

4-1-2010

Measuring Success: An Exploratory Study of United States Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies and the Five Year Plan

Armin J. Jezari

Texas State University-San Marcos, Dept. of Political Science, Public Administration Program, armin.jezari@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

Jezari, Armin J., "Measuring Success: An Exploratory Study of United States Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies and the Five Year Plan" (2010). *Applied Research Projects, Texas State University-San Marcos*. Paper 335.
<http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/335>

This Research Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Public Administration Program at eCommons@Texas State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Applied Research Projects, Texas State University-San Marcos by an authorized administrator of eCommons@Texas State University. For more information, please contact ecommons@txstate.edu.

Measuring Success: An Exploratory Study of United States Bahá'í
Local Spiritual Assemblies and the Five Year Plan

By:

Armin J Jezari

An Applied Research Project

(Political Science 5397)

Submitted to the Department of Political Science

Texas State University – San Marcos

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

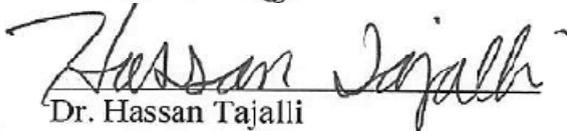
Masters of Public Administration

(Spring 2010)

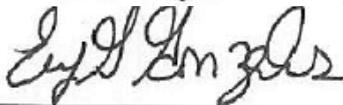
Faculty Approval:



Dr. Thomas Longoria



Dr. Hassan Tajalli



Ms. Evelina Gonzales

Abstract

This Applied Research Project is an exploration of the functioning of a typical United States Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA)—which is an administrative part of the Bahá'í Faith, an international nonprofit religious organization—based on the Five Year Plan and scholarly literature on public administration. The object of the study is to measure to what degree a typical Local Spiritual Assembly is adopting characteristics of effective public administration based on directives found in the Five Year Plan. Three working hypotheses relating to communication, engagement, and learning are formed about the typical LSA. A survey was sent out to over 800 Local Spiritual Assemblies to measure LSA success in each of the three categories. A total of 167 Assemblies replied to the survey for a response rate of twenty percent. At this stage of development, the typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly ranked between weak/moderate and moderate in each category.

Notes

"A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental lifegiving, life sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Bahá'í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism. May you with renewed determination and a rededication to spiritual values, seize your chance, while there is yet time, to convey the Message of Bahá'u'lláh thoughtfully, patiently and attractively to your fellow-citizens, whether they be dwellers in the cities or rural areas, whether they be high or low, lettered or unlettered, rich or poor." — Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the United States

About the author: Armin J Jezari is a member of the Bahá'í Faith. He has served as corresponding and recording secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Garland, Texas and as assistant to an Auxiliary Board member. Armin was awarded a B.A in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Texas at Dallas and received a Masters degree in Public Administration from Texas State University. He served as a Broadcast Journalist for the U.S. Army and worked three legislative sessions as a Policy Analyst and Committee Clerk for the Texas House of Representatives. He can be reached at armin.jezari@gmail.com.

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
	Research Purpose.....	1
	Performance Measures and Pragmatism.....	2
	Local Spiritual Assemblies (LSAs) and their Directives.....	3
	The Five Year Plan (2006-2011) and Engagement.....	4
	Communicative Cluster Development.....	6
	Posture of Learning.....	7
	Chapter Summary.....	9
II.	The Bahá'í Faith	
	Introduction.....	10
	Bahá'í Administration Order.....	12
	Local Spiritual Assemblies.....	12
	National Spiritual Assemblies.....	13
	Regional Bahá'í Councils.....	13
	RTI, ATC, CIC.....	14
	Universal House of Justice.....	14
	International Teaching Centre.....	16
	Continental Board of Counsellors.....	16
	Auxiliary Board Members and Assistants.....	17
	Conclusion.....	18
	Prominent Aspects of the Administrative Model Needed for Success.....	19
	Unity in Diversity.....	19
	Consultation.....	20
	Democracy.....	21
	Pattern for Future Society.....	21
III.	Literature Review	
	Introduction.....	24
	Public Administration Elements Influencing Organization Outcomes.....	24
	Communication.....	24
	Working Hypothesis 1.....	26
	Community Engagement.....	26
	Working Hypothesis 2.....	29
	Learning.....	29
	Working Hypothesis 3.....	31
	Conclusion.....	31
	Conceptual Framework.....	32

IV.	Methodology.....	34
	Unit of Analysis.....	34
	Method of Data Collection.....	34
	Strengths and Weaknesses.....	35
	Human Subject Protection.....	36
	Operationalization Table and Survey Questions.....	36
V.	Results.....	39
	Descriptive Results.....	39
	Communication Results.....	45
	Community Engagement Results.....	47
	Learning Results.....	50
VI.	Conclusion.....	54

Figures

Figure 1.1.....	Administrative Order Diagram
Figure 1.2.....	Seat of the Universal House of Justice
Figure 2.1.....	LSAs and Community Size
Figure 2.2.....	LSAs and Urban or Rural Areas
Figure 2.3.....	LSAs and Cluster Level
Figure 2.4.....	LSAs and Region
Figure 2.5.....	LSAs and New Enrollments
Figure 2.6.....	LSAs and Feast and Holy Days Attendance
Figure 2.7.....	LSAs and Percentage Trained Community Resources
Figure 2.8.....	LSAs and Ongoing Community Activities
Figure 3.1.....	LSAs and Monthly Consultations
Figure 3.2.....	LSAs and Consultation among Various Intuitions
Figure 4.1.....	LSAs and Community Members Visited
Figure 4.2.....	LSAs and Core Activities / Collective Teaching by Member
Figure 5.1.....	LSAs and Reflection Gathering Attendance by Member
Figure 5.2.....	LSAs and Consultation on Core Activities
Figure 5.3.....	LSAs and Five Year Plan Strategy Adjustments

Tables

Table 1.1.....	Working Hypothesis 1: Communication
Table 1.2.....	Working Hypothesis 2: Community Engagement

Table 1.3.....Working Hypothesis 3: Learning
 Table 1.4.....Conceptual Framework
 Table 2.1.....Operationalization Table
 Table 3.1.....Communication Results
 Table 3.2.....Community Engagement Results
 Table 3.3.....Learning Results
 Table 4.1.....Working Hypotheses Results

Appendix

Appendix 1.1.....IRB Exemption
 Appendix 1.2.....Survey Questions and Results

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research Purpose

The Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion with adherents in virtually every nation. Membership and core activity growth are on the rise in the U.S. Bahá'í Community. According to the 2009 Annual Report¹ the community realized an increase of over 400 new enrollments in 2008-2009 and a surge in the number of core activities. Local Spiritual Assemblies (LSAs) are partly responsible for this growth and activity. An exploration of the administrative skills of the typical Local Spiritual Assembly will provide useful data for Bahá'í institutions about the functioning of the local unit of their administration.

The purpose of this research is to explore to what degree a typical Local Spiritual Assembly in the United States is adopting elements of effective public administration based on the Five Year Plan. A successful Bahá'í organization, for the purpose of this paper, is defined as one that is adopting the objectives of the Five Year Plan. Authored by the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Five Year Plan addresses the Bahá'í World—seeking to prepare it for large scale growth. The Five Year Plan and supplemental Bahá'í texts constitute directives for Local Spiritual Assemblies. This study will explore working hypotheses formed about the typical Local Spiritual Assembly through a review of public administration literature. The working hypothesis states that the typical Local Spiritual Assembly is utilizing elements integral to a well functioning organization, specifically: communication,

¹ Annual Report authored by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

community engagement, and learning. These public administration elements were selected based on a review of Five Year Plan directives.

Through survey testing, this research will explore characteristics of over 800 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the United States. Finally, this research makes recommendations on aligning the actions and efforts of all Local Spiritual Assemblies to the elements of good public administration. Understanding what specific steps and endeavors LSAs throughout the United States are making to achieve the vision set forth in Bahá'í literature and discovering the strengths and weakness that exist among LSAs will be valuable in strengthening all LSAs across the United States.

Performance Measures and Pragmatism

Measuring performance is one of the most common practices found in corporate America, state and federal agencies, and non-profit organizations. Performance measures “increase accountability, build public trust, aid in planning and budgeting, and often lead to increased efficiency” (Grau 2008, 17). Corporate America has the luxury of looking primarily at profits in determining the success of a program. The nature of non-profit organizations however, as well as state and federal agencies, requires them to delve into human inputs—the process by which members of an organization function. Measuring inputs and outputs is an active process defining performance measures (Grau 2008, 18). Furthermore, such measures “tell a story” of how an organization is meeting its challenges (Estes 2007). Due to its utility, the use of performance measures is widespread, and according to Wilson, “it is now impossible to hide from performance measurement in government and the public sector” (2001, 9).

It is in a spirit of pragmatism, defined as a philosophy of common sense that views inquiry as a continuous process (Shields 1998, 2001) that this study is carried out. We can discover strengths and weaknesses in how well Local Spiritual Assemblies perform by studying elements scholars have identified as positive to promoting organizational success. It is the pragmatic administrator, according to Brom, who is mindful of exigencies surrounding him and meaningful in his pursuit of intelligible data to help him make well informed decisions—who uses his common sense but defers to scientific inquiry when available (Brom 2000). This attitude of pragmatism is also a core aspect of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í Faith is “*all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles*”, and its followers believe that “*religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive....*” (Effendi 1996, 6). A presentation of directives and assessment measures for LSAs in the next section is a pragmatic approach in narrowing the scope of elements outlined in public administration literature used as performance measures for this study.

Local Spiritual Assemblies and their Directives

LSAs are responsible for many facets of Bahá'í community life. The structure and nature of Local Spiritual Assemblies is complex and a brief introduction of their administrative responsibilities in relation to the Bahá'í Administrative Order will be presented in Chapter Two. The totality of such responsibilities is numerous and undertaking a full review of all LSA functions is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a general review of the most prominent duties of LSAs in respect to the Five Year Plan will guide the literature review presented in Chapter Three. This literature

review will ultimately be used to form working hypotheses about how closely LSAs are aligning their performance with the elements of a well-functioning organization.

The Universal House of Justice states: “Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes.”² Spiritual Assemblies are also responsible for “familiariz[ing] the Bahá’ís with [their] plans,” “direct[ing] the teaching work,” and “invit[ing] the community to offer its recommendations.”³ As LSAs grow into their roles as ministers of their communities, they will slowly begin to add more tasks to a long list of demands that require attention. The more of these imperatives LSAs accomplish, the more they will learn and the better they will perform.

The next section will explore the Five Year Plan as the source of directives for LSAs.

The Five Year Plan (2006-2011) and Engagement

Plans authored by the Universal House of Justice guide and direct the development and maturation of the Bahá’í World. The current Five Year Plan (the Plan), as well as supplemental literature, charge the Bahá’í World with a mission to embrace a large numbers of people into the Bahá’í Fold with new activities, renewed efforts, and outward looking models of growth. As outlined by the House of Justice the Plan consists of three “participants”—the institution, the individual, and the community. A review of literature as applied to the institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly will be the purview of this section.

² Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván 1996, to the Bahá’ís of the World

³ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 30, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Plan defines several aspects of the role of Local Spiritual Assemblies. First, systematic action through engagement is one of the key attributes required for success.⁴ Systemization of activity entails regularity and consistency in all endeavors. When all activities are coordinated and well planned within a cycle of activity, the chance for success increases. Second, strong leadership defined as a “constant effort to maintain the vision of growth” plays an important role.⁵ Strong leadership through engagement prevents distraction from diverting attention away from the aim of the Five Year Plan and ensures resources are properly and adequately appropriated. The Plan also emphasizes home visits as a form of direct engagement to better learn what the community needs and how to support individual initiative in accomplishing the goals of the Faith.⁶ The importance of LSA engagement is made clear.

The salient features of the Plan as they relate to Local Spiritual Assemblies are numerous, but the emphasis is on systematic action through engagement. LSAs must be consistent and regular, especially in focusing energy on teaching, nurturing individual initiative, and creating a loving and united community through frequent ‘guidance, encouragement and support.’ Additionally, supporting plans of a cluster (clusters are a geographical construct of a grouping of several LSAs) and tailoring local plans to reinforce cluster initiatives will further systematize efforts—and the success of such effort can be measured by the growth of the community.⁷ It is “imperative” that LSA members set examples of systematic action by working closely and regularly with cluster

⁴ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 9, 2001, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

⁵ Impact of Growth on Administration Processes, Prepared by the International Teaching Centre, July 2005

⁶ International Teaching Center, Reflections on Growth, no. 2, May 2004

⁷ Impact of Growth on Administration Processes, Prepared by the International Teaching Centre, July 2005

agencies.⁸ Working at the grassroots with the community, “shoulder to shoulder,” carrying out home visits or teaching is essential for LSA members—as is accompanying⁹ others through the sequence of courses and acts of service.¹⁰ Such servant leadership will both directly and indirectly place priority on training community members, supporting cluster plans, and avoiding distractions from the Five Year Plan. LSA maturity is therefore based on engagement through systematic action. A review of public administration literature in the field of community engagement will determine how the directives in this section are necessary for a successful organization.

The key elements reviewed in the next section include directives for Local Spiritual Assemblies to communicate regularly with other Bahá’í institutions.

Communicative Cluster Development

The LSAs’ role in cluster development requires effective communication. All the institutions must learn to communicate as a team to advance the Five Year Plan. If jurisdictional debates arise, periodic meetings can provide a forum to win the approval of all participants.¹¹ A consultative process centered around mutual understanding and communication will, in most instances, produce unity of vision. Thus a foundation of understanding is laid and the natural outgrowth is collaboration—an intersection of joint effort among organizational entities to achieve common goals.

The Universal House of Justice states that “close collaboration” within a framework of organization and coordination will promote the process of growth.¹² The

⁸ Impact of Growth on Administration Processes, Prepared by the International Teaching Centre, July 2005

⁹ Letter from the International Teaching Centre dated September 30, 2007

¹⁰ Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, February 2, 2006

¹¹ International Teaching Center, Building Momentum: A Coherent Approach to Growth, April 2003

¹² Message from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 9, 2001, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

phrase “close collaboration” connotes an effort to include all stakeholders in the communication process. Through regular meetings, flash updates, and the sharing and adoption of ideas, communication among LSAs and cluster agencies encourages participation and efficiency. For example, the establishment of a coordinating committee with representatives of the LSA might further ensure this close contact between cluster agencies and other institutions.¹³ Any method that provides for a stronger communicative relationship among various institutions should be considered by stakeholders to boost collaboration.

