Survival at the top: Issues and challenges affecting the tenure of international school heads

by

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Abstract

The international school market has grown significantly over the past two decades. This has provided tremendous opportunities for school leaders to take on leadership positions around the globe. Existing literature notes short tenure and a high termination rate suggesting that many international school heads may not have developed the requisite skills to successfully lead an international school. However, significant gaps in the literature exist, most notably current statistics on tenure, an understanding of the current issues and challenges that impact the length of tenure, and which qualities and skills enhance success as a school head. To address these gaps, this study, through a mixed methods design, and framed by principal-agent theory, examines the current length of tenure of international school heads and the issues impacting tenure. In addition, challenges faced in leading an international school were also examined. A total of 177 international school heads completed a survey and 10 in-depth interviews were conducted. Results from both the quantitative and qualitative components indicate that while tenure has increased to an average of 4.8 years since a previous study conducted over a decade ago, many of the same issues heads of school face remain, in particular the challenges of working

with the school board. Key variables which impact tenure are explicated. The most significant challenges revolve around governance and board relations, finance, staffing, and the impact of organizational politics. This study guides current and aspiring international heads of school with recommendations to address important structural challenges which continue to impact their ability to retain the position.

Keywords: international school leadership, head of school tenure, leadership retention, leadership challenges, leadership qualities, principal-agent theory

Dedication

To my wife, Natalia, and son, Eric, for always being there. Whether it was packing up and leaving Canada to explore the world and eventually make Hong Kong home or understanding the need to complete this doctoral degree (which has taken its toll in terms of precious time and energy away from them), they have always been there! Providing guidance, support, and encouragement, and taking the time to hear my ideas, they were always there picking up the slack in daily activities when I was locked down completing assignments, conducting research, and writing my dissertation. Perhaps, at times, they were shaking their head like “What next!” or “You need to get out and get active!”, but either way, they both have been rock solid. Thank you and much love always!

Acknowledgements

After the completion of my MBA in 2014, I began exploring universities for the *perfect* doctoral program. While there are many choices, not all fit into a working professional's life. I was fortunate to gain entrance into the first cohort of the International Education Leadership and Policy program at OISE in a year of great uncertainty as the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the globe. A small cohort of educators and policymakers from many different regions came together to learn and share their knowledge and experiences in a positive, collaborative, and engaging manner. It was very energizing and beneficial to learn with such a talented group under the guidance of a supportive, forward-thinking faculty. This program has not only provided me with an opportunity to focus on my research interests but has also led to new friendships and networks within the international education community for which I am very grateful.

The completion of a doctoral program takes a tremendous amount of personal effort and commitment to see it through to the end, especially when maintaining full-time employment. It benefits greatly from support and encouragement. To this end, I would like to acknowledge my Faculty Advisor and Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Joseph Flessa, for his ongoing support and guidance throughout my doctoral journey. His confidence in my ability to complete the process was reassuring and his encouragement was much appreciated. I extend this appreciation also to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Karen Acton and Dr. Francine Menashy, who provided critical feedback and guidance which was very helpful.

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Finally, this research could not have been completed without the tremendous support of international school organizations from many areas around the world and those international school heads who took the time to complete the survey or volunteer to be interviewed. Your support is much appreciated! A special thank you to the unknown survey participant who added this comment *"Good luck…you've got this!"* under final comments. You would be amazed at how this kept me motivated and focused when at times I asked myself … "What *am I doing*"!!

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List of Acronyms

ACAMIS	Association of China and Mongolia International Schools
ACSI	Association of Christian Schools International
AAIE	Association for the Advancement of International Education
AISA	Association of International Schools in Africa
AISH	Academy for International School Heads
BC (Can)	British Columbia (Canada) Ministry of Education
BSO	British Schools Overseas
CIS	Council of International Schools
COBIS	Council of British International Schools
EARCOS	East Asia Regional Council of Schools
ECIS	European Council of International Schools
FOBISIA	The Federation of British International Schools in Asia
HoS	Head of School
IBO	International Baccalaureate Organization
JCIS	Japan Council of International Schools
MEP	National Educational Ministry of Mexico
MSA	Middle States Association
NAIS	National Association of Independent Schools
NEASC	New England Association of Schools and Colleges
NESA	Near East South Asia Council of Overseas Schools
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
P-A	Principal-Agent
PTC	Principals' Training Centre
WASC	Western Association of Schools and Colleges

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background

The international school market has seen tremendous growth over the past two decades. During this time, the number of international schools has increased from 2,584 schools with around one million students in 2000 (ISC Research, 2020) to 13,614 schools and over 6.7 million students in 2023 (ISC Research, 2023a). This is an impressive growth rate for both schools and students respectively and this rate of expansion is expected to continue "in terms of schools, students, staff, and fee income over the next decade" (Bunnell, 2021b, p. 558).

While international schools were historically established to provide primary and secondary education to expatriate children living in a given host country, this has now changed significantly (see Chapter Two for an overview of the types of international schools), with many researchers noting the increased demand emanating from the local elite and burgeoning middle class of the Global South (Bunnell, 2021a; Gardner-McTaggart, 2016, 2018b; Lee et al., 2012; Poole, 2020). This phenomenon reflects the demand for 'cultural capital' (Poole, 2020) and the social status it confers in the Bourdieusian sense (Bailey, 2021; Brooks & Waters, 2015; Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020; Poole, 2020; Resnik 2009; Simandiraki, 2006) and is fundamental to understanding the continued expansion of this market. It is also a recognition that "for most people, education may be the most important element of their social status, and their educational background will have a greater direct impact on their overall life chances" (Boli et al., 1985, p.145) reflecting that "aspirational parents with financial

means are driven by their hopes and dreams for their child, and many now turn to an international school to fulfil those wishes" (ISC Research, 2023b).

With this growth in the market comes a tremendous opportunity for educational leaders to take on a headship role around the globe. However, with the pressures of increasing demand, a shift in demographic composition, and the need to satisfy multiple stakeholders (Catano & Stronge, 2007), the challenges faced by international school heads[1] can be enormous. One of the most frequently recognized challenges is the ability to retain the headship. Given that the average length of time in the position can range from 2.8 years (Hawley, 1994, 1995) to 3.7 years (Benson, 2011), and "almost eighty percent of all heads of schools are fired" (Littleford, 2023), the ability to successfully navigate the waters of international school headships and maintain one's position is fundamentally difficult.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to better understand the issues and challenges impacting the tenure of international school heads in terms of short tenure and early termination as identified in the literature. This is a very relevant issue, both at an academic and practitioner level. The question is how to make sense of the situation. Why is this occurring? Is it still occurring? There is benefit in constructing a study that: i) provides sensemaking of the tenure-termination situation, ii) untangles the complexity of issues facing international school heads, iii) explicates strategies to

[1] While titles given to staff in leadership roles in international schools vary, this research is only focused on the top tier position, often called Head of School, but can also be referred to *inter alia* as Director, Headmaster, Principal, Executive Principal, or CEO. Please see section on the role of Heads of School in Chapter 2 for more details.

support leaders' success within the international school system, and iv) addresses the gaps in the literature.

Significance

To put things into context in terms of the scope of this research, in 2015, I completed my MBA dissertation which examined how international school leaders go beyond the status quo and implement effective change (cf. Morrison, 2018). One of the recommendations from this study for further research was to investigate the reasons behind the short tenure noted for school heads working in the international school system. This came up in the data collection process and while not the focus of my research at the time it did raise an interesting issue which warranted further investigation.

As I began exploring this area in the literature, it became apparent that the tenure data frequently cited from two important studies is now quite outdated (Benson, 2011; Hawley, 1994, 95). Much has changed in the market over the past 10 to 30 years. Furthermore, the explanatory factors illuminating why there is a short tenure for heads need to be updated for the same reason while at the same time determining if termination of heads is in fact at the extremely high level noted or are heads of school moving on for other reasons. This study provides both an update on current tenure trends combined with a deeper understanding of issues impacting the tenure-termination situation. Currently, there are many questions unanswered and much of the literature continues to take short tenure and termination as a given without a full understanding of the issue.

Part of the reason for the noted gaps in the literature reflects the fact that there is a significant lack of research on leadership in international schools (Bunnell, 2018; Gardner-McTaggart, 2018b; Hammad & Shah, 2018; Keller, 2015; Lee et al. 2012). While it has been slowly increasing, as one will see in the literature search methodology section, there is still much to be done. More recently, academics have acknowledged the potential impact of this market and have placed a call for additional research on leadership challenges in international schools (Bunnell, 2018; Calnin et al., 2018; Keller, 2015). In fact, Bunnell (2018) argues that "the reality of being a leader in an international school stands out as being an especially neglected area of concern" (p. 562). As such, the focus of this study is to better understand the issues impacting the tenure of international school heads, and more importantly, provide insights to support heads in navigating the challenges of leadership within the international school system.

Research Questions

To gain greater insight into this issue, this research will examine the tenure of international school heads as guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the current average length of tenure and reasons for turnover for international school heads?
2. What challenges are faced by international school heads and how does it impact tenure?; and
3. What are the key leadership styles, qualities, and strategies needed to successfully maintain one's position as an international school head?

Based on the literature, it would suggest that many heads of schools have not developed the requisite knowledge and skills to be successful. Throughout this research, these questions have guided this study to determine the current situation concerning tenure, termination, and the challenges of being a head of school. It has also provided a better understanding of the complexities surrounding leading an international school including the factors that impact the decision to ultimately leave a school.

Positionality

It is very important as a researcher that I acknowledge where I am coming from and what potential impact it may have on my research. As Call-Cummings and Ross (2019) note, "researchers, as a part of their identity, have power in the research process in the decisions they make about the research project" (p. 19). As such, I must acknowledge my positionality vis-à-vis my life experience and research interests and the impact they have on research design, implementation, and analysis.

When I entered the International Education Leadership and Policy program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), I had a very clear idea of what I wanted to research. My research focus was directly connected to the interest I had in learning more about the reasons behind the short tenure noted for international school heads. There was a five-year gap between the completion of my MBA and entrance into the doctoral program at the University of Toronto in 2020, reflecting the time needed to find the perfect match between university program and professional life. During this time, I was working in the international school system as a sectional principal. I spent a lot of time thinking about this issue, discussing it

with educational colleagues, and searching for a doctoral program which would support me in reaching my research scholar goals. I see myself as a researcher, focused on independent research while working within the system being examined. I do not feel the conflict Labaree (2003) refers to between the "potentially conflicting professional worldviews between teacher and researcher" (p. 15). I see teacher *as* researcher – a synergy between both – bringing theory and practice together as highly valuable.

While my research is focused on leadership, a topic I am dealing with day in and day out in my professional life, it is more specifically examining the issues faced by the head of school, the most senior position at an international school. I have been an international school principal for over a decade now, with significant leadership training, yet, I have never been at the level nor had the experience of being a head of school. There are significant differences between being the head of school and being a sectional principal. As such, I need to frame the research data not through my lens of experience but rather more phenomenologically, to achieve "a condition of consciousness wherein the researcher can successfully abandon his or her own lived reality and describe the phenomenon in its pure, universal sense" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p.173).

While I have not experienced the role of head of school, I do, however, share many characteristics with international school heads. Research has shown that most international school heads are predominantly white, male, and from Anglo-Saxon countries (Gardner-McTaggart, 2021; Johnson & Fournillier, 2023; Martínez et al., 2021). Most international school heads are, in fact, a mirror image of myself. As such, these factors need to be recognized as I am working through the research

process, and I must be conscious of how this will inform my understanding. While I too am a trained teacher and principal, I will have my own experiences and world view which may, or may not, align with those for whom I am researching given that "one must also identify how their identity relates to class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age, and the power/privilege inherent in those intersecting identities" (Call-Cummings & Ross, 2019, p. 18) to fully understand and acknowledge any possible research bias. It is these insights which have guided me along my research journey.

Overview of Dissertation Structure

This dissertation will be structured as follows. Chapter Two reviews the existing literature to present a context for this study as well as current academic arguments related to issues and challenges impacting the tenure of international school heads. Chapter Three explores the theoretical framework underpinning this research while Chapter Four explains the details and rationale for the methodology employed including the data required, sample selection, instruments, procedures, and ethical considerations. Chapters Five to Seven present the results with corresponding analyses. Chapter Eight summarizes the results with a focus on implications for practice, significance of research findings, limitations, and potential areas for future research and practice.

Chapter II: Literature Review

While international schools are not homogenous in terms of "history, culture (local and organisational), ownership structure, parent and student body, curriculum framework and socio-economics" (Speirs, 2016, p. 5), they do, however, embody such similarities as offering "internationally-recognised, English-medium qualifications based on a curriculum different from the host country" (Hayden & Thompson, 2017, p. 5). They also market themselves as promoting a global perspective, excellence in student achievement, and ultimately the "ability to confer credentials that facilitate entry to the elite universities of developed countries" (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018b, p.150; Lee et al., 2012).

While the review of the literature will not go into a detailed history of the development and expansion of the "international school" as this is well documented elsewhere (Bailey, 2024; Sylvester, 2002a, 2002b, 2003), for purposes of clarity, this section will outline the types of international schools as defined by Hayden and Thompson (2013), the leadership structure and titles used to define and delineate this research, and the specific responsibilities of a head of school. Furthermore, the literature search methodology used to develop the literature review will be outlined before exploring the three key areas connected to the research questions guiding this study.

Types of International Schools

With the tremendous growth of international schools over the past two decades, it has become clear that there is a need to better understand the differences

between the various types of international schools which are present in today's market. Hayden and Thompson (2013) developed a 3-category typology of international schools, which is well accepted and represented in the literature:

Type A 'traditional' international schools: these schools provide an international primary and secondary English-based curriculum to "globally mobile expatriate families for whom the local system is not considered appropriate" (Hayden & Thompson, 2013, p. 5). This was the most dominant form of international school until the late 1990s (Cao, 2021).

Type B 'ideological' international schools: these schools promote an ideological worldview based on "promoting global peace and understanding" (Hayden & Thompson, 2013, p. 5), including elements of equity and justice (Keller, 2015, p. 906). An example is the United World Colleges (UWC) system of international schools.

Type C 'non-traditional' international schools: these schools typically attract students from the "socio-economically advantaged elite of the host country who seek for their children a form of education different from, and perceived to be of higher quality than, that available in the national education system" (Hayden & Thompson, 2013, p. 5). They are typically privately owned and for-profit schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2013, p. 7) This type of international school has been the largest growth area over the past two decades.

What this typology does not include is whether a school is a for-profit or not-for-profit school given there are examples of both within each category. In addition, there can be a shift in category for a given school as a school adjusts to market forces. For example, a school traditionally established as a Type A school catering to

an expatriate clientele can evolve into a Type C school enrolling a large percentage of local students given shifting demographics. Schools could also become not-for-profit after years of being classified as a 'for-profit' school or vice-versa.

Leadership Structure and Titles

This research is focused strictly on the head of school position at international schools. But what exactly does that mean within the many contexts of international schools across the globe? One issue that was noted in the literature was the difficulty in determining which specific level of leadership the research was focused on. It is difficult to go by title alone given the lack of a consistent naming regime for leadership roles. For example, the most senior leadership position at an international school can be referred to *inter alia* as "Director", "Headmaster", "Head of School", "Principal", "Executive Principal", or "CEO", all relating to the same position and level of responsibility. In some cases, the principal is the most senior position, and the head of school refers to the head of a particular section, whether that be elementary or secondary. For example, Bailey and Gibson's (2020) research in Malaysia notes "schools are often split into smaller schools or divisions by age and the leaders of these sections are mainly titled 'Head of School', whilst the position that is in charge of these staff and the whole school is predominately called a Principal" (p. 1008). This reflects the challenge when using terms in research to refer to a specific position of responsibility within an international school. Even in my own experience, I have held the title of assistant principal, deputy principal, and principal for the same job which was head of section.

When researching school leadership, and in this case the process of examining the impact of tenure of school heads, it must be very clear on which level of leadership is being included. For example, Bailey and Gibson (2020) made this very clear when they noted that "titles given to different levels of school leadership vary widely across international schools, it should be clarified that for the purposes of this article, 'principals' and 'leaders' only refers to the *top tier of leadership* within the school" (p. 1008– italics added). This is very important for clarity as many international schools have principals that are not top tier, but rather function as head of section and typically have little connection with the board. These leaders are part of the senior leadership team but would have a very different experience in their relationship with board members and/or owners than the most senior leader, that being the head of school.

For purposes of this study and further research, when conducting leadership research, it would be advantageous to apply a system of tiers that correspond to the hierarchical system found within international schools regardless of various titles. For example, by categorizing the top positions as Tier 1 Leader, Tier 2 Leader, Tier 3 Leader (corresponding to Head of School, Head of Section and Deputy Head of Section), and so on, this would standardize the classification of leaders and provide a better and more accurate level of understanding when discussing leadership issues.

While it has been noted that the titles given to the Tier 1 leadership position within international schools can vary, the position, regardless of title, functions with key similarities and overall responsibilities which differentiate it from other leadership roles within the school. The "*head of school"* title will be used exclusively within this research to standardize the title variation yet retain the same depth of

responsibilities expected by position within the international school sector. Furthermore, for simplicity, not intending to negate the many types of governance models in place at international schools, ranging from simple to complex parent boards, or single to multiple private owners, for purposes of this study, the term "*board*" will refer to the entity responsible for hiring and firing the head of school and providing strategic direction.

Responsibilities of a Head of School

When I began this research, it became clear that many people did not know or understand what the responsibilities of a head of school are within the context of an international school. The head of school is the top-tier leadership position within the hierarchical structure of an international school. They function like a corporate CEO (Lee et al., 2012) in the sense that they are ultimately responsible for every aspect of the overall operations of the school, reporting directly to a governing board.

While the responsibilities will vary between each international school, reflecting the size, structure, and accountability mechanisms in place, in general, the head of school will oversee the day-to-day operations of the school. They will carry out the school's vision, mission, and purpose, develop and oversee school policies and procedures, focus on marketing and admissions, and hire faculty. As noted in one hiring campaign, "the Head of School plays a crucial role in leading the school community toward achieving its goals. They should be able to inspire and motivate others by being decisive and having a clear vision for the school's future" (Canadian Academy, 2023). Furthermore, they are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the academic program of the school reflects the best practices of international education

and contributes towards the achievement of academic excellence. As McClelland notes, “one of the most important roles the head of school exercises is assuring the quality and consistency of the teaching and learning in the school” (2001, p.49).

Another fundamental area of responsibility revolves around financial management. A head of school works closely with the board to oversee all financial matters, from school budgets to tuition increases, to ensure that the organization is in strong financial condition. This is a challenging area as the head of school must balance the needs of the school both in terms of academics and finances. As Macdonald (2007) notes, this “dual focus within the international school context is an area of considerable complexity (p. 157)” in which the head “must not only have a very clear understanding of the importance of both perspectives but must be able to convince educational and business operations decision makers of the best way forward for the school” (Macdonald, 2007, p.157).

As the Tier 1 leader, the head of school is fully accountable to the school board. As such, they must keep in constant communication, attend meetings, and submit annual goals and performance reports when necessary. Furthermore, they must ensure compliance with all laws, statutes, policies, and regulations as enacted by the host country, in addition to relevant policies from accrediting organizations or other governments as applicable. There are many facets to the position which, ultimately, make it a very challenging position.

Literature Search Methodology

To determine the breadth of academic literature on tenure and challenges faced by international school heads, this research incorporated a literature search

strategy of key concepts ("educational leadership" and "international school") and sub-group terms (challenges, termination, and turnover). A combination of the noted terms was used in several search engines provided by the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE) online library system. These included the OISE Library platform, EBSCOhost, JSTOR and ProQuest. Search parameters included all peer-reviewed scholarly work, including academic journals, books, and government publications, in English only, then sorted by publication date. Both parenthesis and Boolean operators were incorporated as the goal was to limit the search to the most relevant articles only.

