader provides more intratask support to teams that are burdened by bias or member identity issues. These directors possess deep institutional knowledge and already play a significant role in coaching and supporting hearing teams. Research suggested that the "prudent regulator appreciates the executive manager and the staff, and the value of high-functioning organizations to the regulatory processes" (Beecher, 2008, p. 597). Beecher (2008) described,

Managers can and do help commissioners and staff members understand their respective roles; encourage the staff to sharpen skills and positions; provide opportunities for academic pursuits, professional development, mentorship, and socialization; solicit staff input on organization and strategic matters; and promote constructive conflict management and adaptation. (p. 597)

As executive members of the organization, the Commission's directors are involved in establishment of organizational goals and, in theory, already champion them within their divisions. Adding this role to hearing teams expands the likelihood that organizational goals are well understood across team members that are not divisional employees (contractors and commissioners), and are consistently contemplated in the undertaking of individual and team-level work. The literature suggested that teams perform best when a shared vision is incorporated so that the team members are working toward common goals; however, once established, the

shared vision must be “reinforced through intense interaction and deep relationships that are developed among the individuals who comprise the team” (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 35).

**Recommendation 4: Encourage collaboration in skills-based team design.** During this study, members expressed interest in the strategic design of teams, and this recommendation addresses that desire while also recognizing that the managing director, if established as a leader for the team, can implement this collaborative approach with relative ease. Taking a more collaborative approach to establishing the team also allows for earlier and more collaborative identification of the roles and responsibilities of the team’s members; this “careful crafting” (Wing, 2005, p. 7) of organization and assignment of individuals is critical to success.

The study participants recognized that the managing director is the first to receive an application, scan the requests, consider the issues, and assign the lead staff role. Meanwhile, the organization’s chair establishes a panel chair to conduct the hearing. These two important scheduling activities are based mainly on skillset and availability. The remainder of the team, however, is often based mainly on availability. I suggest that if the managing director assigns lead staff and the organization’s chair assigns a panel chair, those three integral team members should gather to determine the desired skills and experience for the remainder of the team. Availability and reasonability will factor into this coordination, in that members need to have some criteria for the team design that ensures fair and balanced assignments and avoidance of favouritism. If these concerns can be mitigated effectively, the benefit of collaborating through the team design contributes to team member engagement, skills matching, and possibly a reduction of external contracts in that teams will have to undertake a deeper analysis of possible issues at the outset of the proceeding with time to secure relevant internal resources.

Individual competence within the team is not the single success factor, as this competence is supported by synergies created through collaboration (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 35). Teams need to maintain “high levels of collective performance” (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 457). Therefore, while it might not be reasonable to have the director, lead staff, and panel chair recruit all of their remaining team members, some value can be achieved if they are afforded some input into the resources required to achieve the team’s goals.

**Recommendation 5: Establish team processes and procedures.** The organization has significant control over some environmental and cultural aspects that support high-performance teams, including providing necessary resources and development support. The organization should hear from its members what processes and procedures require formal development or clarification of. Once identified, this project should be formally resourced. The nature of the regulatory environment is such that the organization will have some processes and procedures that need to be controlled. Teams are embedded within the larger organizational system that ultimately drives the complexity and difficulty of the team’s tasks (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 80). In people-dependent systems, like the Commission, documentation, learning, and knowledge management are imperative for long-term team success (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 40). Further, as a quasijudicial regulatory agency, members require formal and continuous training and development relevant for achieving goals effectively.

It is reasonable in a regulatory environment that there are processes and procedures that teams must adhere to, and study participants recognized that a number of team procedures are requirements either of the organization or legislative responsibilities of appointed members. In establishing procedures that require tight control, the organization is then able to evaluate the degree of autonomy it can give its teams through effective leadership. Autonomous work groups

can be more effective than traditionally managed work teams, but may not be the best approach for the organization (Laszlo et al., 2009, p. 39). Establishing formal references will ensure that members can focus on areas of their work that allow more flexibility and professional autonomy. In the absence of these documented procedures, team members will continue to expend a great deal of energy on figuring out how to do the job, rather than doing the job as effectively as possible. Requiring team members to distribute their efforts over too many tasks creates confusion, low morale, job dissatisfaction, and reduces the accomplishment of important goals (Wing, 2005, p. 7).

Given the nature of the work environment, the organization should require continuous development of skills that are unique to the regulatory regime. Particularly, “commissioners should be socialized into the roles of expert, trustee, and judge and supported with academically grounded continuing education that includes meaningful training in regulatory principles, judicial skills, and ethics” (Beecher, 2008, p. 600). Whereas the directors, responsible for divisional and team leadership, should be provided with regular leadership development to ensure effective guidance of the teams.

