The Role of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition: An Exploratory Case Study in the Education Sector

par

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Ce mémoire a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes:

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition of a private, alternative faith-based school by a public provincial school board, both located in Canada. To keep the anonymity of these organizations in this study, the organizations were given pseudonyms. These were ‘Biblical School’, for the private alternative faith-based school and ‘School Board’, for the public provincial school board.

The organizations came together in July of 2015, in a deal that was officially referred to as an ‘acquisition’, with the School Board as the acquiring organization. However, the acquisition negotiations began several months earlier. In the agreement, the Biblical School would gain access to resources held by the School Board, while the School Board would take over the two campuses belonging to the Biblical School. Additionally, the School Board would be responsible for the provincial school program, whilst the Biblical School would be left with some responsibilities, including alternative faith-based education programs and some logistics components.

Senior managers from both organizations were involved through all the stages of the acquisition, from the negotiations, to the transfer of knowledge during the transition. This thesis focuses on these roles by studying the perceptions of senior managers, middle managers, teachers and support staff, drawn from both organizations.

In order to clarify the role of the senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, the literature review explores the concept of mergers and acquisitions, the knowledge transfer, the role of senior management and the proximity factors in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. Under mergers and acquisitions, the literature helps understand the concept and the importance of supporting organizations to transfer or consolidate their assets,
including knowledge. In the following section, the literature reveals the definition of knowledge transfer, how it can be achieved, the factors that affect it and its importance in mergers and acquisitions. Then, in the role of the senior management component, the literature identifies the role of senior managers in supporting an effective transition in a merger, or an acquisition. Finally, the factors of influence regarding the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition are revealed in the literature as geographical, cognitive and organizational proximity. Nonetheless, time is also mentioned in the literature as a major factor of influence.

The aim of this qualitative and exploratory study is to understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. It is based on a case study carried out within the two institutions previously mentioned, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 29 participants.

The results of the study help the researcher to identify the pillars around the role of senior management and in the process meet the three objectives of the study which are: a) to describe and understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, b) to highlight the best practices of senior management in order to improve the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, and c) to identify the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

From the results emerged a model that illustrates the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The model includes the categories, strategies, best practices and factors of influence surrounding the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

First, the model presents the role played by senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, which is divided into three main categories; knowledge management, communication management, and transition management.
These categories are viewed through the lenses of the pre-acquisition and post-acquisition phases. Each category is divided into different strategies. The strategies under the knowledge management category are identified as: 1) performing research on the acquired organization, 2) creating and implementing the knowledge transfer plan, and 3) providing resources for the knowledge transfer. These strategies fall under both pre and post-acquisition phases. Next, the strategies related to the communication management category, which also fall under both pre and post-acquisition phases, are primarily identified as: 1) setting up communication channels, 2) setting and communicating expectations clearly and transparently, and 3) being receptive to the employees’ ideas and concerns. In the last category, the strategies under transition management are underlined as 1) being physically present and organize meetings, 2) offering employees support during the transition, and 3) providing the necessary tools during the transition. These strategies fall only under the post-acquisition phase.

Second, the model highlights the best practices of senior managers in the knowledge process during an acquisition. These best practices are divided into three main categories: forecasting, relationship building, and training. Each category of best practices is linked to a specific category related to the role of senior management. Forecasting is linked to the knowledge management category, relationship building to the communication management category and training to the transition management category. Under relationship building, the perceived best practices are creating and partaking in relationships between employees in both organizations, encouraging an open-door and teamwork culture and showing appreciation to employees. Under forecasting, creating a plan to support the transition, assigning someone on-site to manage the transition and learning from previous experiences are revealed as the perceived best practices. Lastly, under training, identification of employees’ levels of knowledge, the offer of training programs to facilitate the knowledge transfer and providing expert speakers, trainers and mentors, are revealed as the perceived best practices.
The model also showcases four factors of influence around the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. These factors are: geographical proximity, cognitive proximity, organizational proximity and time. Under geographical proximity, distance in relation to physical presence and distance in relation to communication flow are identified as the two characteristics that affect the role of senior managers. Also, in terms of cognitive proximity, shared knowledge vs knowledge gaps and employees’ professional experiences, are revealed as the main cognitive proximity characteristics that should be taken into consideration when looking at the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. Additionally, similarities or dissimilarities of the organizational cultures and the similarities or dissimilarities of the organizational structures are identified as the organizational proximity characteristics. Lastly, the time factor, including time adequacy and transition timeline, is identified as another factor that affects the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

In conclusion, the theoretical contributions of this study are to improve the understanding of the relationship between the knowledge transfer process and mergers and acquisitions, to enhance the understanding of the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, to improve the understanding of the theoretical bridges between the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition and proximity factors and finally, to contribute to the understanding of the time factor around the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The study also presents practical contributions, including useful ideas and actions around the role of senior managers, the best practices and the factors of influence in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
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INTRODUCTION

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) can count on more than 100 years of literature on both how they occur and the areas in which they may be most or least effective in growing an organization. This includes strengths, weaknesses, employee relations, and legal considerations (Wright, 1901; Stigler, 1950; Lewellen, 1971; Falconi, 1997; Horja, Avram, Ignat, & Vancea, 2009; Hiwarale, 2016). However, research on the relationship between educational institutions and mergers or acquisitions is less common, having occurred primarily in the 2000’s and having resulted in as few as 38 research papers found by Ahmadvand, Heidari, Hosseini, and Majdzadeh (2012). More specifically, the study of M&A in the context of primary education, whether public or private, has even less information available in online library databases, based on a search conducted in 2017 of EBSCO, ProQuest, and ERIC databases. Primary education institutions provide services to children that must obtain an education in order to eventually contribute and compete with the large population of adults. The subject of M&A in primary education may have a direct influence on the school, administrators, and teachers that will guide these children.

M&A are defined in the literature as two separate occurrences between entities that result in an organization achieving vertical or horizontal growth, where the intent is to combine, or consolidate the resources of the organizations (Zhang & Stening, 2013; Greenberg & Guinan, 2004; Buono, 2003). Smaller organizations, acquired or merged with larger organizations, may experience integration where the larger organization imposes upon the smaller organization a new culture, structure, or design (Zhang & Stening., 2013; Greenberg & Guinan., 2004). In order for the M&A to be successful, it requires that the organizations share knowledge and ensure communication between both groups of employees, in order to achieve progress and growth and to ensure that the processes between the organizations do not result in conflicts (Greenberg et al., 2004; Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005; Haspeslagh, Jimmieson, Bordia & Irmer, 2007; Hitt, Harrison, & Ireland, 2001; Mirc, 2013). To achieve knowledge transfer, senior managers in both organizations must communicate effectively and provide sufficient information that fosters interaction.
between managers and employees in both organizations (Haspeslagh, et al., 2007; Bröchner, Rosander, & Waara, 2004; Harrison & Farrell, 2008; Seo & Hill, 2005). In some cases, this communication will be done from a top-down, or leader to employee direction (Cîrnu, Bușan, & Chirtoc, 2016). When information is communicated from employees to leaders, this is considered bottom-up (Cîrnu, et al., 2016). In the case of M&A, it may appear that a top-down communication is necessary, as a result of the inability to involve employees in the decision-making processes. However, research indicates that employee satisfaction may be improved by including them as part of the communication and processes (Raina & Britt Roebuck, 2016; Dutta & Kleiner, 2015).

The focus of this thesis will be on the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process in the context of an acquisition. The organizations studied are a public school board (referred here as the School Board), which acquired a private school (referred here as the Biblical School), in a major Canadian city. Chapter One presents the context of the research problem since the Biblical School has been acquired by the School Board, and its need to adjust to this new and larger base of students into their structure and culture. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature which explains each of the concepts and theories to shed light on the case study. Chapter Three includes the methodology in which the case study was developed, aspects of limitations and delimitations. The results are combined and processed for delivery into Chapter Four, followed by the discussion in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER ONE
RESEARCH PROBLEM

This chapter presents an in-depth background on the organizations involved in the research and the context of the research problem. The first section presents the descriptions of the acquired and acquiring organizations prior to the acquisition: the Biblical School and the School Board. The second section explains the elements of the agreement reached between the two organizations upon acquisition. Finally, the third section of this chapter presents a summary of the research problem. Information gathered about the organizations was obtained from employees within the acquired Biblical School and the School Board following the acquisition.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDIED ORGANIZATIONS

1.1. The Biblical School

The Biblical School was founded in 1992 as a private school for a religious community. The aim of the school is to instil biblical moral values and create a genuine learning environment for its students within its two campuses. The school provides students with a modern learning environment, evident through the comprehensive academic program. The teaching approach from Kindergarten to Grade 12 is targeted at preparing students for a competitive higher education system and career progression.

The Biblical School’s mission is to enrich the community by promoting academic achievement, leadership and biblical values through its learning community. The vision of the school is to build and maintain a learning community capable of developing leaders with a background in faith, knowledge and ingenuity. The school values include a holistic learning approach to promote human excellence
through intellectual, social, physical and spiritual endeavor. The development of impeccable biblical characteristics, academic skills and exemplary citizenship is instilled within students from the onset\(^1\).

Figure 1
Organigram of the Biblical School before the Acquisition

Figure 1 shows the organigram of the Biblical School before the acquisition. It starts with the private school board, followed by the principal of the school, where the executive assistants worked with the principal. The vice-principals and teachers closed out the management of the school. The structure in the school was a four-tiered hierarchy, with trickle-down command structures. The board was an elected body, composed of students’ parents, community members, investors and local business owners. The principal implemented the policies and decisions coming down

\(^1\) Source: School website and preliminary meetings with key respondents.
from the board. He had to support the school board decisions, regardless of the clarity in the decisions. The Principal was then able to share leadership through the vice-principals of the school. However, there was not much stability or longevity in the principal position; at any time of the year, the board could decide to fire, rehire or have a new principal for the school. In the case where there was no new hire, the school would function with an acting principal. On the other hand, the vice-principals, with the support of the principal, could also create rules and identify where new rules or regulations were needed.

With the three VPs identified as middle managers, the final level included the executive assistants and receptionists. The structure supported two campuses, where both could work together for unity and support, but operate within their own hierarchy following the decisions of the school board. Whilst trust existed between the members, it did not result in a proactive and successful structure, since the school suffered from instability when members changed, or when failures in communication occurred. As a result, it was hard to operate the school and to bring structure to its management.

Another challenge was the lack of employee commitment, both from the board and from principals, with terms in office rarely exceeding three years. This resulted recently in appointed board members, principals, vice-principals and executive assistants, with little experience, managing the school and students. The most active members of the board involved in school decision-making or policy-making, were parents and community members. Parents had a great deal of faith and trust in the school, particularly because of their individual involvement. However, this did not result in a strong structure and efficient management of the school system.

The need to create a buy-in from all stakeholders prior to any changes, tended to result in almost no changes. This was due to a lack of agreement, or lack of understanding of the administrators, teachers, or even students’ needs. The school did not have a fluent functioning structure of authority, policies and rules. Guidelines were not adhered to in all areas and many people had an influence on the board
members, or they were active in making decisions without necessarily having the qualifications to make those decisions. Also, there was very little stability in the board, as it was often dissolved and recreated with new members chairing it. In the case where the Biblical School board was dissolved, the school was running without a board and only the school principal was heading it. In spite of all these challenges, prior to the acquisition, trust between all members, including teachers, administrators and parents, was very strong and demonstrated a united front towards objectives.

The school needed to embrace change in order to grow and become stable. An acquisition by a more organized and larger board, would address many of these challenges. Whilst the Biblical School was working within the legal requirements in regard to education and the teacher’s association, the rules and regulations running the school did not seem clear to the school’s employees and the processes did not seem to be running smoothly\(^2\). Specifically, employees did not always know the changes that had occurred, nor was the policy the same in each classroom or campus. The constant changes within the board resulting from the inconsistency of the school board members, along with the lack of experience in education, caused the school to be overly micromanaged in some areas and ignored in others. The school board worked to maintain its control of the management of the school in both campuses, by controlling membership on the board. However, three things were working for the school: the school had a strong working relationship with the teachers’ association, operated in a community council owned building and was operating within the provincial department of education regulations. These strengths, considering the size of the private school, created value to the School Board in acquiring the Biblical School.

\(^2\) Source: Preliminary meetings on the research field with key respondents.
1.2. The School Board

The School Board is a legal entity created in 1995 by consolidating two parent-guided school boards. The School Board has since then grown to incorporate faith-based alternative programs. The headquarters are located within a two-hour drive from most of its schools, including the newest acquisition, the Biblical School. Proximity within the distance was necessary to manage the schools more effectively and reduce traveling issues for staff. The programs extend from Pre-school to Grade 12. In July 2015, the School Board acquired the Biblical School and both parties signed an agreement that stipulated the Board’s commitment to providing a system of public education with a wide range of educational opportunities for all students and that set to involve parents and the community. The programs offered at the Biblical School would remain faith-based, and designed as an alternative program by the Board.

Contrary to the structure in which the Biblical School operated before the acquisition, the acquiring School Board functions with a variety of teams that are designed to divide the workload and requirements of the various schools’ combined needs. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the organization uses a hierarchy beginning with the Board of Trustees. The second tier of leadership in this structure is the Superintendent of Schools, with the assistance of the executive assistant, communications officer and communications specialist. In the third tier are the three team leaders, including two associate superintendents and a secretary treasurer. In addition, the school principals and coordinating principal of early learning are also in the third tier, answering directly to the superintendent of schools. In the organizational chart, the Biblical School is in the orange sections of tier three.
Figure 2
The School Board Organizational Chart

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART 2015-2016

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Executive Assistant

Superintendent of Schools

Communications Officer

Communications Specialist

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources)

HR Manager

Exec. Assistant

Secretary Treasurer

Finance Manager

Corporate Services Coordinator

Finance Services Coordinator

Transportation Services Supervisor

Facility Services Supervisor

Executive Assistant

Associate Superintendent (Education Services)

Director of Learning

Literacy Specialists

Counseling Services

Family School Liaison

Counselors Speech Language Pathologists

Director of Learning (Instructional Services)

Director of Learning

Director of Learning (Support Services)

Director of Learning

Director of Learning (Student Services)

School Principals

Coordinating Principal of Early Learning

Vice Principals

Teachers

School-Based Support Staff

Counselor/Teacher

Curriculum Coordinator

Assistant Superintendent

Play Program Coordinators

Counseling Services

Career and Academic Counselors

Technology Services

Systems Analyst

Network Analyst

Computer Technician

Clerical Support Staff

Paying Specialist

Transportation Services

School Bus Drivers

Facility Services

Building Maintenance

Mechanic

Bus Service

Financial Services

Finance Officer

Accounts Payable Specialist

Purchasing Specialist

Receptionist/Accounting Clerk
2. THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS

As mentioned earlier, the Biblical School became part of the School Board, which oversees faith-based schools, in July 2015. The acquisition of the Biblical School brought two additional campuses to the School Board, with an added student body of about 1,300 students and around 100 employees. The acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board would also increase student enrollment. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the expected enrollment for all the School Board was 8,100 students, in 15 community schools, 8 Christian faith-based programs dedicated to the low-German speaking Mennonite learners, outreach programs for high school level, online learning, and 17 Hutterite colony schools. For the School Board, it was important that the Biblical School remained successful, in addition to the continued growth. Therefore, the benefits of the acquisition needed to be expressed in terms of structural and financial strengths beside the growth in enrollments and the number of employees.

Figure 2
The Acquisition Timeline
Figure 3 illustrates the acquisition timeline which was particularly condensed. The discussions and negotiations between the School Board and the Biblical Board regarding the acquisition offer started in May 2015. Only senior managers and one of the middle managers were implicated and consulted throughout the discussions of the pre-acquisition stage. The offer was accepted by the acquisition core team in June 2015. Thus, the official acquisition announcement was prepared by senior management in August 2015 and sent by email one week prior to the back to school date. It was directed and intended to all the employees of both organizations. Some of the employees didn’t get the memo and were only informed on the first day of work.

The Biblical School’s former board believed that joining the larger school system of the School Board would provide students with better learning opportunities and align with the school’s ongoing commitment to student achievement. Following the acquisition, all the stakeholders, ranging from students to the educators at the Biblical School would gain access to several benefits that they lacked as a private institution. Some of the benefits to the students included access to resources and learning material of a higher quality. The teachers’ benefits included access to professional development and a chance to participate in collaborative programs, including receiving instructional support, which can help them familiarize with the new expectations set by the School Board. This could ultimately improve their service delivery and accountability. Nonetheless, teachers and school leaders could have reduced control in their ability to dictate policies and manage expectations of parents, administrators, and students.

Understanding the changes occurring in the school, including the differences between previous operations and current expectations, is very important since this was an acquisition and not a merger. The Biblical School was acquired by the School Board and it is now running under its wing.
Previously, it was functioning as an independent private school. Now that it is under a public-school board, a major transition needed to be supported. The Biblical School experienced major changes in terms of structure, administration and even class management. Senior management played a very important role in this transition since many changes needed to be implemented. The process of knowledge transfer in the departments within both organizations was critical to the success of the acquisition. For example, employees needed to understand the new roles of each organization, such as what responsibilities were retained by the Biblical School and what was given to the School Board as stipulated by the terms of the acquisition agreement.

The organizations operated based on a horizontal acquisition in which the companies involved provide different attributes, within the same industry, for achieving a common goal (Kansal & Chandani, 2014). According to the agreement, the school program was now under the governance of the School Board. The board was tasked with the overreaching goal of serving students from diverse backgrounds and learning needs through the provision of educational programs at the Biblical School. The Biblical School also had key responsibilities; however, those were based on what roles and expectations are assigned by the School Board. For instance, the Biblical School managed a component of the common need for specific learning programs dedicated to the diversity of the student body, thus the alternative faith-based educative programs. Some logistics components also remained under the Biblical School management. These included buses, buildings, and Bible. In this context, the School Board used the term Bible to refer to any religious components of all its alternative faith-based schools.

Also, the senior management played a key role in handling the knowledge transfer process during this acquisition. Senior management had to assist in assimilating and transferring the knowledge based on their understanding of the needs underlying the acquisition (Huang, Ling, Yang & Zhao, 2012). Senior management had specialized knowledge, including
human resources, processes, culture, and structure. The active participation of senior management was critical to the success of the acquisition.3

3. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board was a major initiative for both organizations. It generated an important knowledge transfer process to ensure the success of the acquisition. This research is focused on investigating the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during this acquisition. To do so, we studied not only the perceptions of senior managers, middle managers and support staff from the acquiring organization (the School Board), but also those of senior managers, middle managers, teachers and support staff from the acquired organization (the Biblical School). The research focuses on how the different participants perceived the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during this acquisition. Additionally, we seek to understand how knowledge transfer can assist and contribute to a successful transition. The selection of the Biblical School and the School Board as studied organizations fills a gap in the literature regarding the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition in the education sector.

3 Source: Website and preliminary meetings with key respondents in both organizations.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The research problem presented in chapter one calls for a literature review to better understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. Chapter two is divided into six sections: mergers and acquisitions, knowledge transfer, the role of senior management, proximity in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, summary of the literature review and finally, the research question.

1. MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

M&A are commonly used by organizations as a way to gain resources or to grow (Halkos, Matousek, & Tzeremes, 2016). In the context of the present study, it becomes important to better understand M&A to lay a foundation for the rest of the literature review. This section will cover the conceptualization of mergers and acquisitions and the acquisition process stages.

1.1. Conceptualizing Mergers and Acquisitions

The terms mergers and acquisitions are used together in much of the literature, but each represents a strategic activity in organizational expansion. A merger is a grouping of two organizations to work together as one through equal presentation in the newly formed organization (Zhang et al., 2013; Greenberg et al. 2004; Buono, 2003). An acquisition is the procurement of one organization by another, resulting in the continuation of the acquiring
organization while the processes of the other become fully integrated into the acquiring one (Zhang et al., 2013). In an acquisition, one party has the controlling power. Segal-Horn and Faulkner (2010) define an acquisition as an outright purchase of one company by another. The transaction occurs when one company acquires enough of the other company’s shares to gain ownership or control (Segal-Horn et al., 2010). On the contrary, a merger is a collaborative agreement between two companies to combine their ownership, interests, and structures into one company. M&A occur in different industries, including in non-profit industries when aimed at providing or increasing services to the populations served (Prufer, 2011).

Thus, M&A are considered common strategic tools that organizations apply as they aim to achieve better positioning in a volatile and dynamic business environment (Wagner & Hilal, 2014; Schraeder & Self, 2003; Picot, 2002). The importance of M&A for researchers and practitioners is highlighted in the literature, focusing on a variety of tools, methodologies and strategies that organizations can either use to implement change or improve management (Greenberg et al., 2004; Stahl et al., 2005; Haspeslagh, et al., 2007; Hitt, Harrison, & Ireland, 2001). Picot (2002) notes that M&A will continue to increase due to market expansions, globalization and rapid technological growth. Much of the available literature has focused on the outcomes of M&A; however, some have conducted research to better understand whether the goals of the merger or acquisition were achieved (Ahmadvand, et al., 2012; Zhang, et al, 2013; Greenberg, et al., 2004). Some research indicates that the main determinant of M&A deals is the process itself (Almor, et al, 2014; Huang et al., 2012; Minbaeva, et al, 2003). This is because the process holds key impediments that influence the outcomes (Haspeslagh, et al., 2007; Hitt et al., 2001; Mirc, 2013). M&A deals can be analyzed as a fractioned process since the impediments and determinants in the process change over time and influence the course of outcomes and actions (Segal-Horn et al., 2010; Picot, 2002; Wagner et al., 2014; Schraeder et al., 2003).
Organizations may choose to engage in a merger or an acquisition deal based on various motivations. The common motives include economies of scope, economies of scale, market share, research and development and knowledge (Segal-Horn et al., 2010). M&A are highly rational strategies, focused on clear goals and objectives. Research on the trends for the last twenty years shows that M&A deals have been on the increase, especially in the high-technology industry, as a way to gain expertise, knowledge and ability to compete with rivals (Almor, Tarba & Margalit, 2014; Huang et al., 2012; Minbaeva, Pedersen, Björkman, Fey & Park, 2003). To hold a better market position and to maintain a competitive advantage over other rival companies, M&A are mechanisms for achieving these goals faster than developing products internally (Huang et al., 2012; Minbaeva et al, 2003). In the case at hand, the School Board gains additional resources, including an increase in the size of the student body, resulting in a consequent financial gain.

M&A can occur in two different ways, horizontal or vertical. Horizontal M&A involve companies with similar work portfolios, while vertical M&A are for companies in diverse areas (Kansal et al., 2014). The key to the success of both horizontal and vertical M&A is that they have to create new opportunities for the organizations (Kansal et al., 2014). Usually, when M&A occur between a large and a small organization, the larger one tends to integrate the smaller one, although the organizations have the choice of coming up with a newly designed integration model (Kansal et al., 2014). Examples of integration can be seen in situations where some aspects of the smaller organization have been moved directly into the larger one, resulting in jobs becoming redundant and resources being duplicated (Kansal et al., 2014). Arguably, M&A may be easier for horizontal M&A because the organizations involved either engage in similar activities or are in the same industry (Kansal et al., 2014). The acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board is a horizontal acquisition, since both organizations are in the same industry. While the Biblical School does increase value in the supply
chain, such as additional infrastructure, equipment and staff, it remains in the same area as the other services and offerings from the School Board.

Through acquisitions, organizations must combine efforts in creating a unified system that works for all parties involved. Some of the primary risks in M&A are a result of employees that may suffer the most during the planning and implementation stages of unifying the organizations (Cartwright & Copper, 1993; Fairfield-Sonn, Ogilvie, & DelVecchio, 2002). Acquisitions require that the existing systems of operations must not be overhauled, but rather a new system must provide a better solution to the function. Nevertheless, new and old systems are challenged when integration occurs. Employees’ lack of trust and faith in the changes to come can directly influence the success of any implementation of structures they do not know or understand (Klendauer & Deller, 2009). Several processes occur, typically in stages, during an acquisition. These stages are defined in the following section.