While the academic authorship on educational leadership has significantly increased in the past two decades, very little was published in this area before this century. For example, based on EBSCOhost results, during the 1960s, only 29 journal articles were found. By the end of the 1990s, this had increased to 1,459 articles; however, it was not until post-2000 that there was a dramatic increase in educational leadership publications with 4,811 articles between 2000-2009 and 13,870 since 2010. This is a tremendous increase and reflects a monumental shift in focus during this period from the *management* of to the *leadership* of educational organizations (Bush, 2008). When adding "turnover" to the "educational leadership" search, there were no results until the 1980s with a return of 2 articles, then 4 in the 1990s, 18 in the 2000s and 109 since 2010.

As the scope of the search was narrowed to international schools, ProQuest found only 34 articles on "international school leadership" - one in 2004, one in 2005, and the remainder all published since 2012. EBSCOhost only found 24 articles with the first one dating from 2014. When splitting the search to "international

school" and "leadership", EBSCOhost, and ProQuest (results in brackets) found: 1960s - zero (8); 1970s - zero (13); 1980s – 1 (42); 1990s – 1 (98); 2000s – 31 (218); and since 2010s – 188 (612). While there is a significant difference in results between the two search engines, many of the ProQuest articles were found not to be relevant. When searching for articles on "international school turnover", no results were found in any searches. As such, "international school" and "turnover" were separated in the Boolean search, resulting in an EBSCOhost find of 67 articles between 2004 (the oldest publication) to 2023. When replicating the search strings within ProQuest between 1980 and 2020, 294 articles were found and only 27 pre-dated 2000. Yet, when adding "leader" to "turnover", the focus of this literature review, the search produced only two results in ProQuest and no results in EBSCOhost. These findings validate the call for additional research on leadership studies within international schools (Bunnell, 2018; Calnin et al., 2018; Keller, 2015).

For the most part, this literature review primarily focused on sources between the years 2000 and 2023 given very little scholarly work, as noted above, was written on this topic before 2000. The key exception to this is the inclusion of Hawley (1994, 1995) since these articles are justifiably the catalyst to and reference point for much of the literature henceforth in this area of research. Based on the search criteria and overall results, a total of 81 publications were short-listed and included in this review.

The following sections of the literature review will address the noted research questions by examining the literature to determine the issues faced by international school heads with the goal of better understanding the comparative and contextual

reasons behind the noted low tenure and high turnover. This will include current research on i) tenure and impact of turnover; ii) key challenges and determinants contributing to short tenure; and iii) the leadership styles, skills and strategies required for success as a head of school within the international school market.

Leadership Tenure and Impact of Turnover: A Comparative Perspective

Academics have acknowledged that the international school head position is extremely challenging (Bunnell, 2018; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Hammad & Shah, 2018; Keller, 2015; Normore, 2004; Speirs, 2016) and that "this is clearly not an environment for the ambitious teacher wanting to get on the leadership ladder" (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022a, p. 12). Short tenure and a high probability of termination make the position comparable to "professional sports managers in terms of short-lived careers" (Morrison, 2018, p. 522).

Our current reference point for an international school head's tenure dates back anywhere from 12 to 30 years. With only 480 U.S. overseas schools registered at the time, Hawley's (1994) quantitative research study examined the employment period of 336 school heads working in U.S.-accredited schools. He determined that, on average, the length of tenure was 2.8 years (p. 12). In addition, and more dramatically, 15% only lasted one year, 35% for two years, and only 26% remained after six years (Hawley, 1994, p 12). Variations in tenure were noted by location, with longer tenure in Europe (4.8 years) versus Africa (1.9 years); by curriculum, with the International Baccalaureate increasing time in position; and by 'prestige value', again, also resulting in longer tenure (Hawley, 1994, p. 16-19). A decrease in tenure was connected to negative travel advisories reflecting the push factors that forced

school heads to leave both the school and the country (Hawley, 1994, p. 19; Hawley, 1995). As one would expect, “tenure is longer in more stable social, economic and political environments” (Hawley, 1994, p. 33).

In terms of school governance, the structure and composition of the board had a direct impact on the longevity of international school heads. For example, Hawley (1994) found where there was greater nationality representation on the board, tenure was much shorter; conversely, if only one nationality, tenure was the longest at over 6 years (p. 15). Furthermore, he determined longevity increased when board membership had a higher number of “disinterested” members, meaning no children at the school (Hawley, 1994, p. 13). This is important as it exemplifies an inherent challenge by design when the governance model allows for divergent interests between parent groups to compete with school leadership vision and direction.

Benson (2011) is the only other research study found on the same scale focusing specifically on international school head turnover, and like Hawley, quoted extensively within the literature. Incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods, Benson (2011) found the average tenure of international school heads to be 3.7 years (p. 93). This was based on 83 surveys and 8 interviews conducted with international school leaders from across the globe with previous experience as heads of school. Although the pool of respondents was double the noted amount, almost half were not included in the calculation since they were in their first post as head, which, is interesting as it points to the significant number of new heads in the position. He found that tenure increased when heads had prior teaching experience in international schools, leadership experience in their home country, and

professional leadership qualifications (Benson, 2011, p. 95). In addition, tenure increased when individuals were promoted to the position from within the organization as opposed to externally recruited (Benson, 2011, p. 97).

When examining educational leadership retention rates comparatively, it has been argued that there is a much higher turnover within international schools compared with national public or private schools (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018a; Hayden & Thompson, 2008). For example, Kane and Barbaro (2015) found in their qualitative study that tenure for U.S. independent school heads was on average 12.6 years (n.p.). While no equivalent data was found for U.K. independent heads, it was recognized that several top U.K. independent schools had the same head for over 25 years, and a few over 35 years (Moorhead, 2011). In the public sector, a study of U.S. public school principals, conducted between 2008 and 2013, determined the average to be 6.6 years with 78% remaining in the same job in the same school the following year (Goldring & Taie, 2014, p. 2). In Ontario, Canada, the average tenure for principals was deemed 7.6 years although 20% had 10-15 years' experience (Pollock, 2014, p. 9). In the United Kingdom, a government study on public school headship retention rates of newly promoted heads in 2013 found that 81% of elementary and 69% of secondary headteachers (under the age of 50) were still in the position three years later (Department of Education, 2018). Comparatively, within the corporate world, when examining US-based Chief Executive Officers, Blackwood (2018) found the median years changed significantly over time, fluctuating from 11.3 years in 2002, 7.2 years in 2009, and 10.8 years in 2015. In 2018, the tenure for S&P 500 CEOs was 7.2 years (Citrin et al., 2019). However, both sets of leaders are operating

within very competitive and challenging environments, yet CEOs remained much longer than that of the average international school leader.

One issue that may impact the noted tenure within public systems is that placement within the public system may vary considerably given the internal movement within a school district's network (Bartanen et al., 2019) and district policy on time limit rotations (Macmillan et al., 2011). Transferring to another school within the district/board was noted in the Béteille et al. (2012) study on principal career paths and termination was noted as being extremely rare (p. 905). An additional observation was that principals moved to more "advantaged and higher achieving" (Béteille et al., 2012) schools each time in a 'stepping stone' pattern as part of their career advancement trajectory. Given that most international schools are single-entity schools and not part of an educational district or private conglomerate, internal transfers are not an option, nor an issue faced by school heads. While it has been noted that principal turnover rates in public schools in the aforementioned countries are on the increase (Ontario Principals Council, 2017; Yan, 2020), based on the research to date, the findings do support that tenure is longer than the range noted for international school heads. Nevertheless, when a length of tenure comparison is made, deconstructing the various push-pull factors is critical to separate internal movement from external departure from a school or district to gain an accurate understanding of the issue.

This leads to a central question that has not been fully addressed within the literature. Aside from Littleford's statement of a high termination rate (Littleford, 2023), the reasons for leaving a school within the international school context require further elucidation. As Mascall et al. (2011) argue, "the circumstances that

prompt a principal to move from the job are diverse, and often unplanned" (p. 89). Researchers need a better understanding of what is driving this "*revolving door",* to adopt Littleford's phrase (Littleford, 2023). As such, "there is a need to move beyond merely focusing on turnover, and more toward attrition" (Bunnell, 2021b, p. 566). It is necessary to have a greater understanding if school heads move due to termination or non-renewal of contract, or, are moving for personal or professional reasons, for example, better remuneration, more interesting locations, or larger, more prestigious schools of their own accord.

Regardless of the reasons behind the move, one cannot ignore the impact short tenure can have on the direction and culture of a school. School leadership is important regardless of type of school or location. Many studies have validated, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that *effective* leadership is the key to a successful school (Branch et al., 2013; Gurr, 2014, 2015; Sampat et al., 2020) and has a direct impact on student achievement (Bush, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Pont, 2020; Roberts & Mancuso, 2014; Simon et al., 2019; Slater, 2011).

It has also been determined that school leaders need time to be effective. Yet, as noted above, school head retention in general remains an issue in many countries (Fuller & Young, 2009; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Meyer et al., 2011; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010; Wills, 2016). Time is a key factor, as it can take up to five (Littleford, 2023; Pont et al., 2008), seven (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009) or even ten years (Blackwood, 2018) to maximize effectiveness and for change initiatives to become well entrenched within the school culture. Relationships need to be developed and trust needs to be established to maximize outcomes (Browning, 2014; Morrison, 2013, 2018) and to concretize commitment to the school's vision, mission,

and direction (Mascall et al., 2011; Pont et al., 2008). Any time less than this is simply far too short for any leader (and related system) to expect change to be first identified and then actions effectively adopted to produce a successful outcome. This, to be accepted, takes time. And yet, as noted, typically the tenure of heads does not allow for such deep-rooted change to be established. Given the current research, it is valid to say that the potential for turnover is much higher, and the safety nets are less secure, for international school leaders when compared to their national public system counterparts.

There is also evidence that a change in leadership can dramatically impact many facets of a school. It has been noted that "one of the most significant events in the life of a school that is most likely to bring about a sizeable shift in direction is a change of leadership" (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006, p. 18). Unfortunately, that impact can weigh heavily on the negative side of the equation. Within the literature, it has been identified that short tenure has a significant impact resulting in increased instability in schools (Bartanen et al., 2019; Hawley, 1994; Gardner-McTaggart, 2018b); increased teacher anxiety (Littleford, 2023); increased teacher cynicism and resistance to change (Mascall et al., 2011); higher teacher turnover (Béteille et al, 2012; Blandford & Shaw, 2001; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Branch et al., 2013; Gardner-McTaggart, 2018a; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009); loss of institutional memory (Béteille et al., 2012); increased organizational costs associated with hiring and training new staff (Béteille et al., 2012; De Jong et al., 2017; Hawley, 1994); and overall long-term planning challenges (Hawley, 1994; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018).

Furthermore, given the noted impact on many areas of school planning and staffing, more recently, academics are examining the impact leadership turnover has on student achievement to determine if any causality (Bartanen et al., 2019; Béteille, et al., 2012; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Branch et al., 2013; Mascall et al., 2011; Sampat et al., 2020). Will's (2016) study of principal changes in South Africa, for example, utilizing a "fixed effects estimation strategy to isolate the principal turnover effect from the confounding influence of school level characteristics" (p. 112), was significant as it brought forth empirical evidence to support the argument that principal turnover, particularly in the short to medium term, has an adverse impact on student achievement (p. 118). When determining causation, it is important to recognize that the level of impact will depend upon many confounders, including the quality of leader and "it does not follow that all principal turnover is detrimental; high turnover rates among low performers may actually promote school performance in subsequent years" (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018, p. 356). The complexities around organizational change, leadership impact, and meeting the expectations of stakeholders create a challenging environment for incoming heads and may in turn contribute to the short tenure given the multifaceted situations new leaders must embrace.

Overall, this is a significant list of issues for any school head to contend with and for any international school wanting to be the 'best', research is showing that a revolving door approach to head of school retention is a sure way to do quite the opposite.

Key Challenges and Determinants Contributing to Short Tenure

International heads of school are at the top of the hierarchy, very much like a corporate CEO (Lee et al., 2012). If they are not successful, there is nowhere else to go within the organization. They cannot take a demotion or transfer to another role within a broader school district. Conversely, if they are successful, there is typically nowhere to move up in the corporate sense. The exception to this is the very recent growth in international education with conglomerates like Cognita, GEMS, and Nord Anglia which have branch campuses and offices across the globe (cf. Bunnell et al., 2020; Gibson & Bailey, 2021). Therefore, heads will attempt to secure positions at other schools with perceived higher value, based on many factors, like location, school reputation, renumeration, and size of student population (Hawley, 1994; Benson, 2011). This makes determining the causes of the documented short tenure and high termination rate a challenge. While tenure length from the two studies noted has been repeated regularly within the literature, subsequent studies have not thoroughly replicated the research to determine ongoing validation and root causes. For example, Stout (2005) notes "there is a seemingly disproportionate number of heads who are fired or replaced with varying degrees of acceptable procedure" (p. 16), yet *seemingly* implies there lacks a solid quantifiable justification for this claim. Based on this literature review, most researchers have bought into the 'fact' that tenure will be short. Only one study countered this with "despite the regularity of such comment [short tenure], there has still been little investigation into explaining or 'making sense' of this situation" (Bunnell, 2018, p. 553).

If the duration is so short for heads of school there must be very concrete reasons, particularly when termination is so prevalently noted. Hawley (1995) argues

that the most noted reason for short tenure relates to issues of governance; that is the control and micro-management by the board of directors (p. 24). Tensions between the head and board have also been noted in other research (cf. Bailey & Gibson, 2020; Benson, 2011; Gardner-McTaggart, 2018b; Keller, 2015; Stout, 2005) including Speir's (2016) quantitative report based on heads of schools in Asia and the Gulf region where governance was "seen as the number one reason that Heads leave earlier than anticipated and, in the view of many Heads, seems to be the biggest issue facing international schools" (Speirs, 2016, p. 27). This remains a key area of concern and as Gibson & Bailey (2021) argued regarding high turnover "it would appear valuable to focus on the principal governance relationship" (p. 2). Additional challenges noted in the literature were adjusting to the political and cultural conditions of the host country, learning the school culture, and the transient nature of the school (Bailey & Gibson, 2020; Kane & Barbaro, 2015).

At an operational level, another key challenge noted for international school heads is navigating the leadership-management dichotomy. When examining "theoretical models of leadership, one can see, at least in the literature, a shift from dominant-patriarchal (authoritarian) to collective-distributive (power-sharing) modes of operation in terms of organisational management" (Morrison, 2013, p. 413) and the important connection between leadership and management, "with leadership steering the organisation and management propelling it towards its target goals" (Morrison, 2013, p. 418). School leaders must be adept at both, yet more recently, theory and practice have emphasized the need for a greater leadership role in proportion to overall work. However, when examining the skillset required by international school boards for a head of school position, Roberts and Mancuso

(2014) in their study of job advertisements for such positions determined that the most frequent leadership style noted was 'managerial'. This is not surprising as heads, both in national and international schools, spend much of their time managing instead of leading (Ontario Principals Council, 2017; Pollock, 2014; Sampat et al., 2020).

Yet, in terms of the role of a leader, Pont (2020) argues it has shifted over time from "an administrative role in 1960 through to the 1980s; to a management role in the 80s and 90s; and finally, to a leadership role since the beginning of 2000" (p. 156). However, this may be more reflective of theory and not practice. While this paradigm shift is reflected in leadership studies, it may not represent what power holders (boards) of international schools necessarily want. Rather, international school leaders, many of whom have advanced degrees and studied educational leadership as a prerequisite for a headship (Mancuso et al., 2010) are expected "to embrace the ideas around collaboration and distribution of leadership, yet the structural model they are functioning in still reflects the formal hierarchical system of yesteryear" (Morrison, 2013, p. 416). These structural constraints - between leading and managing - can actually "hinder a leader's ability to transform current systems and reinvigorate them for further development and growth" (Morrison, 2013, p. 413). When placed into the realm of board mandate, the focus on a managerial role may exacerbate tensions by explicating the power dynamics and expectations of the board versus the head of school.

This connects directly to a role incongruity between the perception of the school board (as principal) and the duties or expectations of the head of school (as agent) within school operations. This relationship, at a theoretical level, will be

explicated in more detail in the next chapter, however, what is important to recognize here is the skillset required by international school boards for a head of school position lies firmly in the managerial category (Roberts and Mancuso, 2014, p. 101). This is quite surprising given the emphasis on school leadership and away from management over the past several decades. It has the potential to place the principal's expectations at odds with the agent and highlight a challenge international school leaders face in navigating the leadership/management dichotomy.

Furthermore, it will interact with the function of change, school improvement, and performativity expectations between the various stakeholders. If school boards want a manager, and heads of school envision themselves as leaders, and "leadership is about change, and change is equated with instability, which management tries to minimize, then there is an inherent conflict between the concepts of leadership and management" (Morrison, 2018, p. 512) and, as such, between the perceived role of head of school in relation with the board. These increasing tensions can impact other interest groups within the school and will eventually erode the trust between the head of school and the entire school community (Walls, 2020). It is the head of school who will take the collective complaints as they act (as are publicly seen) as the singular representative of the school. These issues need to be examined to see if there is a connection between defined roles (leader versus manager) and the tenure of school heads.

In comparison, the challenges faced by private school heads in the United States revolve around three main areas - finance, transferability of job skills, and dealing with competing demands (Kane & Barbaro, 2015). While studies are limited

in this area, research examining the challenges facing public school principals is much further developed. For example, Leithwood and Azah (2014) conducted a two-staged, mixed-methods study involving 102 Ontario principals and vice-principals and determined challenges include increasing workload, new government initiatives, government and board policies and regulations, unions and contracts, and the overall volume of communication and email required (p. 83). Pollock (2014), incorporating a mixed methods study of Ontario principals, found that key challenges were "recognition for the work principals do, managing mental health concerns in the school community, implementing and responding to provincial initiatives and mandates, and dealing with staff who are resistant to change" (Pollock, 2014, p. 3). Similar results were found in Wang & Pollock's (2020) quantitative study of British Columbia school principals. As one can see, the specifics are more detailed and precise within the literature for public school leaders in comparison with their international colleagues. There are also key differences in roles between public and international school heads. If one were to summarize, "one could argue that in government school systems the school Head is primarily focused upon operational effectiveness issues while, in international schools, Heads are much more focused on strategic decision-making" (Macdonald, 2007, p. 158).

Concerning the challenges international school heads face, it would be remiss to negate the impact of the 2020 global pandemic on schools in general and leadership in particular. The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic were unprecedented in modern times and have "without question… upending the modern world" (Harris, 2020, p. 321). It will take time to truly understand the overall impact it has had on the education system. For heads of international schools, like all

educational staff globally, it was a very challenging time. While Harris and Jones (2020) correctly note that "there are no precedents and no guides to leading schools in a pandemic" and while "this is a perfect storm with imperfect leadership responses" (p. 244), Harris (2020) also acknowledges that "school leaders are working tirelessly to ensure that for the learners in their care, emotional, social and mental well-being is nurtured and supported" (p. 322). International school heads around the globe functioned in crisis mode and while the "pandemic has created undeniable chaos… it has unleashed a wealth of energy in innovative, collaborative and laser-focused problem-solving" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020, p. 334).

How the pandemic will impact the issues noted within this dissertation is yet to be seen. Perhaps given the challenges surrounding travel restrictions and issuance of work visas, the tenure of school heads may have increased as schools held on to the staff currently under employment. Conversely, the pressure on heads by boards became more pronounced as employer repatriation of workers and challenging economic times impacted total student enrolment and the financial bottom line for many schools in many countries.

