



BC FIRST NATIONS EXECUTIVE TENURE SURVEY REPORT 2022-2023

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Introduction

Mason Ducharme conducted the BC First Nations executive tenure survey as part of his dissertation on "The Retention of Indigenous Executives in Indigenous Organizations." Recognizing that the First Nations Public Service Secretariat (FNPSS) is exploring a similar topic, "Critical Positions in First Nations," Mason generously offered to share his survey results and report. This collaboration aims to enhance the collective understanding of the issue and reduce research fatigue within First Nations communities.

The survey aims to quantify executive tenure among BC First Nations, both in terms of the past ten years and historically. It seeks to determine the number of executive positions held by Indigenous individuals over the past decade and to assess the interest within First Nations communities in filling these critical roles with Indigenous leaders.

Survey Design and Development

The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool designed to provide a user-friendly experience for respondents. To ensure clarity and ease of use, the survey was carefully crafted with accessibility in mind.

Respondents were asked to specify the population of their Nation and the number of subordinates reporting to the executive. This information was crucial for analyzing and reporting data based on Nation population and subordinate numbers. Additionally, Nations were invited to voluntarily identify themselves to prevent duplicate submissions. Using the provided Nation names, Mason was able to gather details such as geographical location, annual revenue, and governance systems from Indigenous Services Canada's First Nations profiles. This data was instrumental in cross-analyzing executive tenure, hiring practices, and preferences.

The report will also include qualitative insights from Mason's interviews with current and former Indigenous executives, as well as leaders in BC Indigenous organizations. These findings offer a deeper understanding of the reasons behind executive tenure.

Mason distributed the survey through his database of BC First Nations chiefs and band managers. This database was compiled by collecting publicly available email addresses from websites and by contacting First Nations directly to obtain email addresses not publicly listed.

Survey Data and Analysis

35 completed responses were submitted for the 2022-2023 survey. While participation is low, given that there are 203 First Nations in BC, each of the respondents had enough data to report. It is important to note that given the small sample sizes, the information may not be fully representative and must be interpreted carefully. In statistics terms, the report aims to provide a descriptive analysis to understand this new phenomenon.

Reporting

The data has been divided into the following categories:

- Small First Nation (Less than 500 members)
- Medium First Nation (501-1,500 members)
- Large First Nation (Over 1,501 members)
- Zone 1 First Nation (Urban First Nation)
- Zone 2 First Nation (Rural First Nation)
- Zone 3 First Nation (Semi-Isolated First Nation)
- Zone 4 First Nation (Remote and Isolated First Nation)
- Under \$10 Million First Nation
- \$10 Million - \$20 Million First Nation
- Over \$20 Million First Nation
- Custom Electoral System (First Nations with a Custom Electoral System)
- Indian Act (First Nation that uses the standard Indian Act Electoral System)
- Treaty (First Nation with a Modern treaty)
- 0-6 Staff (First Nation with 0-6 subordinates reporting to the executive)
- 7-12 Staff (First Nation with 7-12 subordinates reporting to the executive)
- Over 12 Staff (First Nation over 12 subordinates reporting to the executive)

Statistical Terminology

1. **Average:** The average is the sum of a set of numbers divided by the number of numbers in the set. For example, if you have the numbers 2, 3, and 5, the average is $(2 + 3 + 5) / 3 = 10 / 3 = 3.33$.
2. **Median:** The median is the middle value in a list of numbers arranged in order. If there is an even number of values, the median is the average of the two middle numbers. For example, in the list 2, 3, and 5, the median is 3. In the list 2, 3, 4, and 5, the median is $(3 + 4) / 2 = 3.5$.
3. **Minimum:** The minimum is the smallest value in a set of numbers. For example, in the list 2, 3, and 5, the minimum is 2.
4. **Maximum:** The maximum is the largest value in a set of numbers. For example, in the list 2, 3, and 5, the maximum is 5.

Limitations

Some of the potential limitations associated with survey research could include:

1. **Sampling Bias:** The sample may not represent the entire population accurately, leading to skewed results.
2. **Response Bias:** Respondents might answer in a way that they think is socially acceptable or what they believe the surveyor wants to hear, rather than their true experiences.
3. **Recall Bias:** Respondents may not accurately remember past events or experiences, leading to errors in their responses.
4. **Survey Fatigue.** Long or complex surveys may lead to respondent fatigue, resulting in incomplete or rushed responses.