LSAs can set the tone for true cluster-wide communication and development. By leading the community in collaboration, LSAs will promote their own development. Strong LSAs are the ones that are “fully involved in all aspects of the process of planning and implementation at the level of the cluster.”¹⁴ LSA conferences can also be used to communicate this new culture of growth to its members. The more communicative the efforts carried out, the greater the likelihood that LSAs will have a positive impact on growth and development. A review of public administration literature in the field of communication will determine how the directives in this section are necessary for a successful organization.

The key elements reviewed in the next section include directives for Local Spiritual Assemblies to establish themselves as a learning organization.

¹³ Letter from the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas, dated December 20, 2001, to a National Spiritual Assembly

¹⁴ Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 12, 2001, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Posture of Learning

Learning is a critical key to success and a theme repeatedly emphasized in Bahá'í literature. A glance at directives and guidance from messages, letters, and documents authored by agencies of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) show the importance of learning, how learning can be achieved, and what outcomes evolving learning methods can produce. The BIC explains that “[a]t whatever level they operate, the central theme of all Bahá'í development efforts is learning.”¹⁵

The Bahá'í community sees learning from an environment of action, reflection, and consultation. Incorporating science and religion in all endeavours is a trademark of the Bahá'í community.¹⁶ Static approaches to learning, as with anything else, are avoided in favor of developing new learning modes.

The range of capacities inherent in Bahá'í institutions and the skills used to promote growth are only “enhanced when an attitude of learning prevails...”¹⁷ Nurturing and encouraging community members to value attitudes of learning can enhance problem solving. Learning “promotes material, moral, and spiritual progress” and every Bahá'í development project should be considered as a “center for learning.”¹⁸ Spiritual Assemblies, the House of Justice warns, should be prepared to “undergo intense periods of learning in the years ahead.”¹⁹ Such commitment to learning among the institutions and the community will produce a mutually reinforcing channel for the greater appreciation of learning. A review of public administration literature in the field of

¹⁵ Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2002

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ International Teaching Center, *Building Momentum: A Coherent Approach to Growth*, April 2003

¹⁸ Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2002

¹⁹ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 27, 2005, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

learning will determine how the directives in this section are necessary for a successful organization.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 provides a research purpose, a survey of Bahá'í literature as it relates to Local Spiritual Assemblies, and chapter summaries. Chapter 2 consists of an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith and its administrative order. Chapter 3 presents a review of public administration literature done in the fields of communication, community engagement, and learning. Chapter 4 covers methodology, operationalization table, and survey questions. Chapter 5 provides detailed results. Chapter 6 is the conclusion.

The next chapter introduces the Bahá'í Administrative Order and provides a comprehensive yet succinct overview of various aspects integral and necessary to its evolution and development.

Chapter 2 The Bahá'í Faith

Introduction

Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, is considered by Bahá'ís as the latest but certainly not the last in a long list of Prophets and Manifestations sent by God to guide humanity's development and growth. He revealed volumes of documents, epistles, prophecies, laws, exhortations, prayers, and letters to world leaders. *“Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight!...”* is part of his great announcement to mankind (Bahá'u'lláh 2005, 332). His appeal and address to humanity and to the potentates of the day was met with over forty years of exile and imprisonment. Bahá'u'lláh's Prophet-Herald, The Báb (1819-1850), faced a similar fate for claiming that the Promised One (Bahá'u'lláh) would be made manifest. The Báb's life and short tumultuous six year ministry was ended with an execution by firing squad in 1850.²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, on the other hand, lasted nearly forty years. Prior to Bahá'u'lláh's ascension he established a covenant for the uninterrupted flow of divine guidance to the Bahá'í World: *“O ye people of the world! When the Mystic Dove will have winged its flight from its Sanctuary of Praise and sought its far-off goal, its hidden habitation, refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock.”* (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, 82). Among the voluminous writings of Bahá'u'lláh and other supplemental Bahá'í texts exists a perfect

²⁰ *Execution of the Báb* on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Execution_of_the_B%C3%A1b

but nascent blueprint for an administrative order destined to become the crowning glory of a world teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

A brief overview of the Bahá'í Faith and its administrative order will place this study in a more meaningful context. The Bahá'í Administrative Order engineered by Bahá'u'lláh offers a unique approach to leadership, organization, and collaboration when stacked against the world's preexisting political, economic, ecclesiastical, or social institutions. Bahá'u'lláh describes the effect of this system by stating "*The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System -- the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed*" (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, 118). Although Bahá'u'lláh ordained the institutions of this new system—its development and maturation continues to evolve. Through the inviolable stronghold of the Bahá'í Covenant, beginning with Bahá'u'lláh's appointed successor 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Center of the Covenant), who further defined and elucidated on the complexities of this new world order, followed by Shoghi Effendi (Guardian), 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appointed successor, who guarded the viability and assisted in the proper development of this 'wondrous system,' the ultimate authority finds its present day resting place in the nine member democratically elected supreme governing body of the Universal House of Justice. The House of Justice's role is manifold, but as relates to this paper, it is to guide the development and evolution of Local Spiritual Assemblies and the way those LSAs contribute to advancing the objectives of plans authored by the House of Justice.

Bahá'í Administrative Order

A brief snapshot of the construction and design of the Bahá'í Administrative Order will provide the reader with a better understanding of the relationship of Local Spiritual Assemblies to other institutions of the Bahá'í Faith and how those institutions are designed to work harmoniously together. Discovering the frequency of such harmonious cooperation and regular interaction among various institutions and the LSAs will be an objective of this paper. The Order has two parts: the institution of the Learned and the institution of the Rulers. (Figure 1.1)

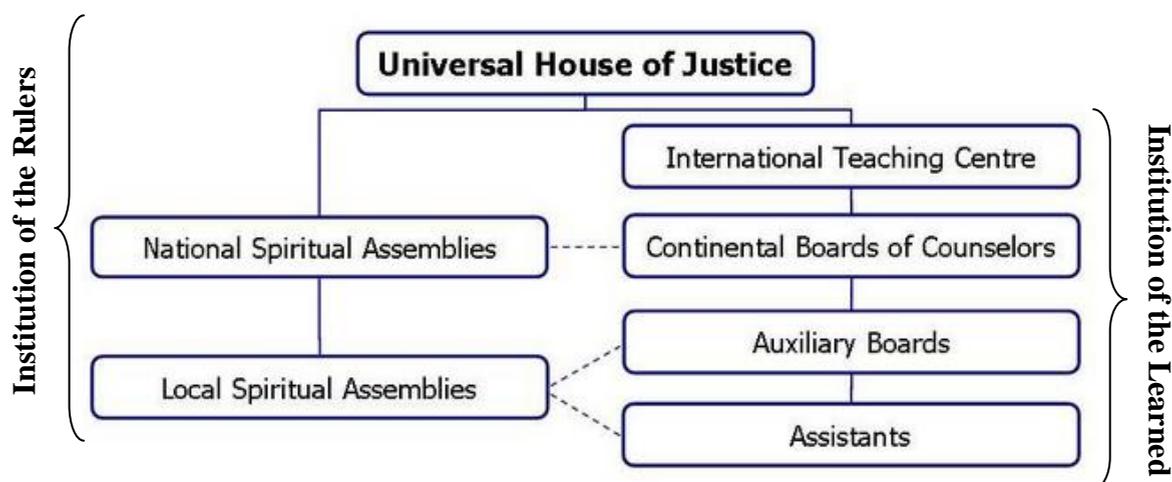


Figure 1.1

Local Spiritual Assemblies

Local Spiritual Assemblies fall under the institution of the Rulers. Just as in other hierarchical organization, the Bahá'í Faith has several levels of council leadership—all democratically elected. Local Spiritual Assemblies form the local rung of the hierarchy and are a nine member council elected by the body of local believers annually in a non-partisan, non-political, nomination-free, and campaign-free secret ballot election. These LSAs “are at the present newly-born institutions,” and “as yet only embryos of the

*majestic institutions ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His writings. . .*²¹ Although these LSAs currently carry the name Local Spiritual Assemblies, they are destined in the fullness of time to grow into their true destiny, a Local House of Justice “*appointed of God for all that dwell on earth*” (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, 29).

National Spiritual Assemblies

The middle rung of the institution of the Rulers is formed by National Spiritual Assemblies. LSAs have jurisdiction to exclusively administer the affairs within their locality, but matters that affect the national body of believers rests with the NSAs.²² The National Spiritual Assemblies are also annually elected by the body of believers, but indirectly through an electoral college system. Bahá'í communities are divided along electoral lines and the body of believers within each electoral unit elects one delegate who in turn is sent to the Annual National Convention to vote for nine members of the NSA. Any Bahá'í in good standing that is 21 years of age and a resident of that nation is eligible for election. Once the National Spiritual Assembly is elected, all Local Spiritual Assemblies are under obligation to obey and support them.²³

Regional Bahá'í Councils

Acting as an intermediary council, Regional Bahá'í Councils channel and implement guidance between National Spiritual Assemblies, Local Spiritual Assemblies, other institutions, and communities—coordinating the growth and development of Bahá'í communities regionally. As noted by the Universal House of Justice, “*The main task of a*

²¹ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 30, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

²² Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, 1996, Article VII, Section 8

²³ Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, July 29, 1942

Regional Bahá'í Council is to devise and execute expansion and consolidation plans in close collaboration with the Local Spiritual Assemblies..."²⁴ Regional Councils are limited in function and do not deal with personal issues involving members of the community as do LSAs, but rather coordinate the implementation of teaching and propagation activities of the Bahá'í Faith. Regional Councils are nine member councils that are elected annually by members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies within a specified region, currently a several state geographic region.

Regional Training Institutes, Area Teaching Committees, Cluster Institute Coordinators

Regional councils in turn appoint Regional Training Institutes (RTIs), Area Teaching Committees (ATCs), and Cluster Institute Coordinators (CICs) designed to reach out and matriculate people through Institutes for the Study of the Sacred Text, as well as assist in the offering of community service activities, known as core activities. Examples of such activities include junior youth empowerment programs, children's classes, and devotional gatherings offered to members of a neighborhood. *"The Councils direct and coordinate the work of cluster agencies, as well as ensure the collaborative involvement of Local Spiritual Assemblies in cluster and core activities"*²⁵ Determining the effectiveness of LSA coordination with such appointees and activities under the Five Year Plan is part of the objective of this paper.

The Universal House of Justice

The highest and supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, seated on Mount Carmel in Israel, and also part of the institution of the Rulers is the Universal House of

²⁴ Universal House of Justice, *The Establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils in Certain Countries, Their Characteristics and Functions*, May 30, 1997

²⁵ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 5, 2006, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Justice (Figure 1.2). Referred to in the Bahá'í Community as the House of Justice, it is composed of nine members that are elected every five years at an International Convention attended by members of all National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world. Currently serving NSA members act as delegates in the election of the House of Justice and they are the only ones eligible to cast ballots. It is the House of Justice that sets the tone and direction of the worldwide Bahá'í Community in annual messages, multi-year plans, and general letters and guidance. In the most simplistic terms, the House of Justice may be likened to possess similar consolidated powers of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the U.S. political system. *"The Universal House of Justice, which the Guardian said would be regarded by posterity as 'the last refuge of a tottering civilization' is now, in the absence of the Guardian, the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn...and is the 'apex' of the Bahá'í Administrative Order..."*²⁶ The House of Justice therefore guides the Bahá'í World and its guidance forms the basis of a practical ideal model that all institutions of the Faith, and in particular, Local Spiritual Assemblies seek to implement.



Figure 1.2

²⁶ Universal House of Justice, 27 May 1966 to an individual

International Teaching Centre

Turning to the institution of the Learned, which can be best described as appointed positions that coordinate the extension of social and economic development activities of the Bahá'í Faith as well as its propagation and protection, we first began with the highest and most austere body, the International Teaching Centre (ITC). The Seat of the ITC is one of five Bahá'í Arc buildings located on Mount Carmel²⁷ in Israel and is flanked by the seat of the Universal House of Justice, the Bahá'í International Archives Building, the Centre for the Study of the Sacred Text, and the soon to be built Bahá'í International Library. The Universal House of Justice directly appoints the members of the ITC to five year renewable terms. The duties assigned to this nine member body include, but are not limited to, coordinating the activities of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, being fully informed of the endeavors of the Bahá'í Faith, and making recommendations to the House of Justice. ”²⁸

The ITC's function in the collection of data provides a critical role in making informed recommendations for the advancement of the Cause based on coherence and congruency. Acting as a liaison between various institutions of the Faith, the ITC ensures that international, national, and local efforts are sustainable and harmonious based on the blending of divine guidance from the House of Justice and scientific data collected at the grassroots level.

Continental Board of Counsellors

Also appointed to five year renewable terms by the Universal House of Justice are Continental Board of Counsellors. Currently, there are 81 Counsellors assigned across

²⁷ *The Projects on Mount Carmel* from Bahá'í Topics <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-6-5-3.html>

²⁸ From letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World June 8, 1973

the globe based on the Bahá'í population and the needs of society. The Counsellors primarily provide assistance to National Spiritual Assemblies in an exclusively advisory capacity, as well as keeping the House of Justice apprised of developments in their respective territories. However, not only do Counsellors work with NSAs but they also educate, inspire, stimulate, and counsel LSAs, individuals, and groups. According to the House of Justice, the Counsellors serve to “*broaden the base, foster the strength and ensure the security of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the institutions and communities under their jurisdiction.*”²⁹ Charged further with functions related to the propagation and protection of the Bahá'í Faith, Counsellors in turn appoint Auxiliary Board members who assist them in their function. This unique and unparalleled role throughout religious history that Counsellors play in carrying out their responsibilities is best described by the House of Justice: “*The Counsellors are members of a continental, as distinct from a national, institution, and they occupy a rank higher than that of the National Spiritual Assembly. Apart from any other consideration, their rank is, in a practical sense, a functional necessity if these officers of the Faith are to be accorded freedom of the community at all levels and their advice and other functions are to be taken seriously...*” however, Counsellors are totally devoid of any priestly authority.³⁰ The role and scope of the Counsellors, just as all the institution of the Faith, will continue to evolve with the passage of time

Auxiliary Board Members and Assistants

We will conclude with the last agency of the institution of the Learned: Auxiliary Board members (ABMs) and their assistant. ABMs are appointed to renewable terms by

²⁹ Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, May 19 1994 by Universal House of Justice

³⁰ Ibid.