1.2. Acquisition Process Stages

The acquisition process involves two specific stages namely, pre and post-acquisition, which influence the outcome of the entire process (H spaslagh & Jemison, 1991). Teerikangas (2012) support this claim stating that an acquisition consists of the two interrelated phases. The authors explain that the primary goal of the pre-acquisition phase is to allow the firms to develop the decision of whether to approve and participate in the deal or to decline it. On the other hand, the post-acquisition phase focuses on the organizational change that influences the two parties involved in the deal with the intention of creating an environment that enables knowledge transfer (Teerikangas, 2012). Marks and Mirvis (2011) establish that the post-acquisition phase is a delicate stage that determines how well an organization will adapt to its new status, especially considering possible cases of
misunderstandings and disruptions in terms of power and control. Birkinshaw, Bresman, and Hakanson (2000) agree that an assessment of the position of the post-acquisition phase is critical. They argue that the process creates value based on two main steps, namely task integration and human integration. Task integration is the goal of the acquisition deal in terms of assets and capabilities exchange, while human integration revolves around the communication among the organization members as well as their retention and satisfaction.

In the post-acquisition stage, the organization’s focus should be on finding a balance between task and human integration, otherwise there is a risk of one undermining the other (Birkinshaw et al., 2000). For instance, excessive focus on human integration can be expedient for employee retention and satisfaction while decreasing operational processes. Similarly, an emphasis on task integration initiates synergies. However, it may sacrifice personnel satisfaction, retention, and well-being. Therefore, the management team involved in the acquisition needs to balance both human and task integration to achieve the goals and objectives of the deal during the post-acquisition phase. The post-acquisition phase enacts the objectives dedicated to creating a market position, gaining competitive advantage, entering new markets and acquiring new customers. As Oberg and Tarba (2013) observe, the post-acquisition phase also includes making decisions in terms of knowledge transfer and transfer of other factors that influence the success of the acquired organization. Marks and Mirvis (2010) support that decisions made during the post-acquisition phase should aim at value creation.

A study by Seo & Hill (2005) shows that, during the post-acquisition phase, firms begin to integrate data and information from each other, which should result in employees from both organizations communicating extensively. The objective of this communication is to gain new knowledge and learn different and better ways of working. However, the people involved need to appreciate that tasks involved in the post-acquisition phase are
complex, and may take longer than expected (Seo & Hill, 2005). Wagner and Hilal (2014) state that the post-acquisition phase is the waiting period for the things that will actually happen after the organization’s goals change; this is found to increase the uncertainty influencing employees’ cooperation and behaviors. Faulkner, Teerikangas and Joseph (2012), who researched methods that would help in managing the surrounding activities in an acquisition, concur that the major challenge comes after approval and commencement of the deal. This is recognized as the period when the deal must be viewed and treated as a process with different connecting phases and not combined sequential steps.

Moreover, Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991) argue that the post-acquisition phase is essential for the successful outcome of the acquisition. However, they note that this phase is complex since it is detail-oriented, involves regular interactions and has a noteworthy impact on the transfer of capabilities and knowledge. The post-acquisition phase is a dynamic process and requires managerial empowerment and agility (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991).

**Figure 3**
The Post-Acquisition Integration Process

Source: Adapted from Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991).
Figure 3 presents the post-acquisition integration process adapted from Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991). Interactions occur between the acquiring firm and the acquired firm, where a focus must be placed on moving through the problems of integration, typically in the acquired firm, to the final step of improved competitive advantage. The perceived steps are focused on the idea that together the firms must reach an atmosphere for capability transfer, resulting in an actual transfer of strategic capabilities, to realize their goals in the union.

According to Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991), the post-acquisition phase is gradual and filled with interactions between the participating organizations where they need to learn and exchange knowledge on how to cooperate to enable the knowledge transfer process. Therefore, transfer of strategic capabilities is the key element of the post-acquisition phase. Capasso, Dagnino and Lanza (2005) define transfer of strategic capabilities as the ability to pass successful competitive strategies between the acquired and acquiring organizations. Transfer of competitive capabilities enable the organizations’ survival and increases their value over time. Besides taking into consideration the strategies employed by a business, strategic capabilities also include the organizations’ market positions, resources and assets. The acquiring party oversees the transfer of capabilities but may encounter challenges, since skills, knowledge and capabilities are embedded in the individual and organizational procedures and routines. Therefore, the process is time-consuming and difficult. It requires a reciprocal understanding between the parties involved as well as the willingness of the individuals to ensure success in the exchange of information and knowledge sharing process. The authors stress the need for establishing mutual benefits and goals to create a working environment derived explicitly from the interactions between the involved firms. They also note that interactions can be categorized into substantive, administrative and symbolic. Substantive interactions represent the effort provided in order to transfer the knowledge. Administrative interactions emphasize the information and control systems
that take part in the process. Symbolic interactions are the interactions that involve the focus of certain beliefs on the different elements faced during the transition. These interactions may vary from one individual to another. In a nutshell, the development of the post-acquisition stage influences the processes of knowledge transfer, which is explored subsequently.

2. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Knowledge transfer is important because it allows employees to gather and communicate knowledge that improves the activities of an organization (Ajith Kumar & Ganesh, 2009). This section is divided into three parts: conceptualizing knowledge transfer, stages of the knowledge transfer process during M&A, and knowledge transfer in M&A.

2.1. Conceptualizing Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge transfer is the process in which organizations transfer knowledge from one person, unit or region to another (Leonard, Swap & Barton, 2015). Knowledge transfer, as defined by Musial, Budka, and Blysz (2012), refers to the processes and methods in which expertise, skills, knowledge, and capabilities are transferred from the source of the knowledge to the individuals in need of the knowledge. Knowledge transfer is an aspect of knowledge management, which is defined as processes and strategies for movement of knowledge in order to create competitive advantage, utilize human resources and integrate learning or knowledge, through systematic means of selecting, distilling, organizing and presenting knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997; Carrillo & Anumba, 2002; Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003). It is expected that knowledge management and knowledge transfer will foster innovation and create opportunities for the development, retention
and transfer of knowledge throughout all areas of the organization (Argote et al., 2003; Musial et al., 2012; Paulin & Suneson, 2012). The results of knowledge sharing are that the individuals, teams, departments and the organization as a whole benefit from the influx and movement of knowledge. This creates value for the organization as a resource that can be built upon and used to develop strategies and innovation in all areas, including in developing employee skills and team building (Paulin & Suneson, 2012; Zack, 1999). Human resources play a vital role in M&A, since it is through human interactions and communications that knowledge is created and transferred (Zack, 1999).

Information and knowledge exchange takes different forms. Paulin and Suneson (2012) state that the exchanged information and knowledge can be focused or unfocused when aligned to prior objectives. This means that the exchange can fit with previously set goals or follow no discernible pattern. A general assumption is that knowledge exchange moves in both directions. Paulin and Suneson (2012) add that knowledge transfer involves a variety of interactions that require cognitive understanding between those involved. Cognitive understanding refers to the intentional willingness and ability to apply the transferred knowledge.

The most popular classification of the types of knowledge is the distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997) define tacit knowledge as the knowledge embedded in the human mind through experience. It includes personal experiences and wisdom, intuitions and insights. On the other hand, the authors define explicit knowledge as codified or digitized knowledge, such as knowledge found in books. Risks to knowledge transfer occur when the knowledge, tacit or explicit, is not understood and does not transfer effectively and completely to the employees, resulting in failure of the knowledge transfer to achieve results (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997). Seidler-de Alwis and Hartmann (2008) investigate tacit knowledge, and cite Polanyi
Polanyi (1966) established the principle of tacit knowledge using the words “people know more than they can tell.” Kikoski and Kikoski (2004) clarify the phrase stating, “What is unsaid and unexpressed could be the reservoirs of tacit knowledge (66).” This kind of knowledge is highly personal and challenging to formalize (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008). Therefore, unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is difficult to interpret and share with others. Morosini, Shane & Singh (1998) agree with this concept by stating that tacit knowledge transfer depends mainly on the person involved and is thus very difficult to succeed.

Joia and Lemos (2010) discuss several factors associated with the transfer and interpretation of tacit knowledge. For instance, they mention factors such as common language, management of time, mutual trust, hierarchy, relationship network, knowledge transference, power, knowledge storage, type of training, media, internal level of questioning and type of valued knowledge. They also define tacit knowledge as “a direct result of experience, reflection and dialogue, which are three activities that require time” (p. 413). Therefore, during knowledge transfer, it is important to allow time to reflect upon and experience tacit knowledge. Another principal factor in tacit knowledge transfer and management is mutual trust. Therefore, for tacit knowledge to be successful, it is crucial that there is a relationship of trust between the parties involved. In the context of M&A, both organizations must develop mutual trust within their social as well as their cultural contexts. Notably, the greater the trust between groups or individuals, the lower the risk and uncertainties in the tacit knowledge transfer process (Joia & Lemos, 2010).

Another reason that makes tacit knowledge difficult to transfer is that it requires the employees to move individual knowledge to the realms of collective knowledge. Collective knowledge, in the case of organizations,
the knowledge of all of the organization, similar to how different cultures have collective knowledge and focus around areas of routine, expertise and structural processes (Zhao & Anand, 2009). Individual knowledge only becomes collective through an investment of time to understand, decipher and teach the knowledge to others (Gruber & Paneva, 2014). Individual knowledge transfer to collective knowledge can also be complicated by issues such as competitiveness within an organization or controversy regarding the merger or the acquisition, for example. Zhao and Anand (2009) concur that collective knowledge can only emerge as a result of collaboration, coordination and knowledge transfer through a variety of different communication tools. While individual knowledge is important, it might not be as productive as collective knowledge. For instance, Benbya (2016) states that a low rate of tacit knowledge transfer, from individual to collective, in an acquisition can lead to a very high turnover rate. This makes collective knowledge an important part of retaining employees in the context of an acquisition.

Collective knowledge is not without its difficulties. For instance, it brings challenges in M&A due to the larger amount of knowledge, from various sources, which must be utilized and evaluated when the organizations work to become a single unit (Junni & Sarala, 2012). However, individual knowledge can be gathered through direct communications and filtered by the senior managers to sort the individual knowledge for higher value (Junni & Sarala, 2012; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). As a multilevel process, knowledge transfer in the context of M&A engages individuals and organizations by attempting to recover, disseminate and absorb the knowledge of the two organizations in order to filter the knowledge and result in a new understanding between the sender and the receiver (Junni & Sarala, 2012; Zhao & Anand, 2009). The ability to analyze and interpret the knowledge depends on a variety of other issues, from proximity factors to success in communication from management (Junni & Sarala, 2012). Additionally, researchers such as Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2005) and Kirst (2000)
indicate that resistance to knowledge transfer can occur, particularly as a result of barriers created from both communication and competencies after M&A. Models are usually used to explain the stages of the knowledge transfer process during M&A. They take into consideration factors that enhance and those that act as barriers to knowledge transfer, as explored in the next section.

2.2. Stages of the Knowledge Transfer Process during M&A

Different models depicting knowledge transfer in M&A are available in the literature. In one of these models, the knowledge transfer process unfolds in four stages, namely initiation, implementation, ramp-up and integration (Tsang, 2008) and promotes a process of mutual exchange of knowledge from a source to a recipient. Gruber and Paneva (2014) illustrate the process as shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4
The Four Stages of the Knowledge Transfer Process during M&A

Sources: Tsang, 2008; in Gruber and Paneva, 2014
Initiation is the first stage that involves making and approving decisions for the knowledge transfer practice. According to Tsang (2008), “initiation consists of the events that lead to the decision to transfer a routine,” (p. 8). The process of transfer always starts when both a need and the knowledge to meet that need exist. Gruber and Paneva (2014) support this idea by arguing that the need for knowledge is enabled and may facilitate the finding of superior knowledge. Therefore, the knowledge transfer process unfolds further, and the transfer is defined and explored deeply. The authors denote that the collection of knowledge requires a substantial time investment.

Implementation is the second stage in the knowledge transfer process. Szulanski (1996) indicates that the second phase comes immediately after making and approving the decision to transfer knowledge. According to Gruber and Paneva (2014) and Tsang (2008), the implementation stage takes place when the exchange of both knowledge and resources between the two parties involved in the acquisition occurs following the establishment of social relations. They further note the need to adjust knowledge transfer according to the recipient’s needs during the implementation stage and to accommodate the process appropriately. The completion of the implementation stage occurs when the recipients apply the transferred knowledge (Gruber & Paneva, 2014; Tsang, 2008).

Tsang (2008) states that the ramp-up stage of the knowledge transfer process begins when the recipient starts using the transferred knowledge. The recipient is predominantly concerned with identifying and resolving unexpected problems and risks arising from the application of the transferred knowledge. Challenges might occur if there is poor performance or a mismatch of the new knowledge. Gruber and Paneva (2014) emphasize that knowledge might not fit immediately after the transfer, which may result in inefficiency.
Integration is the final stage involved in the knowledge transfer process. The recipient has now experienced the expected results and the integration phase begins (Gruber & Paneva, 2014). Therefore, as Szulanski (1996) states, the recipient firm applies the transferred knowledge in a slow and orderly pace. The application of this knowledge becomes part of the daily routines of the recipient. The author stresses that when the recipients experience the knowledge, their actions are typified, and the transferred knowledge is associated with particular meaning that is interpreted and understandable. Tsang (2008) finds that the integration stage is often longer in acquisitions. Notably, as in the ramp-up phase, a difficulty encountered during the integration stage is that the recipient organization occasionally reverts to old routines even after the new routines have been integrated and in operation for a considerable time (Tsang, 2008). Additionally, a routine is not a stand-alone item (Szulanski, 1996; Tsang, 2008). Routines may be sequential in design, which causes confusion when sections of a routine change during an acquisition, which could create failures in adherence or misunderstandings from employees (Szulanski, 1996; Tsang, 2008). Another factor that affects the integration of new routines is that they may not be compatible with the firm pre-existing ones (Szulanski, 1996; Tsang, 2008).

2.3. Knowledge Transfer in M&A

Knowledge transfer in M&A refers to the ability of an organization to assimilate, adapt and improve on the existing processes and products of another organization through modification of the existing processes or further innovation (Greenberg & Guinan, 2004). The approach involves a transfer of actionable knowledge that is relevant to the circumstances of the company, and based on the experience of the sharing company (Leonard et al., 2015). The transferred knowledge needs to increase value for the acquiring organization. Greenberg and Guinan (2004) note that value creation becomes
the most fundamental reason for all acquisitions, in which the integrated organization leverages on information, resources and expertise shared between the two organizations. Sharing is important as it leads to the identification and implementation of new products and/or services or improvement of the existing ones, thus increasing the company competitive advantage (Greenberg & Guinan, 2004). However, for Liu and Wang (2013), the issue of knowledge transfer in M&A becomes important only after the completion of the merger or the acquisition and when the barriers start to become evident.

The word barrier can be used to refer to several factors such as ineffective communication, loss of employees and time that affect the transfer of knowledge. The barriers obstruct the free sharing and dissemination of knowledge between two firms during M&A deals and can arise from ignoring informal communication, a lack of management intervention and shortage of time (Soo et al., 2002). Barriers not only stop the flow of knowledge between the two firms but also destroy the ground for other activities in M&A. Barriers can also be in the form of organizational attributes such as hierarchical structures and physical attributes such as the distance between the firms. Eliminating or controlling the barriers does not mean that the knowledge transfer process will improve. However, the strategy is essential. According to Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991), the challenge and difficulty of the integration process come from the complexity of creating the appropriate atmosphere for a smooth knowledge transfer process and not only from the development of the strategic capabilities. In order to create an appropriate atmosphere for transfer, one needs to understand the essential factors for an effective knowledge transfer.

Different factors can facilitate the knowledge transfer process between the two firms in M&A deals. Through identification of the enablers, a firm can improve the process of post-acquisition between the parties. Bresman, Birkinshaw, and Nobel (1999) suggest a framework for the factors affecting
the transfer of knowledge in M&A transactions. According to these authors, the factors include absorptive capacity, disseminative capacity, visits and meetings, communication, the size of the acquired organization and elapsed time. We elaborate on these factors in the paragraphs below.

Absorptive capacity was introduced by Cohen and Levinthal (1990). The theory of absorptive capacity posits that a minimum level of knowledge is required to communicate with and to absorb knowledge from another party. If the minimum level of knowledge is lacking, then the transfer and leverage of knowledge in M&A deals is cumbersome or unlikely (Ensign et al., 2014). According to Reus (2012), absorptive capacity relates to the abilities of the acquiring company to forecast the value of the acquired knowledge, interpret it and then use it according to its applicability. Absorptive capacity is interrelated in the organizational routines and procedures, and it needs time and experience to be developed. Minbaeva et al., (2003) concur that absorptive capacity does affect the knowledge transfer process. According to the study findings of Ensign et al. (2014), an overlapping knowledge base is critical for communicating knowledge, particularly technological knowledge, which can change during M&A. For instance, Bresman et al. (1999) state that if the nature of knowledge transferred is tacit, the process will be challenging and may require more interactions between the firms. According to Minbaeva et al. (2003), challenges in transferring tacit knowledge can affect interpersonal communication. Therefore, trust is a critical contributor towards the effectiveness of knowledge transfer. Inkpen and Li (1999) state that the notion of trust is critical in developing relationships. There is also an emphasis on the importance of trust, as partners trust and forbearance are directly linked to the strength of interpersonal relations. However, managers often lose sight of the reality and end up fostering distrust. According to Empson (2001), it is critical to assess and understand the individual reactions and needs in order to build trust.
Another category that is vital for knowledge transfer is disseminative capacity, which represents the capabilities of the organization members to explain and articulate the knowledge they possess. Therefore, both disseminative and absorptive capacities have individual and collective natures. Junni and Sarala (2012) add that the relationship between the firms directly influences the disseminative capacity to transfer knowledge. Mutual motivations and derived benefits from the knowledge transfer process are pivotal for both organizations to achieve the goal of the M&A deal. Further, Ahuja and Katila (2001) establish that in case the transferred knowledge is similar to the existing one, capabilities to explain, articulate and apply the new knowledge are enhanced. Similarities in the transferred knowledge can be in terms of languages and skills and facilitate communication, which in effect enables knowledge transfer.

Visits and meetings are other critical factors that contribute to the knowledge transfer process (Bresman et al., 1999). The authors state that putting more focus on the interactions such as meetings, visits and training sessions facilitates the post-acquisition phase. These mechanisms promote both work relations and social interactions, which are valuable additions to the knowledge transfer process. According to Ahuja and Katila (2001), regular interactions create opportunities for teaching and mutual learning. Further, Mirc (2013) agrees with Ahuja and Katila (2001) and establishes that the application of cross-division integration teams, job rotations and regular communications enable the transfer of knowledge in M&A and contribute positively to the process of sharing. Through sharing, the individuals in the company can develop trust in one another and learn about the organization so as to work more effectively. McCarthy and Dolfma (2013) argue that the common staff might not have much knowledge regarding what may be happening to an organization on the management level. As long as they still get their salaries and the organizations are still running, then, they believe that all is well (McCarthy & Dolfma, 2013). However, knowledge such as the financial status of a company, its potential maximization capabilities and
perpetuity is part of the information that only members at the management level may know (McCarthy & Dolfma, 2013). Such information can be passed on to the staff through visits and meetings. Individuals who do not trust their colleagues or the new company owners are unlikely to cooperate during the knowledge transfer initiative. According to Siemieniuch and Sinclair (1999), people will not make proper use of knowledge management processes if they lack trust in the organization and the employees working in it.

Smooth communication flow between the firms involved in M&A directly contributes to successful knowledge transfer. Furthermore, communication is critical throughout the post-acquisition phase since it leads to transparency and determines success in the decision-making process (Bresman et al., 1999). The authors note that communication is a prerequisite for regular interactions and elimination of misinformation between organization members. Notably, communication predefines the appearance of a social community, which is vital for knowledge sharing. Knowledge transfer is a long process that involves the exchange of tacit knowledge, and thus, communication intensity should be high (Bresman et al., 1999). Knowledge transfer is understood to be the interaction between individuals, including from the companies that must combine employees and resources, which requires that the transfer process focuses on specific information (Mirc, 2013; Reus, 2012). Included in this concept is the idea that the essential area in the transfer is the ability of the managers to provide communication between the two entities, in an attempt to merge the two cultures and processes (Mirc, 2013; Reus, 2012).

The other factor that influences the knowledge transfer process is the size of the organization acquired. Notably, the volume of the transferred knowledge differs depending on the size of the unit acquired (Bresman et al., 1999). In a large unit, more individuals are involved and therefore, more
knowledge needs to be transferred. In effect, a large unit may face a complex and prolonged process of knowledge transfer.

Lastly, the time elapsed is another factor that influences the knowledge transfer process during M&A deals. Bresman et al. (1999) state that during the post-acquisition phase, knowledge is transferred gradually and in a slow pace. However, if there are cases of uncertainty or stress due to time constraints, barriers can arise in the form of uncooperative behavior. For instance, people may resign, and other personnel may be hired. According to the authors, throughout the knowledge transfer process, it is crucial for managers to explicitly support the process by allocating time to it. Other authors such as Rumyantseva, Gurgul, and Enkel (2002) support this view when they establish that during the post-acquisition phase, it is fundamental that the process of transferring knowledge be facilitated with a slow pace since it can result in stress and ill feeling.

3. THE ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The role of senior management is a critical factor that contributes to the success of knowledge transfer in the context of mergers and acquisitions transactions. It is often the senior managers’ role in the acquiring firm to decide how the firms integrate and therefore, have a critical influence on the success of the knowledge transfer process. If management intervention is lacking in the process, then the transfer process will not be effective (Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005). This section will cover the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
3.1. The Role of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition

Senior managers play a critical role prior, during, and after a merger or an acquisition. The role of senior management in knowledge transfer is important, specifically in facilitating processes from planning through completion of the integration of the organization (Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005). In this case, senior managers have the green-light to clout a knowledge transfer project, set the general scope and business objectives and provide the budget as needed. Conditions developed by senior managers must encourage, ease and promote knowledge transfer in all areas, including in areas of proximity, such as culture and organizational structures, in order to achieve strategic goals and align the new organization with the processes of the acquiring organization (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991; Stahl & Mendenhall 2005).

M&A are strategic for organizations, but may create stress for employees, particularly in the need to share knowledge and develop new procedures (Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005; Haspeslagh, et al., 2007; Hitt, Harrison, & Ireland, 2001). Senior managers are responsible not only for ensuring the knowledge transfer and development of new procedures, but also for making sure it is running smoothly. Other areas of importance regarding the role of senior management during the knowledge transfer process in M&A include communication, interventions, loss prevention, employees’ turnover and promoting knowledge management.

Senior managers take on the role of developing communications that facilitate the transfer of knowledge between the two organizations, in order to create a seamless and successful M&A (Haspeslagh et al., 2007; Bröchner et al., 2004; Harrison & Farrell, 2008; Seo & Hill, 2005). Therefore, they are required to spend a large portion of their time communicating with other members of the organization, listening to their issues and ideas, showing
empathy and creating conditions that encourage all employees to participate in the knowledge transfer process. Harrison and Farrell (2008) state that communication should be clear during M&A and should flow through all levels of the organizations. Additionally, Harrison and Farrell (2008) note that the process can be managed effectively by maintaining and promoting continuous communication and flow of information. Zander and Zander (2010) and Ranft and Lord (2000) also state that regular communication is a facilitator for successful M&A implementation. Further, Wagner and Hilal (2014) share a similar view and state that communication is a primary element for M&A’s success and is a complimentary part of the entire process. Moreover, the authors state that communication flow should ensure the distribution of data and information in an accurate and timely manner. Communication should be practiced early during the knowledge transfer process and should be continuous. Communication process, according to Wagner and Hilal (2014) is a two-sided process that involves both listening and responding. Therefore, it is vital to stabilize the employees’ perception of power by engaging them in the decision-making process and training them to accept the changes that will occur during the process. The takeaway on the findings of the authors’ studies is that continuous involvement of employees in the communication strategy is a prerequisite for the success of knowledge transfer in M&A.