Concurrent with the economic challenges, there was a significant socio-emotional impact and now overall mental health challenges are being examined. Kelly, a former international school principal, has been investigating this area and determined that "55% [of international school leaders] felt close to breaking point at some time during 2020" (Kelly, 2021) and "sixty-seven percent of leaders felt their stress levels were impacting negatively on their health" (Kelly, 2020). While no data could be found on those leaving the profession within the international school context because of the pandemic, one study:

> conducted by the National Association of Secondary Principals (NASSP) revealed that 45% of the principals responding during the 2020 crisis were considering leaving the job sooner than they had previously planned [due to] concerns with health, extreme pressure or stress, and lack of support. (Derrington & Hayes, 2021, p. 84)

Within the international context, this may be exacerbated by the addition of travel restrictions resulting in school heads feeling the need to return to their home countries. This issue has been identified in Hong Kong as top government leaders warn that "retaining talent in the education sector was an 'imminent issue' amid a wave of emigration and the coronavirus pandemic, with travel restrictions forcing some teachers, including expatriates, to quit to reunite with their families" (Yiu, 2021). One can predict that as the challenges associated with the pandemic continue, there could very well be a greater number of heads leaving the profession and this factor was taken into consideration within the study design.

As explicated within this section, there are many unique challenges faced by international school heads. Whether social, political, geographical, structural, or global health-related, heads of school must navigate many areas carefully to ensure that they are both successful in their role while meeting the high expectations of the board and parent community.

Leadership Qualities and Skills Required for Success

There are many challenges in leading an international school. It has been demonstrated that heads of school must navigate many areas carefully to ensure that they are both successful in their role while meeting the high expectations of all

stakeholders. Yet, this is not an easy task. While being a school leader anywhere can be extremely challenging, "in an international school, with its added complexities and idiosyncrasies, it becomes an art form" (Caffyn, 2010, p. 56). Based on the research it would suggest that many heads of school have not developed the requisite *art form* to be successful and maintain their position. Comments like "leadership in international schools has always been a precarious position" (Bunnell, 2018, p. 553) or international schools are "largely unappealing and unattractive area of education involving much precarity and insecurity" (Bunnell, 2021b, p. 559) do not elucidate the complexities nor further our understanding of the situation. While determining the current situation and root cause for head turnover requires further investigation, so does better understanding the leadership skills needed for success. This has been an ignored area of research although Bunnell (2021b) recently asked a very pertinent question, that being "what strategies do they [school heads] adopt to 'survive'?" (p. 559) recognizing that this phenomenon of short tenure requires a more focused examination.

If reasons for termination relate *inter alia* to governance issues and relations with the school board, a key area of research must focus on the leadership attributes and skills required for success. If what Malpass (1994) argued several decades ago remains valid today, that "many heads … have either forgotten, or indeed have never learnt, the basic principles of good school management" (as cited in Bunnell, 2018, p. 552), then the issue of termination may be connected to perceived or actual incompetence. Being a successful teacher versus a successful school head (in many ways functioning as a de facto CEO of a complex organization) in charge of multimillion-dollar budgets and hundreds of staff is profoundly different. This

highlights the complexities surrounding the role of school head as they are "increasingly being asked to perform dual roles in protecting both educational standards and the commercial bottom line" (Gibson & Bailey, 2021, p. 7). This facet of the position may be one of the key issues impacting the success of a head of school as "the failure to mediate between the education and business perspectives – to align the lenses and create a clear picture and proper depth of vision for all parties [has been acknowledged as] a key factor in the high turnover of school heads" (Macdonald, 2006, p. 211).

Earlier it was mentioned that *effective* leadership was the key to a successful school. Yet the term *effective* is broad in meaning and may be framed differently depending upon the role one has within the school system. For teachers, school heads were deemed *effective* if "they were supportive, gave them respect, worked with them to develop the school's vision, encouraged collaboration among teachers, and worked with staff to meet curriculum standards and to solve school or department problems" (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 319). This perspective is much more aligned with transformational leadership and not the managerial leadership style prioritized by boards as noted in the Roberts and Mancuso study (2014) and discussed in the previous section.

Therefore, what are the leadership skills required for strategic success and ultimate survival as an international school head? There are many studies which examine the connection between school leadership and school effectiveness (Day et al., 2020; Harris & Jones, 2023; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004, Pont et al., 2008, Pont, 2014). One of the most prolific and influential studies revolves around the work of Leithwood and colleagues, including Leithwood and

Riehl's (2003) development of a leadership framework to support educational leadership improvement. They note that "three broad categories of practices have been identified as important for leadership success in almost all settings and organizations" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 3). While Leithwood et al. adjusted the headings in their latter works (2008, 2019), they originally organized key leadership qualities and practices into the domains of: i) setting directions; ii) developing people; and iii) developing the organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Each category outlines specific competencies which they argue reflect a "core set of leadership practices [that] forms the 'basics' of successful leadership and are valuable in almost all educational contexts" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 3). This framework has had an impact on leadership theory and practice. For example, this model has had a direct influence on the development of the Ontario government's *Ontario Leadership Framework* which "provides aspiring leaders at both the school and district levels with important insights about what they will need to learn to be successful" (Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 5; cf. Leithwood, 2012).

While there is not a definitive list of leadership characteristics which will guarantee success as a school head, there are "a number of studies [which] have found that honesty, integrity, trust and approachability are fundamental to the making of an effective leader" (Morrison, 2018, p. 516). Other qualities noted for success, aside from overall competence, are "embraces diversity (83%), an inspirational motivator (67%), good interpersonal skills (67%), a sense of humor, and approachable and friendly (62%)" (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014, p. 94). While these are connected to building and maintaining positive staff relationships, they are

also fundamental to maintaining good relationships with all stakeholders, most notably with the board.

When examining a leader's ability to retain the head position, it is necessary to recognize the fundamental importance of the *affective* characteristics of a leader in that organizational success has been connected to the leader's ability to develop people (cf. Morrison, 2018) so that they may become "effective managers of change (Simon et al., 2019, p. 269). This is supported by Speirs (2016) assertion that "successful Heads are composed, self-assured and project a positive, calm presence – irrespective of how they might be feeling inside. They need the drive and strength of character to cope gracefully, overcome setbacks and remain positive" (p. 56). Equally important given the international nature of the position, Keung and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2013) note that cultural intelligence factors play a significant role in effective leadership practices. They argue that "cultural intelligence should be an important consideration in the selection, training, and professional development of international school leaders" (p. 848).

A tremendous skill set is required to be a successful head of school. These skills allow international school heads to deal with the continuous pressure from the board to ensure that the school is operating optimally, growth is occurring, and academic results are consistently improving so that students are entering the top universities globally. A school's academic success is a key area of importance for heads of school. International school heads cannot shirk this area of responsibility since if academic test scores decline, there will be tremendous pressure on the head to make changes to ensure improvements continue. However, as noted, much of the time spent on tasks focuses on management and not leadership, plus the

management tasks are not around instructional leadership activities that will necessarily lead to improved student achievement. While not within the context of international schools, Sampat et al. (2020) found that school leaders in the Global South "spent less than 25% of their time managing activities related to student learning" (p. 35).

However, these issues can lead to potential problems *if* the board and head's vision lack congruence. Given that there are two sides to any power situation, that being *conflict* and *cooperation*, and while schools can be "arenas of struggles" (Ball, 1987, p. 19; cf. Zhang & Henderson, 2018) with both legitimate and illegitimate forms of power being utilized to further one's goal (Hoyle, 1982; Lindle, 2020; Meyer et al., 2011), it can also be "about cooperation and collaboration, supporting each other in order to achieve certain ends" (Eilertsen et al., 2008, p. 295). Situations of aligned versus conflicting agendas highlight the complex relationship between a board and its head of school. Keller (2015) argues that these "challenges, if not met well, may lead to a 'dark' or 'destructive' form of leadership contributing to the leader's failure and removal" (p. 900). While these 'dark forces' are noted emanating from the leader, they are also acknowledged surrounding the leader. Caffyn's writings (2018) use the metaphor of "vampirism" to elucidate the destructive power struggles prevalent within international schools.

As such, without the knowledge and skills of how to handle competing interests and agendas, a head of school will fail. They must have an excellent understanding of the power dynamics surrounding everyday interactions across multiple stakeholders. Ultimately, a successful school head "is one who possesses political skills and acumen and understands that how he/she acts politically affects

teaching, learning, relationships, school governance, change efforts … and his/her career" (Winton & Pollock, 2013, p. 51). Having this essential knowledge will assist international school heads in being effective leaders who can maintain their finger on the pulse of the school (cf. Smeed et al., 2009) and guide the narrative thereby maximizing cohesion and success between themselves and the board.

Summary

With the continuing growth of the international school market, a greater understanding of the challenges faced by heads of school is warranted. It is necessary to first determine the current tenure and termination situation of international school heads, and then, delve into a fuller understanding of the results. With the tremendous changes impacting the international school market over the past two decades, it is difficult to know if the data from earlier studies remains valid. This is, in part, because the data regarding the relatively short tenure of international school heads are derived from only two studies – the total of studies published on this topic over the past 30 years.

Yet, within the literature, there is continued referencing to the average length of time in the position ranging from 2.8 years (Hawley, 1994, 1995) to 3.7 years (Benson, 2011). Many academics base arguments on the results of these two studies to frame international schools as negative spaces with precarious working environments dominated by 'dark forces' (Bunnell, 2018; Caffyn, 2010, 2018; Eilertsen et al., 2008; Keller, 2015) which have led to high termination rates. Few authors make note that the data may not be representative of the current situation thus reflecting a tremendous gap in the literature.

Furthermore, while high turnover is accepted as a fact, there is a lack of explanatory detail within the literature to fully understand this phenomenon. This is another significant gap that needs to be addressed. For example, why is tension between the board and head of school so prevalent? While there are many challenges international school heads face noted in the literature in broad terms, a minor voice has argued that there is insufficient data to "substantiate some of the claims made by these researchers about the specific challenges facing international school leaders" (Bailey & Gibson, 2020, p. 1010). Again, the data available is a significant limitation with the possibility that what is being espoused in the literature is not an accurate reflection of the current situation. Finally, connected to the necessity of requiring a better understanding, there is very little research that attempts to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding this phenomenon. As Bush (2011) argues, "theory is valuable and significant if it serves to explain practice and provide managers with a guide to action" (p. 24).

Given the noted gaps in the literature, *the goal of this study is to design a comprehensive examination into the tenure and termination of international school heads in context to the current situation and explicate the challenges faced in leading an international school*. As Labaree (2003) so accurately noted "you can't fix problems of practice unless you have a deep and sophisticated understanding of the nature of these problems and of the contexts within which they arise" (p. 17). As such, this study will lead to a better understanding of the issues impacting the tenure of international school leaders, and more importantly, provide insights to support heads in navigating the challenges of leadership within the international school system.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

The Theory behind the Design

Structuring research with a sound theoretical framework is vital as "theory establishes a foundation that provides a framework for analysis, for decision-making and, ultimately, for action" (Morrison, 2013, p. 414). In this sense, theory does not only function as *theory-for-understanding* but also *theory-for-improving* (cf. Hoyle, 1982). When examining theoretical frameworks that would bring greater clarity to the research questions, it was determined that it would be beneficial to structure the study around principal-agent theory. The rationale for selection reflects the structural relationship and policy interactions between an international school board (principal) and head of school (agent). This can have a direct impact on school head efficacy and related tenure. While principal-agent theory "has been applied in different disciplines to analyze human behavior in diversity of contexts" (Rabossi, 2017, p. 320), no research was found connecting this theoretical framework with international school research.

Principal-Agent Theory

When examining the structural relationship between international school heads and their employer, that being the school board, principal-agent theory is an excellent model to frame this problem of practice. This reflects the contractual relationship with the board and the fact that the board controls the hiring and firing of the head of school. This study is about head of school tenure and what it takes to maintain the position. It is about the relationship between the head and board given

the success of the head is dependent on the board in terms of maintaining a contract. As such, principal-agent theory "is a good starting point to analysing stakeholder relations" (Yallew et al., 2018, p. 96). The research noted in the literature review has identified that the school board and head of school relationship is a key area of conflict and tension (Benson, 2011; Hawley, 1994, 1995; Littleford, 2023; Morrison, 2018; Speirs, 2016). As such, applying principal-agent theory provides insight into board and head of school relations, policies, issues and interactions (like the potential increase in agent monitoring). It also connects self-interest, problems of information asymmetry, and the potential issue of the agent shirking one's duties, which will be explored in greater detail below.

If an international school head's contract is cut short, or not renewed, then the decision-making to implement such must be at the board level. This is where principal-agent theory can help make sense of the situation given that it examines "the relationship between two or more parties, in which one party, designated as the principal, engages another party, designated as the agent, to perform some tasks on behalf of the principal" (Lane & Kivistö, 2008, p. 144) while at the same time can explain "the potential for conflict of interest that arises" (Turner & Müller, 2004, p. 329) between principal and agent. While the principal-agent relationships can be complex within organizations, and across organizations, this research will focus on the board (as principal) and head of school (as agent).

Given that the principal does not have either the time or expertise to fulfill the required duties, an agent with the skills is hired to work on their behalf. The agent is entrusted to work in the best interests of the principal, not their own. However, there is no guarantee that this will happen. It is expected that the agent will operate with

self-interest (Borgos, 2013; Casson, 2007; Levačić, 2009; Moe, 1984, 2006; Nikula & Kivistö, 2020; West et al., 2009). Therefore, a fundamental concern is how can the principal ensure that the agent is kept in check and doing what is required to maximize the principal's interests. This is where one can examine the structural interconnectedness and relationship between the principal and agent within an international school to see if there are any shortcomings which may illuminate the short tenure and termination issue for the agent.

There are several concepts which highlight potential problems which can arise between the principal and agent within this theoretical framework. The first problem is 'information asymmetry'. This occurs "when the principal has less knowledge than the agent of how the agent's effort relates to his/her output" (Levačić, 2009, pp. 35-36). Since it is the agents who are doing the work, they will be more up-to-date on the day-to-day operations of the school and those activities may not be effectively communicated to the principal. School directions and priorities established by the board may not be communicated effectively or promptly to the agent and, conversely, updates from the agent to the board may also have the same problems. This asymmetry in information can lead to tensions since the principal will not know if the agent's performance is being maximized or even following the board's mandate.

Furthermore, this can lead to another issue, that being 'moral hazard'. This means there is "the prospect of providing misleading information, acting in bad faith, or engaging in insincere and risky behavior for one's own benefit and to the detriment of others' interests" (Walker & Florea, 2014, p. 202). This will result in "some uncertainty regarding the relationship between the agent's effort and his/her

output" (Levačić, 2009, p. 35). This is connected to the belief that the agent will ultimately attempt to shirk duties and operate to maximize self-interest (Turner & Müller, 2004) since "people who engage in moral hazardous behavior are prone to taking unwarranted risks because they do not have to bear the consequences" (Walker & Florea, 2014, p. 202). This can be exacerbated by 'adverse selection' referring to the intentional withholding of information. In this context, "school effort (from a school's administration or teachers) is not fully observable to parents or policymakers, and this creates a potential moral hazard problem as the school has an incentive to under provide effort" (Ferreyra & Liang, 2012, p. 237). Both issues can create problems for the principal and may explain why boards feel the need to increase monitoring of school management and operations.

Given the noted challenges, Turner and Müller (2004) determined that in their examination of project management, the best scenario for positive interactions relied on high collaboration and regular communication (both formal and informal) combined with data and information needed to analyze performance. The results build a "good, trusting, working relationship between them [principal and agent], while empowering the [agent] to deal with the risk that inevitably arises… but also leaving the [principal] some control" (p. 335). If this is not the case, one of the only options for the principal is to increase agent monitoring (Borgos, 2013; Moe, 2006; Nikula & Kivistö, 2020). This has been noted in previous studies concerning the potentially high level of micromanagement by school boards (Bailey & Gibson, 2019; Benson, 2011; Blandford & Shaw, 2001). Perhaps the reasons for high termination rates are the lack of trust between the principal and the agent, the lack of information the principal has (or is getting), and the tensions that emanate out of a

relationship where the principal wants a manager, and the agent wants to be a leader. It can also lead to a tremendous level of frustration for the head of school. It's an ultimate clash of structures, roles, and personalities.

By incorporating principal-agent theory, an examination of the relationship between board and head is beneficial with the caveat that it does have some limitations connected to the theoretical assumption that the agent's pursuit of self-interests surpasses all else and a collegial relationship between principal-agent is not inherently possible without some form of economic incentives or structural controls. Notwithstanding, this framework provides a deeper understanding of the interaction between the principal and agent, connecting policies, actions, and responses, and elucidates the challenges faced by heads of school not only in leading schools successfully but also in maintaining their positions.

Summary

When examining the challenges facing international school heads, in terms of leading a school and being able to maintain their role as leaders, there are definite benefits of framing this situation through principal-agent theory. For example, principal-agent theory "has enjoyed far reaching success in modelling interaction between persons where one works for the other" (Lane, 2014). This theory provides greater depth to the sensemaking surrounding the problem of practice challenges in this study.

Given that this theoretical approach can provide great insight into board and head of school policies, issues and interactions, applying principal-agent theory for

analytical purposes has merit. Working within this framework will provide a greater understanding of the research questions.

Chapter IV: Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

While knowing what you want to research may be straightforward, knowing how to do it can be quite a challenge. With the research questions of this study formulated, the next task was to examine various methodological approaches and accompanying methods to determine which would be the most beneficial in securing data to further our understanding of the issues. This reflects that "research questions are the most important part of any research design because they drive the research methods used" (Merchant et al., 2021, p. 2). When examining the research questions, it was determined that an explanatory sequential mixed methods (Creswell, 2009, 2016; Creswell & Clark, 2018) design would be best suited to maximize the overall understanding of the issues and challenges impacting heads of school. The rationale for such is noted in the next section.

A mixed methods approach has "become an important approach to research worldwide" (Adu et al., 2022, p. 321) and "has contributed immensely to academia through its application in the social sciences" (Adu et al., 2022, p. 323). Mixed methods research (MMR), as defined by Creswell (2016), is:

> an approach to research in which the investigator collects, analyzes, and interprets both quantitative and qualitative data (closed- and open-ended information), integrates or combines the two approaches in various ways, and frames the study within a specific type of design or procedure. Sometimes the researcher makes specific their philosophical assumptions, and more often than not, they include a theory that guides the quantitative or qualitative strand of their

> research or both. Also, both strands need to be conducted using rigorous methods of data collection and analysis. (p. 60)

When looking at methodology, there has been a long history of contention between positivism and interpretivism, with each side arguing that they are mutually exclusive in terms of ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches to a social phenomenon (Giddings & Grant, 2007; Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Even within MMR, there lacks "consensus on its meaning" (Small, 2021, p. 59) and there has been much discussion and debate as to what constitutes 'mixed methods' given recognition of studies defined as such are not always clear on how the research questions warrant an MMR approach (Fàbregues et al., 2021; Merchant et al., 2021). However, as Small (2021) acknowledges, "it is easy to recognize as mixed method a quantitative survey supplemented by qualitative interviews" (p. 58). Incorporating both of these approaches to address a research area of study can be tremendously powerful. As Cohen et al. (2018) argue "mixed methods research recognizes, and works with, the fact that the world is not exclusively quantitative or qualitative; it is not an either/or world, but a mixed world" (p. 31). In addition, it is important to recognize that "both positivist and interpretive approaches to research have substantial value [and] contrary to the current rhetoric, [they have] deep similarities rather than deep differences" (Weber, 2004: iv). Ultimately, MMR "takes its foundation from the pragmatic paradigm and seeks to use 'what works best' to address complex research problems" (Adu et al., 2022, p. 327).