Counsellors and in turn appoint their own Assistants. Two categories of appointment exist—one for protection and the other for propagation of the Faith, but overlap is possible. The area within the jurisdiction of an ABM is usually limited to a cluster of communities, depending on size and density. Assistants are assigned to specific grassroots areas within those multiple clusters. Assistants report directly to the ABM who appointed them and ABMs report directly to the Counsellor who made their appointment. In principal, Auxiliary Boards work at the grassroots of the community, *advising, stimulating, and assisting* individuals and local institutions. More recently, the role of ABMs and assistants has expanded to support and collaborate with the newly formed cluster institutions in an effort to coordinate activities, prioritize efforts, increase knowledge, boost morale, inspire creative new ideas, and more. Discovering how often ABMs and assistants meet with Local Spiritual Assemblies will be another objective of this paper.

Conclusion

All the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith work together with a common purpose and united vision to lift humanity out of the yoke of failure. *"There can be no conflict of authority, no duality under any form or circumstances in any sphere of Bahá'í jurisdiction whether local, national or international."*³¹ It is this unity of vision that distinguishes the Bahá'í Administrative Order from other bureaucracies. As knowledge and action increase among Bahá'í institutions, so will the evolution of their maturity.

³¹ Shoghi Effendi: Postscript by the Guardian to a letter written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, June 11, 1934

Prominent Aspects of the Administrative Model Needed for Success

Three prominent characteristics work together in the proper functioning of the Bahá'í Administrative order. Of the utmost importance is that of unity in diversity. Unity provides for the work of the Bahá'í Faith to be carried out in a seamless and forward moving direction. As seen from preexisting political establishments, lack of unity leads to gridlock and a failure to achieve support from all participants and actors—and in some cases lack of unity is the cause of regressive movement. However, all the efforts of Bahá'í institutions and administrators are carried out with an underlying vision of unity. Although consensus is the ideal outcome of the other two main processes—democracy and consultation—once a decision is arrived at, even with a simple majority, it is the obligation of all members of the community to publically abide and collectively support the decision. Unity is thus one of the fundamental tenants of the Bahá'í Faith and one which its adherent strive to embody. `Abdu'l-Bahá (2007, 92) exhorts the Bahá'ís to “*Be in perfect unity.*” Unity, coupled with democracy and consultation, form the basis of an ever advancing administrative order.

Unity in Diversity

Diversity makes up the beauty of the human race, and unifying and capitalizing on diverse elements and attitudes is one vision of the Bahá'í Community. Unity is so important to the Bahá'í administrative order, that even if an LSA arrives at an incorrect decision, the body of believers should publically support that decision for the sake of unity.³² Provisions in the administration provide for an appellate process to higher institutions to address grievances or perceived miscarriages of justice, all the way up to

³² Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 26, 1943, to an individual believer

the Universal House of Justice, but they are carried out with discretion and privacy, never with intent to undermine the institutions. Public unity and support of the institutions is a virtue that can be best described as submission to the Divine Will, and when such unity is achieved and encompasses a diverse body of believers, it challenges our current understanding of sociological relationships. Greater knowledge of plans and guidance will allow Bahá'í institutions to function with perfect unity.

Consultation

Following unity, the consultative nature of the Bahá'í Faith provides an approach that allows all individuals to express themselves and make their thoughts and suggestions known. Bahá'u'lláh (1994, 168) revealed that *“The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.”* Whether during the regularly held 19 day community Feast, at cluster meetings, or within the chamber of Local Spiritual Assemblies, consultation provides for greater pollination of information and understanding. Each individual member of the Bahá'í community is encouraged to take part in the consultative portion of the 19 day Feast and provide comments or suggestions on how to improve current endeavors. With the movement towards cluster level collaboration within the Bahá'í Community, consultation still maintains its elevated position, as mentioned by the House of Justice, in that it *“is to maintain a high level of enthusiasm and to create a spirit of service and fellowship among those present.”*³³ It would be beneficial to discover to what extent the process of consultation meets the

³³ Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 9, 2001, to a National Spiritual Assembly

guidance of the Universal House of Justice within clusters vis-à-vis Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Democracy

Finally, the democratic nature of the Bahá'í Order provides a mechanism for constant evolutionary change and acts as a safeguard to protect the system from authoritarianism and dictatorship. Furthermore, elections provide a means to renew the creativity, the knowledge, and the vision of the members of the community and the institutions. The dynamics of Bahá'í elections are beyond the scope of this paper and although elections are held in a democratic fashion, it by no means indicates that the Bahá'í Order is a pure democracy. Rather, the Bahá'í system can be likened to a representative form of government where the elected are responsible to their conscious and to God rather than being directly accountable to the people. Elections, nonetheless, provide a mode of continual progress, and *“the existence of elections is a sufficient indication that assembly members, though forming part of an institution that is divine and perfect, are nevertheless themselves imperfect. But this does not necessarily imply that their judgment is defective.”*³⁴ Furthermore, diversity of age, regular turnover in membership, and election of minorities (whether ethnic or racial) brings new blood and energy to the institutions and provides an opportunity for the institutions to take a fresh look at plans and activities.³⁵

Pattern for Future Society

Theocracy is a word with a negative connotation due to the horrific and inhumane acts carried out by purported theocratic systems. Whether it be the Crusades carried out

³⁴ Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 15, 1935, to an individual believer

³⁵ Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 21, 1946, to an individual believer

by Christian nations or the holy wars carried out by Islamic states, both leaving a bloodstained history for humanity, the reality is that no preexisting ecclesiastical system can be defined as a true theocracy. The man-made aspects of various religious systems have watered down the purity and divinity their authors left behind. Furthermore, the authors of past religions never left constitutional provisions that defined and outlined leadership and governance after their passing—a will and testament or charter as some might say. This has led to a number of denominations and sects vying for power within the world’s major religions. Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, through the uncontested handing down of successorship, as well as specifically ordained laws and institutions by the prophet himself, is unique in that it ensures the unity of the Bahá’í Faith: *“The Baha’i Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world’s recognized religious systems”* (Effendi 1993, 152).

Divinity does not mandate the forceful establishment of a religious theocracy; quite the contrary, as the Bahá’í Administrative Order advocates the separation of church and state and subordinates itself to the laws and ordinances of the land in which it functions. *“Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country’s constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.”*³⁶ At the same time, such a policy of complete and utter submission by the administrative order to a nation’s laws and prerogatives does not preclude the Bahá’í system as being adopted voluntarily by the

³⁶ Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 21 March 1932 addressed to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada

governments of the nations of earth. In such an event, a pattern for society would emerge based on the structure of Bahá'í institutions. The vision of the foundation of such a pattern is best described by Shoghi Effendi as the Baha'i Commonwealth."³⁷ The crowning glory and Golden Age of planet earth is therefore prophesized as the Bahá'í World Commonwealth—and the basis for achieving a glorious destiny finds itself in the maturation, crystallization, and evolution of the Bahá'í Faith. It is clear that enshrined within the Bahá'í writings is a commitment to building an ever-advancing civilization. At this stage of development, infallibility is limited to the decisions of the Universal House of Justice and therefore Local Spiritual Assemblies may benefit from an analysis of their collective development. This paper is designed to strengthening Local Bahá'í institutions and further assist in the speedy maturation and development of the Bahá'í Administrative Order using working hypotheses developed from scholarly literature.

The next chapter, chapter 3, presents a comprehensive analysis of public administration literature done in the fields of communication, engagement, and learning—to determine how each contributes to a successful and forward moving organization.

³⁷ Shoghi Effendi, letter written to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada dated 27 February 1929

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Introduction

A survey of literature in fields related to organizational success will provide the basis for working hypotheses used to explore characteristics that make LSAs successful in adopting the directives of the Five Year Plan. Identifying which characteristics strengthen organizations will be imperative in presenting a coherent study on Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies and the Five Year Plan. Scholars have studied numerous aspects of organizations, including communication, engagement, and learning. The factors hypothesised to contribute to positive organizational outcomes based on the Five Year Plan are presented within this literature review and strategies to explore those factors are discussed in a conceptual framework found at the end of this chapter.

Public Administration Elements Influencing Organizational Outcomes

Communication

Communication is a key component of organizational development that enables participants to synchronize efforts and avoid redundancy (Strack et al. 1988). The greater the degree and style of communication, the greater the progress towards goal attainment (Saige 1996). Scholars have repeatedly looked at organizational communication in an effort to determine how communication improves success. How often LSAs communicate indicates their progress in adopting objectives of the Five Year Plan

Effective leadership depends on a network of relationships that produce frequent interaction defined as bilateral communication (Scribner et al. 2007). The ability to get work done in an efficient and competent manner is a characteristic of a strong leader, and

that ability is dependent upon communication (Scott 2002). People may carry the formal title of leader or be assigned to a formal leadership role, but true leadership is born out of relationships with people (Crow et al. 2002). In a school context, R.W. Scott (2002) used the term social distribution of leadership to focus on interaction, dialogue, collaboration, and communication between teachers, parents, administrators, students and others as necessities to enhance leadership decision making. Therefore, for Local Spiritual Assemblies to be strong servant leaders they need to have effective modes of communication.

While studying the indirect impact of communication on performance via organizational culture Garnett et al. (2008, 277) found that “improvements in task-oriented communication, feedback, and upward communication are shown to increase the likelihood of excellent performance by more than 23 percent.” Unity of vision and purpose yields positive results. The directives of LSAs are to promote unity of vision through communication with regular meetings.

Furthermore, according to Lammers and Barbour (2006, 366), “it is often through external communication that organizational members come to reflect in their decisions the features of an institutional environment.” An environment that welcomes open communication inside and outside an organization improves decision-making among organizational members. Naturally, being part of a decision-making process or having the opportunity to provide input or gain insight through multi-directional dialogue increases overall knowledge and involvement. This is a prerequisite to engagement in the management of knowledge through communication. Working hypothesis 1 (WH1) is summarized below:

WORKING HYPOTHESIS 1: COMMUNICATION

The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly communicates regularly.

WH1: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly communicates internally and externally regularly.	(Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers 2007) (Crow, Hausman, and Scribner 2002) (Scott 2002) (Lammers and Barbour 2006) (Garnett, Marlow and Pandey 2008)
WH1a: Internal LSA consultations take place regularly.	(Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers 2007) (Crow, Hausman, and Scribner 2002) (Scott 2002) (Lammers and Barbour 2006) (Garnett, Marlow and Pandey 2008)
WH1b: LSA consultations with other institutions take place regularly.	(Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers 2007) (Crow, Hausman, and Scribner 2002) (Scott 2002) (Lammers and Barbour 2006) (Garnett, Marlow and Pandey 2008)
WH1c: LSA consultations with cluster agencies take place regularly.	(Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers 2007) (Crow, Hausman, and Scribner 2002) (Scott 2002) (Lammers and Barbour 2006) (Garnett, Marlow and Pandey 2008)

Table 1.1

Community Engagement

Flanagin et al. (2006, 37) used the phrase ‘mode of engagement’ to describe collective action as “normative rules...to be followed by all participants.” It can only stand to reason that interaction, of course rooted in communication, between Local Spiritual Assemblies and members of the community will have a positive outcome on the division of labor, human resource development, and collective plan execution. The more people dedicated to achieving goals set by LSAs the more likely those goals will be achieved. Personal interaction with the community translates into human contact and knowledge delivery that has an effect. Rather than absolute delegation of tasks and duties by assignment or the transmission of knowledge electronically, active participation by LSAs inspire greater commitment and participation by members of the community. Engagement provides a direct opportunity for the recipient to be motivated and for the transmission and absorption of information and knowledge. According to Cummings (2004, 352), “work groups that engage in information exchange and task-related

communication within the group” have been shown to be beneficial. It is this task related engagement and communication that we hypothesize Local Spiritual Assemblies are carrying out.

Communication, engagement, and knowledge management are interrelated and influence one another indirectly; engagement, however, provides a unique channel of materializing into action aspects of communication and knowledge management. Most empirical studies focus (Cummings 2004, Hippel 1994, Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006) on the benefits of knowledge sharing and communication; however, the delivery method, whether through direct engagement or electronic communication have not been greatly examined. As mentioned, while numerous studies have outlined the benefits of the transfer of knowledge within and outside an organization (Argote et al. 2000), few have analyzed the benefits of engagement as a method of delivery. Cummings (2004, 352) did state that “the sources of knowledge for any given work group can range from customers to organizational experts to members themselves,” leading the reader to conclude that participants of workgroup engagement create sources of knowledge that influence organizational effectiveness. It can also be assumed that engagement is, at a minimum, just as valuable a source of knowledge creation that benefits an organization as any other source of knowledge. This engagement goes to the heart of governance and Bingham et al. (2005, 548) assert that “managers ought to facilitate greater citizen engagement in the work of government” because in part it strengthens democracy. Therefore, a strong and vibrant democracy that engages its citizens in active deliberation on the creation and implementation of shared goals refocuses priorities and helps advance the collective.

A survey of public management literature led Cooper et al. (2006, 80) to the conclusion that civic engagement on the part of public managers will lead to citizen centered collaboration that is “most likely to build citizen efficacy, citizen trust in government, and citizen competence.” Such characteristics of an informed citizenry have the potential to stimulate greater effort on the part of the community in shouldering the responsibility of true citizenship. Using a model based on normative arguments that “participation promotes efficiency and effectiveness,” Pradeep and Cooper (2005, 559) found encouraging preliminary results in the fostering of collaborative engagement between city agencies and neighborhood councils. Such collaborative engagement showed to work reciprocally by energizing citizen participation and leading to greater democratization of administrative processes. This active relationship between service providers and service users who make substantial resource contributions, termed “coproduction” by Bovaird (2007), also helps mobilize more resources in dealing with public issues. Bovaird highlights six case studies where coproduction has an effect on public services. Coproduction is the result of an effective engagement model between service providers and users.