Also, senior managers do not have to be the direct managers of the team engaged in the knowledge transfer process. They are also not usually involved in all the day-to-day implementation of the program, but they oversee and support the transition. Nonetheless, a senior manager has a critical role to play in terms of planning the transition and managing it. For instance, according to Kavanagh & Ashkanasy (2006), the senior management should be a good role model to other employees during the transition process. This can be achieved by participating in the knowledge transfer process. Notably, members in management positions are usually knowledgeable and experienced. Their knowledge and experience are
valuable to both organizations in the context of M&A. Even in the case where senior managers do not have the proper knowledge or experience, they are still preferred and needed due to other skill sets. Training can increase their skills and improve their effectiveness in managing M&A (Weber, 2015).

Stahl and Mendenhall (2005) state that a wavering contribution by management causes employees to refrain from full participation in the integration and implementation activities. Therefore, the authors indicate that lack of top management intervention can be seen as a barrier to the two teams working together prior to and during the knowledge transfer process during this acquisition. Buono and Bowditch (1989) note failure of companies to use their communication channels optimally. According to the authors, communication requirements in M&A contexts differ due to employees’ feelings of insecurity. However, in most cases, firms fail to acknowledge such issues and fail to put enough focus on efficient and effective communication. According to Seo and Hill (2005), organizations can reduce employee anxiety through communication from top to bottom and correct information should be shared throughout the levels to determine what will happen next. Bröchner et al. (2004) articulate a similar view by stating that transparent and seamless communication from management level is crucial during the knowledge transfer process.

Other authors such as Allen et al. (2007) report that when organization members feel uncertain, they try to access information that helps them reduce the feeling of uncertainty. However, Allen et al. (2007) argue that individuals do not always perceive uncertainty as negative. Uncertainty is a perception, and when individuals are unable to eliminate the feeling of uncertainty and engage in the search for information, communications may fail. However, Allen et al. (2007) state that effective and proper management of information deals adequately with the employee’s uncertainty. Brahma and Srivastava (2007) imply that malfunctioning communication is a critical contributor to the failure of M&A. Lack of effective communication causes decreased
commitment of the employees since they will spend more time searching for information and answers to reduce their uncertainty.

The senior managers further hold the role of identification of human capital needed for the knowledge transfer and ensuring their retention (Ranft & Lord, 2002). Human resources management is a critical part of this process, as knowledge comes both from the people in the organizations, their cultures, and the internal processes, and must be communicated through the many contacts that will occur between the two organizations (Castro & Neira, 2005; Gruber & Paneva, 2014; Marks & Mirvis, 2011). Ensign et al. (2013), Berends et al. (2011) and Puranam and Srikanth (2007) also note that senior managers influence innovation and knowledge transfer by playing an active role in which the managers intervene as required.

The senior management is also responsible for the selection and development of the best implementation plan for successful and effective knowledge transfer. Development of an implementation plan should occur prior to the merger or acquisition and include any variations to how the staff may respond. The importance of the implementation plan is to enable a quick, fully communicated, and cooperative transition to occur for all parties in the merger or acquisition. Ranft and Lord (2002) stress the importance of human capital management in knowledge transfer in technology mergers and acquisitions context. Poorly implemented mergers and acquisitions result in the loss of key employees, due to lack of proper management intervention from departmental heads. In effect, there is loss of their skills and knowledge, which are vital in the post-mergers and acquisitions innovative performance. According to the authors, it seems that the important question to ask is whether the mergers and acquisitions deal is good or bad for knowledge transfer and innovation and the components that affect the outcome. This can be done prior to the merger or acquisition by creating an implementation plan.
Lastly, senior management intervention can enable an organization to achieve the intended goals of a merger or acquisition. Ensign et al. (2013) discovered that research from the organizational behavior discipline repeatedly emphasizes post-mergers and acquisitions integration as the critical factor in mergers and acquisitions success and failure. The same findings were restated by Berends et al. (2011) and Puranam and Srikanth (2007). According to the authors, senior management can intervene when proximity dimensions like cultural practices exert a negative influence on innovation and knowledge transfer. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), a multinational professional services network, carried out a survey on post-merger integration in 2010. According to the respondents of the Post-Merger Interaction Survey by PwC (2010), there is a belief that mergers and acquisitions deals fail to achieve their expectations and the post-merger or acquisition phase is not adequately managed. Therefore, a lack of senior management intervention is a critical factor identified in the survey that leads to an unhappy situation in mergers and acquisitions. The survey results found that very few firms involve the board and the senior management team in the process. The survey states that management is important and both executive team and merger or acquisition teams need to continuously get involved and support the process.

However, the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition can be affected by different types of factors. According to the literature, it is clear that the involvement of the executive team can be affected by diverse proximity factors as will be discussed in the next section.
4. PROXIMITY IN THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESS DURING AN ACQUISITION

Senior management plays a key role in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. However, senior management’s role is challenged by proximity factors that influence how organizations can successfully merge or be acquired at a benefit. Proximity in the context of M&A denotes the similarity regarding different aspects between two firms involved in M&A (Ensign et al., 2013). The proximity factors are identified as geographic, cognitive, and organizational and are found in the communications or activities that occur between the two organizations in M&A (Cantwell and Zhang, 2011; Ambos & Håkanson, 2014). This section explores a conceptualization of proximity and explanation of each of the proximity factors, namely, geographic, cognitive, and organizational.

4.1. Conceptualizing Proximity

Boschma (2005) indicates that the most important proximity factors to monitor and control in M&A are: geographic factors, cognitive factors and organizational structure factors, which make knowledge transfer more challenging and can divide the recently united companies further. Proximity issues can not necessarily be controlled prior to the decision for M&A. However, management of the issues may be more effective through communications and knowledge transfer. For example, a manager can identify key elements of the structures between the two organizations during the process of integration in order to establish where training and support may be needed. In addition, senior managers may intervene in proximity issues by engaging in communication and knowledge transfer to prevent alienation of employees during the process. Geographical distance issues, for instance, can be solved by stationing a short-term in-house representative to improve
knowledge transfer during the more difficult times of the integration. Cognitive proximity may also benefit from knowledge transfer in regard to training shared between organizations.

In that sense, senior managers have a critical role in proximity, particularly in the areas of knowledge and culture transfer (Torre and Gilly, 2000; Varga, 2000). Ensign et al. (2013) note that managers can intervene when proximity dimensions, such as alienating cultural practices, exert a negative influence on the knowledge transfer process. Additionally, senior managers must successfully promote and integrate all human resources between the two organizations, in order to increase the success of integration. Employees are important in the success of M&A because they possess the knowledge and skills that are critical following M&A (Ensign et al., 2013). Proximity issues following M&A can lead to loss of key employees. Senior managers can remedy the situation by intervening in proximity issues. For instance, managers can enable the employees to maintain contact and communication even when faced with geographical barriers by facilitating travel or even teleconferencing (Ensign et al., 2013). The next sections present reviews of each of the three main proximity factors.

4.2 Geographical Proximity

Ensign et al. (2013) state that physical closeness between firms offer the possibility for participants to have greater social interaction. This interaction is crucial to the tacit knowledge transfer discussed earlier. Although the availability of advanced communication tools and effective transport channels have reduced the communication barriers, these advancements cannot replace the social presence of participants in mergers and acquisitions transactions and knowledge transfer process (Ensign et al., 2013). Therefore, the authors imply that greater geographic distance hinders
communications. Other scholars like Cairncross (1997) argue that with the emergence and improvement of information and communication technologies (ICT) as well as the faster transportation mode available today, distance has become irrelevant.

However, Rallet and Torre (1999) disagree by stating that distance is still an influencing factor and close proximity offers the best way to ensure efficient communication regardless of modern communication and modes of transportation. They hold that the implementation and use of ICT could facilitate the transfer of technological knowledge, but it is still difficult to eliminate the challenges and barriers caused by the geographic distance. Junni and Sarala (2012) state that geographical distance between the target and acquirer of knowledge can be expected to have a hindering effect on the knowledge transfer process. According to the author, the geographic distance is characterized by costs associated with face to face communication. Researchers such as Zander and Kogut (1995) indicate that the physical proximity between organizations in M&A may have a direct influence on the ability for knowledge transfer to occur. For instance, a lack of face-to-face communications, failure to share information due to distance or inability to have a true understanding of the other locations as a result of being unable to visit the locations can have a negative effect on the knowledge transfer process. Geographical proximity has also been found to influence organizations even in the case of non-M&A, specifically in the case of industrial organizations that have geographical distance between locations (Jasimuddin, 2007). Most authors agree that the primary concerns in regard to managing the geographical distance touch mainly two elements, first the access to the different types of communication and second, the transportation services (Cairncross, 1997; Rallet & Torres, 1999).
4.3 Cognitive Proximity

Apart from the geographical proximity, Ensign et al. (2013) highlight cognitive proximity. According to the authors, complementarity in technological capabilities and knowledge is critical in determining cognitive proximity. Perez and Soete (1988) further argue that firms need to have shared knowledge to understand the knowledge of the other partners. However, too much shared knowledge reduces the learning potential, that is, it limits the sources of novelty resulting to a competence trap where an organization no longer develops the necessary assets that conform to market developments (Man and Duysters, 2005). Other authors like Chaudhuri (2004) establish that technical incompatibility often slows down product development. Additionally, Breschi, Lissoni, & Malerba (2003) state that companies develop new technologies related to their existing knowledge bases in faster ways. Therefore, it can be inferred that a moderate level of similarity between the firms’ knowledge bases is positively related to innovation (Ahuja and Katila, 2001; Man and Duysters, 2005).

In their study, Ensign et al. (2014) establish that cognitive proximity has two aspects; base knowledge and domain expertise. The distinction between domain expertise and base knowledge has, however, not been well established empirically (Iansiti, 1999). Notably, most studies are conceptualized around the relatedness of technological knowledge or the complementary of technological knowledge. According to the authors’ findings, overlapping base knowledge is critical for communicating technological knowledge. Therefore, companies need to have common technical and scientific principles or need to be in the same or a closely related industry. To support this statement, the theory of absorptive capacity can be cited (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Apart from the base knowledge, Ensign et al. (2014) identify domain expertise, which is the organization’s knowledge and capabilities specific to a particular field. Therefore, when two
companies with different domain expertise merge, the process offers an opportunity to explore new knowledge since there is availability of complementary knowledge and capabilities (Graebner, Eisenhardt, & Roundy, 2010).

4.4 Organizational Proximity

Ensign et al. (2013) further discuss organizational proximity. According to the authors, organizational proximity is an overarching concept that can be categorized into cultural proximity and structural proximity (Ensign et al., 2013). Cultural factors are the aspects related to elements such as language, interactions between organizational members and groups and established rules and practices that regulate different relations within the organizations (Berends et al., 2011). On the other hand, structural factors are the aspects that pertain to how companies regulate at the macro-level such as systems, hierarchy, structure, and power. According to Boschma (2005), organizational proximity minimizes uncertainties and increases the effectiveness of coordination during the knowledge transfer process. In the context of mergers and acquisitions deals, the most closely aligned concept to organizational proximity is organizational fit. Datta (1991) states that organizational fit is the level of compatibility in the organizational systems and management styles between the acquiring and acquired firms.

According to Ensign et al. (2014), if organizations differ in working hours, employee’s attire, use of technology such as open-source technology, entrepreneurial orientation and other cultural practices, that can be detrimental to the knowledge transfer process. According to their study, the authors state that structural differences also affect knowledge transfer, either positively or negatively. For example, if the acquiring organization has better structured processes and strategies, the knowledge transfer would be
positively affected since the acquired organization would benefit by adopting and implementing these structures and processes. On the other hand, the knowledge transfer would be affected negatively if the acquired organization has to adopt structures that are too complex from the acquiring organization. This not only shifts responsibilities but also reduces the speed of decision making. Notably, if the proximity dimensions and factors have a negative influence on innovation and the process of knowledge transfer, such as alienating cultural factors (Brannen and Peterson, 2009), then management is required to intervene to manage and mitigate the impact caused by these factors. Berends et al. (2011), Ranft and Lord (2002), and Puranam and Srikanth (2007) state that management can intervene when proximity dimensions like cultural practices exert a negative influence on innovation and knowledge transfer.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

We consulted four broad areas of study to understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition: 1) Mergers and Acquisitions, 2) Knowledge Transfer, 3) the Role of Senior Management, and 4) Proximity in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an acquisition. From the literature on mergers and acquisitions, we obtained the understanding that M&A are used by organizations to either transfer or consolidate their assets and resources. The definitions of a merger as a grouping of two organizations to work together as a one organization and an acquisition as the procurement of one organization from another (Zhang & Stening, 2013; Greenber & Guinan, 2004; Buono, 2003; Cartwright & Cooper, 1993) were also presented in this section. Some of the motivations for engaging in M&A were found to be economies of scope, market share, economies of scale, research and development and knowledge as described by Segal-Horn & Faulkner (2010). The literature also led to the understanding
of the two stages of acquisition; the pre and post acquisition phases which must be considered by organizations engaging in an acquisition in order to ensure a successful agreement and transfer of strategic capabilities between the organizations.

The literature on knowledge transfer brought to light the definition of knowledge transfer, how it can be achieved, factors that affect it, and its importance in M&A. Leonard, Swap and Barton (2011) define knowledge transfer, in the context of M&A, as the ability of an organization to assimilate, adapt, and improve on the existing processes and products of another company. The two main ways through which it can be achieved are innovation and modification of existing processes (Paulin & Suneson, 2012; Zack, 1999). The factors that affect knowledge transfer in M&A, as evidenced from the literature, are absorptive capacity, disseminative capacity, visits and meetings, communication, the size of the acquired organization and elapsed time (Junni & Sarala, 2012; Zhao & Anand, 2009). These factors are important in the enhancement of knowledge transfer.

From the literature on the role of senior management, we gathered that senior management intervention can enhance the effectiveness of M&A. This section of the literature review also presents information on the main roles played by senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. These include communication, human capital management, development of the implementation plan and ensuring the organizations achieve their expected outcomes after the merger or acquisition (Bröchner, Rosander, & Rosander, 2004; Harrison & Farrell, 2008; Seo & Hill, 2005).

Lastly, the literature review section on proximity shed light on the proximity factors that can affect the senior management’s ability to ensure effective knowledge transfer during M&A. Proximity in this section is defined as the similarity in various aspects between two firms involved in M&A (Ensign et al., 2013). Cantwell and Zhang (2011) and Ambos & Håkanson, (2014) identify three proximity factors that are critical in the
transfer of knowledge, namely; geographical, cognitive and organizational. Senior managers are required to intervene when these proximity factors have a negative impact on the knowledge transfer process.

6. RESEARCH QUESTION

In the light of the studied research problem and the literature consulted, the research question of this thesis will be stated as follows.

Research question:

- What is the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition?

The next chapter presents the research methodology of this thesis in an attempt to answer the research question.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this study is to better understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. This chapter details the process employed to answer the research question and objectives. It is divided into five sections: research objectives, ontological and epistemological considerations, methodology considerations, validity considerations, and lastly ethical considerations.

1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study explores and describes the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The three research objectives of this thesis are:

a) Describe and understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

b) Highlight the best practices of senior management in order to improve the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

c) Identify the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
2. ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ontological considerations are considerations based on the nature of reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988), while epistemological considerations are considerations based on the relationship between the researcher and the reality (Carson et al., 2001) or how the reality is captured or known. Ontology and epistemology are two different ways of viewing research philosophy. There are various ontological and epistemological ideologies including constructivism and objectivism. Bryman (2012) defines constructivism as an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meaning are continually being accomplished by social actors. Objectivists on the other hand believe that the world is external and that there is only one objective reality to any situation on research phenomena (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The research paradigm that best reflects the goals of this research is constructivism, where social reality is the state of the event, particularly in the case where individuals are studied and their perceptions are based on their individual existences, history, experiences and feelings (Bryman, 2012).

The approach used in this study is the qualitative research method which uses exploratory methods to seek opinions on a research problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The approach provides different perceptions to the research topic by allowing respondents to explain themselves. Qualitative research is useful in the investigation of behavioural science. The current research topic fits within the behavioural science as it looks at issues surrounding knowledge transfer and the role of senior management during an acquisition. Based on the topic, qualitative research was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, qualitative research allows for synergy between different respondents meaning that they can add onto each other’s ideas or comments, specifically resulting from data collection such as interviews (Creswell & Clark, 2013).
Further, rather than numbers, this method allows for exhaustive delivery of answers from participants who can clarify responses and add information as they deem applicable. Different issues may occur over the course of the M&A processes that may be unseen initially, but can be uncovered during the interview process. In this study, qualitative research enabled the researcher to achieve a greater depth of responses and knowledge to understand the role of the senior managers during the acquisition process.

Qualitative research allows a researcher to obtain answers that go beyond the original statements that participants give (Thomas, 2003). If for example a researcher wanted to know if management had been efficient in the knowledge transfer process, it was easy for a respondent to say ‘yes’. Qualitative research will allow the researcher to probe further and ask why they think that management had been efficient in the role. This is a very important aspect when a researcher is trying to find an explanation of why things happen in a certain way in organizations. Another consideration in the research method used was the small sample being used to gather a large amount of information.

Also, qualitative research focuses more on the scope of a topic rather than the degree to which variables affect each other. This means that it aims at gaining a variety of information that will help a researcher reach a conclusion found within its explorative attributes (Babbie, 2012). In the process of understanding the role of senior management in knowledge transfer during an acquisition, it was more important to understand how senior managers can affect the process and whether they have been doing it. The data required was not measurable information but information that would help the researcher understand the topic further.
3. METHODOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Research Strategy

The chosen research strategy to answer our research question is the exploratory case study. A case study is designed to consider real life phenomena on an issue of study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The authors add that the case study tells a story about the research problem, which in this case, surrounds the role that senior management took in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The information will potentially have pedagogic utility value, since it can be used to understand the role that senior management plays during the knowledge transfer process in M&A. According to Kohlbacher (2006), the use of a case study offers the opportunity to focus on a single unit putting into consideration the context and contents, and examining how they fit in with the topic under study. This responds to the fundamental goal of exploratory design, which is to offer the researcher an in-depth understanding of the topic (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008; Johnston, Leach, & Liu, 1999). As noted by Yin (2012), an exploratory case study is useful in exploring those cases where the researcher may not have a clear set of outcomes or in which outcomes will differ, and in which it would be difficult to examine causal relationships based on surveys and experiments.

The current case approach explores the experiences of the Biblical School and School Board as unique to their situation, but potentially transferable to other similar settings. Although the literature on the transfer of knowledge is abundant, the case assessed in this research was a unique combination for which the researcher was not able to identify “the role and effect of senior management in the process of knowledge transfer during an acquisition” in the current literature.
However, one should note that the exploratory design did not provide immediate solutions, but provided responses that helped analyse the situation in a reflective way. The approach was useful in determining the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition since exploratory designs provide direction on obtaining as much information as possible during the process of data collection and in analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2015).

The research strategy was designed to deepen the knowledge of the object of study to better understand the phenomenon. To come up with the best research strategy, three critical factors were considered; the form of the research question, whether control was required over the behavioural events and finally, whether it was focused on contemporary events (Creswell, 2007).

3.2 Sampling

The method of sampling was purposive, which is appropriate for this study as it allows the researcher to choose the sample based on the group that best represents the characteristics of the target population (Babbie, 2012). The researcher requested the involvement of the organizations to identify 50 potential participants, based on the following criteria: the potential participant has been working for the organizations for at least two years and that the participants represented different categories of employment. Then, the researcher went to the two organizations to present herself and her research in order to give a heads-up to all employees that they might have been selected to participate in this research, if interested. Then, from the pool of potential participants, the researcher randomly selected 30 participants and sent them an email to invite them to participate in the study on a voluntary basis (see annex A). All participants accepted the invitation to participate. The sample represented the variety of responsibilities and positions held by the staff from each institution (the Biblical School and the School Board). More precisely,
the final sample included 8 senior managers, 6 middle managers, 10 teachers, and 5 support employees. One participant decided to withdraw from the research in the middle of the conduction of the interview, for health reasons. The participant informed the interviewer that he was not feeling well and did not wish to reschedule because he did not have time in his schedule in the upcoming days. That participant asked for his data not to be used for the research. Thus, this research includes 29 participants.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection method used was semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews involved a face-to-face meeting with each of the participants between October 15, 2016 and December 15, 2016; at their respective workplaces. The interviews were semi-structured to provide room for probing (Patton, 2014). The interviews involved members from both organizations, so that it was possible to compare their perceptions on the role played by senior management to enable knowledge transfer during the acquisition. An interview guide was used during the interviews (see annex B). The interview guide was divided into three major parts based on the three research objectives presented before. Participants who were senior managers answered the questions while considering their peers’ role and their own role in the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and were digitally recorded and transcribed as strict verbatim with the consent of the interviewees. As stated above, only one participant withdrew from the research. Table 1 presents the various groups of participants from each organization.
Table 1  
Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Management</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Acting Superintendent</td>
<td>School Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Associate Superintendent (Education Services)</td>
<td>School Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Secretary Treasurer</td>
<td>School Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Associate Superintendent (Human Resources)</td>
<td>School Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Director of Learning</td>
<td>School Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Director of Human Resources</td>
<td>School Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Principal-Campus 1</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Principal-Campus 2</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<th>Middle Management</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 HR Manager</td>
<td>School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Finance Manager</td>
<td>School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Vice-Principal- Campus 1</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Vice-Principal- Campus 1</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Vice-Principal- Campus 1</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Vice-Principal-Campus 2</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tr>
<td>15 Executive Assistant</td>
<td>School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Finance Officer</td>
<td>School Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 Educational Assistant-Campus 1</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Receptionist-Campus 1</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 Receptionist- Campus 2</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<td>20 Campus 1</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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<td>21 Campus 1</td>
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<td>29 Campus 2</td>
<td>Biblical School</td>
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Considering the exploratory nature of this case study, the data collected was analyzed using grounded theory techniques, including open, axial and selective coding. Open coding methods are used to generate and name concepts from the empirical data collected (Charmaz, 2000; Paillé,
1994; Strauss & Corbin, 2004). As for axial coding, it is a process of reviewing the interview results that allows the researcher to investigate the interactions and identify themes that may occur in different or overlapping areas (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Primary relationships are developed prior to and during the analysis, which then results in the use of selective coding, allowing for more specific themes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Additional themes occurred during selective coding, allowing the progressive construction of a model on the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. However, it was important to focus on the primary questions and themes that were identified, to ensure that the conclusions answered the research objectives.

3.4 Validity Considerations

Validity refers to the “truth” or “falsehood” of a research finding, with respect to an external and internal reality. There are different stands for judging the quality of research. Guba and Lincoln (1985) recommend four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility is defined as the confidence in the “truth” of the finding (Macnee & McCabe, 2008; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). This criterion involves establishing that the results of the qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participants in the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Guba and Lincoln (1985) define transferability as the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Dependability, on the other hand, is defined as the stability of data or findings over time and conditions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress that there are close ties between credibility and dependability in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. Lastly, confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality of the findings or the degree to which the outcomes are shaped by
the respondents and not the researcher’s motivations, interests, or bias. In this sense, confirmability refers to the degree in which the findings can be corroborated by others. The table below summarises the strategies used in this research to meet these four validity criteria.

Table 2
Strategies Used to Meet the Validity Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Strategies Used During Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>• Purposive sampling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Triangulation of collected data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identification of contradictory explanations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consideration and identification of changing factors in the environment during data collection period</td>
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<td>• Validation of sample by key respondent</td>
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<td>• Data collection in a specific time window</td>
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<td>• Representative selection of participants</td>
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<td>Transferability</td>
<td>• Diversified sampling of participants from both organizations, the School Board and the Biblical School</td>
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<td>• Detailed description of both organizations and their context</td>
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<td>• Use of various methods to reduce and analyze data to generate a model around the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition</td>
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<td>Dependability</td>
<td>• Detailed presentation of the methodological approach carried out with its data collection and analysis procedures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Rich description of data</td>
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<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>• Clear definition of the research subject and validation of the managerial problem with participating organizations, both the School board and the Biblical School</td>
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<td>• Research question clearly exposed</td>
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<td>• Use of a theoretical framework</td>
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<td>• Recording and transcribing interviews into strict verbatim</td>
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<td>• Triangulation of data from multiple sources</td>
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3.5 Ethical Considerations

Stakeholders in this research are recognized as employees and the two organizations being studied. To manage risks and respect ethical practices, the researcher agreed not to publish any identifiable information regarding the two organizations prior to the acquisition, or the current organization after the acquisition.