**Recommendation 6: Establish organizational metrics that would establish and track alignment of teamwork with the Commission’s vision and goals.** This study sought to understand what teams use to measure their own team performance and to explore effectiveness of the current recognized measures utilized by the organization. The participatory portion of the study was relatively unsuccessful in both; however, research consistently supported the use of performance metrics that measure team and task effectiveness. “The goals of any organization should be to produce optimal outcomes” (Becker & Glascoff, 2014, p. 50) and to measure process-related factors that lead to those outcomes. Teams that espouse the organization’s value

of high-team performance will pay closer attention to the performance of the team as a whole. These teams will be more likely to measure, communicate, and re-align their goals along the way (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 467). However, in order to do so, teams need to understand the organization's goals and how success is defined.

Performance measurement provides opportunities to reward team success and offers teams an opportunity to celebrate what they know they achieved. This recommendation intentionally avoids suggesting particular measures that may be useful for assessing team performance. While efforts were made to understand how members view success, it is important that the people whose performance will be measured have more significant input into the design and use of the performance measurement strategies that will be adopted. As Rowland (2013) aptly stated, "Judgements, about how individuals contribute to teams, are perhaps best made by teams themselves" (p. 50).

### **Organizational Implications**

The recommendations made as a result of this study are significant undertakings. It was the intent of this research to identify the team practices that support high levels of collective performance, and based on the literature used to support the study, I had expected that organizational strategy would be a significant consideration in the design and sustainability of high-performance teams. However, a cultural shift is needed that recognizes "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" (Aristotle, as cited in O'Connor & Robertson, 2014, para. 2) in achieving organizational goals. This organization requires high-individual levels of professional competence; yet this study recognizes that in addition to that competence, the organization cannot reasonably fulfill its mandate without teams. Strong cultures are based on two things: "high levels of agreement among employees about what's valued and high levels of intensity

about these values” (Chatman & Eunyoung Cha, 2003, p. 23). The organization can reach new levels of success when it achieves a culture that values its teams intensely.

The recommendations made leverage existing well-structured processes led by devoted individuals. Through these recommendations, my intent is to encourage the organization to work toward a shift in organizational culture that observes, rewards, and celebrates teams as central to achieving organizational goals, while respecting and honouring the traditional regulatory roles and responsibilities. In strategizing how to move forward with the initiatives, the organization should evaluate its expected outcomes with each phase of the implementation plan and ensure that due time is provided for positive impacts.

The recommendations made in this report should not be implemented independent of one another. Consideration should be given to all recommendations as an integrated strategy, and plans developed for each one based on the resources and potential rewards from the others. However, some recommendations certainly require effective establishment of companion recommendations; for example, a cultural shift that recognizes teams as central to the organization’s success requires pairing of performance measures that adequately reflect team-oriented goals. Otherwise, if performance measures reward individuals, the organization’s strategy to create “an environment where individuals can grow and develop as part of a team” (Rowland, 2013, p. 49) may never come to fruition and, in fact, may impede team performance.

**Leadership.** The organization was in an unusual circumstance at the time of this study, in that it coincided with the end of the term of the Commission’s Chair and CEO, who was also the sponsor of this project. At the time of finalizing this study, the Chair and CEO was reappointed for a further six-month term. As Bridges (2009) eloquently stated, “Just as an organizational transition must begin with an ending, it must also end with a beginning” (p. 399). By nature of

appointed leadership, the organization's members must be prepared to adapt to changing strategy and goals. However, if implemented, this study supports strengthening leadership and strengthening team togetherness in advance of larger change.

The Commission is undertaking leadership development activities across the organization. The next phases of training are targeted toward management team effectiveness, and leadership development for hearing teams can be swiftly incorporated into that strategy to begin to identify the type of leadership desired for supporting teams and to initiate exploration into the practices that make leadership effective. The recommendations made from this study require continued leadership development across all levels of the organization, particularly for those roles that carry a larger responsibility to support, mentor, and develop others, such as directors, lead staff candidates, and panel chair candidates. In a somewhat flat, professional organization like the Commission, there is value in developing leadership skills in everyone, as "organizations need leaders who can provide a durable sense of purpose and direction, rooted deeply in values and the human spirit" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 437).

**Authority.** The outcomes of this study, if implemented, may see a shift from a predominant authoritative team design to one that reflects increased use of a shared leadership model. The current organizational environment places a great deal of deserved respect upon commissioners, as independent decision makers. This is evident in the data collected, and from my own sense of respect toward this group of people. However, designing high-performance teams will generate even greater degrees of regard for commissioners and professional staff alike, as both groups are regarded as being the skilled experts for their portion of the hearing team's efforts.

While establishing a matrix hierarchy was not an objective of the study, nor is it a recommendation resulting from the study, the organization should consider that components of the matrix design may evolve over time. In any event, the structure of the organizational hierarchy is an important consideration going forward, but it should be recognized that teams, particularly interdisciplinary teams, will flourish when there is a high degree mutual respect for one another's contributions. In contrast, rigid designated authority within the teams may impact the team dynamic and limit the team's ability to reach desired levels of high performance.