Taking information beyond the borders of institutions, administrators, and appointees and sharing it with the community is one step of direct engagement and is a meaningful form of external knowledge sharing. External knowledge sharing requires engagement with the community. Cummings (2004, 360) found that “both intragroup and external knowledge sharing are important for performance in work groups.” Likewise, a survey carried out by Glaser et al. (2002) concluded that getting citizens to express their points of view improves civic involvement, and governments must balance

towards civic investment and away from self-interest. Such civic investment is found in engaging the community in a bilateral community building process and working with those that are willing and committed to the process. Working hypothesis 2 (WH2) is summarized below

WORKING HYPOTHESIS 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly engages with the community regularly.

WH2: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly engages with the community.	(Cummings 2004) (Hippel 1994) (Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006) (Pradeep and Cooper 2005) (Bovaird 2007) (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005) (Glaser, Denhardt and Hamilton 2002) (Flanagin, Stohl, and Bimber 2006)
WH2a: LSAs are engaged with community members.	(Cummings 2004) (Hippel 1994) (Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006) (Pradeep and Cooper 2005) (Bovaird 2007) (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005) (Glaser, Denhardt and Hamilton 2002) (Flanagin, Stohl, and Bimber 2006)
WH2b: LSAs are engaged in core activities.	(Cummings 2004) (Hippel 1994) (Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006) (Pradeep and Cooper 2005) (Bovaird 2007) (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005) (Glaser, Denhardt and Hamilton 2002) (Flanagin, Stohl, and Bimber 2006)
WH2c: LSAs are engaged in collective teaching projects.	(Cummings 2004) (Hippel 1994) (Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006) (Pradeep and Cooper 2005) (Bovaird 2007) (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005) (Glaser, Denhardt and Hamilton 2002) (Flanagin, Stohl, and Bimber 2006)

Table 1.2

Learning

Learning is key to self improvement and organizations that are setup in a mode that maximizes learning “realize performance advantages in competitive markets” (Thomas et al. 2001, 331). Advantage is gained when we can identify our mistakes, learn from them, make adjustments, and apply new approaches to problems. Such attitude is born from an ability to study patterns, observe outcomes, reflect on goals, and make necessary changes. An East Metro Summit City council case study showed the council

benefited from a governance education program which instituted a learning model for council members (Vogelsang-Coombs 1997). Based on the advantages of learning models, it is hypothesized that LSAs are active participants in a learning process

When an organization can learn from existing knowledge and information, they will be more successful than their counterparts (Botkin and Davis 1994). Setting up an organization to learn, to synthesize information, and to adopt a dynamic changeable posture can provide a clear advantage. Such systematic approaches to learning can be defined as strategic learning. According to Barabba and Zaltman (1991), a sustainable advantage is sourced from methods of strategic learning that properly utilize knowledge. Looking at successful rural development case studies from Asia, Korten (1980, 497) attributes a great deal of success to a learning process approach: “These five programs were not designed and implemented—rather they emerged out of a learning process in which villagers and program personnel shared knowledge and resources to create a program which achieves a fit between needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and those of the outsiders who were providing the assistance.” The emphasis is placed on a series of steps starting with the need of development program recipients communicating their desires to program coordinators—who in turn work closely at every level of development adjusting the program to find a right ‘fit.’ This process of successful grassroots development, Korten explains, includes a firsthand learning of beneficiary needs and a posture of embracing error through stages of learning related to effectiveness, efficiency, and expansion.

One aspect of a learning organization paradigm is “to use information and technology to improve understanding of changes in the environment and institute new

practices and procedures to meet emerging environmental conditions” (Brown and Brudney 2003, 34). Such learning is critical for organizations to be nimble and agile in an evolving environment. Moreover, while Mahler (1997, 519) primarily focuses on the influence of culture on organizational learning, she unequivocally states that a learning organization moves towards meeting its objectives by “altering their rules, strategies, structures, routines, program technologies, or even their goals...” To Bahá’ís, static approaches to learning will only provide a baseline of results—it is dynamic methods such as learning in action that will advance an organization towards its goals. Working hypothesis 3 is summarized below:

WORKING HYPOTHESIS 3: Learning

The typical Bahá’í Local Spiritual Assembly is a learning organization.

WH3: The typical Bahá’í Local Spiritual Assembly is a learning organization	(Thomas, Sussman, and Henderson 2001) (Barabba, and Zaltman 1991) (Botkin and Davis 1994) (Korten 1980) (Vogelsang-Coombs 1997)
WH3a: LSAs attend cluster reflection gatherings.	(Thomas, Sussman, and Henderson 2001) (Barabba, and Zaltman 1991) (Botkin and Davis 1994) (Korten 1980) (Vogelsang-Coombs 1997)
WH3b: LSAs adjust their Five Year Plan strategies regularly.	(Thomas, Sussman, and Henderson 2001) (Barabba, and Zaltman 1991) (Botkin and Davis 1994) (Korten 1980) (Vogelsang-Coombs 1997)

Table 1.3

Conclusion

It is clear from the literature review that a successful organization needs to adopt a series of behavioral and structural elements to help it succeed. In review, those elements can be best summarized as follows: first, how openly entities within the organization communicate; second, the extent to which an organization is engaged in the community; lastly, whether the organization is establishing a learning environment.

Conceptual Framework

The working hypothesis framework in this paper explores Local Spiritual Assembly adoption of the objectives of the Five Year Plan based on public administration literature. Such a framework allows for a great deal of flexibility in defining a question, and collecting and analyzing data according to Shields and Tajalli (2006, 319). An exploratory model of working hypotheses is a pragmatic approach in carrying out research (Shields 1998, 211) on this topic especially since it is in a new context, a Bahá'í context. Pragmatism is summarized by Shields (1998, 205) as “Read-Write-Think-Connect to Experience.” The conceptual framework is a compass for the process of reading, writing, thinking, and connecting to experience. Pairing the purpose and framework give clarity to research techniques (Shield and Tajalli 2006). The table below lists those working hypotheses, supporting literature, and data collection methods:

Table 1.4: Conceptual Framework

Working Hypotheses	Supporting Literature	Survey questions
<p>WH1: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly communicates internally and externally regularly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WH1a: Internal LSA consultations take place regularly. • WH1b: LSA consultations with other institutions take place regularly. • WH1c: LSA consultations with cluster agencies take place regularly. <p>WH2: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly engages with the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WH2a: LSAs are engaged with community members. • WH2b: LSAs are engaged in core activities. • WH2c: LSAs are engaged in collective teaching projects. <p>WH3: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly is a learning organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WH3a: LSAs attend cluster reflection gatherings. • WH3b: LSAs adjust their Five Year Plan strategies regularly. 	<p>(Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers 2007) (Crow, Hausman, and Scribner 2002) (Scott 2002) (Lammers and Barbour 2006) (Garnett, Marlow and Pandey 2008)</p> <p>(Cummings 2004) (Hippel 1994) (Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006) (Pradeep and Cooper 2005) (Bovaird 2007) (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005) (Glaser, Denhardt and Hamilton 2002) (Flanagin, Stohl, and Bimber 2006)</p> <p>(Thomas, Sussman, and Henderson 2001) (Barabba, and Zaltman 1991) (Botkin and Davis 1994) (Korten 1980) (Vogelsang-Coombs 1997)</p>	<p>Number of LSA meetings/consultations with various institutions.</p> <p>Regularity of LSA engagement through community activities.</p> <p>Changes in strategic objectives and reflection meeting participation.</p>

The next chapter will look at the methodology, including methods of data collection, operationalization tables and survey questions.

Chapter IV

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the degree to which a typical Local Spiritual Assembly is adopting directives of the Five Year Plan based on public administration literature. This study explores three working hypotheses related to LSA process and activity. This research attempts to analyze the typical Local Spiritual Assembly by using scientific methods of data collection.

Unit of Analysis

U.S. Local Spiritual Assemblies constitute the unit of analysis for this study. Each LSA acts independently of another and has jurisdictional authority over its own region. Soliciting biographical and activity data from Local Spiritual Assemblies will provide a metric to determine the degree which a typical LSA is adopting Five Year Plan directives. Although the nine member LSA forms one unit of analysis, determining individual member's roles represent part of this unit.

Method of Data Collection

Since the purpose of this study is to explore the degree at which a typical Local Spiritual Assemblies is adopting the objectives of the Five Year Plan, survey research works well for data collection. Babbie (2007, 254) states that "surveys may be used for descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory purposes," and "survey research is probably the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for a population too large to observe directly." Weisberg et al. (1996, 15) assert that "researchers at universities regularly conduct surveys" and surveys can answer questions about "differences between groups of people in their attitude, beliefs, and behaviors." A survey therefore was found to be the best method to explore characteristics of Local

Spiritual Assemblies advancing organization objectives. According to Babbie, one of the many strengths found in survey research is that it is economically feasible and less time consuming than personal interviews. Both authors, however, do note limitations with survey research. For example, those surveyed may not always be truthful or the survey itself may be inflexible or too standardized. The secretary of the LSAs responded to the survey questions. The secretary maintains archival records and administrative data allowing them to answer the survey questions.

An electronic survey was constructed and sent to over 800 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the U.S. to collect responses related to the description of the community itself and the working hypotheses.

Strengths and Weaknesses

As useful as surveys are in drawing a picture from a sample population or collecting data in an efficient and timely manner, they pose several challenges. First, there is no way to ensure that survey respondents are honest in completing a survey. Although the survey associated with this study is anonymous and protects the identity of the individual, nonetheless, there is always a risk that respondents may embellish answers or simply provide inaccurate answers. For example, when a respondent does not know the exact number of activities taking place, they may provide an estimate. Second, the structure and wording of survey questions potentially bias results. Every effort was made in this survey to word questions in a neutral and impartial format, however all surveys run the risk of influencing responses. Finally, of the over 800 Local Spiritual Assemblies surveyed, 167 responded, a 20% response rate.

Human Subjects Protection

This applied research project was submitted to the Texas State University Institutional Review Board and was deemed exempt (see appendix 1). No risk was posed to the subjects and all survey responses were both anonymous and voluntary. Interviewee information was kept confidential and no benefit given to the interviewees. The subject matter and objective of this study did not pose any risk of harm to the participants

Operationalization Table and Survey Questions

Transforming abstract theory into practice, the operationalization table shows how a “conceptual framework moves from the abstract to measurements and modes of evidence collection” (Shields and Tajalli 2006, 319). A theory on how to explore characteristics of Local Spiritual Assemblies was developed in the literature review and conceptual framework. The operationalization table delineates how data will be collected to answer each working hypothesis. The operationalization table presents variables, definitions, and measurements used to collect data for this study.

Table 2.1: Operationalization Table

Demographic Information		
Descriptive Variables	Definition	Measurements
Type of city	Are you located in an urban or rural city?	Urban or rural
Community Size	How many Bahá'ís live under the LSA's jurisdiction?	Numerical value ranging
Cluster level	What's the level of your cluster?	A, B, C, or D
Region	What region are you in?	Central, Northeastern, Northwestern, South Central, Southeastern, Southwestern
Percentage of trained resources	What percentage of community members are trained resources (tutors, CC Teachers, Animators)	%

Ongoing core activities in community	How many core activities are currently offered in your city?	Numerical value
Ongoing firesides offered in community	How many neighborhood firesides are offered in your city?	Numerical value
Number of home visits	How many regular home visits are taking place?	Numerical value
Number of enrolments since new LSA	How many new enrolments has your LSA had since its formation in Ridvan?	Numerical value
Average percentage community attendance at 19 day Feast and Holy Days	What is the percentage attendance at Feast and Holy Days?	%

WH1 (WH1a, WH1b, WH1c): The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly communicates internally and externally regularly.		
Variables	Definition	Measurements
Number of LSA meetings/consultations.	How many times per month has the LSA met or consulted?	Numerical value
Number of LSA meetings/consultations with a Counselor , ABM or Assistant, RBC members, NSA member about the Five Year Plan	How many times this term has the LSA met/consulted with a Counselor, Auxiliary Board member / Assistant, Regional Bahá'í Councilmember, or a National Spiritual Assembly member to discuss any issue related to Five Year Plan?	Numerical value
Number of LSA meetings/consultations with the RTI, CIC or CDF, or ATC Secretary about the Five Year Plan	How many times this term has the LSA met/consulted with the Area Teaching Committee Secretary, the Regional Training Institute, or the Cluster Institute Coordinator or Cluster Development Facilitator?	Numerical value

WH2 (WH2a, WH2b, WH2c): The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly engages with the community.		
Variables	Definition	Measurements
Number of community members the <i>LSA or one of its members on its behalf</i> has met with.	How many community members has the <i>LSA or one of its members on its behalf</i> had a personal visit with?	Numerical value

LSA members involved in core activities	How many LSA members are involved in a core activity? Of those core activities LSA members are involved in, what percentage occur outside your community/ jurisdiction	Numerical value %
LSA members involved in collective teaching project	How many LSA members have participated in collective teaching projects this term?	Numerical value
Number of core activities the <i>LSA or one of its members</i> is involved with.	Number of Children’s Classes, Institute Courses, Devotionals, or Empowerment Programs the <i>LSA or one of its members</i> is involved with?	Numerical value ranging from 0 to 50

WH3 (WH3a, WH3b): The typical Bahá’í Local Spiritual Assembly is a learning organization.		
Variables	Definition	Measurements
Number of LSA members attending cluster reflection gathering	On average, how many LSA members attend the cluster reflection gathering?	Numerical value
Percentage of LSA meetings discussing core activity status	What percentage of LSA meetings includes consultation on core activities status?	A. 0%-25% B. 25%-50% C.50%-75% D. 75%-100
Percentage of Feast discussing Core Activity status	What percentage of Feasts include consultation on core activities status?	A. 0%-25% B. 25%-50% C.50%-75% D. 75%-100
Number of times Five Year Plan strategies have been changed to reflect new information	How many times have your Five Year Plan strategies changed to reflect new information?	Numerical value

This next chapter will analyze and present data collected from the operationalization table.

Chapter V

Results

Of the over 1,100 Local Spiritual Assemblies existing in the United States, I was able to access email addresses for 814 LSAs. The contact database I accessed may not have had the most up to date information, and some LSAs may only have mailing addresses. A survey designed from the conceptual framework and operationalization table was emailed to all 814 LSAs. The data collected was operationalized using survey questions measuring activity and characteristics of LSAs in the areas of, communication, community engagement, and learning. Respondents were asked to answer questions related to each area which was identified as contributing to organizational success as set forth in the research purpose.