Also, all individuals were afforded anonymity in their responses, which will prevent their responses from being known by other individuals or being made public. Thus, it is important to clarify that the risks for both organizations and their employees were below the minimum threshold, so the possible disadvantages were comparable to those of everyday organizational life. Prior to proceeding with the interviews, all participants were presented with a Consent Form (see Annex C), which was used to ensure the free and informed consent of participants and the nature of their individual involvement (Fortin, 2010).

All the participants who took part in this research signed two copies of the consent form, one copy was for themselves and the other copy was for the researcher’s records. The data collected in this research will be used only for the purposes identified in the Research Protocol (see Annex D) and no information will be used outside of this research. All information will be stored in a locked file and laptop in the researcher’s office until the information can be deleted as per the regulations specified in the Research Protocol.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results and their analysis. It is designed to meet the three objectives of the study; a) describe and understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, b) highlight the best practices of senior management in order to improve the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, and c) identify the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The case study method was used to answer the research objectives above. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study is a research method designed to explore real life phenomena; it tells the story about the research problem. In this case, using the case study method helps to reveal the facts surrounding the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition. The results presented are from semi-structured interviews and are complemented by information in the previous literature that is relevant to the research topic. The participants expressed their opinions concerning the role of senior management, best practices, and the factors of influence on the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition. The results were ranked based on the number of participants that spoke about them during the interviews.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section outlines the context of the acquisition. This includes the results on the role of the participants in the acquisition and their views on the acquisition progress. The second section presents results on the perception of the participants regarding the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The third section discusses the perceptions of the participants regarding the best practices of senior management in the knowledge transfer
process during an acquisition. The fourth section examines the participants’ perceptions regarding the factors that influence the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

The analysis of the data presented in the four sections mentioned above leads to the fifth section: the proposal of a model to illustrate the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. This model is based on both the results of this study and on the literature review presented in chapter 2.

1. CONTEXT OF THE ACQUISITION

This case study focuses on the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board in 2015, in a deal that was officially dubbed as an acquisition. Following the acquisition, both organizations experienced significant changes, especially the Biblical School. A series of 12 questions were asked to participants to meet the three objectives of this study. An outline of the interview questions is available in Annex B. Table 3 outlines the distribution of participants in the study and the codes that were used in the analysis of the collected data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>SS</td>
<td>Support Staff</td>
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The following section is based on the analysis of the first three questions of the interview guide. These are; a) what was your role during the acquisition process starting July 2015? b) how would you say is the acquisition going so far? and c) what type of knowledge would you say was transferred since the acquisition? The contextual analysis is divided into two main parts to present the synthesis of the contextual elements in the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board: interviewee role during the acquisition process and the acquisition progress.

1.1. Interviewee role during the acquisition process

In the literature review, Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991) note that the post-acquisition phase is complex, detail-oriented, involves regular interactions and has a noteworthy impact on the transfer of capabilities and knowledge. This section presents and analyzes the interviewees’ responses regarding their roles during the acquisition process.

Different respondents played various major or minor roles during the acquisition. Half of the participants reported having played roles in the acquisition. Only some of them reported holding key roles during this acquisition. Senior managers made sure they involved their key employees in various roles, such as drafting and defining the agreement, which ensured that they helped to make the acquisition process run smoothly.

I was involved in the drafting of the agreement template and the lease agreement. That was from both a contractual and financial perspective. I had to work on the relationship with not only the buildings' owners, but also to discuss finances with them (SM).4

4When the citations could compromise the anonymity of the participants, the last letter and number in the participant's code are removed.
In July 2015, I was part of the initial meeting where the community members and the previous board met with the superintendent, chairman of the school board and an associate superintendent that was facilitating the whole transition (MM).

I am part of the senior management team at the School Board. My role was… I wasn't as limited in the sense that I really wanted to support our Board and our Superintendent to demonstrate a unified senior leadership team that they were having. I made a commitment to be at all the meetings (SM).

Half of the participants reported that they were not involved in the acquisition and therefore played no role in the process. While some of them were simply new and were not present when the acquisition took place, the rest were present but were not given any roles in the acquisition process. Some even reported that the acquisition of the Biblical School came as a surprise to them and their colleagues. “I didn’t even know there was an acquisition going on, no one knew, well no one I know, knew about it” (TC7). Some of the participants also reported that major roles were only played by senior management while none of the teachers or support staff had any hand in the acquisition. This was despite the acquisition being a substantial change for the employees of the Biblical School. In their mind, employees should have been informed, more involved and consulted throughout the acquisition negotiations.

We should have been informed from the start, that there are negotiations going on, there is an acquisition offer being considered. I think that our involvement would have only helped the situation in general (TC2).
The employees’ views were in line with those of Raina and Britt Roebuck (2016) and Dutta and Kleiner (2015) that employees’ satisfaction in a merger or acquisition can be improved by making them part of the communication and processes, thus informing them, keeping them involved and consulting them throughout the acquisition negotiations.

I didn’t have any role during this acquisition. In fact, I didn’t know there was going to be an acquisition happening at all. I got the news on my first day at work (TC1).

The acquisition was a surprise to all of us, I heard about it in the newspaper once the agreement was signed, and it was just one little article in the local newspaper. This was a couple of weeks before school started (SS).

I didn’t have any hand in the acquisition process or anything. We didn't know about it until the end of June. We found out in June that something is happening, and we might be on a different board and that it's in the talks and it's in the process, but we'll know in the summer for sure what's going on. I think we found out in August (TC6).

In short, the acquisition’s negotiation was not an open court discussion. It was mainly concentrated around senior managers and some of the middle managers. The next section will touch on the progress of the acquisition.
1.2 Acquisition Progress

The literature review reveals several factors that affect the acquisition process. For instance, Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991) state that the greatest challenge of the acquisition process comes from the complexity of creating the appropriate atmosphere for capability transfer that can support the transfer process. Similarly, Bresman et al. (1999) state that cases of uncertainty or stress due to time constraints can raise barriers in the transition process. In the case of the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board, the acquisition progress was determined from the interviewees’ responses regarding the atmosphere and time constraints.

1.2.1. Atmosphere

Senior management needed to ensure that the atmosphere following the acquisition was good so as to facilitate the knowledge transfer process. In this study, all the participants reported that the first day of work was a positive experience for them. Some of the participants also mentioned that they appreciated being part of the School Board community. This was a positive sign since a good atmosphere creates a better chance for the knowledge transfer to run smoothly (Haspeslagh and Jemison, 1991).

We went to the Biblical School on campus for the first day of work. We met everyone. The senior management made the announcement and informed the Biblical School’s employees about the new change. It was really well received and everyone seemed excited and happy (MM).
I did get the email that we are now part of the School Board community. I was a little stressed before, but once we all met on the first day of school, everything went well. I only heard good things being said in the corridors afterward (SS).

I was excited and happy to be part of the School Board teachers, it was exciting news for most of us (TC4).

Despite every participant being happy on the first day, two thirds of the participants reported that the transition was difficult in the first year of the acquisition. For instance, it was mentioned that the sudden change in the management of the Biblical School, being now under the umbrella of the School Board, left some of the employees unsure of their tasks and roles.

At some point, I just did not know what I am supposed to be doing and I know other employees felt this way. How is this acquisition affecting my position now? Everything was happening quickly and some of us were lost, at first (MM).

Furthermore, the School Board introduced several new policies in a brief period of time and created a stressful atmosphere for some of the employees. The pressure that was perceived by the participants might have hindered effective knowledge transfer.

With any acquisition, the first year is always quite rough. There are so many things to consider for both parties (SM).
The energy level and the environment in general was different the first year compared to this year. The first year was just way too stressful for everyone (MM).

It just was not consistent. I think that's also a factor for us this year, maybe not feeling as confident as we should have been because, this year we thought it was going to be a lot smoother, but then it still wasn't fully smooth. I think part of that is because we've never had a school where it's just from year to year same staff, year to year same number of students (MM).

The second year of the acquisition went a lot smoother with two-thirds of the participants reporting that the acquisition was going well. This was because the participants had time to learn about the School Board’s policies and guidelines or simply their approach on how to run a school, for example. They also started to adjust consequently to the changing atmosphere. They also had time to experience the benefits of the acquisition, such as more stability in administration and teaching staff.

I think it's fine. There were a lot of growing pains last year… To be honest, since the School Board, we've been more stable, our administration is more stable, our teachers are more stable (MM).

We're learning a lot about the School Board’s programs. We're becoming more familiar, but it's still a lot of work. We still need to learn a lot of things that they want us to learn. This year is way smoother than the first year. The first year was like a tornado sometimes, but with time, it is getting better (TC6).
Everyone is getting to know each other, the first year was more task oriented to get the Biblical School up to speed with our guidelines and policies. But this year we are getting there and it is going well (SM).

The senior management could have clarified the nature of the transaction between the two organizations. While the majority of the participants called it an acquisition, one of the senior managers mentioned that the transaction was not an acquisition and offered a divergent view. The respondent stated that it was actually a merger, citing that according to his understanding the agreement between the two organizations was a merger and not an acquisition. The respondent also reported that since the process was mutually desired, the agreement should be considered as a merger and not an acquisition.

An acquisition is considered that we're buying something from somebody. It is certainly not an acquisition. That was never the tone of our conversations. It was a mutual understanding and a mutual, if I can put it this way, union. Merger is maybe a better word to describe this situation (SM).

Clearly, the environment and the atmosphere around the acquisition played a significant role in not only the knowledge transfer process but also on the acquisition progress. This is in line with Haspeslagh and Jemison’s (1991) view that the interactions between the acquiring and acquired organizations should be geared towards moving through the problems of integration to improve competitive advantage through knowledge transfer.

Participants also mentioned that time was a significant factor in the acquisition progress. The next section will address the time and its place around the acquisition progress.
1.2.2 Time Constraints

Senior management should provide adequate time for the acquisition process. Joia and Lemos (2010) mention time management as one of the factors associated with the transfer and interpretation of knowledge. Gruber and Paneva (2014) also assert that individual knowledge becomes collective only through the investment of time to understand knowledge, decipher it and teach to others. The majority of the participants acknowledged that the process of the acquisition was too rapid. This left a very short window for decisions which might have affected the transition process. For instance, it was somewhat difficult to communicate the news of the acquisition to 140 new employees in a single week. I was also difficult to process these new employees at the School Board’s central office. This led to some of the employees not being on the same page on the first day of school. The rapid transition also resulted in stress and anxiety for a third of the staff. Some of the participants mentioned that the process should have included six to 12 more months of planning. The extension of time could have ensured that all employees were informed and contributed their opinions towards the transition.

The negotiations and decisions had to be made fast. We wanted to process the acquisition before the start of school year. Mind you, there were less than 2 months between the start of the discussion around this acquisition and the decision. If we had to do it again, I would say we need more time, for sure (SM).

The whole thing was just too fast. Well, the decision making was OK, but to plan and implement, we
would have needed more time, the transition should have started the year after (SM).

I mean, the news was out there a few days prior to that, but that wasn't enough time for us to go through the policies, to learn about what it's like to be a school within this School Board’s District (MM).

I am certainly not an expert, but I think that senior managers should’ve taken more time to process everything. I think more time would have helped us all, on every level. It created too much work and the first year was too stressful, there was no need for that (SS).

The context of the acquisition and its progress gave an introduction to this chapter. The role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition is tackled in the next section.

2. PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESS DURING AN ACQUISITION

In order to illustrate the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, the interviewer asked the following questions to the 29 participants: a) how did the senior managers facilitate the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? b) in your opinion, what should be the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition? Although these were the main questions that addressed the roles of senior managers, some of the roles were
also drawn from the elements shared by the respondents in other interview questions.

Through the participants’ answers, the researcher was able to identify the perceived role that senior management should play. It was evident from the results that the perceptions of the participants did not differ much based on their organizations and the role they played in the acquisition. The perceived role of senior management is presented and analyzed through three key categories; knowledge management, communication management and transition management.

These categories span from the pre-acquisition phase all the way to the post-acquisition phase. Teerikangas (2012) opine that acquisition consists of two interrelated phases, namely pre-acquisition and post-acquisition. The authors add that in the pre-acquisition phase, the firms are tasked with making the decision on whether to approve and participate in the acquisition or not. On the other hand, Marks and Mirvis (2011) state that the post-acquisition phase determines how well the organizations will adapt to the change, considering possible misunderstandings and disruptions. The knowledge management category falls in both the pre and post-acquisition phases, the communication management category also finds itself in both phases, and finally the transition management category is solely found in the post-acquisition phase.

2.1. Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is revealed in the literature review as a critical factor that contributes to the success of knowledge transfer. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997) define knowledge management as processes and strategies for movement of knowledge aimed at creating competitive advantage, utilizing human resources and integrating learning or teaching,
through systematic means of selecting, distilling, organizing and presenting knowledge. Senior managers have roles to play in both the pre and post-acquisition phases in this category of role. For instance, in the pre-acquisition phase, senior managers are expected to increase their level of awareness about the other organization so as to manage the knowledge transfer effectively (Huang et al., 2012). As Oberg and Tarba (2013) observe, the post-acquisition phase also includes making decisions in terms of knowledge transfer and transfer of other factors that influence the success of the acquisition.

It is always the role of the senior management in the acquiring firm to oversee knowledge management (Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005). In the case of the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board, senior management was actively engaged in knowledge management. This first category is divided into two subcategories; 1) Level of Awareness and 2) Knowledge Transfer Process: Planning and Implementation.

2.1.1. Level of Awareness

Senior management should perform the necessary research on the acquired organization to elevate their level of awareness and thereby improve knowledge management. This would also help them afterward in the knowledge transfer process and transition management. Huang et al. (2012) state that senior managers assist in assimilating and transferring knowledge based on their understanding of the needs underlying the acquisition. This can only be achieved by conducting a prior research to build awareness to carry out knowledge and transition management effectively. Ranft and Lord (2002) add that lack of proper intervention management can lead to the loss of skills and knowledge which are critical in the post-acquisition phase. Thus, if the
necessary research is not conducted in the pre-acquisition phase, it will have an impact on the knowledge transfer after the acquisition.

The majority of the participants spoke about the importance of the research conduct regarding the functioning of the Biblical School, mainly as a means of increasing the awareness in the structure and running of the school. This would lead to a better management of the knowledge transfer since the senior managers would hence be able to make informed decisions during the transition process.

Personally, I think it is very important for senior managers to know us, their new school. They must do the necessary research; come talk to us, the employees; here on the site, to know more about how things really go on a day to day basis here. This would be a necessary task on their to-do list (TC2).

As a School Board employee, I know we deal with these types of situations when we acquire a new school. It helps a lot when the senior managers go on-site and learn more about the school, and tell us more about it, this way we as employees of the central office become more aware of the situation of our new colleagues. Basically, going out there and getting this information will help us all. Senior managers need to be the ‘know it all’ here (MM).

Despite the importance of conducting research on the acquired organization to increase awareness, only half of the participants reported that the senior management performed the necessary research about the acquired school. The senior managers that had researched were reported to possess the
necessary expertise and knowledge to manage the knowledge transfer process.

Through their identification of the school review and through the accountability pillars, also them visiting the school and their informal communications with other administrators, they know what the situation is here, and they know about us and how we function (MM).

Some of the senior managers were actually knowledgeable about the functioning of our school. That was definitely a plus for them and us (TC3).

The senior management was dedicated to the process, the transfer process and they wanted it to succeed, that's for sure. I saw it through their interest in us as a school, and how we were doing things. They even came as a surprise in our classes and listened to us teachers and saw how we were managing the classes and all of that fun stuff (TC9).

The other half of the participants believed that the senior management did not do the necessary research to build their awareness and raise their level of familiarity with the new acquired school. Despite the initial lack of awareness, the senior management did all they could to learn about the school later on.

The School Board didn’t know much about the Biblical School in the beginning, because there was not time to do so, no time to meet and mingle and
talk. After a little while, I know senior managers did their best to get to know us more. They requested meetings, they were asking questions, etc. This was after the acquisition obviously (MM).

I did not feel, through my dealings with the senior managers, especially from the central office, that they were aware of our reality here, of how we do things on a day to day basis and what needed to really change. Them not knowing these things made it stressful, well for me. Because I felt that sometimes they were out of touch (MM).

Ok yes, we need to change things around, but give me a break, I mean senior managers think my job is easy. No, it’s not, and now managing the back to school period and having to transit. They need to come and see how my day is and then they would know. To be fair, this was more at the beginning, now they are way more understanding because they got to know my reality (SS).

According to the words of one of the participants, “Senior management should be the knowledge base and sounding board” (MM). The senior management was responsible for making the decisions before and after the acquisition. After the acquisition, they also took over the responsibility of decision making in the school from the principals. Due to the lack of adequate awareness, all the senior management respondents opined that they managed the transition as they went. This view was echoed by an overwhelming majority of the other participants. By taking this approach, senior managers were only able to react and manage situations on a day to day basis, there was no time for planning per say.
The first year, we started working more and communicating more with the vice principals to get more familiarized with the functioning of the school, and then this year I made the decision around our secretaries as well, to even know more about how everything is running and how we can help (SM).

We didn’t have time to plan for this transition on the first year, it was really action-reaction. But it ended up all being good (SM).

The changes were taken care of as we were advancing in time. For example, the report cards situation in general. It was clearly not planned for in advance, it was rather managed with time, senior managers are still being taken care of now (MM).

The first year we were literally thrown in this acquisition and we had to handle it and make sure we are doing our jobs, it was stressful at first. At this point it seems like there is a clearer plan (TC4).

Participants stressed the importance of awareness amongst their senior managers and how it has a role in the knowledge management during the acquisition, especially in the pre-acquisition phase. The section below accosts the importance of planning the knowledge transfer process.

2.2.2. Knowledge Transfer Process: Planning and Implementation

It is the role of the senior management to create a knowledge transfer plan during the acquisition. A majority of the participants talked about the
importance of the knowledge transfer plan and the role that senior managers should play in it. According to Ranft and Lord (2002), the development of a plan should occur prior to the merger or acquisition and should include any variations to how the staff may respond. A knowledge transfer plan includes decisions on the steps to be taken during the transition and the guidelines on the distribution of tasks and responsibilities. Classifying and categorizing the knowledge to be transferred by department, as needed, is also of the utmost importance.

There's a lot of things and you can't do them all at once, and you can't do them all in the first few months, so part of the role of senior leadership is to determine what's really important now and what can wait and plan accordingly (SM).

Our managers need to know where they’re going with this and why. They need a plan to manage all of this. Otherwise, it will become a real mess. Despite the little time we had, it is getting done (SS).

Besides planning, the senior management also had the responsibility of implementing the knowledge transfer plan. While planning is in the pre-acquisition phase, implementation occurs in the post-acquisition phase. According to Ashkenas and Francis (2000) and Buono (2003), an example of an implementation role is committing the required resources for the knowledge transfer process. The majority of the participants were aware of the roles played by senior managers in the creation and implementation of a knowledge transfer plan. An example of a task carried out by the senior management in the implementation of the knowledge transfer plan was the planning of the knowledge transfer for the support staff, teachers, managers and principals. This was mainly to streamline the knowledge transfer process.
Each of these categories involved different types of knowledge and the senior management offered support to each group to ensure the implementation of the knowledge transfer plan.

Senior managers tried to plan for the knowledge transfer; it was a smart move (SS).

We planned for all the training, to prepare the processes of all the knowledge we needed to get out there, we tried to plan for each position at the school (SM).

The School Board organized a school review, all of the employees were evaluated, when I say all, it was all the school. This way they knew what type of training the teachers needed, what type of workshops the administrators needed, even the receptionist and the librarian were evaluated and then got assigned some type of training (TC10).

As an administrator at the start of the school year, we got evaluated and appointed a training plan to catch up with what we need to do our jobs well. It was a wise thing to do; they evaluated everyone, not just us (MM).

The senior management was also responsible for providing other necessary resources for the knowledge transfer. This includes creating training manuals, guidelines, and providing mentorship programs to make the employees aware of their roles. Two thirds of the participants reported that the senior management invested heavily in providing training and guidelines
to enable the employees to understand their roles. The majority of them mentioned that mentorship programs were also held for new individuals to keep them up to date with the acquisition and the knowledge transfer process.

The School Board clearly put a good amount of money for training us, their new employees. That was a smart move, because after we went to the trainings, we came back with all of these tools and documents, etc. (TC).

The trainings and mentorship programs were well thought and planned on our end, it was important for us to use all the necessary tools, guidelines and resources to make this possible (SM).

Some of the participants reported that the facilitation of the knowledge transfer process did not always meet their expectations. This was determined because some participants stated that there was a lack of resources to facilitate the knowledge transfer process. The availability of resources influences the conditions in which the transition team deploys its strategies and empowerment to the employees. For instance, Ensign et al. (2014) state that availability of advanced communication tools and effective transportation means reduce communication barriers. Consequently, a lack of resources could hinder effective knowledge transfer.

How it was actually facilitated, though, was a big letdown. Just the fact that we joined up with a larger umbrella organization was a very positive thing, but there were a lot of unknowns with that, and underneath that, there were expectations of how they would do that role. The details were, we found, a lot of surprising gaps and weaknesses (TC7).
The process itself was not clear, I can’t tell you what was the knowledge transfer process during the first year, I don’t know if there was one. It was stressful for me as an employee. I knew there was change, but didn’t know what I needed to do. We were not provided with anything. It seemed more like we were just expected to do things. I don’t feel like they invested in us enough, I don’t think they gave us enough, in terms of clear expectations, guidelines or even a booklet explaining the impact of this change, nothing (MM).

During an acquisition, senior management plays a key role in the knowledge transfer process. Knowledge management was the first category discussed. It was demonstrated in the section above how it is related to both the pre and post-acquisition phases. In the next section, communication management will be tackled.

2.2. Communication Management

Whenever two organizations come together, such as in an acquisition, communication becomes a central part of the transition. From the literature review, it was clear that effective communication between the members of the acquiring and acquired organizations contributes to a smooth transfer of knowledge, which will ultimately lead to better collaboration between the organizations (Zhao & Anand, 2009). Communication is also important in ensuring that members of both organizations are aware of the acquisition, the roles they will be playing and other changes that will come with the acquisition. Brahma and Srivastava (2007) note that malfunctioning communication is a critical contributor to the failure of mergers and acquisitions. The communication management category falls in both the pre-
acquisition and post-acquisition phases. Birkinshaw et al. (2000) agree that an assessment of the position of organizations in the pre-acquisition phase is critical. Regarding the post-acquisition phase, the authors add that communication amongst the members of the organizations fosters their integration. A study by Seo & Hill (2005) shows that, during the post-acquisition phase, firms begin to integrate data and information from each other, which should result in employees from both organizations communicating extensively. This emphasizes the importance of communication during both phases of the acquisition.

This section presents an analysis of the interviewees’ responses regarding the role of senior managers in communication management during the acquisition. This section is divided into two subcategories; communication channels, and support and availability through communication means.

2.2.1. Communication Channels

Senior management has a role of setting up communication channels to enhance their communication with other employees during an acquisition. According to Bresman et al. (1999), setting up smooth communication channels directly contributes to successful knowledge transfer. Additionally, individual knowledge can be gathered through direct communication and filtered by senior managers to sort the individual knowledge of higher value (Jinni & Sarala, 2012; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The majority of the participants reported that the senior management set up communication channels in the form of phone and email communication which enabled employees to communicate with the senior
management whenever they had a question or when the management needed to pass on important information to them. This was an important tool used by senior managers in the pre-acquisition phase. It enabled employees to communicate more with each other and with the senior management. For instance, the email communication channel made it possible for the employees of both the School Board and the Biblical School to be constantly updated about the transition processes and the upcoming steps.

The communication was very constant, and it was mostly through e-mails. We were constantly updated about the transition status and what we needed to do next, and if we had questions, we were able to ask them directly via email and we would call if need be, but employees here in the school needed to go through us, the VPs, before going to senior managers, it was not a written rule, but you know what I mean (MM).

They'd always have anything new, or better ideas and easy ways they would actually email us and give us. ‘FYI: this is good for your information.’ They'd always keep us on top of our notes. They wouldn't ever leave us unknowing and that made us feel more comfortable during the transition the first year and this year as well (SS).