Method Justification

When examining how best to address the research questions, it was determined that "the complexity of the problem cannot be deciphered or fully understood from a single quantitative or qualitative approach" (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015, p. 115). This supports Lavelle et al. (2013) in that the "research questions should reflect the rationale for undertaking mixed methods research and clearly demonstrate the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the project" (Lavelle et al., 2013). By adopting a mixed methods approach, this study benefitted from the strengths of each methodology, which together, made for a sounder research design and allowed for the determination of more meaningful results. As Blaxter et al. (2010) note, another benefit is that a combination of approaches can increase the "validity of the information being collected" (p. 205).

Terrell (2016) argues that for a study to be considered mixed methods, one data set is "used to complement or explain the other by merging or connecting the two" (p. 197). In this study, the key question regarding the current international school head tenure and termination situation must first be addressed (the big picture) before addressing and framing the specifics connected to the challenges and strategies for success. It is believed that this approach is extremely valuable as the researcher moves from an understanding of the *breadth* of the issues (positivism) to a greater *depth* of the issues (interpretivism).

As Hesse-Biber (2016) argues "p*hilosophical pragmatism* centers on the research question and advocates using a range of methods that best meet its needs and research purpose" (p. xxxvi) to "engage the subject of inquiry from all possible angles while using all available tools to fully answer the question" (Hesse-Biber,

2016, p. xxxvi). This should not be interpreted as a simplistic *means to an end*, but rather as acknowledging the importance of linking research questions and methods with "epistemologies, political stances, methodologies, theoretical perspectives, and axiologies/values engagement" (Hesse-Biber, 2016, p. xliii). It has been argued that this approach, by "prioritizing the act of discovery over the justifications for knowledge, may provide the appropriate theoretical scaffolding" (Small, 2011, p. 62) by encouraging "researchers to set aside considerations about what is ultimately true in favor of what is ultimately useful and to remain comfortable with uncertainty and that it orients itself toward solving practical problems in the 'real world'" (Small, 2011, p. 62).

Furthermore, the benefit of including a qualitative component in conjunction with the quantitative data collection is to achieve a deeper understanding of the issues impacting the head of school. As Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) argue, "interviews are a powerful method of data collection, because they entail one-to-one interaction between the researcher and the individuals he or she is studying" (p. 296). Incorporating interviews "enable participants … to discuss their interpretation of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view" (Cohen *et al.,* 2018, p. 506). This process of understanding the big picture vis-à-vis survey data in conjunction with exploring deeper into its meaning and implications vis-à-vis interviews is extremely beneficial. This process has the potential to be very powerful in terms of explicating the nuances surrounding the challenges international school heads have in maintaining their position. However, it is important to remember that "for all types of interviews, in contrast, the interviewer has a powerful and inescapable influence on the data collected; what

the interviewee says is always a function of the interviewer and the interview situation" (Maxwell, 2009, p. 243).

Furthermore, the design of this study has adhered to the MMR necessity for integration. In other words, this study "involves the integration of qualitative and quantitative data in ways that underscore the advantages of using both research approaches to illuminate and advance our understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Watkins & Gioia, 2015). Integration can occur at various stages of the research design, including "design, method, and interpretation and reporting levels of the research" (Fetters et al, 2013, p. 2135). In this study, I have used a basic design of explanatory sequential mixed methods, where "the researcher first collects and analyzes quantitative data, then the findings inform qualitative data collection and analysis" (Fetters et al, 2013, p. 2136). The overall intent of this approach is to "have one phase of the mixed methods study build on the other" (Fetters et al, 2013, p. 2136).

Integration at the methods level "occur through linking the methods of data collection and analysis" (Fetters et al., 2013, p. 2139). While there are several ways to have integration at the methods level and this "may occur through one or more of these approaches" (Fetters et al., 2013, p. 2139), the integration at the methods was achieved by incorporating both *building* and *merging*. Building "occurs when results from one data collection procedure informs the data collection approach of the other procedure" (Fetters et al., 2013, p. 2140) while the "integration through merging of data occurs when researchers bring the two databases together for analysis and for comparison" (Fetters et al., 2013, p. 2140). This was achieved by ensuring that the "qualitative data can be collected using parallel or similar questions" (Fetters et al.,

2013, p. 2140) tied to both the overall research questions and the design focus of the survey.

While again there are different ways to demonstrate integration at the interpretation and reporting level, this study incorporated a narrative approach, weaving data from "both qualitative and quantitative findings together on a theme-by-theme or concept-by-concept basis" (Fetters et al., 2013, p. 2142). This process will become evident as the reader examines the findings and discussion section of the dissertation.

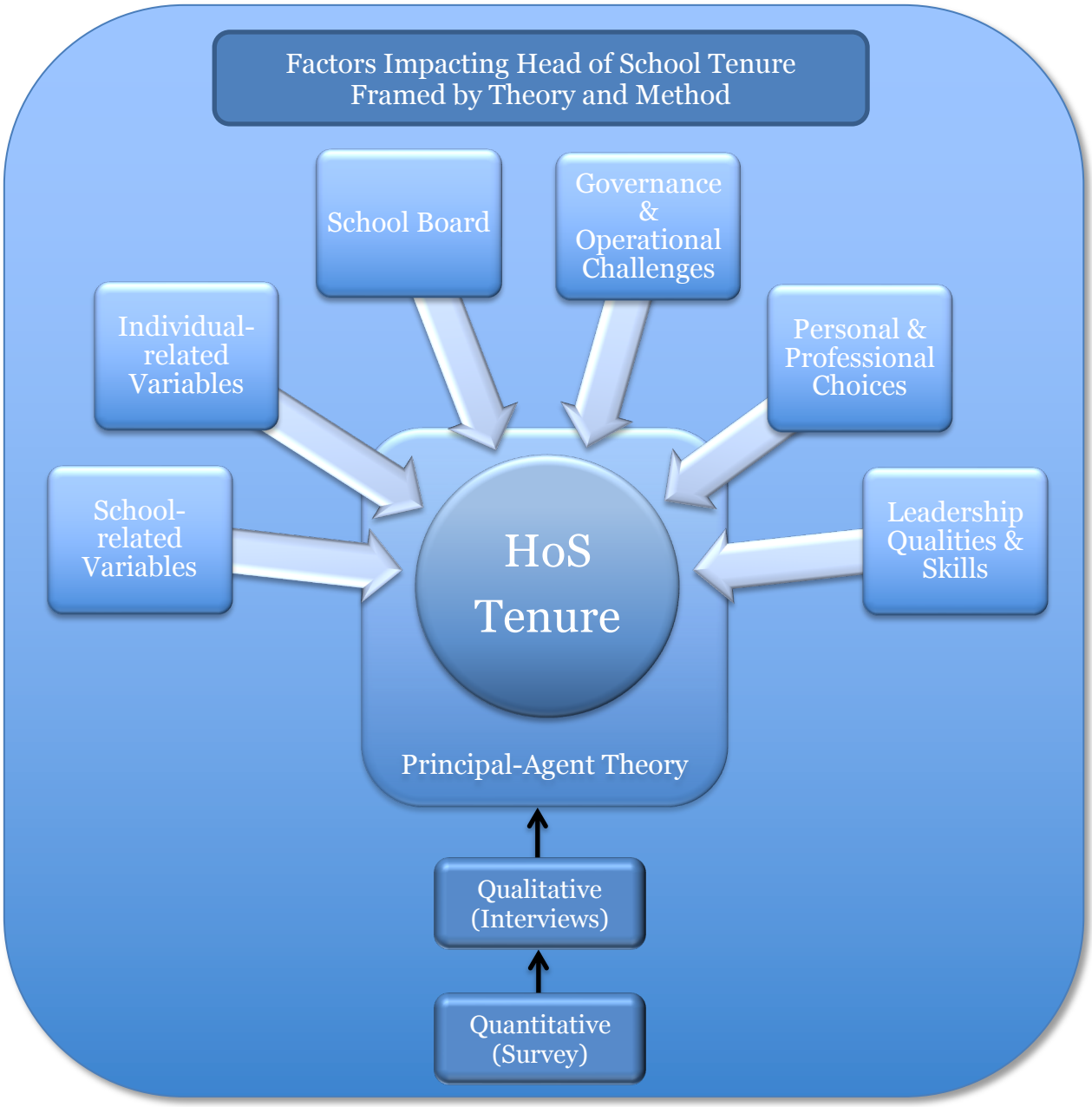
Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) posit that "a conceptual framework is an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous" (p. 26). It is also important to include the elements of *argumentation* (importance of study, design and method), *explanation* (key factor relationships) and *generation* (research questions, methods) within the conceptual framework (Crawford, 2019, p. 41).

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) below reflects the issues being examined as outlined by the research questions, framed by theory and method. Head of school tenure is central to this study thus reflecting the centrality of position in the framework. All core elements of my research design are included - factors that impact the tenure of international school heads, the theoretical framework guiding the study, and methods used to gather the required data to address the research questions.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Research Methods

As noted earlier, the decision was made to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research methods to address the research questions. The following (Table 1) explains in greater detail which research methods and corresponding tools were

utilized and how they addressed the specific research questions. In an MMR study, the research questions must provide " 'integration' to permeate the mixed methods research process [which is] achieved through designing research questions based on both quantitative and qualitative data rather than setting separate questions for each type of data" (Adu et al. 2022, p. 326).

Table 1

Research Question (RQ) and Method

Research Question	Method	Tools used for data collection
RQ1: What is the current average length of tenure and reasons for turnover for international school heads?	Quantitative and Qualitative	Survey of international school heads with questions on years as head, number of schools, reasons for leaving the position, and associated questions on the position and environment Interview questions relating to tenure, experience, reasons for leaving the position
RQ2: What challenges are faced by international school heads and how do these contribute to the noted short tenure?	Quantitative and Qualitative	Survey of international school heads with questions pertaining to key challenges, relationship with the board, role of position, and impact of pandemic Interview questions focused on the same topics noted above and guided by quantitative results
RQ3: What are the key leadership styles, qualities, and strategies needed to successfully maintain one's position as an international school head?	Quantitative and Qualitative	Survey of international school heads with questions connected to heads training, leadership qualities and strategies for success as head of school Interview questions focused on the same topics noted above and guided by quantitative results

Sampling and Procedures

As an explanatory sequential mixed methods study, a survey was first designed, distributed, and analyzed. Interviews were then conducted. The following details the design and sampling procedures of both methods.

Quantitative (Survey)

The following outlines the design, target population, and sampling procedure of the quantitative part of this study.

Design

A cross-sectional survey with a specific target population, that being current heads of school at international schools around the globe, was designed to capture data with a focus on situations, perceptions, and experiences (non-causal) guided by the research questions. The survey was constructed with a focus on i) head of school experience; ii) board composition; iii) challenges of being head of school; iv) leadership skills necessary for success; and v) demographic information. The survey included both open- and closed-ended questions. While constructed to address the research questions, the survey design was also influenced by previous studies (Hawley, 2004, 2005; Benson, 2011) in terms of the variables examined, in addition to an adaptation of Leithwood and Reihl's (2004) leadership framework to assist in the exploration of the leadership skills necessary for success. The list of key characteristics included in this section was adapted from the Leader Attributes Inventory (Moss et al., 1994).

Data collection was internet-based via SurveyMonkey to maximize distribution range, decrease cost, and increase convenience. Once data collection was completed, data was analyzed descriptively and reported in terms of relative ranking and proportions. Open-ended questions were summarized and analyzed thematically. The rationale for selecting this method was the ability to sample many heads of schools within the international school market to attain the best overall representative sample.

The survey was designed (see Appendix 1) and pilot-tested with seven leaders who are current heads of school at international schools in Asia. The selection of candidates to pilot the study was both purposive and random. Initially, two heads with whom I have a direct connection were selected as they both have extensive experience and are heads with very long tenure (12+ years) at the same school. In addition, five random heads completed the survey after an email request from the Executive Director of the Association of China and Mongolia International Schools (ACAMIS) to member schools. Feedback was positive but did result in the addition of an "other" option to the list of accreditation organizations to allow schools to include any accrediting organization beyond the three initially selected (CIS, NEASC, WASC). This inclusion provided a more accurate list reflecting accrediting bodies with stronger regional ties. The priority with the pilot test was to ensure the survey tool was clear, logically organized, readable and captured the data required to address the scope of the study as defined by the research questions.

Population and Sample

Given there are potentially over 13,500 international school heads around the globe (ISC Research, 2023a), it would not be feasible to survey them all. As such, a non-probability sampling method was employed, incorporating convenience sampling (link to the survey on LinkedIn), voluntary response sampling (email to international school accrediting agencies and regional organizations to share the survey with member heads of school), and purposive sampling (targeting heads of school directly from the membership lists of the three accrediting bodies noted below) (Blaxter et al., 2010; Terrel, 2016). The goal was to maximize the number of responses given the challenge of securing a high survey response.

The initial plan was to focus on schools with membership in one of the following three recognized international school accrediting organizations:

i. Council of International Schools (CIS) (https://www.cois.org) representing 740 international schools
ii. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) (https://www.neasc.org) representing 330 international schools
iii. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) (https://www.acswasc.org) representing 560 international schools

The rationale for head of school selection from within these accrediting organizations reflected the importance of researching heads of school within '*like-environments*' as there are different levels of quality schools labelled as international schools and membership in these organizations establishes a quality assurance given accreditation has many components connected to ensuring the highest international education standards. There was also a practicality consideration given access to

heads of school could be centralized from within the organizational members' list. Incorporating this strategy would provide a database of schools with potential access to a large data pool (N=1630 minus the overlap of schools belonging to more than one accrediting organization) of international school heads for participation in the survey to meet the requisite sample size. It was determined that based on this number of potential heads, a sample size of 312 based on a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error would be required.

It is important to note that the three selected organizations are not the only accrediting organizations for international schools, and it became apparent that it was not beneficial to negate the others. While access to heads was concentrated on the database list of the three accrediting organizations, reflecting the benefit of centralized access, the survey itself was adjusted to allow for the recognition of all accrediting organizations and regional organizations.

As noted, the initial strategy was to access the support of the noted accrediting organizations to pass along the survey details to its membership. An email was crafted and sent to the leadership of each organization. The study was outlined and a link to an electronic survey tool was included. A link to opt-out of the survey and any future correspondence was also included in the email. However, like the infamous line in Robert Burns' poem '*To a Mouse'* foretold the "best-laid schemes of Mice and Men/Go oft awry" (Burns, 1786), it did not go quite as planned. Early into the quantitative research phase, it became apparent that not all organizations were able to send the request for survey completion to their members. Organizational policies were in place which forbade this practice given the number of research requests they typically receive. While completely understandable, it did require a shift in approach.

It is important to note that there was tremendous support for this study from all organizational leaders contacted even if dissemination of the survey could not be done.

An additional unexpected benefit was the wonderful support from regional organizations representing international schools in many parts of the world. While I was aware of some of them, I had not initially considered them in the promotion of the survey to maximize the completion rate. For example, the leadership of the Association of China and Mongolia International Schools (ACAMIS) encouraged their member heads to support the research, both in the pilot and final survey stages. In addition, the Association of American Schools of Central America, Colombia-Caribbean and Mexico (Tri-Association), Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA), Council of British International Schools (COBIS), East Asia Regional Council of International Schools (EARCOS), Japan Council of International Schools (JCIS), and the Near East South Asia Council of Overseas Schools (NESA) were all very helpful in distributing the research overview and survey link to their member heads of school. Also, several colleagues who are international school heads shared the survey link within their network which was also beneficial.

For those organizations which were able to share the link to the survey, various approaches were taken. Some organizations distributed my email with the research overview and survey link to their members or brought the request to regional heads meetings, while others recommended posting my study on LinkedIn and then they would comment and/or re-share on their professional (non-organizational) page. All of these were very helpful and essential to getting the

message out to international school heads. In total, 104 surveys were completed in this way.

However, I had concerns that the number of surveys completed at the time was not sufficient and further strategies were required. As such, I reviewed the membership list and contact information of international schools belonging to the three noted accrediting organizations. This data is public record and available on their website. From this list, I created a spreadsheet of over 900 schools, and I visited each school's website to find the relevant contact information. This was incredibly time-consuming work and explicated the challenges of direct access to heads of school. Most international schools do not publish the email address of their head of school on the public area of the school website for understandable reasons. I too, as an international school leader, get numerous unsolicited emails daily, mostly from marketing and business enterprises. As such, most schools only had a general enquiry (info@) or admissions email. Nevertheless, after researching all schools, a data set of 501 school email addresses was created. An email was sent with a research overview, survey link, and request to forward to the head of school if possible. From that data set, 367 emails were opened (73.3%), 88 unopened (17.6%), 31 bounced (6.2%), and 15 recipients opted out (3.0%). For this effort, 74 surveys were returned with 58 being fully completed and 16 partially completed. As such, when combined with the 104 completed surveys noted above, the total number of responses was 182.

With the survey closed to further submissions, the data was then reviewed. Of the 182 submitted entries, four submissions were completely blank, and one submission did not answer the first question as to whether they were a head of

school and then added only three data points. Given the requirement to be head of school, this entry was deleted along with the blank forms, resulting in the final tally of 177 reflecting a completion rate of 80%. In addition, while the pilot survey mirrored the final survey for the most part, as noted above, the data from the pilot was not included in the dataset to avoid any possible introduction of bias into the results.

Data Analysis

With the survey closed, the data was exported from SurveyMonkey to an Excel spreadsheet in two formats – i) raw data; and ii) individual question results. The results from the survey were then analyzed descriptively to gain a better understanding of the current situation connected to the research questions. The findings from the descriptive statistics also provided a reference point to help guide the interviews. In addition, open-ended questions were summarized and analyzed thematically. The survey results were then compared, where possible, with previous data found in the literature.

Qualitative (Interviews)

The following outlines the design, target population, and sampling procedure of the qualitative part of this study.

Design

It is important to note that "interviews provide a space for extended conversations that allow the researcher insights into how people think and what they

believe" (Knott et al., 2022, p. 1). To maximize the benefit, when conducting one-to-one interviews, the researcher needs to consider the structure and format of the interview required to maximize the type of information wanted as there are several options. Cohen et al. (2018) acknowledge that the "number of types of interview is frequently a function of the sources one reads" (p. 508). However, they are typically defined by how the interview is conducted which can range along a continuum from 'formal and rigid' to 'informal and fluid' or moving from a structured to a semi-structured or unstructured model (Cohen et al., 2018; Hobson and Townsend, 2010). Given the tremendous range of options, determining which structure is the most appropriate in any given context can be a challenge. Cohen et al. (2018) argue that:

> the structured interview is useful when the researcher is aware of what she does not know and therefore is in the position to frame questions that will supply the knowledge required, whereas the unstructured interview is useful when the researcher is not aware of what she does not know, and therefore relies on the respondents to tell her. (p. 509)

When examining the process of data collection in this study, given that the quantitative part of this study was designed to provide a broad overview of the tenure-termination and key challenges facing international school heads, it was felt that a structured approach to the qualitative part of this research would not suffice. This reflected the goal of including interviews as part of the mixed-methods approach to provide further insight into what '*I do not know*' surrounding the research questions guided by what '*I do know*' derived from the analysis of the survey data.

As such, to maximize the outcome of the interview, the decision was made to move further along the continuum towards a semi-structured approach which is designed to allow for greater "depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 88). A design of inquiry was constructed thereby providing direction for the interview, adding probing questions where necessary, to gain a deeper understanding of the tenure situation and challenges faced by international school heads vis-à-vis exploring the interviewee's worldview, thus achieving a deeper understanding to the study.

Population and Sample

In contrast to the quantitative methods approach, the selection process of interview participants was purposive sampling given the study is looking for individuals who meet specific criteria. The selection criteria were current or recent heads of school who had varying experiences in terms of geographic location, number of schools, and tenure length given the need to examine both long and short tenure. The selection pool of participants came from: i) survey participants who responded to the request to be interviewed via the survey instrument, ii) those who replied to the request to be interviewed posted on LinkedIn, or iii) those who were identified and short-listed by the author after reviewing their curriculum vitae on LinkedIn. The benefit of this approach was gaining access to enough heads of school with a wide range of experiences.