LSAs meet on average twice per month. In an effort to maximize response rate, and three weeks were given to respondents to complete the survey. The survey was emailed to the secretary of each LSA and each was given the option to complete the survey on behalf of the LSA. Of the 814 surveys emailed, 167 LSAs replied for a response rate of about 20%. The next step will be to look at the responses and analyze the results.

Descriptive Results

This first section presents LSA descriptive statistics including demographics of the LSAs and their communities. This section will help form a picture of the typical LSA in the United States and help interpret results from the three working hypotheses:

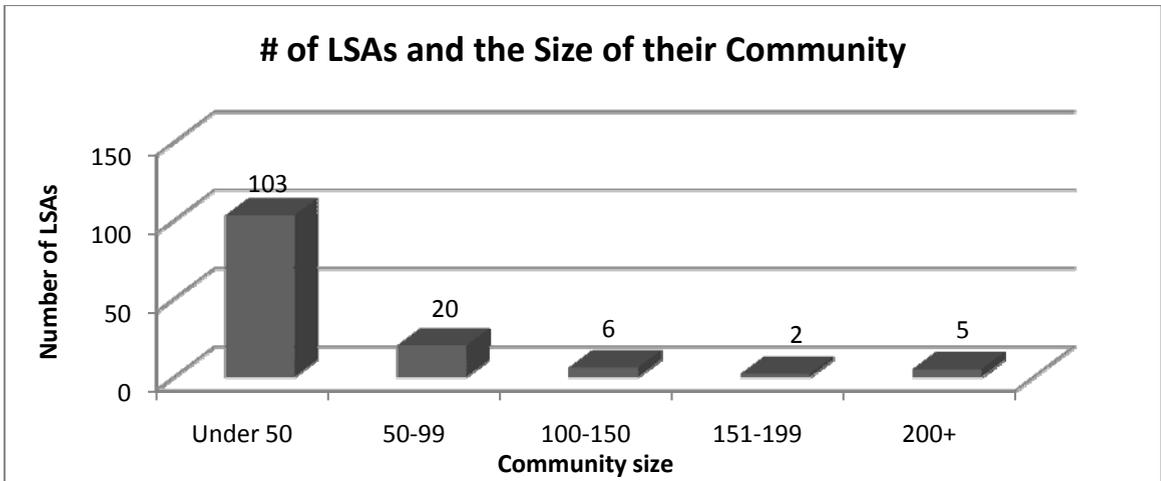


Figure 2.1

The overwhelming majority (*over three fourths*) of responding LSAs have a Bahá'í population of under 50. About 20 (*fifteen percent of*) LSAs have a population between 50-99 and the remaining LSAs (*under five percent*) have populations over 99. We can conclude that the typical LSA has a population under 50.

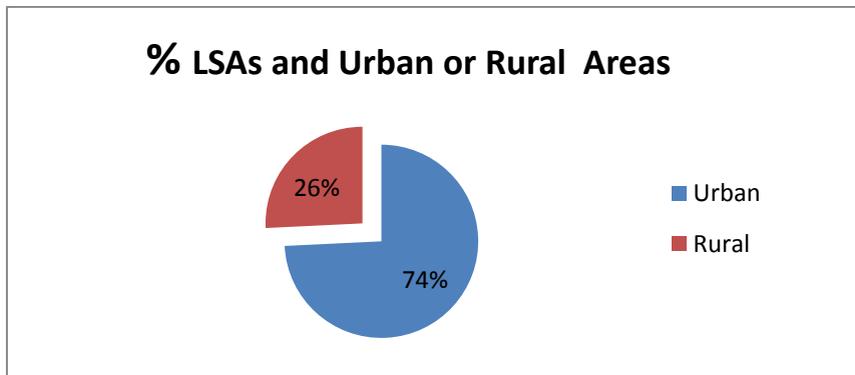


Figure 2.2

The number of rural versus urban communities represented by LSAs responding is just under three quarters urban and just under one quarter rural. Therefore, the typical LSA can be considered more urban than rural.

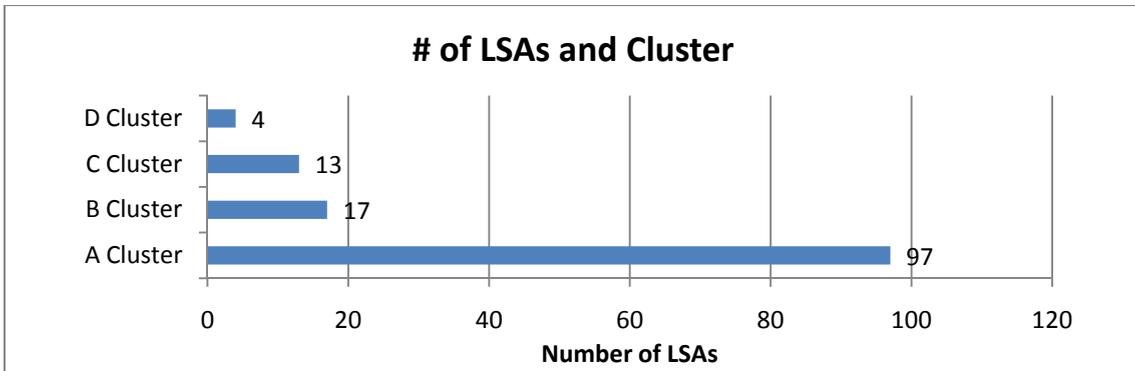


Figure 2.3

Again, an overwhelming number (*nearly three-fourths*) of LSAs are part of an “A” cluster, while 17 (*about thirteen percent*) and 13 (*about ten percent*) belong to a “B” and “C” Cluster respectively. Again, clusters are a geographical construct of a grouping of several LSAs. An “A” cluster means that the communities within that region are performing well. Therefore, the typical LSA can be defined as an A cluster community.

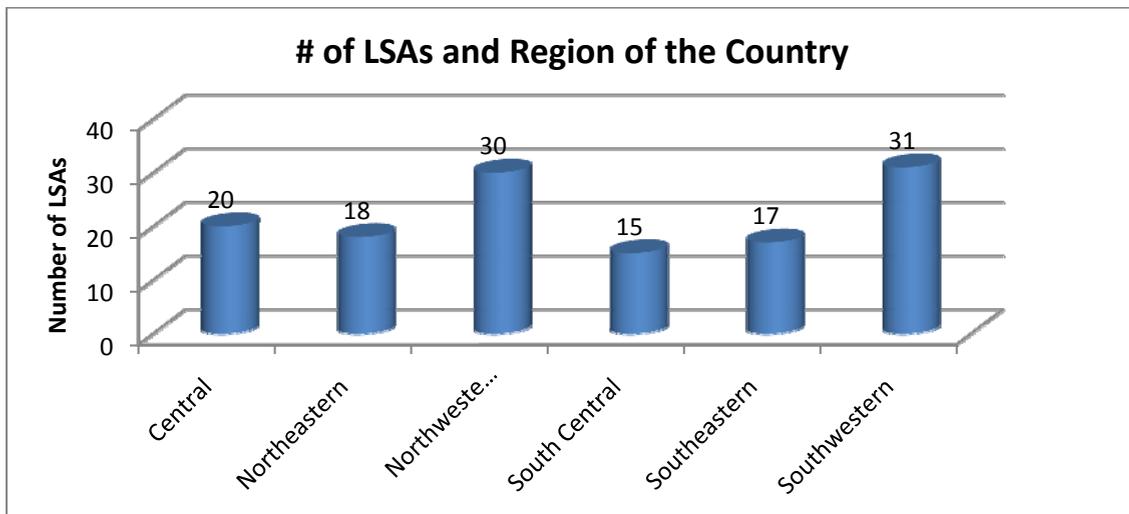


Figure 2.4

Northwestern and southwestern LSAs total 61 (*nearly forty-five percent of those responding*). The other remaining three regions ranged between 15-20 LSAs (*eleven and sixteen percent of total respondents*). There is a relatively even distribution among the

responding LSAs, with a tilt towards the west. Therefore, the typical LSA can come from anywhere in the United States.

Strength of Community Life

We now turn to variables that describe the quality and strength of communities that are within an LSA’s jurisdiction. This is determined by the Five Year Plan: the number of activities taking place, the number of trained resources in an LSA’s area, and the vibrancy of community life. Additionally, the percentage participation and new membership enrollment is also used to measure the strength of community life.

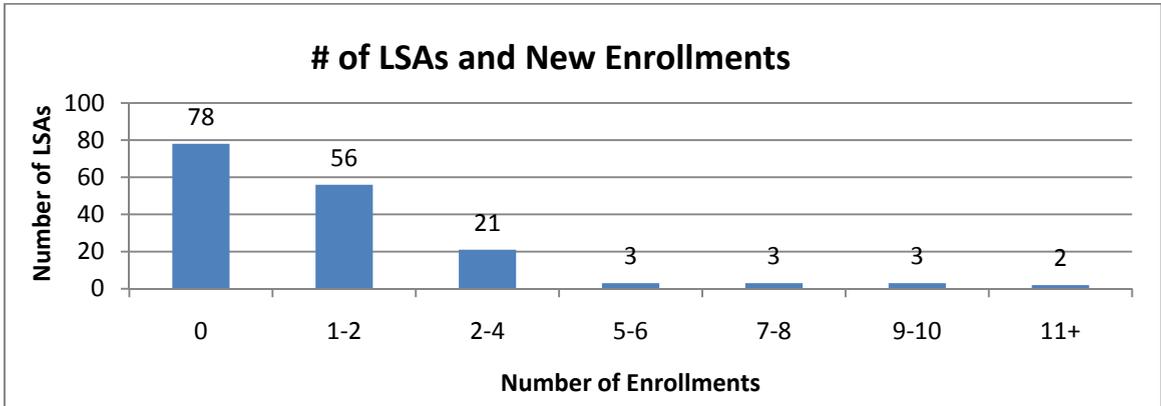


Figure 2.5

New enrollments are an indicator of increasing strength and vibrancy and we can conclude that the typical LSA is not seeing enrollments. Some 78 (nearly fifty percent of) LSAs have reported zero new enrollments while 77 LSAs (about forty-five percent) have reported enrollments of 1-2 or 2-4. A total of 11 LSAs (seven percent) have had 5 or more enrollments in the last year. Therefore the typical LSA sees between 0-2 enrollments a year.

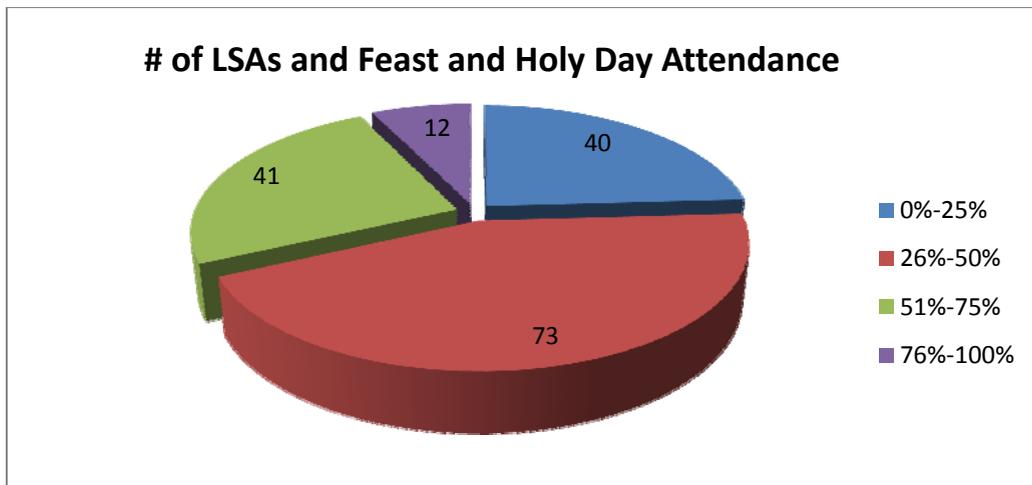


Figure 2.6

113 (*nearly sixty-eight percent of*) LSAs report Feast and Holy Day celebration attendance at under fifty percent. 41 LSAs (*a quarter*) report an attendance rate of 51%-75% and 12 (*almost 8%*) report an attendance rate of 76% or more. The typical LSA therefore has a Feast and Holy day attendance of 26%-50%.

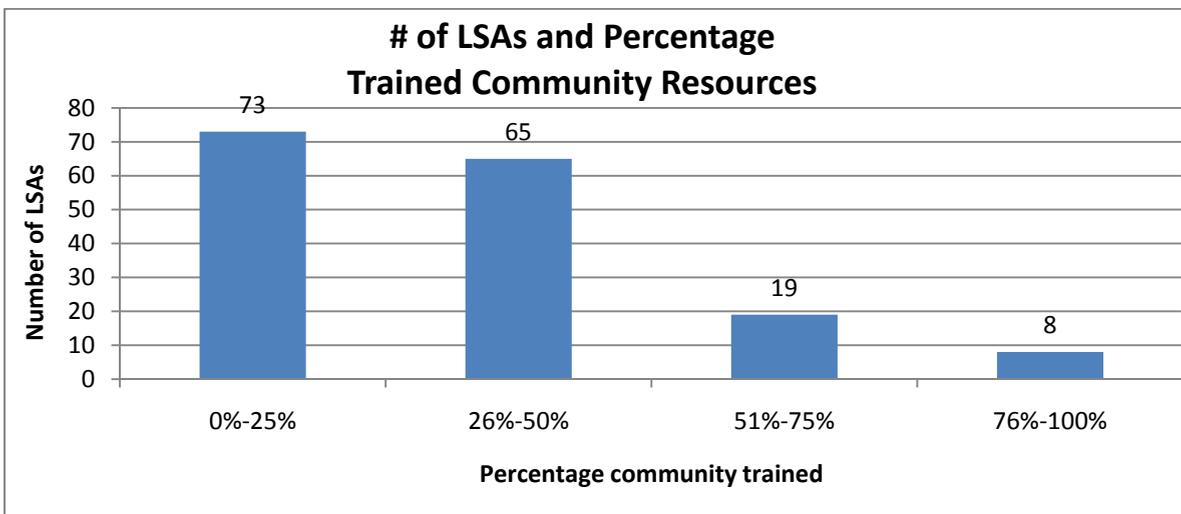


Figure 2.7

138 (*nearly eighty-four percent of*) LSAs report that fewer than 50% of their community members are trained to offer service. Whether they have receive training to offer devotional gatherings, tutor study groups, or teach children's classes, it is apparent that the number of trained resources is lacking. Nonetheless, 27 (*about 17% of*) LSAs report

that over 50% of their community is trained to offer service in one fashion or another. The typical LSA has fewer than 50% of its community members as trained resources.