Commissioners are independent appointments and do not have a formal reporting relationship. Staff, however, report through the organization's structural hierarchy. This results in an unidentified authority relationship between staff and commissioners. It is imperative that commissioners are treated with due regard, as figures of the organization responsible for moving provincial policy forward through regulatory decision making. Similarly, career staff bring extensive academic and professional experience that the credibility of the organization relies heavily on. The organization's leadership should be astutely aware of the subtle interpersonal relationships of this relationship and, if negatively impacting team performance, strategize a way to balance that tension.

**Independent review.** At the time of this study the organization underwent a significant review by government particularly into its efficiency in the regulatory context. This review will result in findings and recommendations that I was not privy to at the time of writing. However, both reports are expected to be finalized around the same time. This means that actions that relate to the government review are expected to be undertaken as priority; however, it is assumed that they will be complimentary to the recommendations put forward in this report, if considered contemporaneously.



**Teams.** The Commission's current environment must also be considered in the context of designing and supporting high-performance teams. The majority of the organization's commissioners are part time and work virtually. These recommendations, if implemented, may result in more commissioners spending time onsite and engaged in relationship building activities. However, an onsite presence is not essential to the success of the recommendations; deliberate practice that either encourages increased face-to-face time or makes better use of technology will be important consideration for teams when deciding on a team communication strategy.

This project's initial assertions were that (a) the Commission's staff members are highly competent in their professional areas; (b) commissioners are highly competent in their ability to undertake their appointed, legislative duties; and (c) managing directors show significant promise in divisional leadership. This means the organization's conditions are favourable to effectively turn leadership attention to the interdisciplinary hearing teams. While these are reasonable assertions, to support them going forward, efforts should be undertaken that ensure (a) staff receive adequate training in their fields to ensure knowledge stays current, (b) commissioners receive the appropriate training that orients them and maintains currency in their roles as decision makers, and (c) directors receive adequate leadership training and opportunity for continuous development.

### **Future Implications**

In "Changing Organizations," Bennis (2009) attributed three areas of change in the philosophy underlying managerial behaviour:

1. A new concept of *human*, based on increased knowledge of humans' complex and shifting needs, which replaces the oversimplified, innocent push-button idea of the human

2. A new concept of *power*, based on collaboration and reason, that replaces a model of power based on coercion and fear
3. A new concept of *organizational values*, based on humanistic-democratic ideals, that replaces the depersonalized mechanistic value system of bureaucracy. (p. 27)

What remain relatively unstudied are how these changing managerial behaviours and approaches can influence the most rigid and traditional structures, such as those judicial or quasijudicial organizations. I believe this study reflects that it is possible to lower the barriers between the groups of people contributing to regulatory proceedings, without creating harm to processes and procedures. Also, high performance is not sustainable if the organization's leaders cannot shift procedures to align with Bennis's (2009) key areas of changed philosophy noted above.

Based on inquiry findings, I recommend that the Commission's divisional directors take on an expanded leadership role within interdisciplinary teams in order to contribute to the organization's achievement through high-performance teams. In order to be successful, lead directors will require a thorough understanding and connection to their purpose on the team and what they are intended to impact as well as more significant understanding about what happens within hearing teams. The lead director's purpose must align with and contribute to the organization's strategy for high performance. A number of factors, including organizational strategy development, will need to be considered further in order to reach success in achieving sustainable high-performance hearing teams.

The study heard from a representative sample of hearing team members regarding the practices that contribute to high-performing teams; however, exact, particular team circumstances should be considered further when designing the team leadership role through experiential learning; "understanding the needs of people for connection and belonging is a critical principle of effective high performing team leadership" (Wing, 2005, p. 10). Directors should assume observer status, document team processes, and consult with team members further

before designing the responsibilities of the lead director. Otherwise, designing the role in isolation of the team members or in the absence of members' team experiences may result in a role "that actually undermine[s] what [the organization may] want to accomplish" (Schein, 2009, p. 642). Leaders should not attempt to supplement or take on a role within the team that does not adequately respond to the support that the team desires.

To gain the support of members, beyond those who participated in this study, it is imperative that the organization fully understands the current state of interpersonal and group processes before making efforts to change how the group members function (Schein, 2009, p. 642). This approach will contribute to the overall change strategy based on an assumption that "humans are guided by reason and that they will utilize some rational calculus of self-interest in determining needed changes in behaviour" (Chin & Benne, 2009, p. 97). If members do not feel the change is in their best interests, they will not follow through (Weisbord, 2012, p. 284). "Systems can be improved only to the extent that everyone who works in them understands how they work . . . [and] that requires a qualitatively different activity from soliciting input" (Weisbord, 2012, p. 285).