Ensuring transparency is another important role of the senior management discussed by the respondents. Senior management should be transparent in the knowledge transfer process. Some of the participants reported that senior management was transparent. The interviewees reported that senior management was able to answer staff’s concerns regarding the transition and communicated the necessary information concerning the transition. This role, therefore, fell in the post-acquisition phase. Nonetheless,
some of the participants reported that there was a communication overflow specifically via email where too much information was passed, which made it not only hard to assess, but also time consuming.

The School Board wanted to be transparent about the transition to a certain degree, I was getting all of these emails about the acquisition and what is getting done, but to be honest, I don’t think anyone had the time to go through all of that, well that is my opinion (TC9).

I have so much work and so many things to do, I don’t have the time to read all the newsletter type of emails. The updates in person were better and much more appreciated (MM).

Unfortunately, transparency was sometimes not upheld by senior management. A third of the participants reported that senior management was not transparent during the acquisition. The respondents reported that senior management offered limited information about the reasons for staff firings, shared relevant information in the last minutes during the acquisition and failed to share adequate information about the acquisition. The lack of transparency was only reported in the first year. The majority of the participants believe that the School Board has now become more transparent with the information. Needless to say, this has improved the knowledge transfer process in the organizations since a mutual relationship has been created through transparency.

The downside is there was not enough transparency. Senior management has to share more with us to keep the transparency and to update us beforehand so that
they can also prepare before things happen, and before their time comes (MM).

At some point, I just didn’t know what was happening and where we were heading. We were kept in the dark for a good period of time. Senior managers were sending emails and they would come, but they were sharing only superficial information (MM).

If you ask me, the School Board was not transparent with us when it came to major decisions, especially when they decided to get rid of our principal last year. It was handled in such a weird way. We were not allowed to ask questions. We were informed that the principal was gone and that was it. I mean, this is not okay, we were like a family here before (TC2).

Another role of senior management is to clearly communicate the policies and guidelines of the School Board. A majority of the participants reported that after the acquisition, senior management was able to communicate the policies through a variety of channels. For instance, they had a website with numerous policies and guidelines for the staff. The senior management was also ready to make clarifications on the policies whenever an individual felt the information on the site was not clear. This helped the employees to a certain degree understand new policies and guidelines to follow. By outlining each policy and requirement on the website, the employees were given the chance to go through them at their own pace and raise their concerns or questions on unclear policies. However, the employees felt alone in the process and overwhelmed by the amount of information to read.
They have a website of over 500 policies that are very step-by-step. There are no two ways about it, and if there were questions, we had to talk to central office about it to understand what it should be, and they might even rewrite it so it's clearer. We didn't have that in the past and now we have that, but 500 hundred policies, that is a lot, I am not sure who read them at this point, not many people, that’s for sure (MM).

However, some of the participants stated that this was not the case in the first year. They reported that the senior management did not communicate the policies clearly. For instance, a lot of information was dumped on the staff, especially during staff meetings. This did not give them enough time to comprehend the shared information and might have affected the transition process to some degree.

When we first came back that first year, we had our traditional opening week, Professional Development sessions and set up time and all that stuff, and we had a whole HR session where they dumped tons of information on us as far as HR documents. They wanted certification stuff, copies of transcripts. It was very informative, but I found it did throw a lot of information at us at once (TC5).

The first year was all about them knowing who we are and we didn’t know who they really were, they just gave us reading to do and websites to visit and said well, ask if you have questions. When will I ever have the time? I am too busy with my everyday tasks already (MM).

Another role of senior management is to state and communicate expectations in an obvious way to all the employees during the transition.
This is in line with Haspeslagh et al. (2007) and Bröchner et al.’s (2004) views that senior managers must communicate effectively and communicate sufficient information that fosters interactions between managers and employees. Even though some of the participants believed that senior management was able to communicate effectively to enhance the knowledge transfer process, two thirds of them reported that senior management did not communicate clear expectations in the first year. Some participants stated that senior management had failed in their role to communicate their expectations in general.

I will be honest with you, sometimes I didn’t know they were even expecting some of the things they came inquiring about in the middle of the year, for example, how they wanted us now to fill and file reports differently (SM).

The first year was no transition, there were last minute orders, such as, no, and this is not how you were supposed to do this. We didn't know what to expect. We didn't know what to do, but then there were certain expectations of us, so we had to learn and then apply everything at the same time. Now on the second year, I feel that we know what to do, so there's a better transition in the first year to the second year (TC4).

One of the participants described the School Board senior managers as good communicators, contrary to the Biblical School senior managers who were not as good, communication wise. This could suggest that the Biblical School administrators might have a lot to learn from the School Board Central in relation to communication. By learning from the School Board Central, they would not only be able to preserve the nature of the knowledge transfer approach, but also increase the knowledge and expertise of each member in the field of communication.
2.2.2. Support and Availability through Communication Means

During and after the acquisition, senior management should be receptive to employees’ ideas and concerns. According to Harrison and Farrell (2008), some of the roles of senior managers are listening to employees’ issues and ideas, showing empathy, and creating conditions that encourage all employees to participate in the knowledge transfer process. This role falls in the post-acquisition phase where senior managers are expected to spend a substantial portion of their time communicating with other members of the organization. Failure to do that could cause employees to refrain from full participation in the integration and implementation activities (Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005).

A third of the participants reported that senior management was receptive to employees’ concerns. They were interested in their opinions and experiences and helped them to find a solution whenever they had problems. This is evident from the organization of a Q&A session on the first day of work with all the Biblical School employees. That first event definitely set a tone for the year to come. The Biblical School administrators also organized town hall meetings to discuss the transition issues once a month. At the meeting, the staff could raise and receive answers to their queries. In the case that senior management did not have the answers to the questions raised, they took their time to look into them and came back with answers. These investments in communication improved coordination and cohesion between the two organizations and all of their employees. It created a sense of belonging, support and showed the availability of the senior managers.
They were really great at communicating what was going on, so what they were being told and is expected... Teachers had that better understanding and there was just a lot of frustration, but at the same time, it was appreciated that they actually brought to us, ‘This is dealing with. We will get back to you once we have an answer.’… They did get back to us. As soon as they knew then we got to know as well (TC10).

I actually felt heard by the senior managers; I took the time to communicate my fears and discomfort. They were there to answer most of my questions. It is all about teamwork when we work with the senior managers, it’s never them and us, it’s always we (SS).

During a transition like this, the most important thing I would say that is needed, it is for employees to feel they are heard, that the senior managers are there with them and for them, that help is offered, they can’t afford for that their employees will feel alone in all of this (MM).

A few of the employees felt somewhat left out and excluded since they were no longer invited to meetings. This created somewhat of a distance and gap between senior managers and the support staff, but also between the support staff and the rest of the employees.

How are they going to support us and hear us out if we are not part of the meetings anymore? Since the acquisition, we are out. Sometimes I just don’t know what is happening with them and they don’t know what is happening with me (SS2).
The next section introduces the third category of role played by the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during this acquisition, namely transition management.

2.3. Transition Management

Transition management refers to the planning, coordination, implementation and evaluation of the processes after the acquisition to ensure the process of transition runs in an orderly and smooth manner. Ranft and Lord (2000) note that poor transition management can result in a number of issues such as the loss of key employees’ due to lack of proper management from departmental heads. Transition management begins with the analysis of the situation so as to create a transition plan which can coordinate the timing of all aspects and activities of the participants involved in the transition. In the case of the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board, the role of senior management in the transition management was analyzed through two subcategories; physical presence – visits and meetings, and support and integration. The transition management category is mainly in the post-acquisition phase. For instance, Kavanagh & Ashkanasy (2006) state that senior managers should be role models during the transition process after the acquisition. The authors add that members in management are also responsible for overseeing and supporting the transition.

2.3.1. Physical Presence – Visits and Meetings

Senior management is responsible for providing meetings to sensitize the staff on the transition. This is in line with the views of Bresman et al. (1999) who hold that organization of meetings is one of the factors in the
framework of factors that affect transfer of knowledge in M&A. These meetings create opportunities for interactions and regular learning (Ahuja & Katila, 2001). The majority of the interviewees mentioned that the senior management should be physically present and organize meetings after the acquisition where the staff can be informed about the progress of the transition. While meetings were mentioned before in the communication management role and pre-acquisition phase, meetings are also important in terms of transition management during the post-acquisition phase, as echoed by the interviewees. This is also in line with McCarthy & Dolfsmas’s (2013) view that information held by members at the management level can be passed on to the staff through meetings and visits, hence the importance of physical presence.

These meetings need to be planned well ahead of time to ensure all employees have ample time to prepare for the meeting and what would be addressed. Two-thirds of the participants reported that senior managers were physically present and meetings were regularly convened by senior management to facilitate the transition. The topics at the meetings could range from the onboarding processes to discussing emerging issues such as when the Paris attack took place.

The senior managers were pretty good with meetings, they were often traveling and coming to the schools, that was definitely a plus for this transition and its management (MM).

Sometimes we didn’t know and we see one of the senior managers in the corridor, it was reassuring (TC1).

I would say there was sometimes too many meetings organised, I am saying too many, but in a good way. The senior managers were helping the administrators
to get the job done, but it made them proactive and aligned with the actuality, for example how we all spoke about the Paris attack, and the impact it will have on our school and how we will need to handle security and safety (SS).

Senior managers should also pay regular visits besides using other communication channels to offer support and guidance during the transition period. Visits are critical factors that contribute to the knowledge transfer process (Bresman et al. 1999). The authors add that visits, meetings and trainings promote work relations and social interaction which are both valuable additions to the knowledge transfer process.

Half of the participants talked about the regular visits and the presence of the senior management in the school to aid the transition. Half of the participants stated that senior managers were physically available for meetings with the administrators and teachers. Some of the participants also stated that the senior managers were monitoring closely every stage of the transition process since they were often physically available to assess the transition.

We basically brought staff together, from the School Board and from the Biblical School in late August and did the onboarding process with, I don't know, 100 and some staff. That was the first step, so it was everybody. Then, from there, it became more specific and more targeted, depending on what people needed. Our visits were organized with a purpose and we went to provide support (SM).
Visits were organized, we went to visit the Biblical School on many occasions during the first year for many reasons, but sometimes we would just pop up and say hello and see how everyone was going (SM).

In emergency cases, especially after the Paris attacks, we would have, first thing in the morning, meetings at 7:30 to discuss security protocols and guidelines (MM).

Senior managers from the School Board would come to the school often for at least the first half or the first year, first semester of the first year. They would come very frequently. They will stay here for one day. They will have meetings with the principal and the vice principals. They would talk to the teachers, they would talk to educational assistants, etc. (TC9).

Senior management would come down to the school, would have an improvised meeting, and they would let us know that this needs to change, or this has to be done, or here are some things that we want you to do by this time (TC3).

They were more micromanaging other things and being here a lot, very present here (MM).

There was no one on site to manage the transition, there should have been someone there just to do that, at least the first year. The principals here are busy already and the senior management at the central office would come from time to time, but really it was not enough (TC7).
Despite the praise for meetings as an effective way to manage the transition, some of the participants reported that the meetings were either not often enough or were convened and communicated too late. Lack of physical presence can lead to the inability of the employees to follow the transition progress. This would ultimately make it difficult for them to efficiently contribute to the knowledge transfer process.

2.3.2. Support during Transition Process

The majority of the participants said that senior managers should support the employees of the acquired party during the transition process in order to integrate the change. For instance, senior managers are required to offer support during the transition process by planning and managing the transition (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). Support in this case refers to the senior managers’ work and empowerment of the transition process and employees rather than listening and talking as in the section on communication management role. “It is really important to have support coming from senior managers during this big change, and that’s what any employee here will tell you” (MM). That was the case, the Biblical School employees and the School Board employees did put the emphasis on the importance of the support that senior managers should provide to their employees. However, only a few of the participants reported that the senior managers were supportive in the transition process. “I felt supported through this transition, during the first and second year. I am not sure that everyone shares my opinion” (SS).

Two-thirds of the participants stated that the senior managers should provide the employees with the necessary tools, for example a transition plan or transition guidelines, to ensure a smooth transition. These tools would help the employees at the Biblical School to manage their tasks and time, for
instance, and at the other end, it would help employees at central office follow up the transitioning with them.

There should be a handbook or a document put together for each category of employees, this way each one of us would know, ok this is what I need to do now. This will help us all, it will just give us boundaries and structure, it will give us a sense of a ‘yes, we do have a support system for this transition’ (MM).

What would’ve made my life easier is a guidebook or something, I didn’t know how to manage the new software, I always had to email central office or call them, the girls there were always helpful and nice, but senior managers should’ve prepared something for us, well planned for it at least, they wouldn’t put it together obviously (SS).

Employees would have felt more support if more guidelines were provided to them. The presence is important, the talking is important, but tools are important, they give a perception of support being there, even when the people are not necessarily there, it’s like a reference of support (MM).

Some of the respondents felt like they were neglected in terms of provision of necessary tools for knowledge transfer during the acquisition by the School Board. This could have been attributed to the fact that there was a lack of enough time during the acquisition to have more structures and planning to incorporate the needs of all the employees in the transition.
There was a lot of transfer or, "Okay, you guys did it this way, but we want you to do it this way now." That transfer going from this state to that state, there wasn't enough time in order to do that smoothly, or for senior managers to make sure employees have the needed tools to go through the first year of change. Now employees learned from their mistakes last year (MM).

According to participants, senior managers have a major role in handling the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. Before going to the next section on the perceptions of the respondents regarding the best practices of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition, we present table 4 which synthesizes the perceived categories related to the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

Table 4
The Categories Related to the Role of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived categories related to the role</th>
<th>Knowledge Management</th>
<th>Communication Management</th>
<th>Transition Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perform Research on Acquired Organization</td>
<td>Set Up Communication Channels</td>
<td>Be Physically Present and Organise Meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and Implement a Knowledge Transfer Plan</td>
<td>Set and Communicate Expectations Clearly and Transparently</td>
<td>Offer Employees Support During the Transition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Resources for Knowledge Transfer</td>
<td>Be Receptive To Employees’ Ideas and Concerns</td>
<td>Provide Necessary Tools During Transition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE BEST PRACTICES OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESS DURING AN ACQUISITION

In order to highlight the best practices of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition, the interviewer asked the following questions to the participants; a) on a day to day basis, what has senior management done to favour the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition?, b) how did senior management ensure employees had a part in knowledge transfer?, and c) can you give any recommendations on how senior management can make the knowledge transfer process more efficient and effective in the future? Although these were the main questions that addressed the perception of the participants regarding the best practices of senior management, some of the perceptions on best practices were also drawn from the elements shared by the respondents in other interview questions.

The researcher analyzed the interviewees’ answers in order to identify their perceptions regarding the best practices of senior management. The perceived best practices were divided into three main categories, forecasting, relationship building, and training. These best practices are closely linked with the different categories related to the role of senior managers identified in the previous section. The best practices are somewhat derived and part of these categories. Forecasting is linked to the knowledge management category, relationship building to communication management and training to transition management. These links will be explained in the various sections below. Just as the categories related to the role of senior management, the best practices also straddle the pre-acquisition and post-acquisition phases of the acquisition process.

The practices were ranked and analyzed in this section based on the number of participants that spoke about them in the interviews. The best practices as reported by the participants will be presented and analyzed
through the three key categories; forecasting, relationship building and training.

### 3.1. **Forecasting**

Forecasting is the use of historical information to determine future trends. Forecasting is linked to the knowledge management category in that senior managers need to gather information about the other organization, then plan and implement the knowledge transfer process based on their forecasts from the gathered information so as to manage the knowledge transfer process effectively.

Reus (2012) notes that the acquiring company’s absorptive capacity is affected by its ability to forecast the value of acquired knowledge, interpret it, and use it according to its applicability.

Forecasting lies in the pre-acquisition phase where the organizations use it to determine their plans such as the transition, the knowledge transfer process or budgets. In an acquisition, forecasting also enables the organizations to foresee future issues and put in place adequate measures to counter them. The measures also ensure the transition process continues smoothly.

Senior managers should have a specific plan to manage the transition process. This view is held by Stahl and Mendenhall (2005) who state that the role of senior management in knowledge transfer is important, specifically in facilitating processes from planning through completion of the integration of the organization. The aspect of transition planning was re-echoed from the previous section on the role of senior managers but in this case, it is addressed as a perceived best practice of senior managers by the participants. Some of the participants believed that the senior management had planned well for the transition and gave clear instructions. Two-thirds of the
participants also said that the senior managers provided them with the necessary guidelines, tools, and solutions during the transition. By planning well and giving clear instructions, senior managers can make sure that the transition process can run smoothly. Providing necessary solutions during the transition also enhances the transition by handling any hindrance along the way. According to Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991), a focus should be placed on moving through the problems of integration to the final step in order to improve competitive advantage in the transition process.

If you need anything, in terms of development, professional development in the resources or anything like that, you go to the senior managers. They'll right away answer, so they have their technology people. They have their literacy people. They have their whatever math and science academics, they have a plan to manage this transition (MM).

Yeah, we have tapped into their resources, I am talking about the School Board’s resources, and brought them here to the school and organized various sessions on technology, in managing behavior, staff wellness, you know many different things, and that was part of our planning and knowing what needs to be tackled and when (SM).

However, some of the participants mentioned that the senior management had not taken the time to plan for the transition before the acquisition. “It was more like a day to day thing, let's manage one thing at a time, it was not planned ahead, I doubt they had the time to plan anyway” (MM2). Also, some of the participants stated that the senior management did not provide the solutions they needed. For instance, the respondents reported
that they did not receive support for all the issues they raised. Even when support was offered, it was usually not up to their expectations.

Even in our second year, I think some teachers still aren't clear on who's responsible for what duties. Even our parents, we get a lot of questions. How come this isn't done… if we need to improve stuff or if we need funding to put the speed and bumps at crosswalks, all we can do is basically plead our case and make an argument for it and give it to them (TC5).

Lastly, senior management should plan to have someone on site to manage the transition. It is important to have a permanent individual or even individuals on site during the transition, because transitions are sometimes faced with issues that need prompt solutions and support. An example of an issue that could need prompt solution or support is employees’ anxiety (Seo & Hill, 2005). This can be effectively reduced by having a person on site to constantly communicate information regarding the transition process. While the aspect of presence on site was discussed in the perceived role of senior managers, it is re-addressed in this section as a perceived best practice by the participants and it is analysed through this lens. The majority of the participants stated that senior management should plan to have someone on site to manage the transition and the majority mentioned that it was not the case in this acquisition.

One of the best practices, well that we should have done, is to have someone on site to manage the transition. We did not have a person doing that, we were just going on random visits, well, on planned visits as well (SM).
There was not someone here at the school to help us. Sometimes the issues are punctual. It needs to be managed here and now and this person was not here, well because there was no one assigned to that task (TC2).

They also reported that senior management should have been able to learn from previous acquisitions so as to forecast the need for an individual on site to manage the transition. The absence of a person on site, especially in the first year, affected the transition process.

This was not their first acquisition, they should’ve learned from their past experiences, I mean it is really common sense to me that someone should have been here helping and supporting the transition (MM).

The participants thoroughly discussed the importance of forecasting in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition and the role played by senior managers. In the next section, the participants speak about relationship building as a potential best practice that senior managers should use.

3.2 Relationship Building

According to Ahuja and Katila (2001), application of cross-division integration teams is one of the ways that senior managers can build relationships that contribute to knowledge transfer. Relationship building is linked to communication management since proper communication management involves good relationship building strategies that enhance the communication between the organizations involved. Joia and Lemos (2010) list relationship networks as one of the factors associated with the transfer and
interpretation of knowledge. Relationship networks are said to be built well over time and, ultimately, lead to a mutual understanding between the entities involved. Bresman et al. (1999) note that cases of uncertainty or stress due to time constraints, can cause barriers to arise in the form of uncooperative behavior. In the case of the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board, relationship building was an important aspect in facilitating the knowledge transfer process. The relationship building section is addressed in two subcategories: creating and maintaining relationships and positive work environment. Considering the result analysis and the link between relationship building, as a best practice, and the communication management category related to the role of senior management, relationship building would inevitably fall under both the pre and post-acquisition phases, and it applies to the two subsections below.

3.2.1. Creating and Maintaining Relationships

The senior managers should be able to build, nourish and maintain relationships with and amongst all their employees, especially in the context of an acquisition, in order to facilitate the knowledge transfer process. This should start in the pre-acquisition phase and continue throughout the post-acquisition phase. Relationships are created by understanding each individual’s reactions and needs in order to build trust (Empson, 2001). An overwhelming majority of the participants believed that relationship building is an essential role that senior managers should fulfill in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. Besides building relationships, senior managers are responsible for nourishing and maintaining these relationships. Fostering good relationships amongst the parties involved enhances the knowledge transfer process since it increases their ability to interact positively.
I really think it's all about relationships, that is the most important part of it all, us as senior managers. We should work on our relationship with the employees of this acquired school, harbor it and take care of it. This would help the communication, the transition and the passing on of the information (SM).

You have to build a positive relationship with people if you're going to be able to have any kind of influence, positively or negatively, but positively hopefully, on any kind of acquisition in that regard or sharing that knowledge (SM).

If you are expecting employees to accept you and not resist the change you are putting them through, you must work on a relationship with them, you have to create a bond. I am not expecting all senior managers to be my friends, but at least create the environment for it and help us develop it with our new peers, you know what I mean? (TC9).

I have a good relationship with the secretaries and the assistants at the central office, the senior managers need to make sure we are all getting along, if we don’t, believe me, nothing will happen and it will become chaos. Even senior managers should be nice to us and talk to us, it will make us feel good and work better. If we have a good energy going on, it is better for everyone, but it is their responsibility to do so, to create that environment (SS).

Senior managers should also provide regular meetings in order to enhance relationships between the stakeholders and themselves. Regular
meetings promote work relations and social interactions between the stakeholders in the transition process (Bresman et al. 1999). A majority of the participants saw this as one of the best practices of their senior management in building relationships. For instance, the School Board provided a superintendents’ leadership meeting every month. All the administrators of all the schools under the School Board also met every month. There was also a learning support team meeting for the teachers at the end of every month where their views could be taken and their progress in the knowledge transfer process tracked. Such meetings enhanced the communication between all the employees involved and gave them the opportunity to interact. The employees were also able to raise their concerns regarding the transition following the acquisition. This not only facilitated the transition but also enhanced the knowledge transfer process.

They were part of our new administrator induction program. We have monthly administrative meetings, and then it was just that kind of one on one support (SM).

The monthly meetings are really helping with the transition, but it is also giving us the opportunity to meet other VPs from other schools and we talk to them, we discuss our fears and they guide us and help us, it is almost like we are colleagues and working at the same school. This was a really good thing our bosses did, it just created a bond, but it is really a catalysis to this transition (MM).

A wise thing that was done, there are also programs for teachers, for example, that they have and that's ongoing for all of their new teachers that come under the School Board, it’s called TIP and TOP. It is a program that helps the teachers and provides them
with mentors as well to ease into their new job and know what to expect and what they need to do. It was not a program created just for this transition, but it helps all new employees to transition into their new position, well as employees of this School Board now, and this was for all employees of all categories. (SM).

The participants’ opinions and perceptions regarding the importance of creating and maintaining relationships as a best practice for the senior managers were presented above. The next section will touch on the significance and importance of a positive work environment and how it can be one of the senior managers’ best practices.

3.2.2. Positive Work Environment

The creation of a positive work environment is harboured in the pre and post-acquisition phases, for example through an open-door policy. This is also one of the best practices when building relationships with the employees. Capasso, Dagnino, & Lanza (2005) note that creating a good working environment that is derived from the mutual interactions between the involved firms enables them to build a reciprocal understanding. A majority of the participants stated that the senior managers created a positive working environment through an open-door policy. The open communication culture created by the senior management between the Biblical School and School Board meant members from both sides could consult with one another at any time, bottom-up and top-down. Employees would just approach one another and raise their concerns, discuss any issues, or help one another in deciding, and taking the issues to the administrators, the principals or the senior managers at the central office. A majority of the participants also reported
this was one of the best practices that led to the creation of a positive work environment.

One of the things that our senior team at the School Board did last year, which I appreciate very much, is they came in and they created many opportunities for the employees to have a dialog, and that by establishing that open communication policy, it was not written on paper as a rule, but it was there (SM).