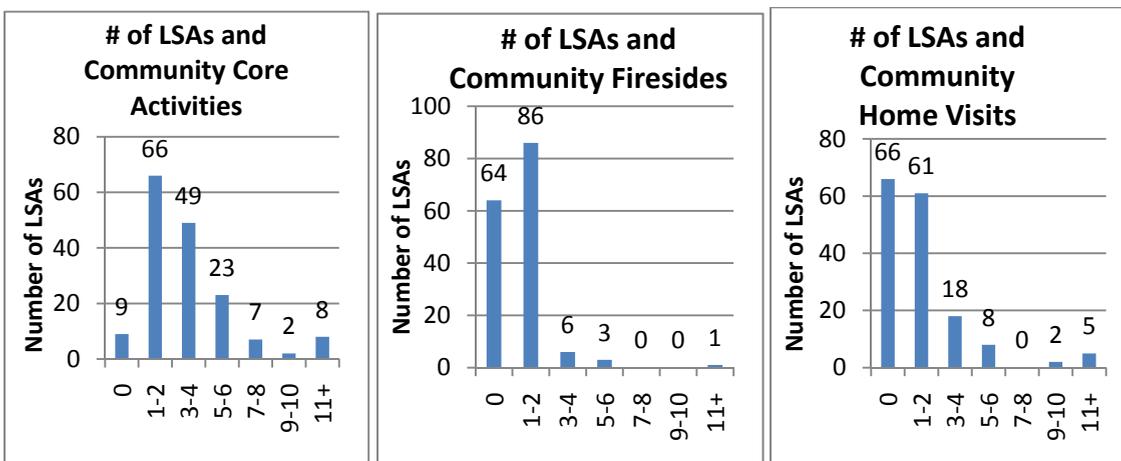


Figure 2.8

A glance the charts above suggests the number of core activities, firesides, and home visits—activities that contribute to the health of the Bahá’í Community—are few. 66 LSAs (*forty percent*) report that their communities are not carrying out home visits on a regular basis, while 61 (*thirty-eight percent*) report that their communities are carrying out between 1-2 with regularity. An interesting result, however, is that 5 (*three percent of*) LSAs report their community carrying out 11+ home visits regularly, indicating that momentum might sustain an increased number of visits. Firesides are also virtually non-existent. 150 (*almost ninety-four percent*) of LSAs reporting state that their communities are holding less than two firesides a month. On the other hand, the number of core activities seems to show strength. Only 9 (*five percent of*) LSAs report that their communities lack at least one core activity, but 138 (almost eighty-five percent of) LSAs report that their communities have between one and six regular activities. The core activity category shows that communities are trying to initiate, carry out, or increase their number of activities. One question that would be interesting to answer is if there is a

direct relationship or an inverse relationship between core activities and firesides / home visits. The typical LSA's community therefore is offering some core activities, but few firesides and home visits.

The next three sections will test the working hypotheses. Three categories will be used to weigh the result of the working hypotheses: weak, moderate, and strong. The typical LSA will be classified as weak if less than 33% of LSAs satisfy the sub working hypothesis. If between 34% and 66% satisfy the sub working hypothesis, the typical LSA will be classified as moderate, and if over 66% of LSAs satisfy the sub working hypothesis, the typical LSA will be classified as strong in the respective section. The average results then for the sub-working hypothesis will be grouped to assign a value for the working hypothesis

Communication Results

Increased communication has been documented to increase organizational productivity and support organizational development. The more communication that takes place, the more productive the organization. Data was collected in three areas to gauge the frequency and regularity of LSA communication: First, how often LSAs consult/communicate; second, how often LSAs consult/communicate with one set of institutions; third, how often LSAs consult/communicate with another set of institutions. Measuring the rate at which LSAs are communicating will answer working hypothesis 1—which states LSA communication is regular.

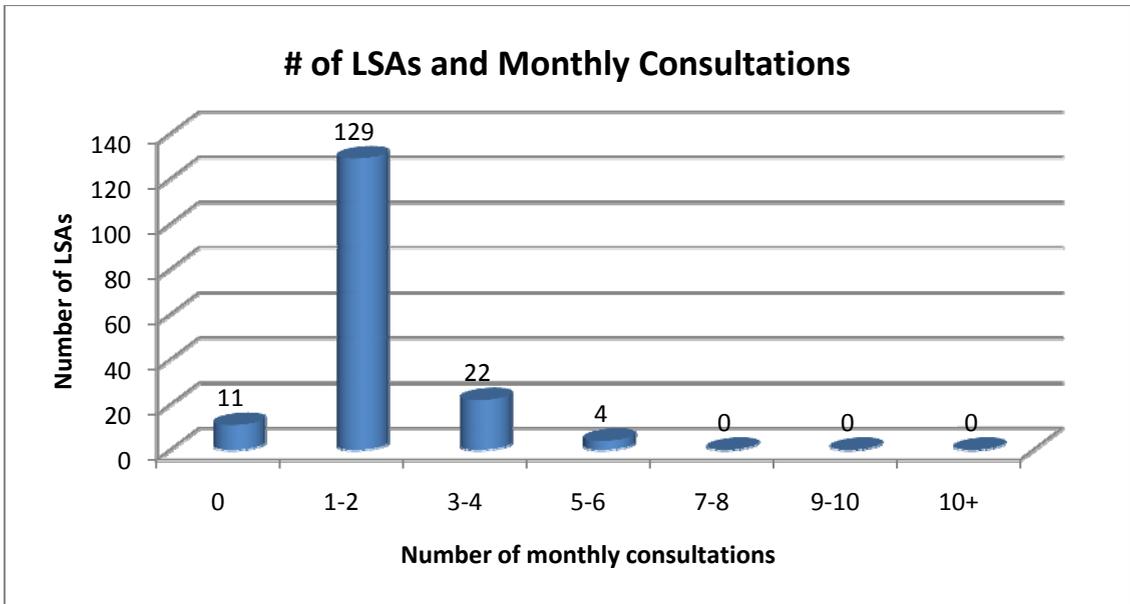


Figure 3.1

129 (almost seventy-eight percent of) LSAs consult once or twice a month and 26 (about fifteen percent of) LSAs consult between 3-6 times a month. The LSAs surveyed never consult more than six times a month, and some LSAs, (about six-and-a-half percent of them), never consult even once a month. LSA consultation is strong in that LSAs are consulting at least 1-2 times a month.

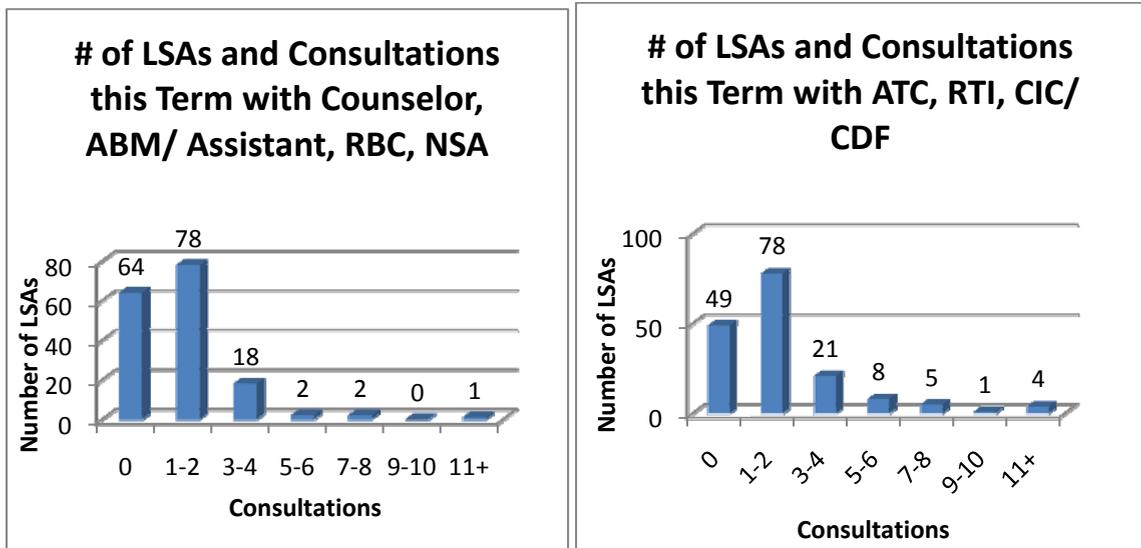


Figure 3.2

The results in Figure 3.2 indicate that LSAs are carrying out minimal communication with other institutions. LSAs are barely consulting with any other institution on a regular basis. The number of LSAs (*about 80%*) that have consulted less than three times with other institutions during their one-year term is surprisingly large. Increased communication, especially among institutions that specialize in components of the Five Year Plan, should help boost LSA success related to the Five Year Plan.

For now, there is a lack of communication. LSA consultation with two separate institutional groupings is weak.

Table 3.1: Communication Results

Support for WH1:	Weak / Moderate
Support for WH1(a):	Strong
Support for WH1(b):	Weak
Support for WH1(c):	Weak

Community Engagement Results

Turning to community engagement, there is ample evidence to suggest that the more an organization is involved with their constituency, the more the constituency is involved with serving the needs of the organization. Engagement thus is a mutually beneficial tool that contributes toward the development and strength of an organization while encouraging members of the community to share in the advancement of the collective. Working hypothesis 3 states that LSA (or LSA member) engagement with the community takes place regularly. The charts below show the results of LSA community engagement.

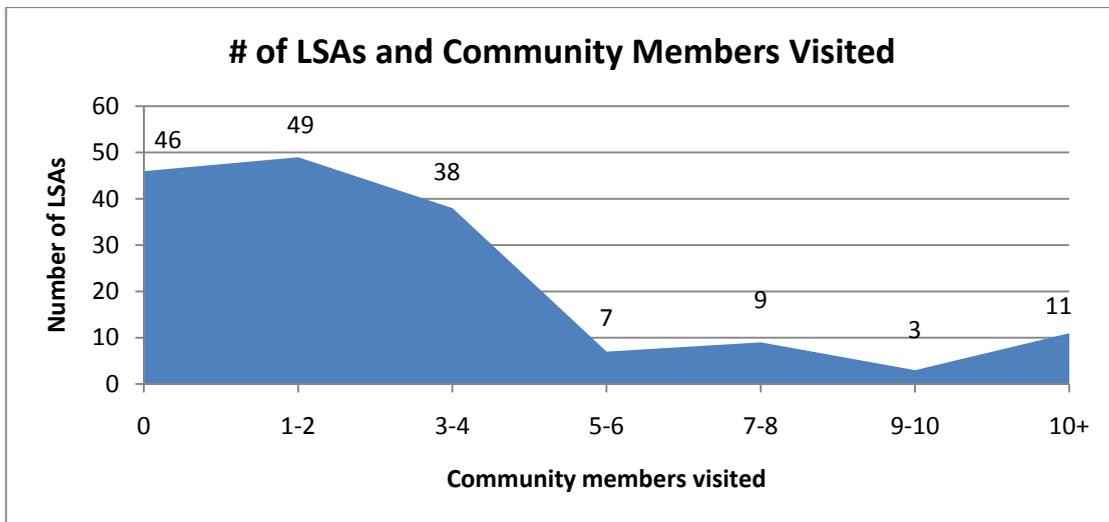


Figure 4.1

The results indicate that a majority of LSAs (*eighty percent*) have carried out visits with less than four members of their community this term. 46 LSAs (*nearly thirty percent*) have not carried out a visit to at least one member of their community, and 49 LSAs (*thirty percent*) have carried out visits with 1-2 community members. Showing promise however, is the fact that some seven percent of LSAs have met with 10 or more members of their community this term. This relatively high percentage indicates that some LSAs value the benefits of community engagement. Although the results seem weak, smaller communities may only have a few members and therefore four visits might represent a fully engaged LSA. Unfortunately, this analysis' categorization of community size does not allow us to know the answer to that question.

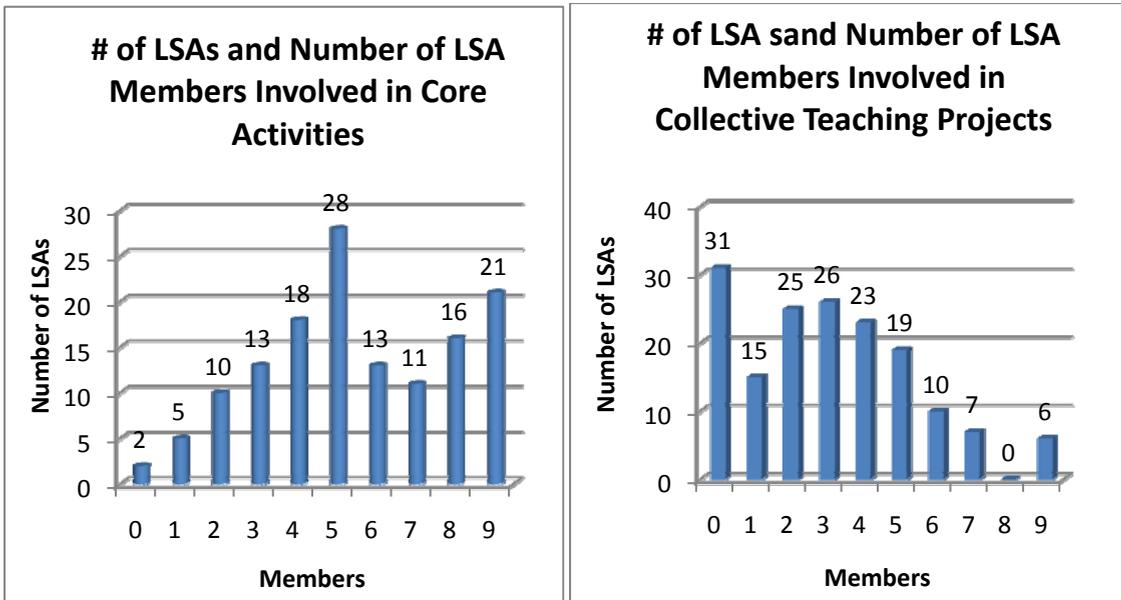


Figure 4.2

Direct LSA member involvement with core activities and collective teaching projects is mixed. The chart on the left shows more LSA members participating in core activities, directly engaged with the community, while the chart on the right shows fewer members of LSAs participating in collective teaching projects. For example, 21 (*fifteen percent of*) LSAs report that all nine members are involved with core activities; however, only 6 (*less than four percent of*) LSAs report all members involved with collective teaching projects. Both activities are a necessary avenue of community engagement and the greater the engagement, the stronger the community.