Developing high-performance teams and establishing a supportive leadership role for teams maintains and reinforces the Commission's current culture of shared leadership. The results of this study are further supported by the organization through continued leadership development. Since pursuing this study on high-performance teams, the organization proactively engaged in leadership development training across the organization. The next phase of the leadership training initiative is with the management team. It is timely and appropriate for the organization to consider the directors' role leading a hearing team in advance of this training

session, and then develop the curriculum around effective team leadership in the context of the hearing teams, rather than only through a divisional leadership lens.

It will also take some time for the organization to establish a set of performance metrics that adequately align with the organization's goals as well as the values and goals of individuals. This initiative should be pursued with a significant amount of effort that includes members of the organization, consultation with peer regulatory agencies, and adequate testing of the efficacy of subsequent measures. Beyond measures development, the organization's members must be able to understand how the standards will be used. It will be important that goals alignment between organization and members is identified, and performance metrics need to be developed that adequately reflect those goals.

As the Commission's current environment has many part-time, off-site commissioners as well as limited and stretched resources, further research and consideration should be given to how teams work together, virtually or otherwise, and how team-building activities can occur on a more frequent basis. Infrequent face-to-face interactions may be a limitation of these recommendations and may be something that requires additional consideration. The use of technology should be further considered in terms of how the Commission can encourage frequent team dialogue without creating additional time commitments (and associated frustrations) or incurring additional costs to bring people onsite more often.

### **Report Summary**

I began this study with an exploration of literature specifically related to high-performance teams and leadership for high-performance teams. From there, consideration was given to the nature of the regulatory environment being one that focuses greatly on procedural fairness, and this was contemplated in the context of how that outward facing procedural fairness

might impact internal teams' expectations and engagement levels. Finally, extensive consideration was given to performance measures, both for the purpose of supporting high-performance teams once established, and also performance measures that are appropriate within a regulatory decision-making context. Currently the organization lacks many such quantitative measures.

I conducted the study through qualitative action research with an appreciative stance and collected data through a survey questionnaire and a short focus group. Study participants demonstrated strong connection to the organization's mandate and expressed a clear desire to deepen the social and team construct within the organization through efforts toward increased communication, shared leadership, and development of procedures and skills that relate to the organization's specific requirements.

As a result of this study, I recommend that directors undertake a supportive leadership role for the teams, allowing professionals to continue to work autonomously while ensuring that the teams communicate and collaborate where necessary in order to increase team effectiveness and contribute to greater organizational learning. I also recommend that the organization deliberately shift its focus and corresponding actions from recognition of individual performance toward collective team performance and make efforts to engage, reward, and celebrate teams in a deep and meaningful way.

It is my belief that this study will provide growth in organizational culture in such a way that people feel a deep sense of belonging and purpose within the organization and within teams. I believe the outcomes of this study will provide motivation for the Commission to examine teams and interpersonal relationships within the organization more closely, provide members with a deeper understanding of one another's roles within the organization, achieve the highest

levels of the performance, and develop a community of people who share similar goals and professional purpose.

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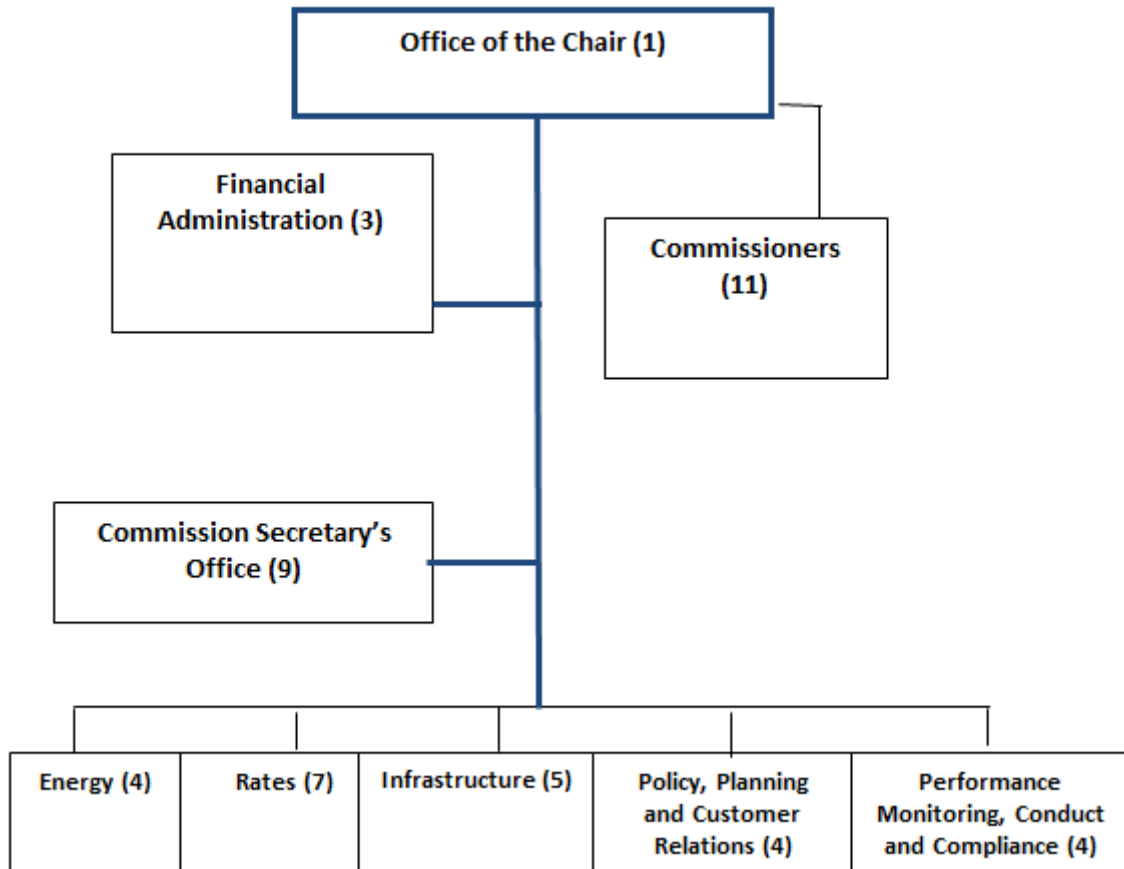
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**Appendix A: Organizational Chart**