I think there needs to be an open-door policy and a non-judgmental environment. We should feel comfortable coming up to the administration and talk about anything that we have as a problem, without feeling like okay, if I say this, will I get in trouble? I think if you work together, then you can build a better environment. It falls on the lap of the senior managers to make sure that this is what they are harboring in their schools and between their employees, this is good for the knowledge transfer and for the transition and everything, but it is needed in general (TC6).

Senior managers can also create a positive working environment by enforcing a teamwork culture. Half of the participants reported that senior management created a positive environment for the knowledge transfer process by enforcing a teamwork oriented style of management. Both the School Board and Biblical School employees mentioned team work as part of their work habits or even as the norm, all the way from the support staff to the senior managers. By reinforcing a teamwork culture, the employees are able to interact with ease and effectively collaborate in the knowledge transfer process.
This acquisition was fast and we had to manage everything in a very short period of time, but let me tell you something, I work with my boss here as a colleague and as a team member. We get the ideas together and we help each other, everyone is valued and their work as well (SS).

Group work and team work is always stronger and will survive more than a one man show. We did work as a team before, but to see that our new board works like that as well was confirming, it means we speak the same language and they reinforced the teamwork spirit and it was not about who is the best, but how can we be the best together (TC5).

It is the role of senior managers to make employees feel appreciated, but it is also one of their best practices. Half of the participants talked about the efforts made by senior management to make them feel special. For instance, they reported that the senior managers often offered one-on-one support for their individual needs rather than general support. Two thirds of the participants also reported that senior management consulted with the employees regularly on some situations regarding the acquisition and the transition. This made them feel appreciated and a part of the School Board team. Showing appreciation to the employees made the process of transition and knowledge transfer an easier and more fulfilling experience for the employees.

So, it's very much appreciated, when your manager, or supervisor, or owner of a company, supports you in that way, you're able to really feel like you're effective, and you give more naturally, you want to do more, because you know it is seen but also welcomed and appreciated. It's just common sense for me that
any boss should tell their employees when they are happy about their work. That helped me go through this big transition, even if the first year was hard because there was a lot of new stuff to deal with (SS).

When a student is doing well I let him know, the same thing goes to the senior managers here or maybe the administrators, they need to tell us when we are doing good, not just the mistakes. Otherwise, it feels like it is all for nothing. The fact that the senior managers visited and came and saw us work and took the time to tell us what they are happy about was good (TC3).

On the other hand, some of the employees felt that the senior management did not consult them enough on the issues that affected them. The participants stated that they felt neglected and left out. Some of the participants also reported that there was actually no interaction between the teachers, the support staff with the senior administration of the School Board. These respondents felt left out in the transition. That might have affected negatively their participation in the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition: “I think we could have had a little bit more guidance or get consulted more about the changes that needed to happen in my own classroom” (TC5).

The participants stressed above the importance of relationship building in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition and the best practices of senior managers. In the next section, the participants speak about training as a potential best practice that senior managers should use.
3.3. Training

Very often, only a few employees and senior managers are in the loop when it comes to the probability of apprehensions and doubts among the staff and other employees. Employees need to be included at all levels of the transition. In order to ensure this, training becomes an important element in the post-acquisition transition and integration process. Training is linked to the transition management category related to the role of senior management, as trainings provided are one of the main tools employed by senior managers to facilitate the transition process. Accordingly, this applies solely to the post-acquisition phase. The transition stage involves practical and initial changes that are made as a result of the acquisition. Bresman et al. (1999) note that besides meetings and visits, training sessions facilitate the post-acquisition phase.

Senior managers should identify the level of knowledge of their employees and plan for the missing gap if need be. The theory of absorptive capacity states that a minimum level of knowledge is required to absorb knowledge from another party (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). The evaluation and training element was discussed in the perceived role of senior managers section above. In this section, it is addressed as a best practice. This is because participants underlined that this practice helped the senior managers in their role by identifying human capital needs and decide how to manage and fill any gaps in the knowledge base. This, as a practice, helped manage the transition and the knowledge transfer process. The majority of the participants stated that the senior managers organized an evaluation of all the Biblical School employees. This was aimed at knowing their level of expertise so as to prepare a training plan that fits them. This was a major step in the knowledge transfer process. Getting to know their employees on a knowledge base level was one of senior managers’ best practices.
Last year there was an overall evaluation of the entire school. From the teachers to the administrators to the receptionists, so every teacher was observed in class twice the same day, by different people, we got evaluated and we got appointed to training programs if we needed (TC9).

We knew from the start that we needed to evaluate all the employees at the Biblical School because we didn’t know them and we did certainly not know what they needed, especially in terms of training. Once the evaluation was over, we appointed each employee with a specific training plan, whether it was the principal or a teacher. I think they liked the idea, it took time from them and us, but it helped everyone (SM).

The evaluation during the first year of the acquisition helped us heaps, it helped us identify who knew what and who needed to learn what exactly (MM).

Technically speaking, these employees are the employees of the School Board now, but they were not interviewed and hired by us, it was very important for us to be aware of who are our new employees and what were their needs, that is why we decided to conduct the school review initially (SM).

Organization of training programs and workshops for all the employees regardless of their department was also highlighted as one of the best practice. Half of the participants stated that it was one of the senior managers’ best practices to organize and offer training programs that helped the employees in the transition process. For instance, all the employees of the Biblical School had to go for training on health and safety, as a general
training, but also, they had training catered to their position specifically. Before the start of every school year, all the employees of the School Board received training which was aimed at sensitizing them about their requirements after the acquisition.

How did the senior management ensure employees had a part in? Well, if we're talking about the different training programs that the employees are directly a part of then we facilitated learning those programs, attending those sessions, attending the different training opportunities. You know, going over with them and getting them accustomed to it, understanding the new way of doing things, I think it was one of the best things we have done to facilitate this transition (SM).

We had an evaluation, that was really nice, because you get to know how you are doing, but the senior managers didn’t leave it at that, I really liked the fact that they came back to us and said ok this is what you do well and this is what you need training for and here is the plan for you now, we will make sure you will have workshops available and even a mentor teacher if I wanted (TC8).

They do a lot of PDs, professional development days for us, so if they want us to learn about some sort of literacy programs, they'll send us on a training if we want. Just like teacher’s conventions, training like that (TC6).

Some of the other best practices, I would say we were mentioning before the PD. The professional development, the training, if you want to go into more
detail. I could say some names of different programs like AIM, the Administrator Induction, and Mentoring program. But we had available training for everyone (SM).

Lastly, providing expert speakers, trainers, and mentors was also considered as a best practice for senior managers. For instance, Joia and Lemos (2010) state that diverse types of training have different effects on the transfer and interpretation of knowledge. Bresman et al. (1999) add that putting more focus on the interactions such as training sessions with professionals facilitates the post-acquisition phase. In the case of this acquisition, some participants reported that expert speakers, trainers, and mentors were provided by the School Board. The teachers also had the option of being paired with an experienced teacher from the School Board’s experienced teachers so as to ease the learning from them and thereby facilitate the knowledge transfer process.

We had training planned, yes, but what was nice, is they were bringing like PhDs from universities to the training session and to some of the workshops, people specialized in education and learning, I know the teachers liked that (TC4).

I follow one of the training programs, the AIM program, the School Board actually pays good money for the trainers they bring, good quality of training we are provided with (SM).

However, some of the participants stated that the training and workshops organized by the senior management were not tailored to the particular needs for the present change. For example, not all the employees
had access to the Teacher Induction Program (TIP) and the Teacher Orientation Program (TOP) programs organized by the senior management.

I know a lot of our teachers got put into the regular TIP programs, which is great because if you're a TIP one teacher, that's excellent because they're assuming this is your first year, but if you're a TIP two or TIP three teacher, which means you're a second or third year teacher, they're already assuming that you've been in it for two or three years, which is kind of false because it was still our first year. All of us should have been in some kind of a TIP, teacher induction program one (TC7).

The researcher analyzed the interviewees’ answers in order to identify their perceptions regarding the best practices of the senior management. Before going to the next section on the participants’ perceptions regarding the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, table 5 below synthesizes the perceived best practices of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived best practices</th>
<th>Forecasting</th>
<th>Relationship Building</th>
<th>Training</th>
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<td>Create and Partake in Relationship Building</td>
<td>Identify Employees’ Level of Knowledge</td>
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<td>Assign Someone Onsite to Manage Transition</td>
<td>Encourage Teamwork and Open-Door Culture</td>
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<td>Learn from Previous Experiences</td>
<td>Show Appreciation to Employees</td>
<td>Provide Expert Speakers, Trainers, and Mentors</td>
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Table 5
The Best practices of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition
4. PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESS DURING AN ACQUISITION

In order to identify the participants’ perception regarding the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, the interviewer asked the respondents the following questions: a) in your opinion, what factors positively influenced/facilitated the role of senior management in handling the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? (levers), b) in your opinion, what factors negatively influenced/hindered the role of the senior management in handling the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? (obstacles), and c) what other factors could have helped the role of senior management in handling the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? Although these were the main questions that addressed the perceptions of the participants regarding the factors that influenced the role of the senior management, some of the perceptions were also drawn from the participants’ answers to other interview questions.

The factors of influence have an impact on the role of senior managers and the highlighted best practices. These factors are referred to as proximity factors and time, they will be influencing the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during both phases, the pre and post-acquisition phases. The proximity factors need to be identified and managed in order to enhance the knowledge transfer process. Senior management’s role is challenged by proximity factors that influence how organizations can successfully merge or be acquired at a benefit. Senior managers can remedy the situation by intervening in proximity issues (Ensign et al., 2013). On the other hand, Capasso, Dagnino, & Lanza (2005) emphasize time as a factor to seriously consider during the knowledge transfer process, since it is known, according to both authors, as time-consuming and difficult.
The perceived factors were divided into four main categories; geographical proximity, cognitive proximity, organizational proximity, and time. These factors were ranked and analyzed depending on the number of participants who spoke about them during the interviews.

4.1 Geographical Proximity

The distance between organizations can affect the ability of the senior managers to perform their roles. For instance, Ensign et al. (2013) note that greater geographical distance hinders communication, which is one of the roles of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process. In the case of acquisitions, acquired and acquiring organizations that are geographically closer have fewer barriers in communication and social interactions. Organizations that are geographically further apart might face inhibiting effects in the knowledge transfer process. A third of the participants stated that geographical distance was not problematic during the transition. In the first year of the acquisition, senior management was far away, the two organizations were about 200 km away, but visits were planned and organized regularly to monitor the acquisition and support the employees in the transition.

Although they're far away, they still made time to come out here and to come to our school, see how we're doing, if we needed help with anything they would come here and try to help us out (TC6).

Like I mentioned, senior managers travel often to see us and various schools within our district to provide
support for all of their staff, all of our administrators and teachers and everything (SS).

Half of the participants were of the contrary opinion and stated that distance was a hindrance to the roles of the senior management in the transfer of knowledge. One of the obstacles related to the geographical distance was that senior management had to spend long hours on the road, traveling to the Biblical School.

The distance was definitely a problem, people were often wasting their time on the road. Sometimes, the whole School had to travel for a meeting day (TC4).

The principal and the administrators had to travel, sometimes they were away for two, three days. They had to travel to meet with the senior managers, which took time and energy. If I had to travel that much, I would hate it (TC1).

It was stressful on the admin work when the principal had to leave for meetings. If the School Board was in the same city as us, the principal would leave for an hour or two and come back, he wouldn’t be away all day and the school now has to work with an acting principal (SS).

The first year was time consuming, especially that we had to often go and visit the school, but it is no longer an issue this year, we have an office across the street from the Biblical School (SM).
Communication flow is the other factor related to geographical proximity. The distance between the two organizations means that the communication stream between them will take more time. According to Junni and Sarala (2012), the distance between organizations can be expected to have inhibiting effects such as in the communication speed between the organizations. Despite the availability of other communication methods such as phones and emails, nothing beats physical presence and consultations with the senior management to enhance the knowledge transfer process (Rallet & Torre, 1999). A third of the participants reported that the senior management was not frequently enough on-site due to the distance.

Lots of time on the road. When we talk about one of the factors that can negatively influence things, we talk about geography. We talk about the notion of being so far removed from our schools can become… That's a challenge (SM).

The senior managers were just not able to be at the school often enough, they had this transition to manage, but they have other stuff to work on as well and the distance didn’t help, it was harder for us to communicate with each other (SS).

The central office team is located far away from the Biblical School campuses, so there was slower communication, although they could talk on the phone and they could communicate through e-mails. Again, that's not as good as people who are close to the central office. They have more frequent impression with the management, and it does impact (MM).
Finally, half of the participants reported that the absence of the administrator and the principal due to the regular trips between the Biblical School and the School Board created some instability during the first year of the acquisition. Bresman et al. (1999) note that senior managers need to explicitly support the knowledge transfer process. According to the authors, failure to be present to support the transition can lead to the development of barriers such as uncooperative behaviour. The respondents claimed that the School administrators were too busy during the first year to even manage the school. The administrators traveled often to the School Board for training and meetings concerning the acquisition and transition which sometimes left the Biblical School without administrators.

It's a concern, so it's high in the priorities here, and that is the fact that there are multiple absences in any given month of administrative members, so they're not here on site performing their function, administrative function (TC7).

Some days, the school ended up with no admins and no principal and a teacher as an acting principal. This was just crazy. If the School Board was across the road it would have been different, well to be honest later in the year they opened an office across the road (SS).

They send them for training, but the thing is they take them, but they're away so often. They're away for a day, two days, so if we have issues, there's no one. You're left on your own. There are times when all of them are gone, and then they have one of the teachers, acting principal (TC2).
You know, we put a lot of miles on traveling back and forth. So that made it challenging. It was okay, and we're used to traveling, but it definitely made it more challenging (SM).

In order to better manage the distance, the School Board opened a new office across the road from the Biblical School, which made it easier for both organizations to interact with employees and helped facilitate the knowledge transfer process. By setting up the office, the organizations reduced the distance between them. Zander and Kogut (1995) state that physical proximity between organizations may have a direct influence on the ability for knowledge transfer to occur.

We opened an office across the road from our new school. That also serves almost like a northern office for us, a sub-office. We've got an HR director in there. We've got a learning director in there. We've got an outreach program there so students can access it. The principal of the school can easily access support right across the road (SM).

The senior management was proactive in that regards and realized the obstacles the geographical distance was creating. It was very important for the School Board to act and manage the situation. The office across the road was not for the sole purpose of supporting the transition of their new school, the Biblical School, but it was also a strategic decision for the future of the School Board and the management of all its schools in that particular area.

The participants had their opinions and perceptions presented above regarding the geographical distance as a factor of influence on the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The
next section will tackle cognitive proximity as a factor of influence in the context of this study.

4.2. Cognitive Proximity

Cognitive proximity is the complementariness in the knowledge base of two actors (Ensign et al., 2013). In acquisitions, cognitive proximity refers to the similarity or difference of the knowledge base of the acquiring and the acquired organizations (Ensign et al., 2013). Two organizations are said to have a good cognitive proximity if they are able to cooperate on particular activities by actively contributing to solving the issues (Ensign et al., 2013). The cognitive proximity between the Biblical School and the School board is addressed in two subcategories below; shared knowledge and learning potential.

4.2.1. Shared Knowledge

Some of the participants reported that there was some shared knowledge between the organizations. This might have made it easier for the senior managers to carry out their roles in the knowledge transfer. For instance, Ahuja and Katila (2001) establish that in case the transferred knowledge is similar to the existing one, capabilities to explain, articulate, and apply the new knowledge are enhanced. In the present study, the two organizations work in the same industry; they are both from the education sector. Working in the same sector and under the same provincial department, the two organizations have shared knowledge. However, one of them is a school board, focused on administration and schools’ management and the other is a school, primarily concentrated on education, class and student management.
The work is mainly the same, we share the same annual goals set by the province department and our teachers had the same schooling, they are certified teacher with a bachelor's degree in education, some of them have master’s degree (MM).

When you look at it, a teacher is a teacher, the job is somewhat the same, the conditions of work change from a school to another and that is normal, but I didn’t have to change or teach differently, just had few adjustments in terms of grading or curriculum priority, testing, etc. (TC4).

On the other hand, the majority of participants reported that the experience of the employees of both organizations helped the transitions. For example, the experience of some of the teachers helped to facilitate the transition. Also, the experience of the School Board, especially the senior managers, in terms of acquiring a new school, helped in the management of the acquisition, transition and in the knowledge transfer process, since they knew what had to be done. Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006) agree that members in management positions are usually knowledgeable and experienced which enables them to handle the transition more effectively.

It’s not like the school was opening this year, the school was running before under our administrators’ watch and it was going fine, it was not optimal, but it was good, their experience and knowledge made this transition way easier (SM).
This is not the first acquisition of our School Board, we have seen it all happen, and we know how to tackle things and I think that helped (SM).

I think that the experience of senior management here and in the experience of the staff at the school, both combined, was a great factor (SS).

However, some assumptions were made by the senior management regarding the shared knowledge between the ways of the School Board and the ways of the Biblical School. For instance, a few participants stated that some tasks received less support as they were assumed to be obvious. Consequently, the employees were unable to effectively carry out their tasks.

If they could have had a book for an admin assistant. What are her duties; what are the steps in getting things done; how do we deal with parents; do we transfer calls to parents through instructional time. Responsibilities being described for every position. For every position from the principal, to VP, to the teacher, to substitutes and to admin assistants. I think that's really important. We don't have that because they just assume that person is going to know their stuff right away right there. That's not good (SS).

It is crucial for senior managers to not make any assumptions regarding the knowledge base at the acquired school to ensure a smooth and complete knowledge transfer process. Otherwise, it would drag them further away from the reality of the employees and the transition process. The upcoming section will touch on the learning potential as a sub-factor within the cognitive proximity concept.
4.2.2. Learning Potential

A third of the participants stated that some of the systems and methods used by the two organizations were dissimilar. The participants reported that the Biblical School and School Board did things very differently, and after the acquisition, several changes were integrated during the transition phase. This might have made it difficult for the senior managers to carry out their roles in the knowledge transfer process. Kansal and Chandani (2014) state that acquisitions are easier if the involved organizations did things in a similar way and engaged in similar activities. The Biblical School saw numerous changes ranging from adopting resources such as software and new school procedures. Being part of this bigger board gave the Biblical School the opportunity to learn new systems, testing methods, and new operational guidelines.

It was how to work in a bigger system and structure. We were a private school, and so you were a little lonely school operating by yourself. When you're part of a bigger system and structure, you have other schools to learn from. You have better operational systems to work under, as well as policy and procedures. Certain policies and procedures are in place, so we got acquainted with those, and that became part of our system (SM).

We did serve the same objectives before the acquisition, it is just now we do it a little differently, we follow different protocols, teachers have new testing and grading methods, presence and absence is managed differently now by the reception and the admin team, it is the same, but different, we had many things to learn (MM).
The respondents pointed out several types of knowledge that were transferred during the transition phase. These included financial processing and expense management, governance style, district’s approach to learning, and administration procedures. Half of the participants said that these types of knowledge were different in the two organizations prior to the acquisition. During the transition and knowledge transfer process, the Biblical School had to adapt to new financial and expense management processes for example. The majority of the participants mentioned that class management and learning focus were also different. These differences created a significant learning potential and knowledge transfer between the two organizations which the senior managers could capitalize on.

We did a comparison if they did join, if they didn't join, and what were the benefits, what were the pros and cons of then acquitting from a financial perspective as well, but we knew that there was going to be a lot of change to handle, from finance management to class management (SM).

I learned so much in this year and a half now, as a teacher, I had the opportunity to see new perspectives, it was a lot in a little time, but there was a lot to learn. I realized that only in the second year, the first year I didn’t even have the time to breathe (TC3).

The learning focus shifted after the acquisition, that was the main thing I noticed from the first year to the second being a teacher under the School Board now (TC7).
The software is not the same, the finances and the financial decisions go through a completely different process now (MM)

According to Kansal and Chandani (2014), M&A may be easier for horizontal M&A because the involved organizations either engage in similar activities, or are in the same industry. In the present study, the differences and similarities between the two organizations created a considerable learning potential, but since the two organizations are working in the same sector, under the same provincial department, and having the same purposes, the learning curve was easier for the employees and the knowledge transfer process was facilitated.

The participants had their share of perceptions presented above regarding the cognitive proximity as a factor of influence on the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The next section will touch on organizational proximity as a factor of influence in the context of this study.

4.3. Organizational Proximity

Organizational proximity refers to the organizational relationship between individuals and the possibility to cooperate with one another to attain a common goal (Ensign et al., 2014). Organizational proximity can be grouped into two; cultural proximity and structural proximity (Ensign et al., 2014). In an acquisition, cultural and structural factors have a huge effect on the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process. This is revealed below in the respondents’ responses to the effect of organizational proximity on the senior managers’ roles. The organizational proximity factor in the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board is addressed in the two subcategories below; cultural proximity and structural proximity.
4.3.1. Cultural Proximity

Some of the participants reported that the culture of both parties involved in the acquisition was similar. One of the reasons fronted for this view was the participants’ observations regarding the shared flexible approach, the teamwork approach, or the open-door culture for instance. The School Board had acquired and managed other schools before, and had thus developed a flexible organizational culture that could match that of the Biblical School. The participants also reported that the School Board and the senior management did not strive to change the school’s culture. The culture was mostly left intact. Two-thirds of the participants also prided themselves in the culture of the Biblical School noting that the two organizations were now a family. Both organizations shared the same philosophy and approach towards people management.

I don't think you'll find too many public-school divisions in the country actually with as much diversity as the School Board’s got. There's a wide variance here so I think having a knowledge and an acceptance of the diverse nature of things, that's a plus. When you start having discussions with other schools coming out of different backgrounds, right off the bat, there's more of an understanding or acceptance. Here I am talking about the organizational culture (SM).

The environment of the school really stayed the same. Nothing had changed, which made it comfortable (SS).
Culture-wise, our culture stayed the way it is at this school, which was great. The School Board came in, we both realized we wanted the same things and we were similar, respect was important for both of us, consideration, everything clicked to a certain degree, there is nothing perfect though (SS).

Despite the existing cultural proximity between the two organizations, some of the participants stated that the firing of the previous principal, during the first year of the acquisition intimidated the employees at the Biblical School. This can be equated to imposition of a new culture on an organization by the acquiring organization which is stated by Zhang and Stening (2013) as one of the ways of integration. Greenberg and Guinan (2004) state that instead of intimidation and imposition, senior managers should ensure effective integration that avoids conflicts. The firing scared some of the employees, especially since it was done in the first year, thus some of the employees perceived this action as a threat.

The way our principal was fired last year was horrible, this made me feel like I could lose my job at any time and I can’t ask why and how. I know I was not the only one feeling this way. Many of us were unhappy with the way they handled this situation (TC8).

The intimidation feeling made it harder for some employees to adjust to the transition. Other employees felt that the firing of the principal and the way it was handled did not represent them nor the values of their school. Some employees of the Biblical School felt that the senior management of the School Board was imposing and not friendly at first. Nonetheless, the employees of the Biblical School and the senior managers met and discussed
the situation to give somewhat of a closure to the school’s employees. This increased the cultural proximity between them.

I saw people crying in the corridors, it was just not funny, some teachers got scared, they felt intimidated and told off when they asked why was the principal fired (TC9).

Right now, both sides are starting to understand each other a little bit more, understand the culture of each side, and we're getting there, but I know that some of the employees didn't like the way the previous principal was fired, it caused a little bit of drama in the school (SM).

Culture-wise, the organizational culture was different. It was not as disciplined and professional but, now, coming under the School Board, they have a system like weekly, and every teacher has to submit weekly report. They have certain criteria and they have to fill out what they did in the week, and they have to report not only to the principal (MM).

Despite the obstacle faced during the firing and the handling of the previous school’s principal, some participants reported that there were some differences that brought positive changes to the school’s culture.

4.3.2. **Structural Proximity**

The majority of the participants stated that the structures of the two organizations were dissimilar prior to the acquisition. Upon the acquisition,
several changes needed to be implemented by the senior managers to the organizational structure of the Biblical School to be in line with the functioning of the School Board. Senior managers were responsible for providing support in order to facilitate this structural shift. The structural changes after the acquisition were considered positive by a majority of the participants.