Table 3.2: Engagement Results

Support for WH2:	Moderate
Support for WH2(a):	Moderate
Support for WH2(b):	Moderate
Support for WH2(c):	Moderate

Learning Results

Setting up an environment to learn offers an organization many advantages. Learning organizations benefit from an ability to both adapt to change and to make positive change. Consequently, the ability to learn by drawing on new ideas and information equips the learning organization with tools necessary to plan strategically and evolve over time. For LSAs, learning related to the Five Year Plan is studied in three areas: First, participation of LSA members at reflection gatherings—considered in Bahá’í literature as a learning matrix, second, the amount of time dedicated to consulting on core activities, and finally, how often LSAs are changing their local Five Year Plan strategies. Working hypothesis 6 states that LSA engagement in Five Year Plan learning is frequent. Let us turn to the results below:

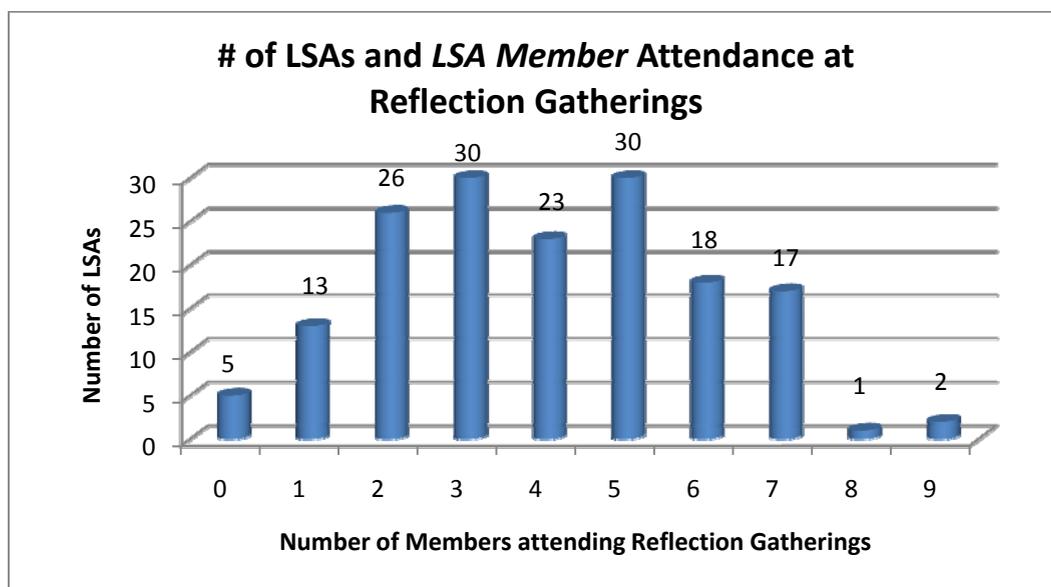


Figure 5.1

Looking at LSA member attendance at reflection gatherings, we see that 3 to 5 members of LSAs are regularly participating in reflection gatherings. These gatherings provide a learning matrix for Bahá’ís and are a valuable forum for discussion and reflection on

strategic processes related to the Five Year Plan. Having 3 to 5 members present represents a commitment on behalf of LSAs to engage in the planning and development of new approaches to community development. Still, nearly 44 (*thirty percent of*) LSAs report that under 3 members of their LSA attend reflection gatherings. Only 38 (*about twenty-two percent of*) LSAs report more than 5 members who attend reflection gathering with regularity.

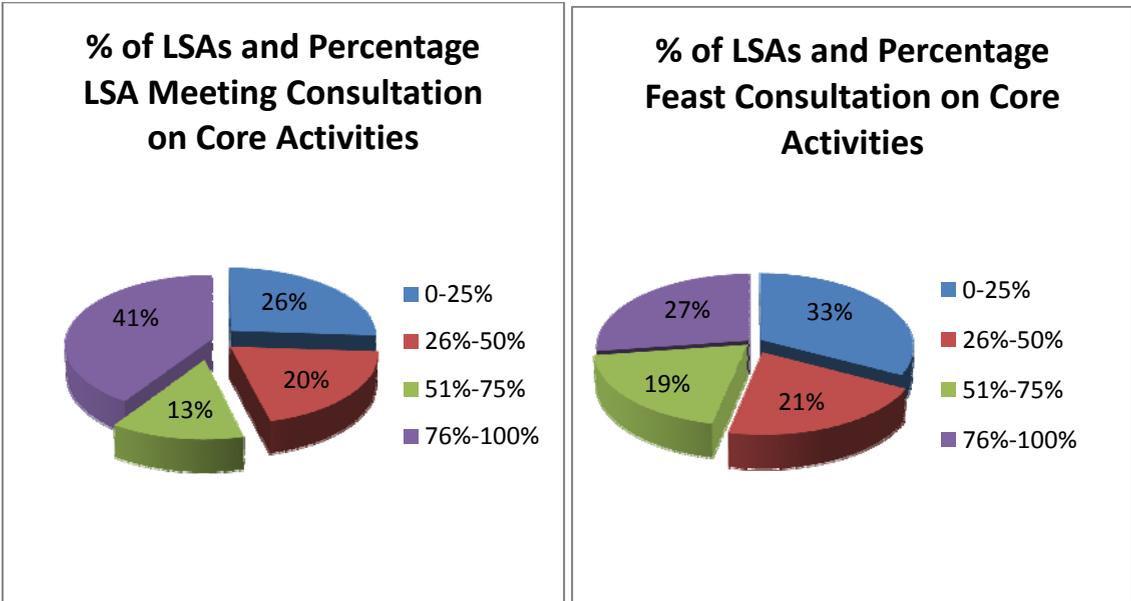


Figure 5.2

Consultation on Five Year Plan activities sets up a learning platform for both the community and the LSA. Beyond reflection gatherings, two forums that LSAs have for scheduling learning discussions on Five Year Plan activities are at Feasts and LSA meetings. According to the results, a large number of LSAs (*forty-one percent*) are talking about core activities between 76% and 100% of the time, and a significant number of LSAs (*twenty-seven percent*) are opening up discussion at Feast on core activities just as often. However, there are still twenty-six and thirty-three percent of

LSAs respectively that rarely (0-25% of the time) discuss core activities. This means that the typical LSA is moderately engaging in learning.



Figure 5.3

Finally, looking at how often strategies change indicates ongoing learning. As LSAs endeavor to refine their application of process, they will naturally be forced to adopt different strategies. The more LSAs are willing to implement new strategies, the more likely a culture of learning exists. For example, changing a neighborhood in which LSAs are working to transform, or the population they seek to connect, or the activities they offer, or the approaches to offer those activities, or the days of the week and times of the day those services are made available—these represent only a fraction of strategic changes that LSAs in a learning mode will make related to the Five Year Plan. Figure 5.3 suggests that most LSAs (*ninety percent*) have made less than four adjustments to their Five Year Plan strategies. One can conclude that LSA success related to the Five Year Plan is steady and there is no need for numerous adjustments, or maybe that adjustments are not made hastily. One can also assume that learning associated with adjustments is made through thoughtful and thorough consideration of facts.

Unfortunately, this study did not ask those questions. Nonetheless, LSAs are making some effort to change strategy and thus they are learning. Support for working hypothesis 3 is moderate.

Table 3.3: Learning Results

Support for WH3:	Moderate
Support for WH3(a):	Moderate
Support for WH3(b):	Moderate

The last chapter will conclude with a summary of the preceding chapters and present suggestions for future study.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Guidance found within the Five Year Plan and supplemental Bahá'í text provide Bahá'í institutions with a roadmap for the transformation of society and the upraising of a new civilization. A new civilization, which in the fullness of time will lead humanity into a Golden Age and reveal the true potential found within every human being. Such a civilization, the glory of planet earth, will be based on unity, equity, justice, and the oneness of mankind. Although this civilization will advance in stages, first with the establishment of the Lesser Peace and ultimately with the unfoldment of the Most Great Peace, it is the current effort of Bahá'í institutions operating within the parameters of the Five Year Plan that will ultimately hasten the end of humanity's culture of war and bloodshed and will give rise to the unity of the human race and the great peace prophesied by seers and poets.³⁸ This paper is an analysis of the characteristics of local Bahá'í institutions in adopting the objectives of the Five Year Plan. The analysis is based on guidance in the Five Year Plan and scholarly research on organizational success done in the fields of communication, community engagement, and learning. Chapter One provides an overview of the research purpose and Five Year Plan guidance as it applies to Local Spiritual Assemblies. Chapter Two introduces the Bahá'í Faith and places this study in a meaningful context. The development of three working hypotheses comes from the literature review presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four outlines the methodology of this study in terms of data collection, strengths and weaknesses, etc... Chapter five analyzes the results of survey data collected from LSAs with charts and graphs to answer the three working hypotheses. Finally, this last chapter will summarize

³⁸ The Promise of World Peace. Document prepared by the Universal House of Justice.

the results found in Chapter Five, provide recommendations based on those results, and offer suggestion for future research.

A summary of the results below indicate that local Bahá'í institutions are in a developmental stage when it comes to administrative traits that contribute to organizational success. Local Spiritual Assemblies rank between weak and moderate in communication (WH1), community engagement (WH2), and learning (WH3). Table 4.1 below summarizes those results

Table 4.1 Working Hypotheses Results

Working Hypothesis	Support
WH1: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly communicates internally and externally regularly.	Weak / Moderate
WH2: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly engages with the community.	Moderate
WH3: The typical Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly is a learning organization	Moderate

Research and case studies presented in Chapter Three provide strong support for organizational success based on the categories used to form all three working hypotheses. Simply put, the the more an organization is setup to learn, the more likely that organization is to outperform towards goal advancement. Guidance from the Five Year Plan reviewed in Chapter One coupled with the research and case studies presented in Chapter Three allowed for the operationalization of three working hypotheses to measure LSA performance.

A survey was sent out to over 800 Local Spiritual Assemblies nationwide and approximately twenty percent replied. Survey questions asked general descriptive questions about the LSA and their community along with two or three questions from each working hypothesis category. The results revealed that LSAs on average are exhibiting moderate strength in two areas that define organizational success (engagement and learning) in adopting the objectives of the Five Year Plan, yet still need to work on administrative procedures related to communication.

Based on the survey results, a few recommendations are in order. To begin, communication is one area that will benefit from increased LSA attention. Here, LSAs will improve their chances of organizational success by consulting more often and with other institutions. This can be achieved by opening up electronic channels of communication for more consultation among the LSA or with the LSA and other institutions of the Faith. Scheduling more meetings with Auxiliary Board members and Area Teaching Committees among others will also help to improve communication. Second, LSAs performed moderately in the category of Community engagement. LSA members showed strength in core activity participation, however lacked strong results in home visits and direct collective teaching campaigns. It is critical for LSA members to continue their strong personal commitment to core activities, but seek to make efforts in visiting more community members regularly and taking part in collective teaching campaigns. Finally, LSAs are again exhibiting moderate strength in learning, but should redouble efforts to increase LSA attendance at reflection gatherings and to discuss Five Year Plan activities among themselves and their communities. Naturally, the more emphasis is put on the activities related to the Five Year Plan, the more experimentation

and strategy adjustment will result. LSAs should therefore continue making adjustments to plans as they gather and learn new information from reflection gatherings and other open forums of discussion.

In conclusion, LSAs are on the right track towards organizational maturity and their commitment to the Five Year Plan. With continued commitment and a few minor adjustments, LSA performance in these three areas will continue to rise.

Future research that will be valuable in testing the merit of the six working hypothesis used to explore LSA performance could be a regression analysis. Future studies could look at the raw survey data and determine if there are any significant relationships between LSAs and the organizational categories used to define success in this study. Other areas of research would be a deeper exploration into each individual category used to define organizational success for this study.

REFERENCES

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 2007. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. 3rd ed. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- Argote, Linda, Paul Ingram, John M. Levine, and Richard L. Moreland. 2000. Knowledge Transfer in Organizations: Learning from the Experience of Others. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 82 (1): 1-8.
- Babbie, Earl. 2007. *The Practice of Social Research*, 11th Edition. Thomson Wadsworth. USA.
- Bahá'u'lláh. 1994. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. New edition. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- Bahá'u'lláh. 2005. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. 1935. Reprint, Chicago, IL: Bahá'í Publishing.
- Bahá'u'lláh. 1992. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. 1st ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- Bahá'u'lláh. 1978. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*. 1921. Reprint. Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- Barabba, Vincent, and Gerald Zaltman. 1991. *Hearing the Voice of the Market: Competitive Advantage Through Creative Use of Market Information*. New York, NY: Harvard Business School Press.
- Bingham, Lisa Blomgren, Tina Nabatchi, and Rosemary O'Leary. 2005. The New Governance: Practices and Processes for Stakeholder and Citizen Participation in the Work of Government. *Public Administration Review* 65 (5): 547-558.
- Botkin, Jim, and Stan Davis. 1994. *The Coming of Knowledge-Based Business*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review.
- Bovaird, Tony. 2007. Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services. *Public Administration Review* 67 (5): 846-860.
- Brom, Robert A., "Workplace Diversity Training: A Pragmatic Look at an Administrative Practice" (2000). *Applied Research Projects*. Paper 91. <http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/91>
- Brown, Mary Maureen, and Jeffrey L. Brudney. 2003. Learning Organizations in the Public Sector? A Study of Police Agencies Employing Information and Technology To Advance Knowledge. *Public Administration Review* 63 (1): 30-43.