*Note.* From *British Columbia Utilities Commission Organizational Overview* (p. 1), by British Columbia Utilities Commission, 2013, Vancouver, BC, Canada: Author. Copyright 2013 by the British Columbia Utilities Commission. Reprinted with permission.

## **Appendix B: Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement**

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Erica Hamilton (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry research study at the British Columbia Utilities Commission identify practices that support high performance teams. The Student's credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address].

### **Inquiry Team Member Role Description**

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, or reviewing analysis of data, to assist the Student and the BC Utilities Commission's organizational change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

### **Confidentiality of Inquiry Data**

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

### **Bridging Student's Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict**

In situations where potential participants in a work setting report directly to the Student, you, as a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this potential or actual conflict of interest in this study. Such requests may include asking the Inquiry Team Advisor to: send out the letter of invitation to potential participants, receive letters/emails of interest in participation from potential participants, independently make a selection of received participant requests based on criteria you and the Student will have worked out previously, formalize the logistics for the data-gathering method, including contacting the participants about the time and location of the interview or focus group, conduct the interviews (usually 3-5 maximum) or focus group (usually no more than one) with the selected participants (without the Student's presence or knowledge of which participants were chosen) using the protocol and questions worked out previously with the Student, and producing written transcripts of the interviews or focus groups with all personal identifiers removed before the transcripts are brought back to the Student for the data analysis phase of the study.

This strategy means that potential participants with a direct reporting relationship will be assured they can confidentially turn down the participation request from their supervisor (the Student), as

this process conceals from the Student which potential participants chose not to participate or simply were not selected by you, the third party, because they were out of the selection criteria range (they might have been a participant request coming after the number of participants sought, for example, interview request number 6 when only 5 participants are sought, or focus group request number 10 when up to 9 participants would be selected for a focus group). Inquiry Team members asked to take on such 3<sup>rd</sup> party duties in this study will be under the direction of the Student and will be fully briefed by the Student as to how this process will work, including specific expectations, and the methods to be employed in conducting the elements of the inquiry with the Student's direct reports, and will be given every support possible by the Student, except where such support would reveal the identities of the actual participants.

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

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

**Statement of Informed Consent:**

I have read and understand this agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Please Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



### Appendix C: Survey Questions

1. Select your role in a hearing team: selection options: commissioner, professional staff, hearing administrator, director/manager.
2. Describe your key responsibilities during a typical hearing. If you are a professional staff, assume you are the lead staff for a hearing. If you are a commissioner, assume you are the panel chair. (open space).
3. What organizational practices do you think best support a successful hearing team? Mark in priority (1: extremely important; 5: generally important):
  - early communication with all team members (staff, panel, administration)
  - regular communication with team members (staff, panel, administration)
  - regular team meetings (staff, panel, administration)
  - clarity and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities (staff, panel, administration)
  - autonomy
  - process training and orientation
  - peer reviewing of work
  - clearly designated team leadership
    - also provide your opinion on the following:
      - panel chair leads successful completion
      - lead staff leads successful completion
      - director of lead staff leads successful completion
4. What regulatory practices do you think best support a successful hearing team? Mark in priority (1: extremely important; 5: generally important):
  - establishment of an issues list
  - the regulatory timetable
  - regular team meetings on questions and evidence
  - information requests
  - open dialogue around decision making and reasoning
  - written staff analysis and recommendations
  - oral staff analysis and recommendations
  - shared decision writing/editing assignments
  - decision completion checklist
  - post mortem
5. What indicators can be used to identify a successful hearing team?