During the interview process, the centrality of the powerful relationship between the board and head of school was reinforced, and as supported by research,

was no surprise. As such, an interview was added with a board member who had years of experience in this role at six different international schools over many years. The rationale was to add the perspective of the board, albeit recognizing it was only one voice, reflecting the significant role it plays in the employment of a head of school, the tenure achieved, and is fundamental to the principal-agent relationship. The importance of this relationship was noted in the survey data which it was felt necessitated further investigation.

A challenge for any researcher utilizing qualitative methods revolves around the number of interviews required to reach data saturation (Terrel, 2016, p. 165). Given that "for qualitative interviewing there is a critical assumption [that] the number of unique opinions is not very large" (Cobern & Adams, 2020, p. 75), and that "once you have captured the possible range of opinions, to whatever level of detail you seek, there is little reason to continue interviewing more people" (Cobern & Adams, 2020, p. 75), it was determined that a saturation level was reached with the interview of nine international school heads and one board member.

The list of interviewees represents a wide array of experiences (Table 2).

Table 2

Interviewee Demographic Information

	Gender	Nationality	Position	Number of Schools*	Number of Years (Average Tenure)
Interviewee 1	Male	USA	Head of School	4†	10, 9, 6 (8.3)
Interviewee 2	Female	undisclosed	Head of School	2	6, 3 (4.5)
Interviewee 3	Female	USA	Head of School	2†	6 (6)
Interviewee 4	Male	Canada	Head of School	2	10, 5 (7.5)

Table 2 Continued

	Gender	Nationality	Position	Number of Schools*	Number of Years (Average Tenure)
Interviewee 5	Male	Canada	Head of School	3	7, 1.4, 3 (3.8)
Interviewee 6	Female	undisclosed	Board member	6	various
Interviewee 7	Female	Canada	Head of School	2	5, 1.5 (3.25)
Interviewee 8	Male	UK	Head of School	3	3, 3, 10 (5.3)
Interviewee 9	Male	USA	Head of School	2	6, 14 (10)
Interviewee 10	Male	Canada	Head of School	3†	4, 3 (3.5)

* Number reflects completed years at previous school and only includes current school if greater than 1 year (thereby excluding new positions)

† Denotes starting the first year at a new school which is not included in the tenure

They were heads with years of experience in many different regions, including Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe. Some experiences were in very challenging locations, defined as hardship posts. Others were in very stable and affluent countries. Their tenure (both specific and overall) reflects a good representation of short to long experiences. Gender is split 60-40 male to female which is not too far off the survey data results. One difference is nationality is heavily skewed towards Canada and the United States. This was not a conscious decision as nationality was not a selection criterion yet manifested after compiling the overview of interviewees.

Prior to the interview, participants received a *Consent Form for Participation in Research Study* (Appendix 2) which provided information on the expected length of the interview, confidentiality and anonymity clause, that the interview would be recorded, and the participant would receive a copy of the transcript for review. Furthermore, to help prepare for the interview, guiding questions were shared with the interviewee. Incorporating a semi-structured approach, the questions were

designed to frame the conversation around the same key areas of inquiry connected to the study's research questions yet provide opportunities to probe specific areas deeper as needed. All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and lasted between 25 minutes and 51 minutes in duration. For documentation purposes, a Sony IC digital recorder was used.

Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded as noted in the design section and an initial full verbatim transcription was completed through speech-to-text software using Otter AI (www.otter.ai). Transcripts were then manually cross-checked with the recording to ensure accuracy. The AI transcription process was not perfect, so this required a systematic review of the content to maximize the accuracy of the interviews. To further ensure accuracy, respondent validation vis-à-vis an Interviewee Transcription Review (ITR) process was utilized. Once the transcript was finalized, the participant received a confidential copy and was asked to review the conversation. This provided interviewees with the opportunity to review and revise content from the interview and modify any misleading or incorrect information, thus increasing accuracy. As argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985), "this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility and as a means to check data and findings with participants" (in Rowlands, 2021, p. 2). Furthermore, as Rowlands (2021) notes "ITR appears to have offered participants the opportunity to take part more freely in the research while retaining the ability to ensure that sensitive information, particularly if it was potentially identifying, could be identified, and managed to protect their anonymity" (p.10).

The next step in the process was coding the interviews. Protocols for coding paralleled Tesch's *Eight Steps in the Coding Process* as outlined in Creswell and Creswell (2018). In summary, this began with a review of all transcripts to get a sense of the 'big picture'. Then, each transcript was re-read taking in more detail to have a better understanding of the issues. Key themes and categories emerged both deductively and inductively in the sense that topics were initially coded around the themes connected to the research questions and then expanded based on themes emanating from the interviews. Nodes were created in NVivo 12 to reflect these assigned themes and each transcript was once again reviewed, applying a structural coding approach so that each code (21 in total) resulted in a dedicated compilation of relevant comments from each interview as outlined in table 3 below.

Table 3

Thematic Codes in NVivo 12

Name	Files	References
Board Chair	7	13
Board Issues	8	39
Board Role	8	21
Board Stability	3	4
Challenges	8	44
Finances	5	7
HoS Role	4	7
Leadership qualities - retention	5	12
Leadership qualities - strategies for success	6	23
Marketing	1	1
P-A Theory		
Communication	5	15
Incentives	1	1
Micromanagement	4	5
Power	5	6
Self-Interest	1	1
Pandemic (COVID-19)	4	9

Table 3 Continued

Name	Files	References
Reasons for turnover	8	24
Tenure impact	3	6
Tenure length	7	17
What supports success	5	13

Once again, each transcript was reviewed using the find function of key terms to ensure nothing was missed. This process was done once again by examining the data through the theoretical lens of principal-agent theory. Additional nodes were created in NVivo 12 to capture this data. If additional relevant comments were found, the appropriate codes were applied.

This process essentially created a compilation of comments connected to the themes and provided a multifaceted series of comments connecting to the research questions. Once this process was finalized, thematic analysis commenced with a review of the comments which were then integrated into the appropriate sections of this study in conjunction with the quantitative data outlined in the results and analysis sections (Chapters 5 to 8).

Ethical Considerations

Since this research study engaged with human subjects, a submission to the University of Toronto's My Research Human Protocols (MRHP) was required. The necessary data was completed for review and Research Ethics Board approval to commence research was obtained on April 6, 2023 (Protocol Reference #44306). In accordance with the ethical requirements of conducting research at the University of Toronto, strict processes were put in place to ensure the privacy and

confidentiality of all participant information. As a mixed-method study, protocols were put in place for both the survey and interviews. The sections below will outline processes connected to ethics protocols.

Quantitative (Survey)

All participants of the survey were informed that by voluntarily completing the survey, they were providing informed consent. Participants were under no obligation to respond to any or all the questions and they were free to exit the survey at any time. The survey was designed with no mandatory fields and the submission of the survey was completely at their discretion.

The survey preamble to participants included the following:

- researcher's name, contact information, and affiliations;
- doctoral study title;
- summary of the proposed research with research questions, methodology, and sharing of results dissemination plan;
- potential time commitment;
- an explanation of key ethical issues including anonymity and confidentiality of response data;
- acknowledgment that there is no obligation to respond to any or all questions, and are free to exit the survey at any time;
- no mandatory response requirements; and
- direction not to place any identifying comments in the survey.

While this study posed a low risk as all participants were adults and provided consent to join the study voluntarily, it was still made clear that there were no requirements to participate in this study and they could exit the survey at any point. Strict protocols were also established to ensure confidentiality issues were

addressed. Personal information was not collected in the survey so there is no knowledge of who completed the survey. All data has been presented in aggregate form and any comments used from open-ended questions with identifying information were anonymized thus safeguarding the identity of the respondent.

Qualitative (Interviews)

Unlike the survey component of this study, where there was no direct interaction between researcher and participant, and conversely given the close interaction between researcher and interviewee, the interview protocol required greater detail and assurances that confidentiality and anonymity would be protected.

The interview protocol preamble to participants included the following:

- researcher's name, contact information, and affiliations;
- doctoral study title;
- summary of the proposed research with research questions;
- potential time commitment;
- explanation of key ethical issues including anonymity and confidentiality of response data;
- acknowledgment that the interviewee is under no obligation to respond to any question and is free to exit the interview at any time;
- request for the interview to be recorded and the option to decline;
- interview will be transcribed to a Word document and shared with the participant;
- interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored in a secure location;
- all raw data (i.e., transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study; and
- contact information for both the doctoral supervisor and the University of Toronto's Office of Research Ethics provided if the interviewee has any follow-up questions regarding research participation.

As noted, the preamble to the interview clearly articulated the goals of the study and emphasized voluntary participation. To assist in the preparation of the interview, guiding questions connected to the research questions were provided in advance. The interviewee was informed that they may request to skip any of the scripted questions or cease the interview at any time. It was also articulated that, as a semi-structured interview, if a question came up that they were uncomfortable with, they were reminded that they could ask to move on to the next question. Participants were respected, and full transparency was followed. Completed transcripts were provided to all participants for review.

As part of the ethical protocols for ensuring confidentiality, the interviewee's data was coded in such a manner as to protect the identity of the participant. All results in this study are presented in a manner which maintains anonymity for all participants.

Summary

In summary, the tenure-termination and challenges international school heads face in maintaining their position have not been examined to this degree in over a decade (Benson, 2011). Many studies continue to refer to the extremely short tenure of 2.8 (Hawley, 1994) to 3.7 years (Benson, 2011) but it is difficult to say if this currently holds given the tremendous growth and transformation of the international school market during this period. To elucidate the current situation as defined by the research questions, this study incorporated an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach as it was deemed the most appropriate to address each

research question to the depth required. Given the tremendous benefits of this research design, it is felt that the goal to better understand the current tenure-termination situation and the complexity surrounding the challenges of leading an international school can be achieved.

Chapter V: Tenure and Factors Influencing Turnover

As noted earlier, the goal of this study was to determine i) the current average length of tenure and reasons for turnover for international school heads; ii) the challenges faced by international school heads and how these contribute to the noted short tenure; and iii) the key leadership styles, qualities, and strategies needed to successfully maintain one's position as an international school head. By incorporating an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the results and analysis from both phases (survey and interviews) have been weaved together by theme and topic, framed by the research questions, and guided by theory. This approach reinforces James and Slater's (2014) argument that "a snippet of qualitative data may be used to elucidate the quantitative evidence just as frequencies in responses or tests of significance may add internal validity to qualitative findings" (p. 219). Given the breadth of data and range of topics covering the research questions, a single chapter of results and analysis was not feasible. It was simply too long and too singular in design. It was like many trees but no cohesively defined forest.

As such, the results and analysis have been organized into three chapters, framed by theme and driven by the research questions, blending in the results from both methods with a focus on current tenure and factors influencing turnover (Chapter 5), challenges and reasons for leaving the position (Chapter 6), and leadership qualities needed for success (Chapter 7). The term "respondent" is used for comments from the survey and if quoted is presented in quotations with "survey

respondent" in brackets while interview data comments are referenced by interviewee number.

Overview of Survey Respondent Characteristics

To provide a frame of reference to the characteristics of the survey respondents, the school and individual-related characteristics will first be explored.

School-related Characteristics

Based on the survey results, almost half (47.3%) of heads worked at schools with accreditation from the Council of International Schools (CIS). A further 20.7% were at schools accredited by NEASC while 24.3% had WASC accreditation. That equates to 92.3% of the heads worked at accredited schools. Reflecting the tendency to have multiple accreditations and/or belonging to broader regional international school organizations, out of the total, a further 48.5% had additional accreditation or membership in 14 other organizations as noted below:

1. BC (Canada)
2. BSO
3. COBIS
4. Cognia
5. EARCOS
6. ECIA
7. FOBISIA
8. IBO
9. Independent
10. Indonesia
11. MEP (National Educational Ministry)
12. MSA
13. Nordic Network

In terms of geographical placement, most respondent heads of school were currently employed in Asia (39.4%), then Europe (21.8%) and Africa (20%) as outlined in Table 4. As the survey requested data on current and the past three headships, the top three geographical locations remained in place until previous headship 3 where Central and South America tied for first place with Asia.

Table 4

Location of Heads (%)

	Current Headship (n=170)	Previous Headship 1 (n=88)	Previous Headship 2 (n=42)	Previous Headship 3 (n=11)
Africa	20.0	15.7	19.0	18.2
Americas	12.3	19.1	26.2	27.3
Asia	39.4	31.5	26.2	27.3
Australasia	0.0	0.0	2.4	0.0
Europe	21.8	21.3	19.0	18.2
Middle East	6.5	12.4	7.1	9.1

The Americas include North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean. While there was a good cross-section of regions represented, it is not a geographically representative sample based on the current distribution of overall number of international schools. For example, in terms of location, Asia currently represents 57% while Europe represents 18% of the market (ISC Research, 2023b). The Middle East, most notably the United Arab Emirates, holds a significant ranking compared to the rest of the world (Keeling, 2015) with a growing number of international schools, topping just over 2000 schools in 2023, representing 15.2% of the global market (Robinson, 2023). However, only 6.5% of respondents were currently in the Middle East. The location of respondents may in part reflect the positive support the author received from regional organizations like ACAMIS, AISA, EARCOS, and the Tri-Association thereby increasing the rate of return from member heads of school belonging to the noted organizations and thus increasing participation from those regions.

In terms of the curriculum offered, when all placements past and present were included, most schools offered the IB program (59.2%), followed by the U.S. (39.2%), the United Kingdom (23.6%), and Advanced Placement (21.4%). This does not quite reflect the overall curriculum usage for an exit qualification given that the United Kingdom A Levels have the highest usage level internationally at 32%, followed by IB at 27%, and Advanced Placement at 15% (Search Associates, n.d.).

In terms of the type of international school, most heads in this study work (or worked) at not-for-profit schools (Table 5). When examining past posts, while not-for-profit remained the majority, there was an identifiable shift over time from for-profit to not-for-profit schools (for-profit declines from 38.1% to 22.9%) as the head transitions to new postings along their career path.

Table 5

Employed at For-Profit vs Not-for-Profit School (%)

	Current Headship (n=175)	Previous Headship 1 (n=88)	Previous Headship 2 (n=42)
For-Profit	22.9	35.2	38.1
Not-for-Profit	77.1	64.8	61.9

* Previous headship 3 data set was too small for reliability

This is interesting given that most international schools today are for-profit as "the growth of international schools has also changed the ownership landscape so that the ratio of for-profit now outnumbers not-for-profit by around 2 to 1 globally" (Gibson & Bailey, 2021, p. 3). The high response rate from heads who worked in not-for-profit schools could be representative of the high level of CIS (47.3%), NEASC

(20.7%), and WASC (24.3%) member schools, which are typically not-for-profit, included in the survey.

This shift over time towards the not-for-profit sector could also be reflective of not-for-profit schools being deemed more prestigious and desirable since “some people see an inherent conflict of interest between providing a quality education and making a profit – at least in the short term” (Speirs, 2016, p.30). Comments from survey recipients reflected this attitude by noting that “misunderstandings about educational outcomes and business outcomes come with the territory of working with 'for profit' organizations” and the overall goal was “making enough profit for shareholders”. Bailey and Gibson (2020) noted that heads of school “who worked in for-profit schools all sought either to emphasise the positives of this environment, or to claim that they protected educational aspects from being encroached on by the business side” (p. 1019). Some have even gone so far as to “suggest that the defensive manner in which principals defend working for a for-profit school may be a result of affective dissonance, whereby they feel a disconnect between their personal values and the puppet master of market realities” (Bailey, 2021, p. 59). This was reinforced by the comment of one interviewee noted in Gibson and Bailey’s (2021) qualitative study that “openly defending the concept of profit, [as] ‘all schools are for profit, otherwise they wouldn’t exist. The question is what happens to the profit, and I think that’s more of the identifier’” (p. 13).

Heads of school have many choices when seeking employment in terms of location, curriculum, school size, and school reputation, but they can also short-list schools based on the type of governance model they prefer to work within. They could work at a not-for-profit school with a board size anywhere from a few to 16

plus members or they could be employed by a for-profit school that has a single owner or a company representing the school. The data from the survey demonstrated that the majority of heads prefer the not-for-profit sector. However, in the interviews, some noted that the for-profit model is just a simpler form of organization. At not-for-profit schools, the governing practices are typically self-perpetuating boards or majority parent-elected boards. As such:

> when you have a situation where the board is elected by parents … you end up with a much greater instability of leadership, in my view, because the board members, no matter how much they were might articulate otherwise, when they feel they are elected by a constituency, they naturally feel they are representing that constituency. (Interviewee 1)

On the contrary, one head who had a tremendously complex and dysfunctional not-for-profit board structure reflected, when noting the challenges, that "I would have never said a for-profit company will have a more normal board, but they did in this case, anyway, I can't say that for everything. But in this case, it's as normal as you can get" (Interviewee 4). While the intention is not to argue one system is better than the other, it is to reflect on the data and comments received from the research.

Individual-related Characteristics

In terms of demographic data, respondents were predominantly white (84.9%), male (63.0%) and over the age of 45 (84.2%). This is similar to the results from the 2018-2019 survey by the Academy for International School Heads (AISH) where 67% of the heads of school (or retired heads of school) were male (in Shaklee et al., 2019, p. 2) and a Council of International School (CIS) survey on diversity in

international school teaching staff and leadership found within their sample a higher proportion of heads were male at 75%, yet the percentage identifying as white was identical (84%) (Neyra, 2021). Comparatively, when Hawley conducted his study in 1994, 88% of the respondents were male (p. 16) while Benson's 2011 study was 70% (p. 91). The above results support the fact that "males, especially white males, continue to dominate the educational leadership sphere" (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023, p. 298). In fact, Shaklee et al. (2019) noted that "many respondents mentioned that school constituents, such as the community, families or Board, had a specific vision of what an international school leader should look like: 'The white male seems to dominate…they are seen as a figurehead, the image which is wanted'" (n.p.).

When the location of heads by gender (Table 6) was examined, Asia and Europe were significantly more representative of female heads when compared to the other regions.

Table 6

Location of Heads by Gender

	Female (%) n=50	Male (%) n=92
Africa	16.0	20.7
Americas	14.0	9.8
Asia	32.0	44.6
Europe	32.0	18.5
Middle East	6.0	6.5

As noted above, the geographical location of many of the respondents was Asia. This was represented by both male and female heads of school, although Europe was tied with Asia for females at 32%. Certainly, an underrepresented area based on response rate is the Middle East given the number of accredited international schools located there.

When the gender of international school heads was reviewed, it remained male-dominated, and an area of significant inequity revolved around race given the disproportionate whiteness. When examined by gender, 89.1% of males and 84.0% of females identified as white. The high percentage of whiteness has resulted in recent criticism that international schools have a racism problem (Gardner-McTaggart, 2021; Pearson, 2022; Xu, 2023). The high percentage of white school leaders (and teachers in general) is a reinforcement of the cultural hegemony of the West and reflective of international school activities that "celebrate cultural diversity whilst tending towards the development of monoculture" (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004, p. 172). It also reinforces the fact that the "interpretation of global-mindedness and criticality is enacted by mostly white staff and leadership in individual schools" (Gardner-McTaggart, 2021, p. 5).

In terms of nationality, while there were 20 nationalities represented, most heads came from the United States (41.2%), United Kingdom (21.6%) or Canada (14.2%). This parallels the CIS findings of the three top nationalities being the United States (51%), the United Kingdom (17%), and Canada (13%) (Neyra, 2021). The dominance of international schools by leaders from these countries is very apparent and validates that "schools implicitly demand a person from an Anglo-Saxon nation" (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022a, p. 15). It is difficult to ignore

the fact that the spread of the English language and Western culture vis-a-vis the international school system has a long history tied to the imperialist expansion of the West and colonization of much of the Global South (Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020) and underscores English fluency as the “lingua franca of the globalized economy” (Bailey, 2021, p. 35; cf. Poole & Bunnell, 2021).