- Cooper, Terry L., Thomas A. Bryer, and Jack W. Meek. 2006. Citizen-Centered Collaborative Public Management. *Public Administration Review* 66 (s1): 76 - 88.
- Crow, G., C.S. Hausman, and J.P. Scribner. 2002. "Reshaping the Principalsip." In *The Educational Leadership Challenge: Redefining Leadership for the 21st Century*, ed. J. Murphy, 189-210. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.
- Cummings, Jonathon. 2004. Work Groups, Structural Diversity, and Knowledge Sharing in a Global Organization. *Management Science* 50 (3): 352-364.
- Effendi, Shoghi, 1996. *The Promised Day is Come*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- Effendi, Shoghi. 1993. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- Este, Stephen. 2007. The challenges of accountability in the human services: Performance management in the Adult Protective Services Program of Texas. Texas State Applied Research Project. Available online at <http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/250/>
- Flanagin, Andrew J., Cynthia Stohl, and Bruce Bimber. 2006. Modeling the structure of collective action. *Communication Monographs* 73 (1): 29-54.
- Garnett, James L., Justin Marlowe, and Sanjay K. Pandey. 2008. Penetrating the Performance Predicament: Communication as a Mediator or Moderator of Organizational Culture's Impact on Public Organizational Performance. *Public Administration Review* 68 (2): 266-281.
- Glaser, Mark A., Janet Vinzant Denhardt, and Linda K. Hamilton. 2002. Community v. Self-Interest: Citizen Perceptions of Schools as Civic Investments. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 12 (1): 103-127.
- Grau, Micah E., "Using a Model Municipal Performance Measurement System to Assess Mid-size Texas Cities' Systems" (2008). *Applied Research Projects*. Paper 282. <http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/282>
- Korten, David C. 1980. Community Organization and Rural Development: A Learning Process Approach. *Public Administration Review* 40 (5): 480-511.
- Lammers, John C., and Joshua B. Barbour. 2006. An Institutional Theory of Organizational Communication. *Communication Theory* 16 (3): 356-377.
- Mahler, Julianne. 1997. Influences of Organizational Culture on Learning in Public

- Agencies. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 7 (4): 519-540.
- Molinari, Gaelle, Mirweis Sangin, Pierre Dillenbourg, and Marc-Antoine Nussli. 2009. Knowledge Interdependence with the Partner, Accuracy of Mutual Knowledge Model and Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning. *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 24 (2): 129-144.
- Pradeep, Chandra Kathi, and Terry L. Cooper. 2005. Democratizing the Administrative State: Connecting Neighborhood Councils and City Agencies. *Public Administration Review* 65 (5): 559-567.
- Sagie, Abraham. 1996. Effects of Leader's Communication Style and Participative Goal Setting on Performance and Attitudes. *Human Performance* 9 (1): 51-64.
- Scott, W. Richard. 2002. Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems. 5th Edition. Alexandria, VA: Prentice Hall.
- Scribner, Jay, Keith Sawyer, Sheldon Watson, and Vicki Myers. 2007. Teacher Teams and Distributed Leadership: A Study of Group Discourse and Collaboration. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 43 (1): 67-100.
- Shields, Patricia M. 1998. Pragmatism as philosophy of science: A tool for public administration. *Research in Public Administration* 4: 195-225.
<http://ecommons.txstate.edu/polsfacp/33/>
- Shields, P. and H. Tajalli 2006. Intermediate theory: The missing link in successful student scholarship. *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 12 (3): 313-334.
<http://ecommons.txstate.edu/polsfacp/39/>
- Strack, Fritz, Leonard L Martin, and Norbert Schwarz. 1988. Priming and communication: Social determinants of information use in judgments of life satisfaction. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 18 (5): 429-442.
- Thomas, James B., Stephanie W. Sussman, and John C. Henderson. 2001. Understanding "Strategic Learning": Linking. Organizational Learning, Knowledge. Management, and. Sensemaking. *Organization Science* 12 (3): 331-345.
- Vogelsang-Coombs, Vera. 1997. Governance Education: Helping City Councils Learn. *Public Administration Review* 57 (6): 490-500.
- Weisberg, Herbert F., Jon A. Krosnick, Bruce D. Bowen. 1996. An Introduction to Survey, Research Polling, and Data Analysis. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

Wilson, Timothy L., "Pragmatism and Performance Measurement: An Exploration of Practices in Texas State Government" (2001). *Applied Research Projects*. Paper 71. <http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/71>

Witesman, Eva M., and Charles R. Wise. 2009. The Centralization/Decentralization Paradox in Civil Service Reform: How Government Structure Affects Democratic Training of Civil Servants. *Public Administration Review* 69 (1): 116-127.

Confirmation of Approval: IRB Application 2010X5135. DO NOT REPLY to this message.

AVPR IRB <ospirb@txstate.edu>

Mon, Mar 1, 2010 at 11:55 AM

To: armin.jezari@gmail.com

This email message is generated by the IRB online application program. Do not reply.

The reviewers have determined that your IRB Application Number 2010X5135 is exempt from IRB review. The project is approved.

If you have questions, please submit an IRB Inquiry form at:

http://www.txstate.edu/research/irb/irb_inquiry.html

=====

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Compliance
Texas State University-San Marcos
(ph) 512/245-2314 / (fax) 512/245-3847 / ospirb@txstate.edu / JCK 489
601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666

Texas State University-San Marcos is a member of the Texas State University System

NOTE: This email, including attachments, may include confidential and/or proprietary information and may be used only by the person or entity to which it is addressed. If the reader of this email is not the intended recipient or his or her agent, the reader is hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution or copying of this email is prohibited. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender by replying to this message and deleting this email immediately. Unless otherwise indicated, all information included within this document and any documents attached should be considered working papers of this office, subject to the laws of the State of Texas.

1. How do you describe your local Bahá'í community?

[Download](#)

Size of community (youth and adults)

	Under 50	50-99	100-150	151-199	200+	Response Count
Response	75.9% (104)	14.6% (20)	4.4% (6)	1.5% (2)	3.6% (5)	137

Urban/Rural

	Urban	Rural	Response Count
Response	74.4% (99)	25.6% (34)	133

Cluster

	A Cluster	B Cluster	C Cluster	D Cluster	Response Count
Response	74.2% (98)	12.9% (17)	9.8% (13)	3.0% (4)	132

Region

	Central	Northeaster	Northwestern	South Central	Southeastern	Southwestern	Response Count
Response	15.9% (21)	13.6% (18)	22.7% (30)	11.4% (15)	12.9% (17)	23.5% (31)	132
						<i>answered question</i>	139
						<i>skipped question</i>	28

2. How many new enrollments has your Assembly had since its formation in Ridván?

[Download](#)

	0	1-2	2-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11+	Response Count	
Total	47.3% (79)	33.5% (56)	12.6% (21)	1.8% (3)	1.8% (3)	1.8% (3)	1.2% (2)	167	
								<i>answered question</i>	167
								<i>skipped question</i>	0

3. What is the percentage community attendance at Feast and Holy Day celebrations?

[Download](#)

	0%-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%	Response Count	
Attendance	24.0% (40)	43.7% (73)	24.6% (41)	7.8% (13)	167	
					<i>answered question</i>	167
					<i>skipped question</i>	0

4. Is there a Bahá'í Center in the city?

[Download](#)

	Yes	No	Response Count	
Bahá'í Centre	18.7% (31)	81.3% (135)	166	
			<i>answered question</i>	166
			<i>skipped question</i>	1

5. Are core activities and 19-day Feasts centralized or decentralized?

[Download](#)

Core Activities

	Centralized	Decentralized	Response Count
Centralized or Decentralized	35.2% (58)	64.8% (107)	165
19-day Feast			
	Centralized	Decentralized	Response Count
Centralized or Decentralized	75.0% (123)	25.0% (41)	164
		<i>answered question</i>	167
		<i>skipped question</i>	0

6. How many times per month does the Assembly meet or consult (including electronic consultation)? [Download](#)

	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	10+	Response Count
Monthly meetings/consultations	6.6% (11)	77.8% (130)	13.2% (22)	2.4% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	167
								<i>answered question</i> 167
								<i>skipped question</i> 0

7. How many times this term has the Assembly met/consulted with a Counselor, Auxiliary Board member / Assistant, Regional Bahá'í Councilmember, or a National Spiritual Assembly member to discuss any issue related to Five Year Plan? [Download](#)

	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11+	Response Count
Met/consulted	38.6% (64)	47.6% (79)	10.8% (18)	1.2% (2)	1.2% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.6% (1)	166
								<i>answered question</i> 166
								<i>skipped question</i> 1

8. How many times this term has the Assembly met/consulted with the Area Teaching Committee (or ATC secretary), the Regional Training Institute, or the Cluster Institute Coordinator / Cluster Development Facilitator? [Download](#)

	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11+	Response Count
Met/consulted	29.3% (49)	47.3% (79)	12.6% (21)	4.8% (8)	3.0% (5)	0.6% (1)	2.4% (4)	167
								<i>answered question</i> 167
								<i>skipped question</i> 0

9. How diverse is your Assembly in the following categories? [Download](#)

Age--Have approx the same age (within 15 years of each other)

	All (9) members	Most (5-8) members	Some (3-5) members	Few (1-2) members	No (0) members	Response Count
Diversity	12.0% (20)	53.6% (89)	31.9% (53)	2.4% (4)	0.0% (0)	166

How many different religious backgrounds (counting denominations) are represented

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Response Count
Diversity	8.1%	28.1%	30.6%	15.6%	8.8%	5.6%	1.3%	0.6%	1.3%	160

Years serving--Have served approx the same number of years (within 3 years of each other)

	All (9) members	Most (5-8) members	Some (3-5) members	Few (1-2) members	No (0) members	Response Count					
Diversity	11.0% (18)	50.3% (82)	32.5% (53)	5.5% (9)	0.6% (1)	163					
Gender											
	0-25% Female	26%-50% Female	51%-75% Female	76%-100% Female	Response Count						
Diversity	4.9% (8)	34.4% (56)	51.5% (84)	9.2% (15)	163						
How many different racial backgrounds are represented											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Response Count	
Diversity	24.4% (40)	32.9% (54)	32.3% (53)	7.9% (13)	1.8% (3)	0.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	164	
										<i>answered question</i>	166
										<i>skipped question</i>	1

10. How many community members (approx) has the Assembly or one of its members on its behalf met personally with by home visit since Ridván? [Download](#)

	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	10+	Response Count	
Community members visits	28.7% (47)	29.9% (49)	23.2% (38)	4.3% (7)	5.5% (9)	1.8% (3)	6.7% (11)	164	
								<i>answered question</i>	164
								<i>skipped question</i>	3

11. How many Assembly members are involved in a core activity? [Download](#)

Total											Response Count
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Response	1.4% (2)	3.6% (5)	7.2% (10)	9.4% (13)	13.0% (18)	21.0% (29)	9.4% (13)	8.0% (11)	11.6% (16)	15.2% (21)	138
Of those core activities Assembly members are involved in, what percentage occur outside your community/ jurisdiction											
	0-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%	Response Count						
Response	70.5% (93)	15.2% (20)	9.1% (12)	5.3% (7)	132						
					<i>answered question</i>	138					
					<i>skipped question</i>	29					

12. How many Assembly members have participated in collective teaching projects this term? [Download](#)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Response Count	
Participate in collective teaching projects	19.0% (31)	9.2% (15)	15.3% (25)	16.0% (26)	14.1% (23)	12.3% (20)	6.1% (10)	4.3% (7)	0.0% (0)	3.7% (6)	163	
											<i>answered question</i>	163
											<i>skipped question</i>	4

International Learning Center related to the Five Year Plan:

	0-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%	Response Count
Meetings where a passage is read	68.1% (113)	17.5% (29)	4.8% (8)	9.6% (16)	166
				<i>answered question</i>	166
				<i>skipped question</i>	1

14. What percentage of Feasts include reading a passage related to the Five Year Plan?

[Download](#)

	0-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%	Response Count
Feast where a passage is read	70.7% (118)	18.0% (30)	7.2% (12)	4.2% (7)	167
				<i>answered question</i>	167
				<i>skipped question</i>	0

15. How many conferences have been held/hosted since Ridván by the Assembly to study elements of the Five Year Plan for either the community or the Assembly?

[Download](#)

	0	1	2	3	4	5+	Response Count
Conferences	71.3% (119)	18.6% (31)	7.2% (12)	1.2% (2)	0.6% (1)	1.2% (2)	167
							<i>answered question</i>
							<i>skipped question</i>
							0

16. On average, how many Assembly members attend cluster reflection gatherings?

[Download](#)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Response Count
Meeting attendance	3.0% (5)	7.8% (13)	15.7% (26)	18.1% (30)	14.5% (24)	18.1% (30)	10.8% (18)	10.2% (17)	0.6% (1)	1.2% (2)	166
											<i>answered question</i>
											<i>skipped question</i>
											1

17. What percentage of Assembly meetings and Feasts include consultation on core activity status?

[Download](#)

Assembly meetings

	0-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%	Response Count
Consultation on core activities	25.9% (43)	19.9% (33)	13.3% (22)	41.0% (68)	166

Feasts

	0-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%	Response Count
Consultation on core activities	32.5% (54)	20.5% (34)	19.9% (33)	27.1% (45)	166
				<i>answered question</i>	167
				<i>skipped question</i>	0

18. How many times has the Assembly's Five Year Plan strategies changed to reflect new information?

[Download](#)

Adjustment in plans	28.4% (46)	19.8% (32)	30.2% (49)	11.1% (18)	5.6% (9)	2.5% (4)	0.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.6% (1)	1.2% (2)	162
												<i>answered question</i> 162
												<i>skipped question</i> 5

19. What percentage of the Bahá'í population within the Assembly's city limits are trained resources (trained to be Tutors, Children's Class Teachers, or Animators)? [Download](#)

	0%-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%	Response Count
Percentage	44.0% (73)	39.2% (65)	11.4% (19)	5.4% (9)	166
					<i>answered question</i> 166
					<i>skipped question</i> 1

20. How many regular core activities (Devotionals, Children's Classes, JY empowerment programs, and/or Institute courses), firesides, and home visits are ongoing within the Assembly's city limits? [Download](#)

Core activities									Response Count
	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11+		
Ongoing Activities	5.5% (9)	40.0% (66)	30.3% (50)	13.9% (23)	4.2% (7)	1.2% (2)	4.8% (8)	165	
Firesides									Response Count
	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11+		
Ongoing Activities	40.4% (65)	53.4% (86)	3.7% (6)	1.9% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.6% (1)	161	
Home visits									Response Count
	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11+		
Ongoing Activities	41.6% (67)	37.9% (61)	11.2% (18)	5.0% (8)	0.0% (0)	1.2% (2)	3.1% (5)	161	
								<i>answered question</i> 165	
								<i>skipped question</i> 2	