## Appendix D: Focus Group Questions

### Goals + Objectives:

- 1) In a proceeding, and in the context of your role as a *lead* panel member or *lead* staff, or director of *lead* staff, what is your main goal for a proceeding that you are assigned, and are you usually able to achieve that goal?
- 2) If not, what would help to achieve that goal?

### Organizational Practices:

- 3) Survey respondents said that process training and orientation is a best practice to support a successful hearing team. How could process training and orientation be provided consistently and effectively to everyone?
- 4) 86% of survey respondents said that clear and shared understanding of roles is essential. How can the Commission enhance and maintain role clarity?
- 5) The majority of survey respondents said that the Panel Chair is ultimately responsible for leading successful and timely completion of a proceeding. What actions would enhance a Panel Chair's ability to ensure success? Should that responsibility be shared with anyone else?
- 6) The majority of survey respondents indicated that early communication with *everyone* with an interest in the proceeding or process is extremely important, compared to some who suggest early communication between just panel and staff. Is the value of having everyone involved at the outset greater than the logistical complications of doing so?

### Regulatory Practices:

- 7) Survey respondents said establishment of an issues list is extremely important. Who can best establish an issues list and when?
- 8) Could a public issues list result in more focused intervention, thus more efficient process, and is the benefit greater than the risk of establishing the wrong issues?
- 9) 80% of respondents said that a successful hearing team issues its decision within 60 days of the record closing. Do you agree with this statement and why?
- 10) Putting less emphasis on the number of days, could the Panel Chair and Director measure success by committing to a self-imposed, but published target date?

### Closing:

- 11) Thinking back to a proceeding that you felt was one of your most successful, what is the one -or two- main factors that contributed to that success?

### **Appendix E: Invitation to Participate in a Survey**

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Master's Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University.

The objective of the research project is to identify practices that support high performance teams in the conduct of public hearings and inquiries. This phase of my research project will consist of a survey questionnaire that is expected to take less than 10 minutes of your time. The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw anonymously and without prejudice simply by closing your browser prior to submitting the survey. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way. If you wish to withdraw after submitting your survey response, you can do so without prejudice by notifying me directly; however, note that since your survey response is anonymous the data you provide cannot be removed from the research project. Your withdrawal will be from any further research activity and will require you to provide your identity.

After reading the attached information letter, should you wish to participate in this research, **please proceed to the electronic survey here: [survey link] on or before Monday, June 30.**

Thank you – and if you have any questions about my research project, please contact me directly.

## **Appendix F: Survey Information Letter**

This research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership Studies: (e) [email address]; (p) [telephone number].

### **Purpose of the Study and Sponsoring Organization**

The purpose of my research project is to identify organizational/regulatory practices that support interdisciplinary hearing teams to achieve high performance, specifically in the context of a public hearing.

### **Your Participation and How Information will be Collected**

The research will consist of a survey questionnaire distributed internally to all Commission members. The survey questionnaire will be followed by a 2-hour focus group where directors, commissioners and professional staff will be invited to participate. The anticipated survey questions include: identification current practices used, including efficiency ratings; role descriptions and responsibilities; identification of practices that have been considered or heard about through other agencies or tribunals; identification of practices that if formalized and used consistently would create efficiency; and suggested indicators of hearing team performance.

### **Benefits and Risks to Participation**

The inquiry project is intended to formalize current practices that support high performance teams. Beyond this, the inquiry objectives include identification of indicators of high performance teams, and identification of new practices that could support high performance teams. This is a low risk inquiry in that it focuses on an ideal future state; however the organization's legislative requirements are to be considered at each phase of this inquiry to ensure the integrity of the Commission's work is maintained.

I realize that due to our collegial relationship, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way. This project will ensure no harm of the persons involved or to the organization's reputation.

### **Research Team**

An inquiry team will support this research project; however, no identifying information submitted anonymously will be provided to any member of the inquiry team. The inquiry team is enlisted to support the data analysis, focus group facilitation, and editing of the final report.

**Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**

All data collected through the survey method is submitted anonymously. In the event that any identifiable information is provided within the free-text fields of the survey, it will be removed prior to its use. No data obtained in the course of this inquiry will be attributable to a person. In the event a member chooses to participate in the planned focus group, confidentiality is a requirement of all participants, however, cannot be guaranteed given that participants will know who else is present and the nature of the open dialogue. At the focus group, members are indicating a willingness to participate in the inquiry with both peers and superiors.

**Confidentiality, Security of Data, and Retention Period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my BCUC office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on my password protected work assigned computer. The focus group conversation will be recorded and transcribed and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored until acceptance of the final thesis report at which time it will be properly destroyed in the same capacity as all confidential organizational filings. Information and submissions of any member who withdraws from the study will be destroyed immediately.