It is very clear from this study that heads of schools are a highly educated group with a wide range of qualifications. Previous studies have confirmed that having advanced degrees is common and often required for the position (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014; Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022a). The progression from teacher to head of school does not usually require any formal licensure other than what is required for a qualified teacher. There are some jurisdictions, like the province of Ontario, which do have a mandatory formal training program for teachers who want to be principals or supervisory officers. However, this form of required training to ascend to the position is not so common. So, when heads were asked in the survey if they felt that had adequate training for the position, a resounding 44% (n=68) said no. This was surprising given the breadth of academic and professional qualifications listed under formal school leadership training.

For example, in this study, most respondents completed graduate degrees (95.2%) at the master's (63.9%) or doctoral (31.3%) level. In comparison to a CIS Research (2023) study on head of school salaries, these findings are quite similar as CIS found heads with a master's degree were slightly higher (68%) and slightly lower for doctoral degrees (22%). At the doctoral level, female heads of school who earned this degree were slightly higher at 34.0% in comparison to their male counterparts at 30.4%. In addition, many completed additional training in areas such as leadership,

finance, and human resources from various accrediting and regional organizations like AAIE, AISH, CIS, NAIS, NPQH, and PTC, in addition to governmental agencies (US State Department), or earned a principal license from a national, state, or provincial government. The list was incredibly extensive and demonstrates the level of continuous education and training required for the position.

When comparing this to a CEO position in the business world, as the job of head of school has at times been described (Lee et al., 2012), nearly 97% of CEOs have an undergraduate degree; however, only 30% have a postgraduate degree including 10% with a doctoral level degree (Urquhart & Zhang, 2022, p. 442). This is a significant difference, particularly when comparing the completion of a graduate degree and most notably at the doctoral level. A question that arises is why is there such a high educational attainment among heads of school. Perhaps, as Diaz (2021) found in her research, completing a doctorate "provided affirmation that a doctorate can give a competitive advantage to persons seeking to advance in their career when all other conditions are equal" (p. 138) and that "a doctoral degree in educational leadership can positively influence the professional practices of school leaders" (p. 143), or it could be as simple as Bunnell (2014) argues, that "educators are increasingly under pressure to 'stand out'" (p. 99). There may also be the remuneration benefit of having a doctorate as there is a positive correlation between average net salary and higher education levels (Council of International School Research, 2023).

In terms of experience, most respondents (93.1%) have worked in the teaching field for more than 16 years and over half (59.3 %) have had a long career in education with more than 26 years. This was also reflected in the age range as noted

earlier with 84.2% over 45 years of age including a significant 8.2% over the typical retirement age of 65 years. In terms of leadership experience, 83.4% have been school leaders for more than 11 years and 64.6% gained all their experience within the international school market. This international school experience was also reflected in the fact that the majority (79.5%) worked as a teacher at an international school before entering a leadership role. This teaching experience in international schools was higher for female heads (84%) compared to male heads (76.1%). Interestingly, the high percentage of international school career experience demonstrates that school heads are integrated into the international school network, navigating through the ranks, and the majority are not parachuting into the head of school position from other national, public, or private education systems.

While there have been comparisons to other studies, given the sample size, it is unknown whether these demographics are completely representative of the population of international school heads as a global database with this information is not available. However, based on other studies noted, the results from this study are within the realm of what could be considered typical.

Current Tenure for International School Heads

A fundamental question and rationale for this study was to determine the current level of tenure for international school heads. RQ1 asks "what is the current average length of tenure and reasons for turnover for international school heads?" Hawley (1994) found that "on average, the employment duration of school heads in international schools is remarkably brief" (p. 13). Elsewhere, it has been argued that "there is sufficient research evidence to suggest that International Schooling in

practice is a precarious 'career' with high turnover rates" (Bunnell, 2014, p. 97). The referenced short tenure of international school heads over the past two decades is prolific in the international school leadership literature (Blandford & Shaw, 2001; Hayden, 2006; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Lee et al., 2012) and continues as "we know that the role (in any one school) is often short-lived" (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022a, p. 13). While *short-lived* is not defined, it typically refers to the two studies noting 2.8 (Hawley, 1994) to 3.7 years (Benson, 2011). Beyond these two studies, however, there is a lack of explanatory factors for the precarity and shortness of tenure. One issue which is ignored in the literature is that while heads are transitioning from school to school, they typically are not leaving the international school market. So, if it is such a *precarious career option*, why is this so?

Based on this study (n=177), the average length of tenure was 4.8 years. This is 1.1 years longer than was found in Benson's study and 2.0 years longer than Hawley (1994). It is important to note that much time has passed since the previous two studies were published and the international school market has grown exponentially since these studies were conducted. What is interesting in this data set is that many of the heads were not completely new to the position. While 49.7% stated they were in their first headship (n=88), only 9.0% (n=16) were in their first year as head of school. Beyond that, 28.2% (n=50) were in their first three years, while 41.2% (n=73) of the heads were in their first 5 years (Table 7). This reflects the increasing amount of time heads remained in their position.

Table 7

Number of Years as Head of School

Years as Head	Percent	n=
1	9.0%	16
2	9.6%	17
3	9.6%	17
4	5.6%	10
5	7.3%	13
6	5.1%	9
7	4.5%	8
8	4.5%	8
9	2.8%	5
10+	41.8%	74
Total	100	177

On the other end of the scale, a significant 41.8% (n=74) have been heads of school for a decade or more. This demonstrates that the retention rate of keeping school leaders as heads of school within the broader international school market is quite high and again questions the notion of a precarious and dark industry for educators (Bunnell, 2018; Caffyn, 2018). They may move from school to school for a variety of personal and professional reasons, which will be explored below, but it does not seem that they are leaving the international school market due to hardship and returning to a national or state system in their home country. This is certainly an area of further research to provide data and not supposition on those who exited the system as it would be interesting to know how many are doing this and for what reasons.

Furthermore, with the high percentage of international school heads having worked in only one school, this data seemingly contradicts what Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart (2022a) recently argued that their research "strongly implies that a

process of (re)production of a 'leadership nobility' is occurring, since it would be *highly unusual for a novice to be appointed*" (p. 12 – emphasis added). On the contrary, there are a significant number of novices being hired (almost 50%), and the data validates that those hired for their first role as head of school remain the longest in the position at 5.1 years (Table 8). Overall, average tenure based on the number of headships held decreases on average from 5.1 years to 3.8 years as the number of headships held increases.

Table 8

Average Tenure by Number of Headships

Average Tenure by Number of Headships	Overall (n=177)	One Headship (n=88)	Two Headships (n=48)	Three Headships (n=28)	Four Headships (n=12)	Five Headships (n=1)
	4.8	5.1	4.7	4.2	3.8	4.0

When it comes to tenure, there are benefits to having stable leadership at the helm of a school and studies have argued that heads should be in the position for at least 5 to 10 years (Blackwood, 2018; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Littleford, 2015; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Pont et al., 2008). Littleford (2023) argues that the "years of greatest contribution" are between 8 and 10 years (n.p.). Blackwood (2018) supports this by noting that the "long-term impact on a school only begins to be felt after eight to 10 years in the role, due to the importance of the principal's relationships within and without the school community" (n.p.). As Interviewee 1 noted, "an ideal length of tenure is nine to ten years [at which point] the board and

the head have a conversation about is the head able to continue to add value given where the school is going to go?" while Interviewee 2 concurred that an ideal length:

> would be something close to seven, eight, something like that. [Given a] typical contract is three years, then I would say three sets of those is ideal. So that takes us closer to nine. But I think definitely a second round as a head of school is really affirming both for the continuity that, you know, needs to happen in every school, but also, because of the kind of work that it is. It isn't simple work… any leadership position is very complex, and you're trying to make change happen, and you're trying to institute some new things, do a lot of improvement [and] those are all things that take time.

In Benson's (2011) study, he determined that only "1 in 10 were still at the same school" (p. 94) at the end of this 8–10-year period. Based on this study, the number of heads who have been at the same school for eight or more years was 18%.

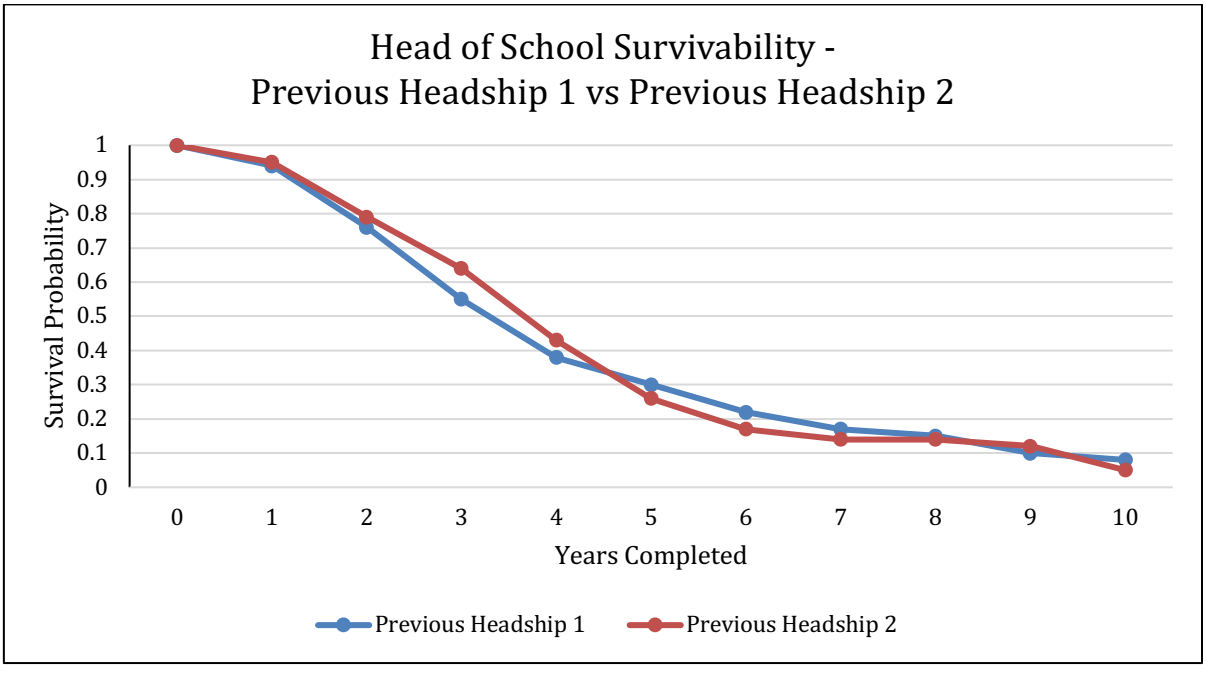
It was also noted that a head can stay too long. While this is not a significant issue as seen by overall tenure, with only 9.7% of heads at their current school and 7.9% at previous headship 1 in the position for more than 10 years. Yet, it was recognized that, on the far end, there can be benefits to a leadership change. It was noted that "10 years is actually forever in an international school. It's a long time…. because then the institution becomes about the person who's running it as opposed to what the institution is doing" (Interviewee 3) and that any timeframe past 10 years it is easy for the "head to become complacent. And you probably need fresh ideas" (Interviewee 4). However, given the variation and complexity of each school, it was noted that there are no perfect predetermined years of service, with three being too short and 10 being too long. As Interviewee 9 notes, "I don't think you can

say, you know, seven years bingo, six years is perfect… [it really comes down to] if they're capable, competent and doing a great job".

Another way of examining tenure is the survivability factor. This process is based on Whitener's (1965) development of "an actuarial procedure for investigating staff turnover in school systems" (Charters, 1970, p. 1) by "showing the proportions of the cohort still in employment at yearly intervals" (Charters, 1970, p. 1). When tenure from the two previous headships (Figure 2) was compared, the survivability rate was very similar, with a relatively corresponding decline across the ten years. The exception is that for previous headship 2, survivability was higher between year 1 and year 4 and lower from year 5 and year 8. The drop in previous headship 1 between year 2 and year 4 could be reflective of the impact of the pandemic on heads' decision to move to another position.

Figure 2

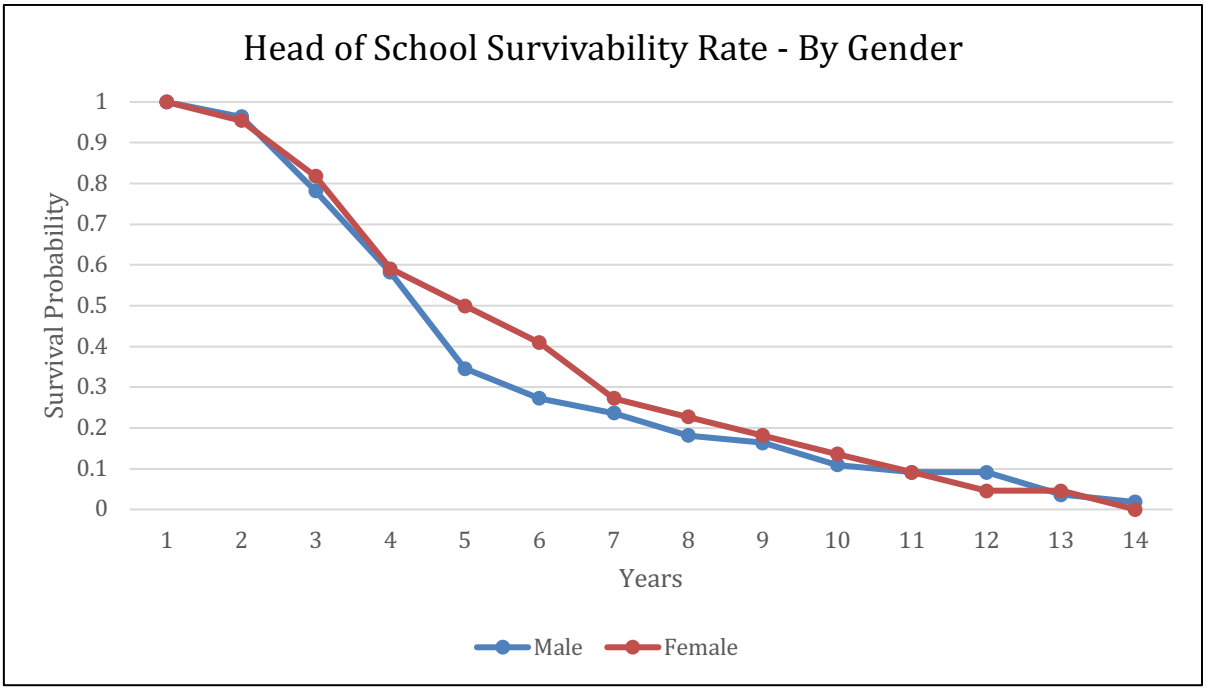
Survivability Rate - Previous Headship 1 vs Previous Headship 2



When Charter (1970) completed his study on teacher survivability, it was determined that gender was one variable which impacted survivability. While the study is dated, and the explanations derived connected more to socio-cultural factors of the historical period, it did provide a reason to examine if gender impacted head of school survivability in today's context. There was no similar comparative examination found in the international school context, although Hawley (1994) did employ a survivability examination in his study on tenure and other key variables but not by gender. Charter (1970) found that males had a longer survivability compared to females. In this study, when the data was examined for differences in gender and survivability, it was determined that up until year 4 there were no significant differences between male and female tenure (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Head of School Survivability – by Gender



However, beyond that point, female heads of school had a higher rate of survivability when compared to their male counterparts between years 4 to 11, albeit very closely aligned from year 9. As noted above, when overall tenure is calculated, based on years as head and number of schools, both males and females were the same at 4.8 years. When this was compared to previous headship 1, female tenure increased to 5.3 years whereas male tenure was 4.9 years. This is represented in the gap noted above.

Factors Impacting Tenure

Tenure and Location of School

In previous research on tenure and international school heads, it was noted that tenure will vary depending on the geographical location of the school (Hawley, 1994; Benson, 2011). This makes sense as some postings may be deemed more comfortable or familiar based on socio-economic, political, and/or cultural environments. As Interviewee 10 noted:

> people who are working somewhere like Europe or Asia where the schools in general have a lot more stability in terms of staffing and everything else. And so, it's a very different experience. The salary packages are different, people are happier with where they live.

In this study, regional differences in tenure were also present with the Middle East ranking first at 5.5 years, Europe at 5.1 years, the Americas at a very close third at 5.0 years, Asia at 4.7 years, and Africa at 3.9 years (Table 9).

Table 9

Tenure by Region

By Region	Average tenure (n=170)
Africa	3.9
Americas	5.0
Asia	4.7
Europe	5.1
Middle East	5.5

When examining the location of first-time heads and corresponding tenure (Table 10), all regions except the Americas have an increased average tenure compared with the overall average. It is no surprise that the longevity of heads in Asia and Europe is equal to or greater than the overall average of 4.8 years. This corresponds with the other findings. What is interesting, however, is the significant increase in tenure for the Middle East at 7.2 years. While a small sample, it reflects that for a first posting as head of school, individuals are remaining longer in the region.

Table 10

Location and Average Tenure of First-time Heads (in Years)

Location	Average Tenure of First Time Heads (n=83)
Africa	4.2 (n=13)
Americas	4.6 (n=12)
Asia	5.1 (n=35)
Europe	5.9 (n=17)
Middle East	7.2 (n=6)

When examining where first-time heads were taking employment, 42.2% of the 83 heads were based in Asia and by far the destination of opportunity. Europe was the second most popular destination at 20.5% (n=17) with the Middle East surprisingly, given the data noted above, in last place at only 7.2% (n=6). Again, this reflects the lack of participation from the region in this study.

Bunnell and Gardner-McTaggart (2022a) argue that in today's international school market, "the emergent and ambitious potential leaders are drawn toward the newer non-traditional models of international school, prevalent in mainland China and the Middle East" (p. 16). It would make sense that the '*emergent and ambitious'* heads of school are commencing their careers in the Middle East and Asia given that is where the greatest growth of new schools is occurring. However, based on the data, most first-time heads were employed at Type A traditional international schools given that 75.1% are not-for-profit schools, 92.3% are members of CIS, NEASC or WASC, and 56% offer the IB. These are elements connected with elite traditional International Schools (ETIS) (Bunnell and McTaggart, 2022a).

Furthermore, in Asia, the opportunities are much broader than in mainland China alone, as only 13.1% of new international school heads commenced their career in mainland China. From a regional perspective, only 31.4% of those who entered the Asian market were taking on headships in this country. Opportunities extended across Asia from Azerbaijan to Vietnam. This does not negate the assertion that "*emergent and ambitious potential leaders are drawn toward the newer non-traditional models of international school*" (Bunnell and McTaggart,2022a), it more reflects that these schools and leaders were not captured in the survey data since

dissemination was focused on school membership with international accrediting agencies.

Tenure and Governance Structure

As noted earlier, most international school heads in this study were employed at not-for-profit schools. When tenure data was compared (Table 11), those heads who were currently working at for-profit schools had a considerably shorter tenure at 3.1 years (n=40) when compared to not-for-profit schools at 5.1 years (n=135). When examining previous headship 1, the pattern remained the same with 3.3 years (n=31) at for-profit schools and 5.4 years (n=57) at not-for-profit schools. This was again found in previous headship 2 albeit there was a significant increase in tenure at for-profit schools at 4.0 years (n=16).