Section 1 – Reasons for Executive Turnover

Before delving into the survey responses, it's crucial to first understand the qualitative factors contributing to the departure of Indigenous executives from Indigenous organizations. The executive role in these organizations is exceptionally demanding, a fact often evidenced by the frequent job postings across Canada. To gain insight into these challenges, Mason interviewed 34 executives—both former and current—as well as leaders such as chiefs and presidents. His research revealed four primary reasons for executive turnover in BC Indigenous organizations: lateral violence, burnout, insufficient governance capacity, and inadequate compensation. Understanding these underlying issues provides a critical context for interpreting the survey results and addressing the broader challenges faced by Indigenous executives.

Lateral Violence: Defined as oppression within the same marginalized group, lateral violence is a significant cause of turnover in Indigenous communities. Instances include gossiping, bullying, insubordination, cliques, aggressive communication, physical violence, harassment, infighting, blaming, and shaming. Respondents noted coworkers were largely unsupportive and often worked against each other's success. The term "lateral violence" is commonly used in First Nations contexts, though its interpretation varies. Despite terms like "lateral aggression" in non-Indigenous literature, "lateral violence" was chosen for its cultural relevance. A common phrase among respondents was the "crabs in the bucket" story, highlighting unsupportive coworkers. Lateral violence was reported from within the organization, particularly from leadership, and externally from the membership served.

Burnout: Burnout is a leading cause of turnover. Indigenous executives often bear the burden of addressing socioeconomic issues such as crowded housing, low incomes, high unemployment, health crises, and aging populations. Their strong sense of compassion leads to compassion fatigue and burnout when they cannot effect change. Burnout also results from being available 24/7 to Chiefs and membership, high travel requirements, large numbers of subordinates, limited organizational capacity, and high demands from key stakeholders. Job design often leaves executives overwhelmed.

Lack of Governance Capacity: This encompasses a range of governance-related issues. Examples include elected leaders interfering with administration and HR decisions, divided leadership on issues, nepotism, limited time, and low levels of education among leaders.

Poor Compensation: Compensation issues extend beyond salary to include benefits and pension plans. Many respondents felt undervalued, citing lower pay compared to non-Indigenous counterparts and inadequate pension plans. Poor compensation, combined with high workloads and limited funding for competitive packages, contributes to turnover. In high-cost living areas, the lack of affordable housing exacerbates this issue.

In summary, the primary factors related to Indigenous executive turnover are lateral violence, burnout, lack of governance capacity, and poor compensation. The consequences of turnover are significant and multifaceted, leading to increased staff uncertainty, disrupted business operations, and halted progress.

Section 2 – Executive Tenure (For 10 Years)

Variables	Categories	# of Respondents ¹	Minimum Tenure (Years)	Maximum Tenure (Years)	Average Tenure (Years)	Median Tenure (Years)
Population Size	Small	12	0.83	10	4.98	5
	Medium	11	0.45	5	3.16	2.92
	Large	12	1	5	2.81	2
Geography	Zone 1	12	0.45	10	4.19	3.75
	Zone 2	14	0.83	5	2.91	3.33
	Zone 3	2	3.33	5	4.17	4.17
	Zone 4	5	1	10	4.49	5
Funding	Under \$10 Million	11	0.83	10	4.37	3.33
	\$10 Million - \$20 Million	10	1.11	5	3.07	2.5
	Over \$20 Million	12	0.45	10	3.6	3.33
Governance	Custom Electoral System	25	0.45	10	3.7	3.33
	Indian Act	7	1.11	10	3.59	2
	Treaty	1	5	5	5	5
Subordinate Size	0-6 Staff	13	0.83	10	3.72	2
	7-12 Staff	18	1	10	3.96	5
	Over 12 Staff	4	0.45	5	2.7	2.67
All		35	0.45	10	3.68	3.33

¹ The number of respondents remains the same in each section, therefore, they'll be excluded in the following sections to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Section 3 – Indigenous Representation in the Executive Roles for the Last 10 Years