**Sharing Results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings members of the BC Utilities Commission. The data and findings may be used for publications as well as members-only and public presentations. The report will be publically available through the thesis archives of Canada and may be published or presented at conferences.

**Procedure for Withdrawing from the Study**

Individuals wishing to withdraw from the study may do so at any time and without prejudice. Survey respondents can cease responding once beginning the survey by closing the web browser. Once the survey is completed and submitted, responses cannot be removed from the research; however, in this case, the respondents, identified as withdrawn participants, will not be invited to participate in the focus group. You are not required to participate in this research project. By responding to the survey questionnaire, you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

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

### **Appendix G: Survey Preamble**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this survey that is expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The anticipated questions will refer to what practices support achievement of high performance hearing teams, and what are the indicators of high performance. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership.

The information you provide will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual. All data received will be kept confidential. All data collected will be destroyed upon acceptance of the final report.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. Your completion of this survey will constitute your informed consent.

### **Appendix H: Focus Group Invitation**

Recently you participated in an organization-wide survey aimed to identify organizational supports that contribute to high performance teams, as well identify indicators of high performance from your experience working within hearing teams. The next phase of this inquiry is a focus group, for which I am seeking **two** volunteers from each group: regulatory staff (i.e., eligible to be a lead staff in a proceeding), directors, and commissioners. The first two volunteers from each group to respond to the invitation will be selected.

I will be submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership. The data and findings may be used for publications as well as members-only and public presentations. The report will be publically available through the thesis archives of Canada and may be published or presented at conferences.

The information you provide in the focus group will be transcribed and summarized, in anonymous format, and included in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual. All data received will be kept confidential. All data collected will be destroyed one year after acceptance of the final report.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you wish to participate, your response to this email indicates your free and informed consent. You will also be asked to sign a paper consent form on the day of the focus group. If you have any questions about the conduct of the focus group, please contact me in person or via email.

To participate, please respond to this email indicating your interest and availability on **Thursday August 14** from **11-1 pm**; lunch will be provided.

Please see the attached information letter for further information on the study.

## **Appendix I: Focus Group Information Letter**

This research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership Studies: (e) [email address]; (p) [telephone number].

### **Purpose of the Study and Sponsoring Organization**

The purpose of my research project is to identify organizational/regulatory practices that support interdisciplinary hearing teams to achieve high performance, typically in the context of a public hearing.

### **Your Participation and how Information will be Collected**

This phase of research will consist of a focus group where directors, commissioners and professional staff will be invited to participate. The focus group is intended to dialogue and expand the context of the survey results to identify practices that, if formalized and used consistently, would create efficiency.

### **Benefits and Risks to Participation**

The inquiry project is intended to formalize current practices that support high performance teams. Beyond this, the inquiry objectives include identification of indicators of high performance teams, and identification of new practices that could support high performance teams. This is a low risk inquiry in that it focuses on an ideal future state; however the organization's legislative requirements are to be considered at each phase of this inquiry to ensure the integrity of the Commission's work is maintained.

I realize that due to our collegial relationship, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way. This project will ensure no harm of the persons involved or to the organization's reputation.

### **Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**

All data collected through the survey method is submitted anonymously. In the event that any identifiable information is provided within the free-text fields of the survey, it will be removed prior to its use. No data obtained in the course of this inquiry will be attributable to a person. In the event a member chooses to participate in the planned focus group, confidentiality is a requirement of all participants, however, cannot be guaranteed given that participants will know who else is present and the nature of the open dialogue. At the focus group, members are indicating a willingness to participate in the inquiry with both peers and superiors.



**Confidentiality, Security of Data, and Retention Period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in the BCUC office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on my password protected work assigned computer. The focus group conversation will be recorded and transcribed and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be sorted until acceptance of the final thesis report at which time it will be properly destroyed in the same capacity as all confidential organizational filings. Information and submissions of any member who withdraws from the study will be destroyed immediately.

**Sharing Results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings members of the BC Utilities Commission. The data and findings may be used for publications as well as members-only and public presentations. The report will be publically available through the thesis archives of Canada and may be published or presented at conferences.

**Procedure for Withdrawing from the Study**

Individuals wishing to withdraw from the study may do so at any time and without prejudice. You are not required to participate in this research project. By responding to participate in the focus group, you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

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

**Appendix J: Focus Group Consent Form**

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

- I consent to the audio recording and non-attributed transcription of the focus group
- I commit to respect the confidential nature of the focus group by not sharing identifying information about the other participants

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

## **Appendix K: Panel Chair Responsibilities**

### **Purpose:**

The Panel Chair holds the overall responsibility for the production and issuance of final decisions, as well as for the proper conduct and execution of the hearing process. The Panel Chair is responsible for effectively engaging and integrating professional staff advice and coordinating the work of the Panel towards an efficient and responsible adjudicative outcome.