Table 11

Tenure and For-Profit vs Not-for-Profit School (percent)*

	Current Headship n=175	Previous Headship 1 n=88	Previous Headship 2 n=42
For-Profit	3.1	3.3	4.0
Not-for-Profit	5.1	5.4	5.3

* Previous headship 3 data set was too small for reliability

This variation in tenure at for-profit schools may reflect the head of school's intention to navigate towards the not-for-profit sector as noted above. The perception that not-for-profit governance is preferred is reflected in the high

percentage of heads working in such schools and exemplified by comments like "I prefer a not-for-profit context. My former school was proprietary. I left as soon as I had a compelling opportunity" (survey respondent) or "working in a not-for-profit school with my current board has been the most rewarding experience I have ever had" (survey respondent).

Tenure and Curriculum

While it may seem that the curriculum the school offers would have little impact on tenure, Hawley (1994) determined that International Baccalaureate (IB) schools were predictive of head duration. He found that IB school heads had a 1.1-year increase in tenure when compared with non-IB schools (p. 19). Hawley (1994) referred to IB schools as prestigious (p. 19) and Benson (2011) notes that perhaps this is why heads remain longer in IB schools (p. 97).

While this study did not examine perceptions of *prestige*, a subjective variable which would be challenging to operationalize both quantitatively and qualitatively, it did include the question of which curriculum your school uses in the survey. While heads who worked in IB schools were by far the most numerous (n=112) at 40.3%, their corresponding tenure was not significantly longer. Rather, when head experience across the past three headships was examined, tenure at IB schools ranked in 3rd place, 3rd place, 2nd place and averaged overall in 2nd place in comparison to the three other most used curricula (AP, UK, and US) noted by heads in this study (Table 12).

Table 12

Tenure by Curriculum - in years and ranking

Curriculum	Current School	n=	Previous Headship 1	n=	Previous Headship 2	n=	Overall Average
AP	4.8 [2]	55	5.4 [2]	20	3.6 [4]	8	4.6 [4]
IB	4.7 [3]	112	4.7 [3]	58	5.4 [2]	23	4.9 [2]
UK	5.0 [1]	25	3.6 [4]	18	6.3 [1]	12	5.0 [1]
US	4.4 [4]	81	5.6 [1]	36	4.1 [3]	16	4.7 [3]

Tenure by curriculum did not demonstrate a tremendous difference reflected in the relatively small range of 0.4 years (4.6 to 5.0). Based on these results, it would be difficult to argue curriculum is a predictor of duration as noted by Hawley (1994). This difference could be reflective of the fact that many international schools offer more than one curriculum. In fact, only 37.4% noted a single curriculum offered at the school. Rather, it is much more common to offer a combination of curricula, like US and AP, or IB and Canada, and when all curricula options are noted, on average, most schools would utilize two different ones given the average is 1.79.

Tenure and Gender

In the survey, the following options were presented – female, male, transgender, non-binary/non-conforming, and prefer not to answer. When overall tenure was examined by gender, responses selected were only female (n=50), male (n=92) or prefer not to answer (n=4). Overall tenure for both females and males was coincidentally the same at 4.8 years. When this was compared to previous headship 1, female tenure increased to 5.3 years whereas male tenure was 4.9 years. This corroborates Hawley (1994) where he also determined gender was not predictive of

duration (p. 16). The four respondents who preferred not to respond to the gender question had a much higher average at 6.4 years while those who did not complete the question (null entry) were slightly lower at 4.3 years (n=31).

Tenure and Nationality

When examining nationality in this study, U.S nationals were found to have the longest tenure at 5.0 years. As per Table 13, American nationals lead both in number and years. Heads of school from the United Kingdom and Australia were next and Canadians had the shortest tenure. While there were many other nationalities noted, they were very small in number such that there would not be an accurate comparison.

Table 13

Tenure by Nationality

Nationality	Average Tenure (in years)	n =
Australia	4.4	7
Canada	3.6	21
United Kingdom	4.6	30
United States	5.0	60

While the data reflected a heavy representation of Anglo-Saxon nationalities as noted above, which corroborates the findings in the literature (Bunnell & Atkinson, 2020; Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022a; Pearce, 2023), some did not fit into this category. While their collective tenure was higher than the other

nationalities noted above, at 5.6 years (n=13), nationality and location of country working were cross-referenced to see if they were working in their native country, where roots would be very strong. In this case, out of 13 heads, six heads were in their native country and three were in regional countries. Only four were working in countries far from home. When examining tenure and longevity, personal circumstances like working in one's home country or marriage to a host country national will certainly impact the length of tenure.

Tenure and Prior Experience

It has been noted that international school heads with prior teaching experience in international schools have a longer tenure than those without this experience (Hawley, 1994). However, the results found in this study did not concur. While most heads did have prior teaching experience at an international school, this did not result in an increased tenure. Rather, the tenure of international school heads who had previous international school experience as teachers was lower at 4.6 years (n=116) when compared with heads who had no prior international school experience at 5.9 years (n=30).

When examining the heads of school with no international school teaching experience, 97% (n=28) were licenced teachers for more than 16 years and 77% (n=23) were school administrations for more than 11 years. Thirty percent (n=9) had doctorates, 50% were from the United States, and 27% were female. It is also interesting that 67% were in their first international school (n=20) while 27% had been head of school in two international schools. Yet, this still did not provide any

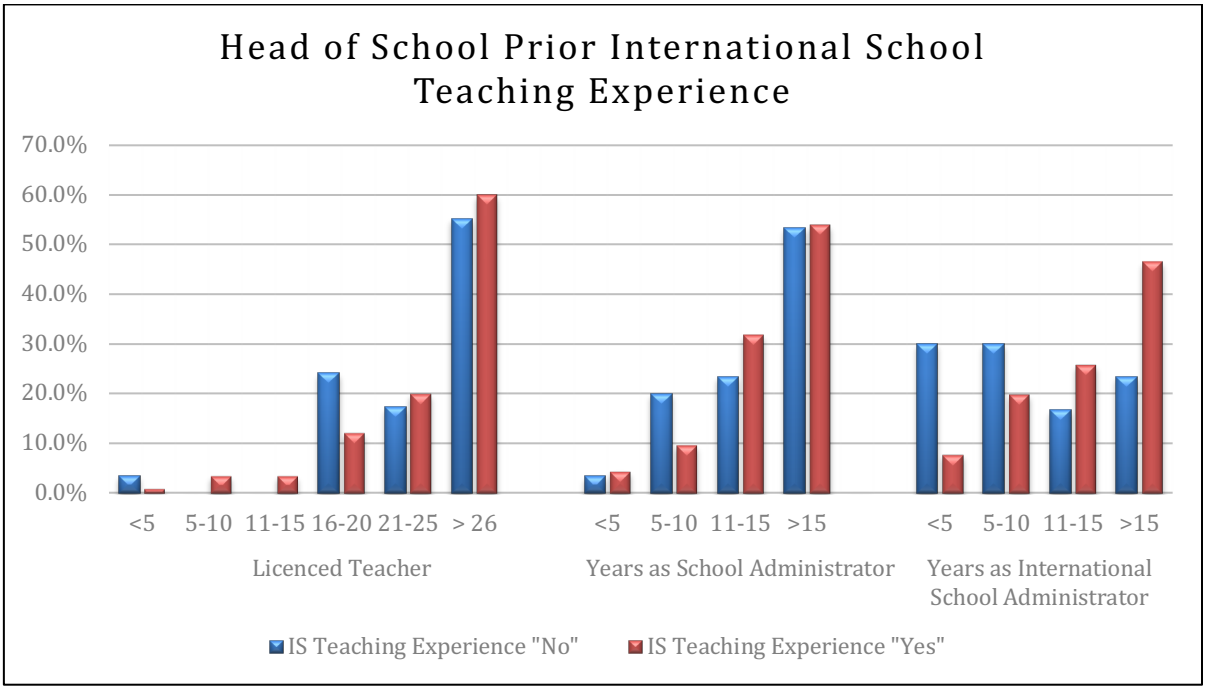
insights into why having no teaching experience at an international school would result in a longer average tenure.

Attempting to deconstruct why this may be led down several avenues. When examining Figure 4, where comparisons are made between years as a licenced teacher, years as a school administrator (vice-principal or higher), and years as a school administrator at an international school, more than 50% were licenced teachers for more than 26 years. This applies to both those with and without international school teaching experience. This also applies to experience as school administrators with over 15 years of experience. That is a great number of years of experience.

Where the data shifts is where the school administrator received their leadership experience, and many heads with no international school teaching experience have entered the international school market relatively recently, that being within the last 10 years (60.0%). This timeframe represents a very large increase in overall international school numbers, and therefore increased demand for school leaders, which may explain an increase in school leaders parachuting in from state and national school systems.

Figure 4

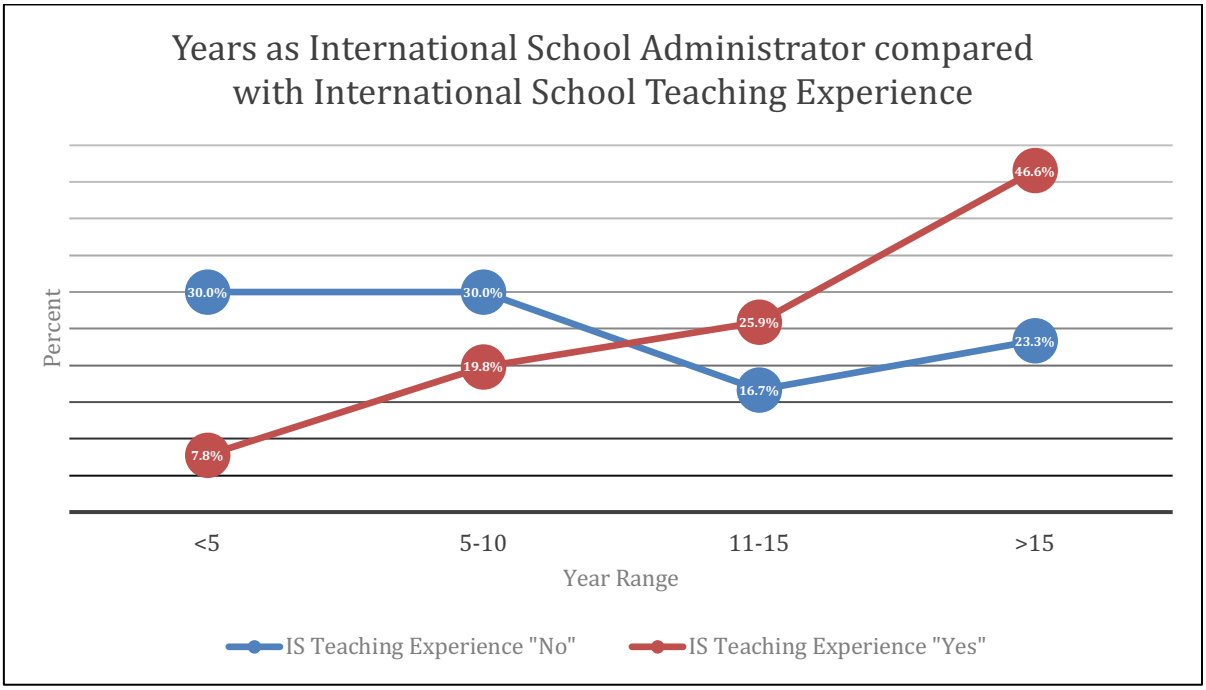
Comparison of Prior International School Teaching Experience



There also exists an inverse relationship between years as an international school administrator when comparing heads with international school teaching experience to those without (Figure 5). This may demonstrate that those heads who have entered the international school market to teach have remained for a long time, working their way from teacher to school administrator to head of school given that years of experience as a school leader, as vice-principal to principal, is required before taking on the top leadership position.

Figure 5

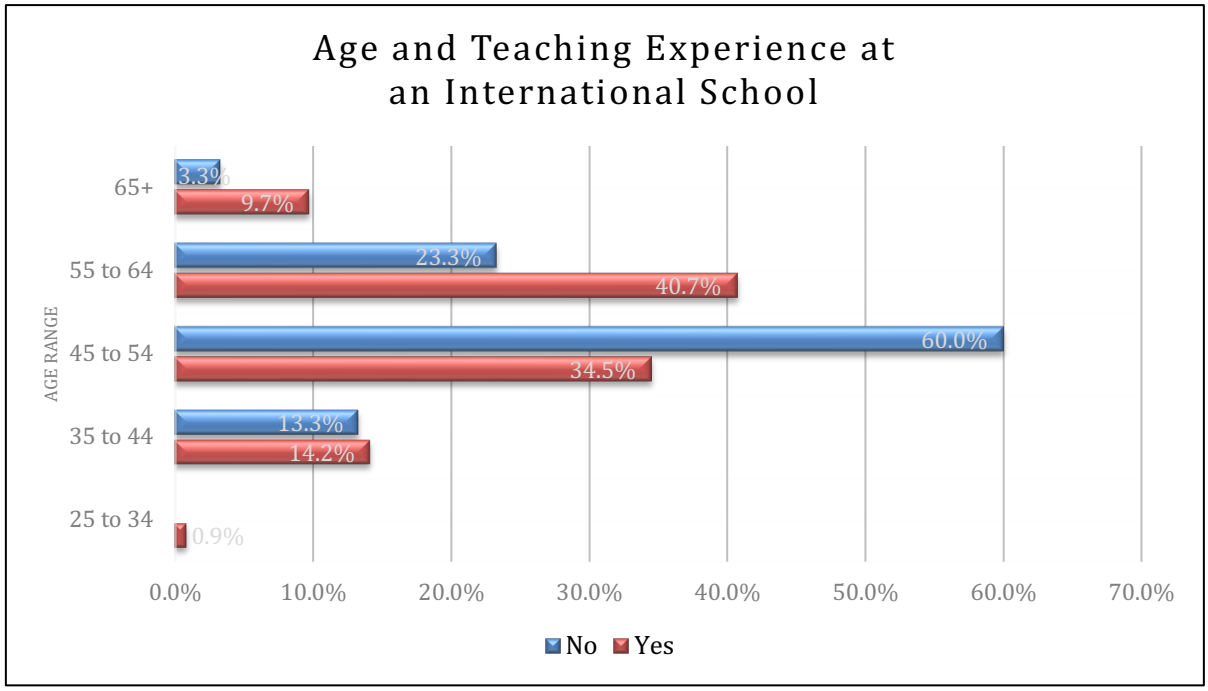
Years as an International School Administrator compared with International School Teaching Experience (%)



The highest percentage of heads without prior international school teaching experience were within the 45-to-54-year age category (Figure 6). Few are younger than this. This may corroborate that these heads have retired early from their national or state system and then entered the international school market. Also, given they are entering the market mid-career, they will not accumulate as many years as international school administrators. This could also apply to the heads in the 55-64 and 65+ categories who are commencing an overseas career after retiring from their home country as administrators.

Figure 6

Age and International School Experience



Conversely, 50.4% of the heads with international school experience were over the age of 55, with a sizeable percentage over 65 (9.7%). This could reflect that they have been working at different schools and in different countries where the pension scheme is either non-existent or not to the level of providing sufficient funds to retire. Unlike the countries where many of the heads originate, where a national, state, or provincial pension system is in place, not all international schools provide a similar employer-sponsored retirement package in which they can participate. As such, it may require the continuation of work as a result.

Even with the exploration of experiences, and variables which may impact entering and leaving the international school market, it does not explain why heads with no international school teaching experience have a longer average tenure. One

possible explanation is heads with international teaching experience may be more accustomed to and comfortable with increased mobility since this behaviour is reflective of the international school teacher market, like the influence of "wanderlust" (Hacohen, 2012; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Wong, 2020) or shifting schools for better remuneration, location, or prestige value.

Tenure and External Recruitment

How a person enters the headship at an international school, whether internally promoted or externally recruited, can impact tenure (Benson, 2011). Based on the results, it was determined that most heads of schools were recruited externally. Moving from current to the three former headships, external recruitment accounted for a 73.4%, 81.9%, 73.8%, and 70.0% recruitment rate. One can see based on this data that external recruitment for the head position is by far the norm.

When examining tenure and recruitment (Table 14), it was determined that tenure was longer for *promoted internally* in each scenario except for previous headship 1 which was very close at 4.7 versus 4.8 years.

Table 14

Comparison of Tenure based on Recruitment (in years)

	Current School	n=	Previous Headship 1	n=	Previous Headship 2	n=	Previous Headship 3	n=
Promoted internally	5.5	46	4.7	16	5.5	11	5.0	3
Recruited externally	4.4	127	4.8	72	4.6	31	3.7	7

When comparing this to CEOs in the business sector, it too parallels this hiring practice as “80% of CEOs were promoted externally from other companies, leaving only 20% of CEOs being promoted internally from the company they worked at” (Egan, 2018). Yet, regardless of sector, one would anticipate that having a head with experience at the same school and rising to the helm from the leadership team should be advantageous, yet the majority of heads were not hired internally. The benefits of hiring internally include understanding the school culture, vision and mission, the clientele, and having an established working relationship with key stakeholders. This was noted in the comments section by one respondent, who noted that:

> matching a head's style, philosophy and character to the school's culture will be a key factor in longevity. This is why heads developed internally tend to last longer. They already fit the school culture and know where a lot of the land mines are. (survey respondent)

While the data suggests that there are definite benefits in terms of retaining the head of school for a longer period, given that heads are predominantly recruited externally, yet stay longer when internally promoted, represents an area of review for boards when seeking a new head of school. Perhaps this practice of external recruitment is by design perpetuating the cycle of a revolving door for heads of school. Most definitely, the reason behind this practice warrants further research.

Impact of the Board on Tenure

The power and influence of the board on the tenure of the head of school is undeniable and one of the greatest challenges for a head of school. The board plays a significant role in the life of a head of school. This is reflected in the principal-agent relationship and the power the board has connected to the contractual relationship with the head. To provide a deeper understanding of the impact of board issues on tenure, the survey provided two sets of data points - one set from the head's longest-held position and one set from the shortest-held position (if applicable). This interaction between principal and agent was referred to extensively as presented in the literature review. In this study, both in the survey and at every interview, the pervasive power of the board was noted. Repeatedly, when head of school issues were discussed, the focus was frequently on the board. Comments like "number one is relationship with the board" (Interviewee 1) or the "board is the most important relationship for my success and the success of the school. So, if this is gone, if this goes south, everything's gonna fall apart [since] they have the control over your contract" and a positive relationship with the "board is probably the key relationship to keep you… in the role" (Interviewee 9).

However, there is a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between the board and the head of school. During the interviews, when the role of the board was discussed, comments referenced the board's role as focused on "hiring and firing the head and overseeing finances" (Interviewee 1) or the

> high-level strategic monitoring of school improvement, how are we making sure we have the financial viability over the next five to 10 years to complete

> the projects that we want to do and fund those things that are going to have the biggest impact on improving student learning. (Interviewee 5)

The separation of governance and operations was clear. Issues arose when the board went beyond their scope and shifted into the operational areas of running the school. Comments like “board members with personal agendas” who had an “insistence on micro-managing” and “interfer[ing] with day-to-day operations” reflecting the challenges of “staying within boundaries” were frequently noted in the survey. As such, it was beneficial to explore this issue deeper during the interviews as comments did reflect the need to better understand why tensions between the board and head are so prevalent. As one head noted:

> I do believe that boards are well intended, and they want what’s best for the school. But from my experience at seven, eight different schools now, I really feel like there’s a huge disconnect between boards and the work of schools. There’s just a lack of understanding what the work of schools is, and also a lack of understanding how the work needs to happen in schools in terms of best practice…and so again, I feel like they’re part of the reason that a board gets disenchanted with a head of school is because of their own lack of understanding about the process, and their own notions about what success looks like and how you achieve that success. (Interviewee 2)

The area of board training and clearly defined roles are discussed in the following sections, and have been recommended in earlier studies (Benson, 2011; Blandford & Shaw, 2001).