Variables	Categories	Minimum Indigenous Representation (%)	Maximum Indigenous Representation (%)	Average Indigenous Representation (%)	Median Indigenous Representation (%)
Population Size	Small	0%	100%	77%	89%
	Medium	0%	100%	61%	63%
	Large	0%	100%	62%	63%
Geography	Zone 1	0%	100%	66%	71%
	Zone 2	33%	100%	63%	67%
	Zone 3	50%	100%	75%	75%
	Zone 4	50%	100%	76%	71%
Funding	Under \$10 Million	0%	100%	61%	67%
	\$10 Million - \$20 Million	33%	100%	76%	80%
	Over \$20 Million	0%	100%	64%	63%
Governance	Custom Electoral System	0%	100%	63%	67%
	Indian Act	33%	100%	74%	78%
	Treaty	100%	100%	100%	100%
Subordinate Size	0-6 Staff	0%	100%	68%	71%
	7-12 Staff	0%	100%	66%	60%
	Over 12 Staff	33%	100%	72%	78%
All		0%	100%	67%	69%

Section 4 – Shortest Historical Executive Tenure

Variables	Categories	Minimum Tenure (Years)	Maximum Tenure (Years)	Average Tenure (Years)	Median Tenure (Years)
Population Size	Small	0.08	4	1.51	1
	Medium	0.003	7	1.4	0.33
	Large	0.005	6	1.73	0.5
Geography	Zone 1	0.003	7	1.3	0.625
	Zone 2	0.083	6	1.66	0.92
	Zone 3	0.5	4	2.25	2.25
	Zone 4	0.5	3	1.4	1
Funding	Under \$10 Million	0.08	4	1.01	0.71
	\$10 Million - \$20 Million	0.003	7	1.68	0.92
	Over \$20 Million	0.005	6	1.91	1.5
Governance	Custom Electoral System	0.005	9.5	1.76	1
	Indian Act	0.003	7	1.46	0.33
	Treaty	6	6	6	6
Subordinate Size	0-6 Staff	0.083	4	1.13	0.96
	7-12 Staff	0.003	6	1.52	0.67
	Over 12 Staff	0.33	3	1.44	1
All		0.003	9.5	1.51	0.88

Section 5 – Longest Historical Executive Tenure

Variables	Categories	Minimum Tenure (Years)	Maximum Tenure (Years)	Average Tenure (Years)	Median Tenure (Years)
Population Size	Small	2	30	11.33	8
	Medium	3	35	11.7	6
	Large	2	25	10	7
Geography	Zone 1	2	20	8.83	7.75
	Zone 2	2	35	10.75	6
	Zone 3	6.5	30	18.25	18.25
	Zone 4	3	30	15.4	15
Funding	Under \$10 Million	2	20	8.45	5.25
	\$10 Million - \$20 Million	2	35	14	8.5
	Over \$20 Million	3	30	13.55	10
Governance	Custom Electoral System	2	35	12.09	7
	Indian Act	3	20	10.79	7
	Treaty	10	10	10	10
Subordinate Size	0-6 Staff	2	30	12.63	7
	7-12 Staff	3	35	12.93	7.5
	Over 12 Staff	5	25	14	13
All		2	35	11	7

Section 6 – Indigenous Executive Hiring Preference

Variables	Categories	Indigenous Hiring Preference (%)
Population Size	Small	75%
	Medium	91%
	Large	83%
Geography	Zone 1	92%
	Zone 2	86%
	Zone 3	100%
	Zone 4	80%
Funding	Under \$10 Million	91%
	\$10 Million - \$20 Million	90%
	Over \$20 Million	83%
Governance	Custom Electoral System	96%
	Indian Act	57%
	Treaty	100%
Subordinate Size	0-6 Staff	77%
	7-12 Staff	83%
	Over 12 Staff	100%

Section 7 - Indigenous Hiring Preference vs. Indigenous Hiring Practice

Variables	Categories	Indigenous Hiring Preference (%)	Average Indigenous Hiring Representation (%)	Variance (%)
Population Size	Small	75%	77%	+2%
	Medium	91%	61%	-30%
	Large	83%	62%	-21%
Geography	Zone 1	92%	66%	-26%
	Zone 2	86%	63%	-23%
	Zone 3	100%	75%	-25%
	Zone 4	80%	76%	-4%
Funding	Under \$10 Million	91%	61%	-30%
	\$10 Million - \$20 Million	90%	76%	-24%
	Over \$20 Million	83%	64%	-19%
Governance	Custom Electoral System	96%	63%	-33%
	Indian Act	57%	74%	+17%
	Treaty	100%	100%	0%
Subordinate Size	0-6 Staff	77%	68%	-9%
	7-12 Staff	83%	66%	-17%
	Over 12 Staff	100%	72%	-28%