The hierarchy, the governance and the structure in its complexity had to transit and live a shift after this acquisition. It actually provided the school with a stronger structure in general, comparing to the years before (MM).

The organisations is the same, but different, there was a board before, but now there is a new board with a completely different way of managing things, so everything is the same, but when you look closer, you can see the change and a positive change (SM).

I do see the difference in the structure, in the communication, in the processes, it was well supported and presented to us, most of us are happy about it, things make more sense now (TC1).

The Biblical School was functioning as a private school with a private board prior to the acquisition. Sometimes, the school didn’t have a board and all the decisions would have to be made by the principals. The school was operating with a high turnover for both the previous board and principals. Smaller organizations, acquired or merged with larger organizations may experience integration, where the larger organization imposes upon the smaller organization a new culture, structure, or design which enhances their
operations (Zhang & Stening, 2013; Greenberg & Guinan, 2004). The new structure provided the school with stability, consistency and a reliable board to support the day to day business.

The participants emphasised the importance of the different proximity factors through their opinions and perceptions presented before. The next section will present time as a factor of influence in the context of this study.

4.4. Time

Time is a crucial factor that affects the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during M&A. Joia and Lemos (2010) list it as one of the factors associated with the transfer and interpretation of knowledge. The majority of the participants in this study stated that the timeline, since pre-acquisition, to complete knowledge transfer between the organizations had not been adequate for a smooth transition. They felt that senior management did not have enough time to plan for the transition. According to Dagnino and Lanza (2005), the process of knowledge transfer is time-consuming and difficult. According to Soo et al. (2002), the lack of time is one of the factors that can act as a barrier to the flow of knowledge between the acquired and acquiring organization. This emphasizes the importance of allocating adequate time in the knowledge transfer process to ensure an effective transition.

I will cover the positive factors first. I think the timing when they started talking about the acquisition, that was the right time. It was in the summer of last year and in summer because the school is closed and all the teaching staff, they are on vacation, and the activities are minimum during summer, so that was a better time to talk about the acquisition and to start working on that, but it would have been better to wait
until the year after to transition, this would have given everyone more time to get ready for this change (MM).

Everyone will tell you, this was all too fast, and there was no time for planning. Everything would have been easier if senior management had the time to plan (SS).

I don’t know why the decision and the acquisition had to happen like that, there was not time for anything, most of us heard about the acquisition on the first day of school, disaster (TC7).

Some of the factors that made the timeline inadequate as reported by the participants include the distance between the organizations and the lack of early and sufficient communication between the senior management and other employees such as the support staff and the teachers.

The other parameter is the distance. The central office is located in another city. It’s like three-hour, four-hour drive from our city. Things were a little bit difficult (TC9).

We learned about that we joined this School Board late August. We were just called earlier, one week. That was on August 23rd, we were called to a meeting. At that meeting, we actually were told, informed, that we are now joining the School Board because that day we signed our contracts with the School Board. That was on the first day of school, all of this timing was weird, we just did not have any other option. They just travelled with their team, came to meet us in the
morning and told us. Maybe I would have chosen to change schools if I knew before, I am not saying I would have, just maybe. (TC1).

We can’t announce something like this to employees like this via email and that’s it. We had to plan a trip from one city to another with a whole team to support that and not much time to prepare everything. It was stressful, but the job got done at the end (SM).

The participants also said that the transition happened so fast that they barely had any time to adjust to the transition. The acquisition involved some assimilation and would have therefore required senior managers to give it more time to ensure all employees were on the same page. Some of the employees mentioned not having enough time to sit and go through the emails or all the policies and procedures.

I would suggest that the very first thing is that there needs to be ample time. It can’t just happen overnight (SM).

Everything happened very quickly. The agreements were signed at the end of July and all of a sudden, we became [a part of the School Board] in the middle of August. I think in that respect, maybe the parent community and even the student community didn't understand the full effect of this acquisition (MM).

Everything was just so quick, I don’t know how everything happened but it did, it just seemed impossible at first. We didn’t have time to adapt, we just had to survive (SS).
The role of senior management was affected by a number of factors as discussed in the four sections above. The factors of influence included geographical, cognitive, and organizational proximity, as well as time. These factors had different impacts on the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition. Before going to the next section, which presents a model to illustrate the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, table 6, in the next page, synthesizes the factors that influence the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

Table 6
The Factors that Influence the Role of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions on factors of influence</th>
<th>Geographical Proximity</th>
<th>Cognitive Proximity</th>
<th>Organizational Proximity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance and Physical Presence</td>
<td>Distance and Physical Presence</td>
<td>Shared Knowledge Vs Knowledge Gaps</td>
<td>Similarities/Dissimilarities of the Organizational Cultures</td>
<td>Time Adequacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance and Communication Flow</td>
<td>Distance and Communication Flow</td>
<td>Employees Professional Experiences</td>
<td>Similarity/Dissimilarities of the Organizational Structures</td>
<td>Transition Timeline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. MODEL ILLUSTRATING THE ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESS DURING AN ACQUISITION.

The analysis of the results in conjunction with the literature review led to the proposition of a model to illustrate the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The model has three main elements, namely the role of the senior management, the best practices of the senior management, and the factors of influence around the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The different elements fit together with the use of color codes and arrows to illustrate the relationships between them. In lieu of simply focusing on the direct statement of the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process, the model goes a step further to illustrate the factors that affect the role and highlight the best practices. By exploring the role in relation to the best practices and the factors of influence, the model is also able to provide a better understanding of the reality of the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. At the heart of the model are two elements that are closely linked; the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process and the highlighted best practices. The factors of influence are located at the periphery of the model as a global unit surrounding both the role and the best practices.

The first element at the heart of the model is the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. Senior managers have a crucial stead in the acquisition’s process and progress. Thus, they can act as a catalyst and enable the success of the knowledge transfer process. In fact, Stahl and Mendenhall (2005) note that a lack of management intervention in the transfer process renders the knowledge transfer ineffective. Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991) also mention that senior managers should be able to create conditions that ease and promote the knowledge transfer process. In line with these authors, the knowledge transfer model presents the
actions that can be undertaken by the senior managers to create conditions to facilitate the knowledge transfer process. The model illustrates senior management’s role within three major categories, knowledge management, communication management and transition management. The categories stride within both the pre-acquisition and post-acquisition phases in the acquisition process.

Knowledge management is the first category addressed in the model and falls in both the pre and post-acquisition phases. It is divided into three strategies. The first strategy is to perform research on the acquired organization. Ensign et al. (2013) note that conducting a research to understand the organizational behavior and discipline of the acquired organization is a critical factor in the success or failure of an acquisition. Senior managers are expected to investigate the acquired organization so as to understand the capabilities of the other organization which would help in tailoring the knowledge transfer plan. The second strategy in relation to the knowledge management category is to create and implement a knowledge transfer plan. Once the senior managers have a clear understanding of the acquired organization in terms of structure, capabilities and staffing, they can create a plan of how the knowledge transfer will take place. Ranft and Lord (2002) talk about the importance of having a plan to enable a quick and cooperative transition for all parties. The third strategy of the senior managers in the knowledge management category is to provide resources to facilitate knowledge transfer Examples of these resources could be guide books, training manuals and mentorship programs to make employees aware of their roles. This conforms with the views of other authors that, besides planning, the role of senior managers extends to committing resources required by the employees to facilitate the process (Ashkenas & Francis, 2000; Buono, 2003; Tetenbaum, 1999).

The second category related to the role of senior management is communication management, which falls in both the pre and post-acquisition
phases as well. Senior managers take on the role of developing communications that facilitate the transfer of knowledge between the two organizations, in order to create a seamless and successful merger or acquisition (Haspeslagh et al., 2007; Bröchner et al., 2004; Harrison & Farrell et al., 2008; Seo & Hill, 2005). In the model, the communication management category includes three strategies that are in line with the view of the authors above: set up communication channels (website, phone calls, email, meetings, etc.), set and communicate expectations clearly and transparently, and be receptive to the employees’ ideas and concerns. Senior managers are expected to spend a substantial portion of their time communicating with other members of the organization, listening to their issues and ideas, showing empathy and creating conditions that encourage all employees to participate in the knowledge transfer process.

The third and last category is transition management, which falls in the post-acquisition phase only. Ranft and Lord (2000) note that poor management of the transition can result in a number of issues during the knowledge transfer process. These include the loss of employees’ due to lack of proper management from departmental heads. According to the model, transition management involves three key strategies used by senior managers; be physically present and organize meetings, offer employees support during the transition, and finally, provide necessary tools during the transition. The aim of being physically present and organizing meetings is to sensitize the employees in the knowledge transfer process and to offer support in case they have any issues with the transition. By offering support, senior managers can ensure that the employees are properly guided and assisted in facilitating their effective involvement in the knowledge transfer process. Finally, providing necessary tools, such as a detailed transition plan or transition guidelines, ensures a smooth integration and knowledge transfer process.

The second element at the heart of the model are the best practices that can be adopted by senior managers to enhance the process of knowledge
transfer during an acquisition. This element is divided into three major categories; forecasting, relationship building, and training. This element is connected to the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The arrows that join the role and the best practices show that they are interrelated. The best practices are derived from the different categories related to the role played by senior management. Forecasting, as a best practice, is linked to knowledge management, relationship building to communication management and training to transition management. The division of the best practices into three important categories makes the model easier to follow and adapt for various acquisitions.

The first category of best practices is forecasting. Senior managers need to gather information about the acquired organization then plan and implement the knowledge transfer process based on their forecasts from the gathered information so as to manage the knowledge transfer effectively. Reus (2012) refers to the ability of the acquiring company to forecast the value of acquired knowledge, interpret it and use it according to its applicability as absorptive capacity. The ability to forecast is also related to the organizational routines and procedures and requires time and experience to be developed. According to the model, there are three best practices related to forecasting: create a plan to support the transition, assign someone onsite to manage the transition, and learn from previous experiences.

The second category of best practices is relationship building. Joia and Lemos (2010) advocate that the creation of relationship networks is one of the essential elements in the transfer and interpretation of knowledge. While striving to build relationships, the best practices as presented in the model are the creation and partaking in the relationship building, encouraging teamwork and an open-door culture and showing appreciation to all the employees. In the section presenting the best practices, the model starts by illustrating the importance of creating and partaking in relationship building since the senior
managers must be willing to create and partake in a relationship following the acquisition. Next, the encouragement of teamwork and an open-door culture have been shown as part of the relationship building best practices. For instance, Ahuja and Katila (2001) establish that one of the factors that contribute to the transfer of knowledge and positively contribute to the process of sharing is the application of cross-division integration teams. This makes the employees in the organizations develop a teamwork spirit which ultimately ensures the success of the knowledge transfer process. Lastly, showing appreciation to employees is also considered a best practice under relationship building in the model.

The third category of best practices is training. Training is one of the main tools employed by senior managers to facilitate the transition process. Bresman et al. (1999) note that one of the ways to facilitate knowledge transfer in the post-acquisition phase is to put more focus on training sessions. Similarly, Wagner and Hilal (2014) note that training can help to facilitate employees’ perception of power by training them to accept the changes that will occur in the process. This shows that training has several impacts on the knowledge transfer process. The model presents three best practices that senior managers should adopt while carrying out training after the acquisition: identify employees’ level of knowledge, offer training programs to facilitate the knowledge transfer, and provide expert speakers, trainers and mentors. As with every training plan, senior managers first need to assess the needs of the employees and what type of knowledge they already possess. This is an important first step in training and determines whether the training will be effective in the long run.

On an overall perspective, the model addresses the factors of influence around the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The factors presented have an influence, either positive or negative, on the senior managers’ abilities to carry out their role and apply the best practices. The factors as presented in the model are geographical
proximity, cognitive proximity, organizational proximity and time. They are located at the periphery of the model and linked by single arrows to the pool of the role of the senior managers and the best practices in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The senior managers can learn to monitor and control them (Boschma, 2005).

The first category of factors that influence the role and best practices of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition is geographical proximity. Ensign et al. (2013) state that closeness of the organizations offers the possibility for greater social interactions. On the other hand, the author notes that geographical distance hinders communication. In the model, geographical proximity is positioned as one of the factors that affect both the role and the best practices of senior managers. Two key characteristics of geographical proximity are indicated; first distance and physical presence, then distance and communication flow. The first characteristic stipulates that geographical distance has an effect on the physical presence of senior managers during the knowledge transfer process. Zander and Kogut (1995) note that the lack of physical face-to-face communication can have a negative effect on the knowledge transfer process. The greater the distance between the organizations, the lesser the possibility of senior managers to be physically present to facilitate the transition and knowledge transfer. The second characteristic is related to distance and communication flow. The effect of distance on communication as presented in the model is in line with the views of Rallet and Torre (1999), who mention that geographical proximity is the best way to ensure efficient communication regardless of the modern communication tools and transportation channels that can reduce or eliminate barriers to geographical proximity.

The second category of factors that influence the role and best practices of senior managers is cognitive proximity. According to Ensign et al. (2013), cognitive proximity is determined by the complementarities that
exist between the two organizations. Organizations involved in an acquisition are required to share the knowledge in their possession during the knowledge transfer process. However, the knowledge to be transferred depends on two main aspects; base knowledge and domain expertise (Ensign et al., 2014). This implies that the shared similarities in the expertise and practices in the organizations have an influence on the knowledge that is shared between them. In the model, these elements are presented as shared knowledge vs knowledge gaps and employees’ professional experiences.

The third category of factors that influence the role and best practices of the senior managers is organizational proximity. According to Ensign et al. (2013), organizational proximity includes two overarching concepts; cultural proximity and structural proximity. In the model, these two concepts are presented as similarities/differences of the organizational cultures and similarities/differences of the organizational structures. The two concepts enshrined in organizational proximity have an impact on the role of senior managers, in that cultural proximity affects the ability of the organizations to interact while structural proximity affects the ability of the organizations to adapt to the changes and structural shift that occur in the management following an acquisition. As mentioned before in the literature review, Ensign et al. (2014) speculate that if organizations differ in working hours, employee’s attire, use of technology such as open-source technology, entrepreneurial orientation and other cultural differences for example, it can be detrimental to the knowledge transfer process. The closer the cultural and structural proximity, the easier it is for senior managers to carry out their roles in knowledge transfer following an acquisition.

The fourth and final factor that influences the role and best practices of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition is time. This factor is in line with Joia and Lemos (2010) who list it among the factors that affect the transfer of knowledge following an acquisition. In the model, the time factor includes two characteristics that can have an
influence on the knowledge transfer, namely time adequacy and transition timeline. Time adequacy seeks to answer the question of whether the timing is right. Time limitation or misuse of time can result in a struggling context for senior managers. It will become hard for them to deliver on their role during the knowledge transfer process. Time adequacy can also affect the best practices; for instance, managers need to take into consideration the time factor when creating a plan to support the transition, so as to be aware whether time is right for a certain activity, then adjust accordingly. Nobel (1999) confirms that knowledge is transferred in a slow pace and gradually during the post-acquisition phase, thus the need for senior managers to have enough time to manage the knowledge transfer process. This is referred to as the transition timeline in the model and it points out to the time needed during the acquisition to support the knowledge transfer process between the two organizations. This factor affects the role of senior managers in that the timeline determines how much time they have to handle the knowledge transfer and transition. As mentioned before, Soo et al. (1995) state that the lack of time can be a barrier to the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. Thus, it affects the senior managers’ decisions and the practices they choose to use to facilitate the knowledge transfer within the time limits.

Carrying out the role and best practices presented in the model under favorable organizational conditions with the possession of the appropriate knowledge can facilitate an effective knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. According to our study, senior managers should take into consideration all the elements presented in the model to ensure they understand their role, what is expected of them and the factors that can affect their ability to carry out the knowledge transfer process during the acquisition. In sum, the illustrated model manages to showcase the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, to highlight the best practices and to identify the factors of influence.
Figure 5
Model around the Role of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

The fifth and concluding chapter of this thesis is divided into three sections. The first section describes the theoretical and practical contributions that emerged from our study, considering the research problem and the literature review. The second section highlights the limitations of this research. The third section concludes this chapter by paving the way for future research avenues.

1. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Given the research problem surrounding the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, we explored the literature on mergers and acquisitions, knowledge transfer, the role of senior management and proximity factors in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, to better understand the depth of our research problem. To our knowledge, there was no research on the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

Based on the data collected and the literature consulted, our study responded to the following question: What is the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition? It also achieved to meet the three research objectives 1) to describe and understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition; 2) to highlight the best practices of senior management to improve the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition and 3) to identify the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
In answering the research question and fulfilling the research objectives, we believe that this study adds a drop of water to the ocean of knowledge. The next section focuses on the theoretical contributions of this study.

1.1. Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this research are: 1) improving the understanding of the relationship between the knowledge transfer process and M&A, 2) enhancing the understanding of the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, 3) helping the understanding of theoretical bridges between the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition and proximity factors, 4) helping the understanding of the time factor around the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

1.1.1. Improving the Understanding of the Relationship between the Knowledge Transfer Process and M&A

The first theoretical contribution of the study is increasing the understanding of the relationship that exists between the knowledge transfer process and M&A. This adds to the knowledge by previous authors that mention this relationship (Greenberg & Guinan, 2004; Junni & Sarala, 2012; Zhao & Anand, 2009) and those that address the knowledge transfer and the factors that affect it in M&A (Greenberg & Guinan, 2004; Soo et al., 1995). The study highlights the relationship between the knowledge transfer process and M&A by exploring the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The above-mentioned authors that have contributed to the understanding of the theoretical contribution of this
study have mainly defined knowledge transfer as the ability to engage individuals in the recovery, dissemination and absorption of knowledge in organizations involved in M&A. By exploring the roles of the senior managers, the best practices and the factors that influence their roles, this study opens up a new perspective on the relationship between the knowledge transfer process and M&A.

Furthermore, by providing a model that helps senior managers play their role effectively while managing the knowledge transfer process in M&A, this study contributes to the understanding of the strategic element. While M&A are strategic for organizations, they often result in a need for knowledge transfer and development of new procedures to prevent the stresses they cause (Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005; Haspeslagh, et al., 2007).

1.1.2. Enhancing the Understanding of the Role of Senior Managers in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition

The second theoretical contribution of the study is in enhancing the understanding of the role of senior managers in knowledge transfer during an acquisition. This was, in fact, the main focus of the research and is in line with previous research on this topic (Haspeslagh et al., 2007; Bröchner, Rosander, & Rosander, 2003; Harrison & Farrel, 2008; Seo & Hill, 2005). This study adds to the theoretical literature on the topic by proposing three main categories for the role of senior management; knowledge management, communication management, and transition management. The study also exemplifies the duties under each of these categories.

Through the analysis of the research results and the existing theoretical literature, the study was able to clearly show the importance of the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition with some highlighted best practices. The study also confirms the
importance of the role of senior managers in enabling a smooth knowledge transfer process and in developing new procedures to enhance the knowledge transfer process. This is in line with Hitt, Harrison, and Ireland (1991), who stress that senior managers intervene during the knowledge transfer process whenever there is pressure on employees, particularly during an acquisition. Therefore, the highlighted best practices in this study, whether around relationship building, forecasting or training, complete our theoretical contribution regarding the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

1.1.3. **Helping the Understanding of Theoretical Bridges between the Role of Senior Managers in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition and Proximity Factors**

The third theoretical contribution of the study is enhancing the understanding of the theoretical connections between the role of the senior managers in the knowledge transfer process and proximity factors during an acquisition. The bridge between these two elements has not been explored extensively by other researchers. Some researchers focussed on the role of senior managers in terms of proximity factors, for example, the focus in their research was more often on the knowledge transfer process and cultural proximity (Torre & Gilly, 2000; Varga, 2000).

The study also reveals that both the best practices and the role of senior managers are influenced by the three proximity factors presented in chapter four. Thus, the understanding, of the complex theoretical bridges between the role of the senior managers, best practices, and proximity factors in knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, is deepened through this study. In line with Berends et al. (2011) and Puranam and Srikanth (2007), the study suggests that senior managers can identify and
1.1.4. Helping the Understanding of the Time Factor Around the Role of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition

The final theoretical contribution of the study is to help understanding the time factor in the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process. While several researchers have explored the proximity factors such as geographic, cognitive and organizational factors that affect the role of senior managers (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991; Stahl & Mendenhall 2005; Cantwell and Zhang, 2011; Ambos & Håkanson, 2014), very few have explored time as another important factor that influences the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The three proximity factors might be the most important to monitor in M&A as noted by Boschma (2005), but time is an equally important factor as noted by Joia and Lemos (2010) who list it as one of the factors that are associated with the transfer and interpretation of knowledge.

This study dissects the time factor as a complete category of factors that influence the role of the senior management besides geographical, cognitive and organizational proximity. The study shows that time adequacy and transition timeline are the main elements that senior managers should consider while carrying out their roles. The study, therefore, suggests and advocates for the time factor to be treated as an independent factor that affects the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

To conclude the section on the theoretical contributions of this study, it is important to mention that our model also responds to the concern of
PWC (2010) that mergers and acquisitions fail when the post-merger or acquisition is not adequately managed. According to PWC (2010), the failure to manage the post-M&A by senior managers leads to the failure to meet the expectations of the M&A with regard to knowledge transfer. Thus, our study helps to understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, to highlight the best practices and to identify the factors of influence, as we described in the proposed model at the end of Chapter Four. These were the theoretical contributions of this study. The next section will present the practical contributions of this research.

1.2 Practical Contributions

The main practical contribution of this study is aimed at the team of senior managers of both the Biblical School and the School Board. This research project has led to the emergence of useful ideas and actions around the role of senior managers and the highlighted best practices in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The participants were able to take a step back from their roles and day to day business to reflect and have an introspection with a view of improvement in regard to the transition management. Senior managers asked also for recommendations on the transition management from the researcher at the end of the data collection period in December 2016.

The researcher offered the following recommendations:

- Extend your level of knowledge regarding the functioning and the daily routines of the acquired School and its employees, in order to better plan and manage the knowledge transfer process during this transition.
• Establish a realistic transition process plan; after a year into this transition you have passed the initiation step of the knowledge transfer process, you should be forecasting in terms of implementation, ramp-up and integration steps.

  o **Initiation**: involves making and approving decisions around the knowledge transfer process.

  o **Implementation**: engages the establishment of the social relations between the two organizations, and is followed by the exchange of both the information and the resources between the two parties involved in the acquisition.

  o **Ramp-up**: begins when the recipient starts to use the transferred knowledge.

  o **Integration**: application of the transferred knowledge becomes part of the daily routines of the recipient organization.

• Define month’s, semester’s and year’s goals, to set clear expectations within a timeframe and share them with all employees.

• Communicate frequently and show appreciation to the employees of the acquired school; relationship building will be a key component to the transition management.

Correspondingly, the suggested model in Chapter 4 brings a direct practical contribution to the School Board and senior managers of both the organizations involved in this study. It helps them understand the external factors of influence surrounding their role. It enables them to pinpoint their respective role in order to define their expectations, but also to have a clear view of the framework in which they should lead the acquisition transition.

Lastly, another practical contribution that touched all participants and employees of both organizations concerns the rise of awareness around knowledge transfer during M&A. They were able to benefit from the
emerged discussions around the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process. As mentioned previously in the literature review, Paulin et al. (2012) add that knowledge transfer involves a variety of interactions that suggests a cognitive understanding between those involved. The interactions helped clarify their understanding of the transition, roles and responsibilities to get avenues of improvement regarding the progress of the transition.

2. RESEARCH LIMITS

Some methodological choices impose certain limitations to the researcher. The first limit of our study concerns the data collection and analysis of the twenty-nine interviews, in both the School Board and Biblical School. The interviews were carried out by the researcher alone, as was data analysis, which may have increased certain biases. Various means have been put in place to ensure the reliability and validity of the results, as presented in Chapter Three of this study.