### **Responsibilities and Authority:**

1. Leads and coordinates all work of the Panel as it considers issues on which it must decide, including but not limited to a full understanding of the issues, procedural matters, jurisdictional issues, schedules, scoping, objections, requests, additions to the regulatory schedule, final deliberations and decision writing.
2. Decision making on all procedural matters and matters regarding the application through release of the final decision and any relevant funding that may be required.
3. Provides direction for the preparation of Commission Orders and correspondence related to the assigned matter and executes or delegates execution of Orders and correspondence.
4. Liaises with Lead Staff to ensure staff are fully engaged in the hearing process and contribute to a full understanding of the matter before the panel. Coordinate ongoing Panel/Staff interaction to ensure it is appropriate while providing maximum benefit to the hearing process and support for the decision making and writing stage.
5. Gathers and communications to staff Panel consensus on information request topics and/or questions; as necessary, the development of Panel information requests; direction on issues to be addressed in submission; the need for, and as necessary, the scope of oral argument; and any other matters the Panel decides should be included in the hearing process.
6. Maintains regular communication and coordination with Lead Staff, counsel and Secretary to facilitate the smooth, efficient and effective progress of the hearing as well as efficient production, editing, and issuance of the final decision.
7. Ensures an early and full identification of the key procedural issues as well as key issues of the application that the Panel must consider.
8. Collaborating with Lead Staff, the Panel Chair is responsible for the completion or delegation of completion of the Decision Writing Checklist and any modifications to that timeline throughout the process. The Panel Chair is responsible for establishing a proceeding/decision making and writing schedule and manages adherence with the schedule.
9. Liaises with key Commission stakeholders including Counsel, Chair, Secretary, and Directors on the progress of the hearing and raises and ensure resolution of any issues which might impede its orderly and timely resolution.

10. Ensures that the written decision meets the necessary procedural, protocol and legal requirements and standards and is consistent with the Commission's applicable guidelines and objectives.
11. Collaborates with Lead Staff and Commission Chair to conduct any necessary post mortem review of the hearing process and or decision.

*Note.* From L. Kelsey (personal communication, November 15, 2014).

## **Appendix L: Lead Staff Responsibilities**

### **Purpose**

The Lead Staff directs and coordinates the work of the professional team assigned to a particular matter before the Commission. The lead staff ensures full discovery of all relevant issues in an application under review, liaises with Commission counsel and the Panel Chair on procedural issues; is responsible for the drafting of Orders, letters and any other formal communication in support of the proceeding, supervises the provision of technical advice to the Panel and leads staff in decision writing as directed by the Panel.

### **Responsibilities and Authority**

1. Ensures full disclosure of an Application before the Commission through information requests and/or cross examination of all relevant evidence.
2. Coordinates the work of the staff team to ensure efficient use of resources, full coverage of all issues or topics and avoidance of duplication of effort.
3. Establishes templates for the preparation of information requests, NSP preparation, cross-examination for oral public hearings and any other activity where the work of individuals must be consolidated.
4. Leads development of the evidentiary record and has the authority (subject to the direction of the Panel Chair and normal supervision of the responsible Director) to determine those issues that are relevant and information requests that should be issued.
5. Establishes schedules for the work of the staff team and monitors adherence to deadlines.
6. Ensures the work of the staff team is complete, relevant and is compliant with Commission standards.
7. Coordinates with Information Services on the issuance of information requests, procedural letters, word processing assistance, posting and distribution of exhibits and any other requirements in support of the hearing process.
8. Organizes the drafting of procedural Commission Orders and letters as requested by the Panel.
9. Reviews against established criteria, participant assistance budgets submitted by Interveners and corresponds that assessment to the Intervener, tracks Intervener attendance at proceeding days, reviews participant assistance claims and prepares an assessment of the assistance for Commission Panel consideration and decision.
10. Coordinates the staff team's participation in the Public Hearing process. Supervises the staff team's preparation of cross-examination questions for an oral public hearing and the write-up of the issue description and proposed settlement for a Negotiated Settlement Process. Maintains a general knowledge of all issues in the Application.

11. Maintains regular communication and coordination with the Commission Panel, counsel, Secretary, and the applicant and the interveners in order to facilitate a smooth, efficient and responsible proceeding.
12. Engages with the Commission Panel as requested to discuss issues, provide technical input and respond to questions prior to the Commission Panel making its decisions.
13. Collaborates with the Commission Panel on the completion of the Decision Writing Checklist and any modifications to that timeline throughout the decision writing process. Coordinates as necessary the work of the staff team in the writing of the decision.
14. Reviews the draft decision and identifies areas in the draft decision or technical issues requiring additional attention.
15. Collaborates with the Commission Chair, and Panel Chair to conduct any necessary post mortem review of the hearing process and or decision.

*Note.* From L. Kelsey (personal communication, November 15, 2014).