Section 8 – Reflections on Indigenous Executive Tenure in Indigenous Organizations

The data on executive tenure in Indigenous organizations over the past decade reveals a critical challenge in retaining Indigenous executives, with the average tenure being just over 3.5 years. This statistic highlights the need for strategies to support and sustain Indigenous leadership in these roles. Despite the short tenure, the data shows a commendable effort to hire Indigenous executives, with an average of 67% of these roles being filled by Indigenous individuals over the last ten years.

Key findings underscore the strong commitment of Treaty First Nations to hire Indigenous executives, achieving a remarkable 100% hiring rate over the past decade. However, there are disparities in tenure and hiring practices among different groups. For example, First Nations with revenues of \$10-\$20 million have notably shorter executive tenures. This could be due to the increased complexity and demands of managing larger financial portfolios, highlighting the need for additional support and resources for these executives.

Alarming, some Nations experienced the shortest executive tenures of only 1-2 days, which may indicate deeper systemic issues or mismatches in role expectations. Conversely, the longest tenures exceeding 30 years are impressive and suggest that with the right conditions, long-term executive stability is achievable. This contrast points to the importance of understanding the specific factors that contribute to both short and long tenures.

Another significant finding is that First Nations with over 12 staff subordinates had shorter average tenures from 2013-2023. This trend suggests that increased managerial responsibilities might lead to burnout or dissatisfaction, necessitating targeted support for these executives.

Notably, Indigenous executive tenure has been strong in both Zone 1 (Urban) and Zone 4 (Remote and Isolated) First Nations, as well as in Small First Nations. These findings highlight that geographic location and the size of the community do not necessarily hinder the retention of Indigenous executives and may even contribute to stronger tenure in certain contexts.

The preference for hiring Indigenous executives is prevalent, with the majority of First Nations showing a strong inclination to appoint Indigenous individuals in these roles. Treaty First Nations, in particular, have a robust preference for Indigenous executives, reflecting a commitment to culturally relevant governance. However, Indian Act governing system First Nations exhibit a divided stance, yet they have managed to surpass their hiring demand, demonstrating flexibility and resourcefulness in their approach.

Zone 3 First Nations prefer Indigenous executives but have only managed to fill 75% of these roles with Indigenous individuals over the past decade, indicating a gap between preference and actual hiring. Additionally, only 23.07% of the groups (Indian Act, Treaty, and Small First Nations) have met or exceeded their Indigenous executive hiring preferences, suggesting a supply shortage of qualified Indigenous candidates.

The data reveals that as the number of subordinates increases, so does the preference for Indigenous hiring, indicating a desire for culturally aligned leadership at higher organizational levels. However, the inability of 76.94% of the groupings to meet or exceed their Indigenous executive hiring preference points to a need for more focused efforts in developing and retaining Indigenous leadership talent.

In conclusion, while there is a strong commitment to hiring Indigenous executives, the short average tenure and the gaps in meeting hiring preferences underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to support, develop, and retain Indigenous executives. This includes addressing systemic challenges, providing targeted support for complex roles, and enhancing the pipeline of qualified Indigenous leaders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the BC First Nations Executive Tenure Survey conducted by Mason Ducharme provides invaluable insights into Indigenous executive leadership within BC First Nations organizations. Despite challenges such as lateral violence, burnout, governance capacity issues, and compensation disparities, the survey highlights a strong commitment to Indigenous leadership. The data reveals both successes and areas needing improvement, emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies to support and sustain Indigenous executives. By addressing these challenges, First Nations can foster more stable and effective leadership, advancing their governance and organizational goals.

I extend sincere thanks to the First Nations Public Service Secretariat (FNPSS) for their support in making this report freely accessible to First Nations communities across Canada. This collaboration ensures that valuable insights reach those who can benefit most, fostering informed decision-making and community development.

Gratitude is also extended to the survey respondents for their valuable participation. Taking time out of their busy schedules to contribute to this survey demonstrates their commitment to advancing knowledge and enhancing understanding within Indigenous governance. Their contributions are instrumental in shaping future strategies and initiatives aimed at supporting Indigenous leadership in BC and beyond.