Another research limit in this study was the data collection tool. The semi-structured interview guide sometimes included questions with some technical words, for example: How did the senior managers facilitate the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? Not all participants understood what knowledge transfer meant, or sometimes they had difficulty understanding the nuances between some of the questions. For example, the difference between the question stated above and this one: On a day to day basis, what have the senior management done to favor the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? Yet, a definition of knowledge transfer was presented at the beginning of the interview. The definition was often revisited during the interviews to ensure the interviewees were aware of the meaning of the questions asked.
Finally, the uniqueness of the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board case makes it difficult to generalize the results, which was not the objective of this study. The detailed description of the context in Chapter One and of the results in Chapter 4 were intended to be sufficiently developed to allow readers to assess the transferability of the knowledge produced in this study. Thus, the qualitative and exploratory methodological design of this thesis made it possible to study in detail a problem not often addressed in the literature. The researcher was unable to compare her findings with other studies in the same field. Caution must, however, be exercised in the interpretation of the results since the study only focuses on two organizations, which means that the results might not be generalized to all acquisitions.

3. FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES

Foremost, regarding the importance of the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, it would be interesting to pursue research on the role of senior management in the development of a transition plan prior to an acquisition. This is because, as identified by Kavanagh & Ashkanasy (2006), senior managers play a critical role in planning the transition and managing it.

Moreover, given the results of the research and the current situation of the School Board and the Biblical School, this study recognizes that senior managers occupy a key role in the transition of any acquisition, especially in terms of the knowledge transfer process. It would be worthwhile, in the future, to focus on the role of senior managers as the primary knowledge base units, within the relevant organisations, during an acquisition. It would also be interesting to study the strategies needed by the senior managers to facilitate the transition during an acquisition. It would also be important to continue the research not only on the role of senior management, but also to extend it to
the role of middle management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

Furthermore, the major role and best practices of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition have been identified. However, this study included 29 participants within the two organizations that have participated. Consulting with other acquired organizations and having a larger number of participants would also provide details on how these roles can be played, what other best practices can be used and which other factors of influence can be considered in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

Finally, there is not much research in the current literature on the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition within the education sector. For instance, Ahmadvand et al. (2012) report that research on the relationship between educational institutions and mergers or acquisitions is less common. More attention should be given in a forthcoming study on the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition in the education sector. It would be interesting to take into consideration the structure and culture of the sector and include it in the research problem and results analysis; this would open the door to new perspectives.
CONCLUSION

The senior managers are at the heart of any organizations’ management team, especially during change and transition periods. Given the research problem and the current literature on the subject, this study focused on describing and understanding the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, highlighting the best practices and identifying the factors of influence around the role of senior managers in the context mentioned above.

To achieve this understanding, multiple sources were incorporated during the data collection process, giving us access to perceptions coming from senior and middle managers, teachers and support staff from both organizations. Several strategies have been used to meet the validity criteria of this qualitative research.

Our study contributes to a better understanding of the role of senior managers in the context mentioned above through the illustration of a model around the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition, thanks to our results and to the theoretical framework we have built. Our study also demonstrates the importance of the role played by the senior managers.

The study results show the key role that should be undertaken by senior managers which is divided into three main categories; knowledge management, communication management and transition management. These categories are spread in both the pre and post-acquisition phases, however the transition management category falls only under the post-acquisition phase. Under each category, the research reveals different strategies including creation and implementation of a knowledge transfer plan, setting up
communication channels and providing the necessary tools during the transition, among others.

The study also highlights the best practices of the senior managers regarding forecasting, relationship building, and training. The best practices are closely related to the categories mentioned above with forecasting linked to knowledge management, relationship building to communication management, and training to transition management. These best practices included creating a plan to support the transition, showing appreciation to employees, and offering training programs to facilitate the knowledge transfer process, as outlined in the model around the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition presented at the end of Chapter Four.

In addition to the roles and the best practices, the study also helped identifying factors of influence around the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. These were geographical proximity, cognitive proximity, organizational proximity and time. All these factors affect both the role of senior managers and the highlighted best practices. Of particular interest was the time factor. The research reveals that time adequacy and transition timeline have a significant effect on the ability of senior managers to carry out their role during the knowledge transfer process.

Finally, this study contributes to a better understanding of the role of senior managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. We would like this memorandum to be useful to the team of senior managers and all employees of both the School Board and at the Biblical School in their reflections and questions around the role of senior managers in the context mentioned above. The future will bring significant changes that will require further research to deepen knowledge on the role of senior managers or even middle managers in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.


Journal of Knowledge Management, 12(1), 133-147.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13673270810852449


Zhao, Z., & Anand, J. (2009). A multilevel perspective on knowledge transfer:
ANNEX A
EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS
**Email subject:** Invitation to participate in a study

Dear (NAME),

My name is Meriem Elhasna Abida. I am currently conducting a study as part of my master’s degree in Intervention and Change management at Université de Sherbrooke, under the direction of Professor Julie Béliveau. The study intends to increase the understanding of senior management’s role in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The Biblical School was acquired by The School Board Regional School board in July 2015. As a Biblical School/ School Board employee who experienced the acquisition, you are in an ideal position to provide us with valuable first-hand information in understanding what has occurred during the transition process in terms of knowledge transfer. Your contact information (email) was provided to us by your employer. That is why we are inviting you to participate in an interview that will last between 45 and 60 minutes. The interview will take place at your workplace during business hours.

Attached to this email, you will find a consent form explaining the project. This form will be reviewed then signed on the interview day. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure the anonymity of the participant during the analysis and write up of findings. The selection of participants who receive this invitation was random, and the participation is voluntary.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable contribution to our research as we anticipate the findings may lead to a greater understanding of the senior management role in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

If you are willing to participate, kindly reply to this email by suggesting a day and time that suits you, between October ___ 2016 and December ___ 2016. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by email.

Thank you,

Meriem Elhasna Abida
ANNEX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE
Title: The Role of Senior Management in the Knowledge Transfer Process during an Acquisition

For the purpose of this study, knowledge transfer refers to an event through which one organization learns from the experiences of another. Knowledge transfer involves the transfer of both tangible and intangible information, expertise, learning and skills between the companies. It involves gaining new perspectives on new directions and approaches in business conduct.

Number: ..............................................

Profession: ..........................................

Position: ..........................................  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening Questions</th>
<th>1. What was your role during the acquisition process starting July 2015?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How would you say is the acquisition going so far?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What type of knowledge would you say was transferred since the acquisition?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 1 Role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition</th>
<th>4. How did the senior managers facilitate the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition (what was their role)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. In your opinion, what should be the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Objective 2                                                                 | 6. On a day to day basis, what have the senior management done to favour the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? (Best practices)  
7. How did the senior management ensure employees had a part in knowledge transfer? |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Objective 3                                                                 | 8. In your opinion, what factors positively influenced/facilitated the role of senior management in handling the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? (Levers)  
9. In your opinion, what factors negatively influenced/hindered the role of senior management in handling the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? (Obstacles)  
10. What other factors could have helped the role of senior management in handling the knowledge transfer process since the acquisition? |
| Closing questions                                                           | 11. Can you give any recommendations on how senior management can make the knowledge transfer process more efficient and effective in the future?  
12. Is there anything else that you would like to add to help us better understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition? |
ANNEX C
CONSENT FORM
INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research project. This document describes the project's procedures. Feel free to ask questions about any words or paragraphs you do not understand. To take part in the project, you must sign the consent section at the end of this document; a signed and dated copy will be returned to you.

**Project Title**

The role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition

**Principal Investigator**

The principal investigator of this research project is Meriem Elhasna Abida. She is doing this thesis as part of her master’s degree in intervention and change management at the Faculty of Administration of the Université de Sherbrooke. Her research director is Julie Béliveau, professor at the Faculty of Administration of the Université de Sherbrooke. For more information, you can contact Meriem Elhasna Abida by e-mail at meriem.elhasna.abida@usherbrooke.ca. You can also contact Julie Béliveau by e-mail at Julie.Beliveau2@USherbrooke.ca or by phone at 1 800 267 8337, extension 62323.

**Purpose of the Research Project**

The objectives of this project are:
i. To describe and understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
ii. To highlight the best practices of senior management in order to improve the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
iii. Identify the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

For the purpose of this study, knowledge transfer refers to an event through which one organization learns from the experiences of another. Knowledge transfer involves the transfer of both tangible and intangible information, expertise, learning and skills between the companies. It involves gaining new perspectives on new directions and approaches in business conduct.

**Study Procedures**

Your participation to this research project will involve taking a 45 minutes to one-hour interview. This interview will be held at your workplace during business hours, at a time and place convenient to you and will take place between October 15 and December 15 2016. The purpose of the interview is to gather information on your perceptions of the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition. The interview will be audiotaped.

**Advantages and Disadvantages from Participation**

Your participation in this research will contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge and should not involve any significant inconveniences, other than taking up some of your time. You may ask to take a break or to continue the interview at a more convenient time.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study**

It is understood that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary and that you remain free, at any moment, to end your participation without having to
justify your decision and without penalty, If you withdraw from the study, do you ask that the audio or written documents pertaining to you be destroyed?

YES ☐   NO ☐

In this eventuality, the researcher will validate your preferences regarding data destruction.

**Financial Compensation**

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater understanding of the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

**Confidentiality, Sharing, and Publications**

All collected data (audio tapes, notes) will be numerically coded by the researcher in order to preserve the anonymity of participants. The key that links your identity to that code number will be kept securely by the study investigator.

The collected data will also be kept by the researcher for a period not exceeding five (5) years. After this period, data will be destroyed. No information identifying the persons who participated in this study will appear on any documents of the project. Only the researcher (student) and her research director will have access to the data.

The study investigator will use these data for research purposes in order to meet the scientific objectives of the study as described in this information and consent form.

These data could be published in scientific journals or shared during scientific discussions or meetings. No data thus published or shared will include any information that could lead to your identification.
For monitoring and control purposes, your research file may be examined by a person appointed by the Research Ethics Board – Lettres et sciences humaines, or by government agencies mandated by law. All these individuals and organizations adhere to a privacy policy.

**Results Reporting and Publication**

You will be informed about the research results and the associated publications as soon as possible by email. We will preserve the anonymity of the organizations and the study participants.

**Control of the Ethical Aspects of the Research Project**

The Research Ethics Board – Lettres et sciences humaines of the Université de Sherbrooke has approved this research project and is responsible for its follow-up. Furthermore, any modification to the study protocol or to this research information and consent form will be submitted to the REB’s approval.

You may discuss any ethical issues related to the conditions of your participation in this project with the person in charge of the project, or address your concerns to Mr. Olivier Laverdière, Chair of the Research Ethics Board – Lettres et sciences humaines of the Université de Sherbrooke, by contacting the committee coordinator by phone at 1-800-267-8337 extension 62644, or by email at cer_lsh@USherbrooke.ca.

**Voluntary and Informed Consent**

I, ___________________________ (please print), have read and/or understand this consent form, of which I have received a copy. I understand the reason and the nature of my participation in this project. I received explanations about the study, and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I freely agree to participate in this research study.
Signature of the participant: _____________________________

Signed in _________________________, on ________________ 20__

**Researcher Declaration of Responsibility**

I, Meriem Elhasna Abida, principal investigator, declare that I am responsible for carrying out this project. I undertake to respect the obligations stated in this document and to inform you of any element likely to modify the nature of your consent.

I also declare that I have explained the terms of this form to the study participant. I have answered the participant's questions on the subject, and have clearly indicated that he or she is free to withdraw at any time from participation in the above described project. I undertake to ensure the respect of the study objectives and confidentiality obligations.

Signature: _____________________________

Signed in _________________________, on ________________ 20__
ANNEX D
RESEARCH PROTOCOL
Research protocol

The role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition

Sous la direction de Julie Béliveau, professeure au département de management et gestion des ressources humaines à l’École de gestion de l’Université de Sherbrooke

August 2016
CONTEXT

This thesis is a part of the Master’s Degree in Intervention and Change Management, a program offered by the Faculty of Administration at Université de Sherbrooke. The process requires that the student establish a research field within the provided university guidelines. I chose to conduct a study in knowledge transfer in the context of an acquisition in the education sector, in which the studied organization is a school board (referred herein as the School Board), in one of the provinces of Canada. In 2015, the School Board acquired a private biblical school (referred herein as the Biblical School) in a major city of that province. Their first year of operation after the acquisition was 2015/2016. Various changes have been initiated in the private school following the process. The organizations involved in the acquisition agreed to participate in my research, but requested full level of anonymity, which also aligns with ethical considerations when conducting a study.

The focus of the study will be on the role of senior management in facilitating knowledge transfer during the acquisition process. Despite the fact that numerous published studies are available on knowledge transfer in mergers and acquisitions, the role of senior management within the education sector has little empirical research. Therefore, I chose the topic to which I believe there is an opportunity to contribute to the existing literature on knowledge transfer. Professor Julie Béliveau from Université de Sherbrooke will oversee the various phases of this research; from the design of the research protocol to conducting the study, and in the completion of the thesis.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

For organizations to survive the fierce rivalry in the current global environment, management has the task of continuously assessing various strategic options available,
including mergers and acquisitions, and opting for one that will provide the organization with the optimal framework in order to sustain a competitive edge in the market.

More precisely, during mergers and acquisitions, management has the imperative role of deciding how to integrate the firms involved and define processes of facilitating successful knowledge transfer (Hitt, Harrison, & Ireland, 2001; Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991). Their work extends to implementing integration strategies such as appointing a new management team and committing resources required by the employees to facilitate the change process (Ashkenas & Francis, 2000; Buono, 2003; Tetenbaum, 1999). The management would also intervene if any challenges arose during the knowledge transfer process by ensuring that the integrated companies experience a positive transition.

While mergers and acquisitions may be an effective strategic alternative for a company’s success, it may also present tangible challenges in terms of cultural management, redundancies, structuring, and assessment of effective knowledge transfer across the companies involved (Kansal & Chandani, 2014). The process of mergers and acquisitions provides organizations with the opportunity to gain and sustain competitiveness via access to valuable knowledge (Huang, Ling, Yang, & Zhao, 2012). The acquired knowledge may be through a combination of lessons from the organizations involved or transfer of the stronger knowledge. Here, knowledge transfer refers to the process of effectively integrating organizational knowledge to develop core competencies as well as create connectivity within the organizations and create value for the customers following a merger or an acquisition (Kansal & Chandani, 2014).

An observation regarding empirical research on knowledge transfer in the context of mergers and acquisitions is that many studies have been done in different sectors, such as trade and banking, but little research has been done within education-based organizations (Almor, Tarba, & Margalit, 2014; Huang et al., 2012; Minbaeva, Pedersen, Bjorkman, Fey, & Park, 2014). Furthermore, the gap extends to the lack of research on the identification of the role of management in mergers and acquisitions within the education sector.
Against this background, this study will be aimed at analyzing the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition within the education sector. The organizations analyzed have somewhat a similar scope of business, which may translate to an easier transition process for the workers as they have similar experiences in the operations of the participating organizations (Argote & Ingram, 2000). The expectation is that the common professional ground will create a greater foundational framework for success as this will act as a unifying factor in streamlining the company’s processes and activities.

The senior management becomes crucial to facilitating the knowledge transfer process. Conspicuously, it is imperative that information regarding the process is open not only to both senior management teams of the two organizations, but also to the involved staff. Process of knowledge transfer is fundamental, with the senior management team holding a significant position in the transfer process (Huang et al., 2012). Undoubtedly, most information regarding mergers and acquisitions lies with senior management who understands that the driving factors behind the process are important and defines ways to facilitate the transfer. Therefore, outsourcing or delegating this role to an external party without the active participation of the senior management will result to failures and more challenges (Huang et al., 2012).

Hence, studying the acquisition of the Biblical School by the School Board offers an opportunity to examine the role of the senior management in the knowledge transfer process within the education sector. The two organizations signed a master plan on their partnership in July 2015, facilitated by the School Board and a faith-based organization in Alberta. The representatives signed a contract for alternative programs that are faith-based which brought two additional campuses to the School Board, with a cumulative student body of about 1,300 students for the Biblical School and around 100 employees. The Biblical School caters to students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the anticipated enrollment for the entire School Board was about 8,100 students, in 15 community schools, 8 Christian faith-based, programs dedicated to the Low-German speaking Mennonite learners, outreach programs for high school level, online learning, and 17 Hutterite colony schools.
Through the acquisition, the Biblical School will have access to financial relief that it lacked as a private institution, which will benefit both its students and educators. For example, the students will have access to the School Board’s expertise in early learning, technology integration, literacy, and other supports. In addition, the students will have access to additional funding per student, and receive financial relief dedicated to promoting inclusive education for special needs students. In parallel, teachers will have access to continuous professional development, participate in collaboration programs, including receiving instructional support and will have a significantly higher benefits and compensation package. As an illustration, the deal enabled school funding to increase from the current 70% to almost 100%. It led to a reduction of fees with an additional 20% sibling discount and 30% early bird discount.

Furthermore, the deal between the Biblical School and School Board led to the opportunity of enforcing third party oversight, merit-based hiring, improved performance reviews and enhancement of long-term retention plans. All of which helps both organizations to develop better internal control systems, enhanced processes and improve quality of education in the school. In addition, the School Board has a surplus fund for school services and facilities upgrades. Accordingly, and aligned with its vision, the School Board aims at an aggressive growth strategy by building or acquiring new campuses across the city quadrants to accommodate the growing number of students.

Other advantages the School Board may benefit from the acquisition include adopting the benchmark assessment used by the Biblical School. Notably, both organizations are focusing on value creation via a transfer of information geared towards ensuring that each entity obtains knowledge that will promote better professional and student development; thus, promoting better outcomes at the School Board and the Biblical School.

Evidently, the post-acquisition integration also brings a number of challenges on many levels, whether it is on a managerial, operational, administrative or financial accountability level. The context of this acquisition gives research opportunities in examining the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process in the context of an acquisition.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Mergers and Acquisitions

A merger is a grouping of two organizations to work together as one organization through equal presentation in the newly formed organization, while an acquisition is the procurement of one organization by another, leading to the continuation of the acquiring organization while the processes of the other become fully integrated into the acquiring one (Zhang & Stening, 2013). In an acquisition, one party has the controlling power. Mergers can occur in two different ways, horizontal or vertical. Horizontal mergers involve companies with similar work portfolios, while vertical mergers are for companies in diverse areas (Kansal & Chandani, 2014). The key to success of both horizontal and vertical mergers is that they have to create new opportunities for the organizations. Usually, when mergers and acquisitions occur between a large and small organization, the larger one tends to integrate the smaller one, although the organizations have the choice of coming up with a newly designed integration model. Arguably, mergers and acquisitions may be easier for horizontal mergers because the involve organizations either engage in similar activities, or are in the same industry (Zhang & Stening, 2013).

Knowledge Transfer in mergers and acquisitions

Knowledge transfer in mergers and acquisitions refers to the ability of an organization to assimilate, adapt, and improve on the existing processes and products of another organization through modification of the existing processes or further innovation (Greenberg & Guinan, 2004). The approach involves a transfer of actionable information that is relevant to the circumstances of the company, and based on the experience of the sharing company (Leonard, Swap, & Barton, 2015). Greenberg and Guinan (2004) note that value creation becomes the most fundamental reason for all acquisitions, in which the integrated organization leverages on information, resources, and expertise shared between the two organizations. The sharing leads to identification and implementation of
new products and/or services or improvement of the existing ones thus increasing company competitive advantage.

In majority of literature, mergers and acquisitions are used as one term despite the two being distinct phrases, and thus, this analysis uses the term in the same way. The reason for adopting this style is that despite their differences, mergers and acquisitions signify the unification of two organizations under the same roof with an increase in their goals, resources, and scope (Zhang & Stening, 2013). Hence, the organizations may pursue extended capabilities and expand their knowledge, but the fundamental concept is unification.

In the context of mergers and acquisitions, proximity refers to the similarities in different aspects, such as, knowledge base, location, culture, and practice between two organizations that are involved in the process (Ensign et al., 2014). Proximity in knowledge transfer process plays a critical role as it reflects possibility of efficiency, and ensuring that the companies obtain a profit from the transaction (Grote & Umber, 2008). For example, companies seeking an acquisition within the same industry are more likely to realize a profit from synergies compared to cross-industry, and especially so if the companies have a close proximity in terms of geographical location (Argote & Ingram, 2000).

**The role of senior management in the knowledge transfer during an acquisition**

The senior management plays a major role in mergers and acquisitions transactions by facilitating the process from the planning stage to its completion including knowledge transfer. The role revolves a lot around creating conditions that encourage all members of the participating organizations to take part in the knowledge transfer process (Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005). The senior management role includes decision making on platforms needed to make the transfer successful (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991; Hitt et al., 1991). The management then communicates their decision to the employees ensuring a seamless process from the top to bottom, and thus avoiding uncertainties that may arise when employees are unsure of the process (Haspeslagh et al., 2007; Bröchner, Rosander, & Waara, 2004; Harrison & Farrell, 2008; Seo & Hill, 2005).
The management further holds the role of identification of human capital needed in the knowledge transfer, and ensuring their retention (Ranft & Lord. 2000). Human resource management is as well a critical part as knowledge comes both from the people in the organizations, its culture, and the internal processes (Castro & Neira, 2005; Gruber & Paneva, 2014; Marks & Mirvis, 2011). As noted by Ensign et al. (2013), Berends et al. (2011) and Puranam and Srikanth (2007) senior management influence innovation and knowledge transfer by playing an active role in which the managers intervene as required. The senior management hold the vision for the acquisition, and have an understanding of the knowledge needed to facilitate success in the process, and thus their involvement in knowledge transfer.

**Thesis Question**

The proposed thesis question for this research is: What is the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition?

**Thesis Objectives**

The research will be aimed at responding to the following objectives:

i. Describe and understand the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

ii. Highlight the best practices of senior management in order to improve the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

iii. Identify the factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this research, considering there were only a few empirical studies on the subject, an in-depth exploratory case study will be used to better understand a complex and understudied issue: the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process
during an acquisition. Thus, the case study in this research will extend experience and add strength to the information that is already known through the previous related research. Through a case study, it will be possible to emphasize detailed contextual analysis of the limited number of conditions and events and their relationships (Petitt and Ferris 2013). As noted by Yin (2012), a case study provides real life information about the issue of study, which is useful in responding to the complexity of the reality of the process involved and the different perspectives. The process involves examining the conditions present in the organization, which will be later used as a tool to highlight lessons on company practices. The data collection approach used to fulfill the proposed research will be a case study of the School Board and the Biblical School in the education sector. The organizations were recently engaged in an acquisition. Using a case study offers an opportunity to explore the specific factors affecting the process of knowledge transfer and the role of senior management in this process. This will provide lessons on practices of knowledge transfer, illustrating ways in which the process was successful, the challenges encountered, and lessons learnt that other mergers and acquisitions could use to execute a better transition.

The method of sampling will be purposive, which is appropriate for this study as it allows the researcher to choose the sample based on the group that best represents the characteristics of the target population (Babbie, 2012). The researcher will request the involvement of the organizations to identify 50 potential participants, based upon the following criteria: the potential participant has been working for the organizations for at least two years. The participants will represent different categories of employment. From the pool of potential participants, the researcher will randomly select between 25 and 30 participants and will send them an email to invite them to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. The sample will conveniently represent the variety of responsibilities and positions held by the staff from each institution. More precisely, the sample will be composed of senior management, middle managers, teachers, and support staff. The sample will include 10 to 15 people from the middle and senior management, 5 to 7 teachers, and 5 to 7 support employees.
The main source of data will be semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews will involve a face-to-face meeting with the participants between the 15th of October and the 15th of December 2016; if need be, the interviews can be done through teleconference. As the interviews will involve members from both organizations, it will be possible to compare and contrast their perceptions on the role played by senior management to enable knowledge transfer during the acquisition.

An interview guide will be used during the interviews. This guide is available at the appendix at the end of this research protocol. The interviews will be semi-structured to provide room for probing (Patton, 2014). The interview guide will contain questions pertaining to the research objectives and will be divided into three major parts based on the research objectives:

1. The role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
2. Best practices of senior management to improve the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.
3. Factors that influence the role of senior management in the knowledge transfer process during an acquisition.

The interviews will last between 45 minutes to one hour and will be digitally recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewees. Considering the exploratory nature of this case study, the data collected will be analyzed using grounded theory techniques, including axial and selective coding.
REFERENCES