To better understand the principal-agent interaction and possible impact on tenure, this section explores the impact the board can have on head of school tenure, guided by issues identified in the literature review.

Importance of the Board Chair

To maintain a positive and effective working relationship with the board, it was noted both in the survey and during interviews that it is essential to cultivate a positive working relationship with the board chair in particular since "this relationship, board-chair and the head of school, is crucial… because the only employee of the board is the head of school" (Interviewee 6). This is fundamental to the overall dynamics of the relationship and can make or break the head in terms of efficacy in results and longevity in position. Comments related to this reiterated that it was "critically important to have a strong relationship with the board chair. That was proven over and over again" (survey respondent) and the "board chair has to be your confidant and your biggest supporter. So, if that isn't a good relationship… that's very, very difficult" (Interviewee 1).

While the relationship with the board chair is "to make sure that I'm functioning well and that he's (sic) not interfering" (Interviewee 4), in many cases, heads noted that if there were problems, this is where they would typically be. If problems arise, it is "usually that relationship with your board chair" (Interviewee 4). In the survey comments, one head noted that the board relationship was "dysfunctional due to Board Chair/CEO who dominated and bullied". To be successful the head of school needs the relationship with the chair to be positive and

productive, and roles need to be very clear. As one head noted, “I think the most successful time was when the chair knew what the chair was doing” (Interviewee 7).

Board Composition and Related Issues

It has been determined that board composition can impact the tenure of international school heads (Hawley, 1994, 1995; Benson, 2011). Variables like board number, nationality number, policies, and board turnover can all have an impact on tenure. As such, in relation to their longest and shortest-held positions, respondents were asked about board-related issues. When examining the results, an overwhelming majority of heads were employed at schools which were board-led at 95.2% (longest-held position) or 80.2% (at shortest-held position).

If the school had a board, at the longest-held position, the average tenure for the head of school was 6.2 years (n=160). If there was no board and the head reported directly to the school owner, the length of tenure interestingly increased slightly to 6.6 years (n=8), albeit the results are from a very small data sample. However, in the case of the shortest-held position, the presence of a board decreased tenure to 3.3 years (n=69) whereas a direct reporting structure to the school owner decreased tenure even further to 2.6 years (n=17). This relationship between owner and tenure could reflect when the relationship is going well, longevity can be increased since the relationship is less complex and opinions more singularly focused, while conversely when there are significant challenges, it is much easier for the owner to end the relationship. Therefore, an increase in tenure when compared to boards on the positive end and a decrease on the negative end.

One question that arose was can the board size impact tenure? As earlier noted, a board can range in size from a few members to over 16 members. An interesting outcome was that as the board size increased, there was a corresponding sizable increase in tenure for the head of school for both scenarios, that being the longest and shortest-held positions (Table 15).

Table 15

Impact of Board Size on Head of School Tenure

Board Members	Longest-held Position		Shortest-held Position	
	Average Tenure	n=	Average Tenure	n=
<=5	5.6	40	2.8	17
6-10	6.3	86	3.3	38
11-15	7.0	23	3.6	8
16+	7.2	9	3.8	6

Based on the results, the head of school remained in the position longer when board membership was larger. This is an interesting outcome. It would have been predicted that this would be the opposite since the complexity and dynamic of more voices on the board could lead to a challenging environment to work in and be successful. However, perhaps this reflects that there is not one unified voice for or against, and as such, the head can navigate the various interest groups more successfully.

Another area which can impact tenure is if board members are disinterested members, meaning that they have no children in the school (Hawley, 1994). Based on the results of this study, it was determined that most heads worked at schools

where board members had children enrolled at the school. This was noted for both longest (77.2%) and shortest-held (76.3%) positions. In terms of the percentage of board members with children, there was a range spread along the continuum from less than 10% to 100%, with the largest percentage between 90-100% at 31.7% (longest-held position) and 44.1% (shortest-held position). In some cases, it was noted that all board members must be parents reflecting the governance policies of the school.

Regardless of whether at the longest or shortest-held position, it was determined that if board members had children attending the school, the average tenure of the head was longer. For example, at the longest-held position, if the board was comprised of all disinterested members, the average tenure of the head was 6.0 years (n=36). However, if board member children were attending the school, tenure increased to 6.5 years (n=122). Similarly at the shortest-held position, while tenure did drop substantially, the pattern of increased tenure at schools with board member children present remained at 3.3 years (n=58) versus schools with all disinterested board members at 3.0 years (n=18).

This increase in tenure when board children attend the school seems to contradict what one might have predicted. Hawley (1994) noted that school heads "have a strong preference for board members … who do not have children enrolled in the school during the time of their board membership" (p. 14). This preference reflected board member's ability to "maintain a more objective view of the school" (Hawley, 1994, p. 14). Having a board with members who have children in the school could complicate and amplify parental self-interest. However, the impact on tenure is positively weighted towards a board with children at the school. Perhaps this

reflects that parents would have first-hand knowledge and broader experiences as a parent when compared to a disinterested board member.

International schools are typically composed of students from many countries, and as such, board membership can be quite international. On average, heads noted that there were 3.4 nationalities on the board. Yet, some boards had only 1 nationality while others had great diversity with 11 or more nationalities represented. Hawley (1994) found that fewer nationalities on the board increased the length of tenure of the head. However, as noted in Table 16, it was determined that the tenure of a head of school increased as the number of nationalities on the board increased, from 6.2 years with one nationality represented to 6.9 years with five or more nationalities on the board. This was found in both data sets provided by heads for their longest and shortest-held positions.

Table 16

Nationalities on Board and Impact on HoS Tenure

	Longest-held Position		Shortest-held Position	
	Average Tenure	n=	Average Tenure	n=
One Nationality	6.2	30	2.3	15
Four Nationalities	6.5	38	3.7	11
Five+ Nationalities	6.9	37	3.9	16

The implications of a diverse board representing multiple nationalities and an increase in tenure are unclear. Once again looking at research on the corporate world experience, it has been noted in relation to board composition that “culture affects perceptions, preferences, and behaviors” (Ji et al. 2021, p. 4) and the

"structure of the board, like any organizational structure, can be influenced by national culture" (Ji et al., 2021, p. 9). If the board is more homogeneous, for example, with members from a "country with higher individualism, board members are more likely to consider their values and positions within the group, rather than taking care of the group's interests" (Ji et al. 2021, p. 11). This will result in greater challenges to achieve consensus and cohesive outcomes.

If the board has greater heterogeneity, with both individualistic and collectivist viewpoints, it has been argued that it "has the benefit of being enlightened on diverse operating environments and cultures that contrast to those of local environments" (Odero & Egessa, 2023, p. 219). It has even been argued that "studies have revealed that nationality diversity [on boards] influences financial performance" (Odero & Egessa, 2023, p. 219). One can hypothesize that diverse boards have better working relations with the head of school. However, before any definitive conclusions can be made, additional research, focusing on board composition and attributes beyond nationality, such as gender, age, expertise, education, and board tenure, is warranted to further our understanding of this issue.

Board Policy

With regards to tenure and board policies, Hawley (1994) determined that if boards had formalized written policies in place, head of school tenure was longer at 4.7 years compared to only 2.7 years for schools with no written policies (Hawley, 1994, p. 15). This is quite a difference in longevity based on a single factor. Based on this study, 86.3% of heads worked at schools with a formalized set of written board policies. When examining this variable and tenure, no identifiable difference was

noted. At the longest-held position, head of school tenure at schools with board policies in place (n=138) compared with schools without (n=23) were the same at 6.3 years. When examining tenure at the shortest-held position, again, the results were very close with an average tenure of 3.3 years with board policies in place (n=59) and 3.2 years for schools without (n=17).

While Hawley (1994) noted that "it would be logical to assume that a set of policies in a school would help guide and provide stability for the school and the school head" (p. 15), which makes sense, perhaps the difference is in today's environment where the majority of schools already operate under set formalized policies, and as such, experienced heads of school can navigate quite easily regardless of if policies are formalized and in place.

Evaluation of Heads

It was determined that the majority of heads of school had an annual evaluation, whether it be at their longest or shortest-held position. This process of "having clear evaluation criteria" (survey respondent) was deemed critical in not only improving communication and relations with the board but also in terms of establishing a cycle for improvement. As one head of school noted,

> we agreed on an evaluation tool that we used for year one for them to give me feedback so there were no surprises. And I think that was really important. And then that became central to our relationship my whole six years. We fine-tuned the goal structure they established and goals I met and I gave them goals as individual board members, so it was a 360 process for them. We modelled that process in the school, we held ourselves highly accountable to

those goals, and we fine-tuned the evaluation process all along. And as a result, we wrote a standard operating procedure manual on how the board and the head of school partner in running the strategic direction of the institution". (Interviewee 3)

Based on the survey results, at the longest-held position, 80.5% (n=129) had a formal evaluation conducted by the board. For those heads with an evaluation process, the average tenure was 6.3 years. However, if there was no evaluative process in place at all, which only represented 19.5% (n=31) of the respondents, tenure dropped to 5.1 years. This was also noted in the data set for the shortest-held position. Again, while the majority were formally evaluated by the board (76.3%, n=58), tenure was much shorter at 3.7 years. If there was no formal evaluation process, tenure dropped to 2.9 years (n=18).

A key factor impacting tenure was the frequency of evaluations (Table 17). Based on the results, when the frequency of head of school evaluations increased, the longevity of the head decreased. For example, heads who were evaluated informally had the longest tenure at 8.7 years while repeated evaluations at 6-week intervals resulted in tenure at 2 years. Given the limited sample size outside of annual evaluations, it is difficult to draw any relationship conclusions; however, this issue does warrant further research to determine if there are any connections between evaluation frequency and tenure.

Table 17

Head of School Tenure by Evaluation Frequency

	Longest Tenure		Shortest Tenure	
	Average Tenure	n=128	Average Tenure	n=58
Informally	8.7	3	-	-
Triennial	7.5	2	-	-
Biennial	7.2	4	-	-
Annual	6.6	108	3.5	51
Biannual	6.0	10	3.0	6
Every 6 weeks	2.0	1	2.0	1

A question that arises is why is there a difference in tenure between no evaluation at all and an informal frequency of evaluations. Perhaps this difference reflects schools with no policies in place representing a more challenging work environment, and an easier ability to remove a head at any point, while schools with policies but more relaxed and informal evaluation structure reflected a positive environment with confidence in the head.

Board Stability

It has been noted in previous studies (Hawley, 1994; Benson, 2022; Littleford, 2023) that board stability plays an important role in maintaining a head of school for a longer period. As Benson notes, "in schools with low board member turnover, chief administrators tend to stay longer than where high board turnover is the norm" (p. 90). This challenge dealing with high turnover was referenced in an interview where the head noted that she was employed by the board "with a particular agenda and

direction, [yet by the time she commenced work it was] no longer work for the same group of decision makers" (Interviewee 7).

The data from this study indicated that board stability is an area of concern. Only 57.2% of the respondents noted board turnover was stable (defined as little if any turnover within 3 years) at their longest-held position and only 44.0% at their shortest-held position. In terms of head of school tenure, it was determined that, at the longest-held position, board stability provided a significant increase in tenure, from 5.6 years to 6.9 years (Table 18). Schools with a medium turnover for the board, defined as new members every two years, were similar to a high turnover environment.

Table 18

Board Stability – Longest vs Shortest Tenure

Board Stability	Longest Tenure		Shortest Tenure	
	Average Tenure	n=158	Average Tenure	n=74
Stable (little if any turnover within 3 year period)	6.9	90	3.3	33
Medium turnover (new members every two years)	5.6	35	3.3	24
High turnover (new members every year)	5.8	33	3.5	17

Interestingly, at the shortest-held position, a high turnover increased tenure by 0.2 years compared to a stable or medium turnover environment. While

negligible, it does raise the question as to the actual impact of an ever-changing board membership. Even at the longer end, tenure at high turnover schools was longer on average at 5.8 years compared with the overall average for tenure at 4.8 years. Perhaps the dysfunction remains at the board level so that focused attention on the head is minimized. This also corresponds to the observation by Berns et al. (2021) when noting that "dysfunction within the board may also deter monitoring and insulate the CEO from dismissal" (p. 378) and "when boards are more powerful than the CEO, they are better positioned to dismiss the CEO when they choose; when boards are relatively weaker, dismissing the CEO becomes much more difficult (Berns et al, 2021, p. 378). High turnover will allow for greater dysfunction, increased difficulty in gaining consensus, and inefficiency as members are trained and brought up to speed. This can create a greater reliance on the head to support the board in this process.

However, continuity within the board, alongside the head of school, is beneficial in terms of working relationships and efficacy of meeting the stated goals. This is reflected in the longer tenure with a stable board and was articulated clearly by one head of school when they commented on the number of recent board chairs, noting that it was:

> my most rocky point here… we went through a spate [of chairs]… [previously] we had fairly long serving chairs. One was here seven years or so and had been chair a few years before…that was exceptional. And then I had a four-year person and a three-year and that was all good. But then I had one chair who was exceptional come in and then for whatever reason…. they left after one year. Another one came in and then another one came in. And at the same

> time, we had a very smart, charismatic, [and] very disruptive board member come into the system. So, I was on the verge of going into chair number four. And I would say that was a time I was pretty close to saying this is it. (Interviewee 9)

This scenario is a good indication of the importance of having consistency with board membership and most notably the chair, as with time working together, "they [the chair] kind of get a sense of the flow of your world. And I think that's really important" (Interviewee 2). The synergy between the principal and agent can be instrumental in keeping the school focused on its vision and mission and ensuring it is meeting the required outcomes for the students and the overall school community.

Summary

As I set out to conduct my study, a key question driving my interest was connected to the current tenure for international school heads. There is a lot of research noting the previous two studies of Hawley (1994) and Benson (2011) as outlined in the literature review. As outlined in this chapter, it was found that the average tenure for a head of school in this study was 4.8 years. It also determined that the demographics of the majority of heads of school were male, white, and from Anglo-Saxon countries. Examining factors which impact tenure cannot be reduced to a singular issue or context as this research identified many variables which can impact the length of tenure for international school heads.

For example, the board is a very powerful entity which controls the hiring and firing of the head of school. It was found that the survivability of the head can be contingent on a positive working relationship with the board. Yet, the results

demonstrated that there are many variables which impact the principal-agent relationship and challenge the ability of the head to retain the headship. Some of these are connected to the structure of the board, like composition and membership characteristics, while others are tied to governance issues, like policies and evaluation. Certainly, heads of school must take this relationship seriously and make a great effort to cultivate a positive relationship with the board chair in particular, and the board in general, to lay the necessary foundation for success.

Chapter VI: Issues, Challenges, and Reasons for Leaving

There are many reasons a head of school may depart from their position, whether it be voluntarily or directed by the board. In this chapter, based on the data from both survey and interviews, the issues impacting the decision to leave are examined, with a focus on the "various withdrawal-inducing forces and events, the 'hazard' to which [a head of school] is exposed" (Charters, 1970, p. 24). To pick up and move takes effort and could place the head in a precarious situation since knowing what options are available may not be readily apparent. There is risk associated with the decision, and what you find in terms of a new position may or may not be what you necessarily want… and it may be halfway around the globe. Several respondents referred to the risk as "putting yourself out onto the market and seeing what you get". Competition is tough. One may end up in a region or school that was not the first or even second choice.

Yet, at times, the overall challenges to remain at the current school are so great that "heads just decide to step away" (Interviewee 1). The decision to leave is not made lightly, and experiences will vary reflecting the multitude of possible reasons for departing, either for professional and personal reasons, or both. It has been noted in the literature that international school leadership positions are precarious at best and boards do not want to keep heads much beyond a typical three-year cycle. As Bunnell and Gardner-McTaggart (2022a) recently noted, an elite traditional international school "certainly has a high mortality rate of leaders, serving on average between 2 and 4 years in office per school" (p. 4). Based on the quantitative data above, heads are stay longer than that noted in the literature,

particularly in the first headship at 5.1 years. So, what are the reasons for the departure?

Key Challenges of the Position

A common thread throughout this research has been the many challenges international school heads face leading the school. There is tremendous pressure on the head of school to ensure the school is successful in all areas – academic, enrollment, reputation, and profitability (regardless of whether the school is established as a 'for-profit' or 'not-for-profit' school).

When heads were asked 'what are the three greatest challenges being a head of school?', the results for most challenging were: i) staffing and staff-related issues, ii) finance, and iii) board relations. However, given that there is a ranking involved in this process, a weighted average was also incorporated providing the ability to assign different degrees of importance thus providing greater accuracy of choice. When calculating the three most challenging areas overall, as a weighted average, the three areas were: i) board relations; ii) finance and staffing and staff-related issues (tied); and iii) governance and organizational politics (tied) (Table 19). The weighted average was calculated by weighting the first (x 1), second (x 2), or third (x 3) most challenging issue utilizing the following formula: (x1w1 + x2w2 + x3w3) / total response count where w = weight of the answer choice and x = response count for the answer choice.

The key challenges noted by heads impacting the relationship with the Board revolved around five key areas as noted in survey question 3.3 (frequency noted in brackets) of the survey. The first two areas are interconnected: i) personal agendas

(9) driving board member actions which led directly to ii) micromanagement of operations and interference (16) with the head of school's ability to do the job. This reflects boards wanting to be involved directly with operations, crossing established boundaries, and influencing key school stakeholders to advance personal agendas, to the point where the board members end up trying to run the school.

Table 19

Three greatest challenges of being a Head of School

	Most challenging 1	Most challenging 2	Most challenging 3	Total	Weighted average
Board Relations	26 (3)	12	14	52	1.8 (1)
Finance	27 (2)	26 (2)	20 (1)	73 (2)	1.9 (2)
Governance	17	17 (3)	17	51	2.0 (3)
Host Country	12	14	14	40	2.1
Organizational Politics	21	14	19 (2)	54 (3)	2.0 (3)
Parents	8	10	16	34	2.2
Policies and Procedures	2	6	10	18	2.4
School Culture	8	6	11	25	2.1
Staffing and Staff-related Issues	28 (1)	39 (1)	18 (3)	85 (1)	1.9 (2)
Students	0	2	1	3	2.3
Transient Nature of the School	5	8	12	25	2.3

As one interviewee framed it:

> I made it very clear that within reason, if the board starts to try to operate the school, I'm at the point where I could just leave my keys on the desk, you guys

> take over, you don't need to pay me anymore. I'll just go back to Canada and look for a new job. (Interviewee 4)

The challenges of working for a board with multiple agendas, challenging personalities, and tendencies to cross the line between governance and operations was noted by one respondent when referencing:

> my most significant issue is a charismatic, very disruptive and time-consuming board member who is relentless and wears down other board members and wastes the time of so many people…yet has a voter following that gets him re-elected and there's not enough on the current board that would vote him off.

Under these noted conditions, tenure can be shortened as the head will seek better employment elsewhere.

A third area noted, while connected to the challenges of board interactions and behaviours, yet on the opposite end of the scale, is board lack of engagement (10) or high board turnover (6) which resulted in ineffective governance. This includes issues with board attendance due to members' busy schedules outside of any board responsibilities. High turnover of board members impacted 20.8% (longest-held position) and 24% (shortest-held position) of the schools. This is an issue, as respondents noted, since "keeping institutional knowledge in place is a challenge" and problems arise due to a "lack of continuity". With continual board turnover, it also takes time for the head of school to "bring new board members up to speed on critical issues".

A fourth area noted represented the raison d'être of the board (24) itself. Fundamentally, what is the board's role and how is governance operationalized? It

was noted that boards can lose sight of their role, slipping from governance to operational matters. As one head noted, it is important to "keep the board focused on generative, high level, future-forward thinking … and not in the operational details of the school". There can be disagreement on the role of the board which leads to a lack of trust between board members and potential conflict between principal and agent. This will complicate matters and agendas will thwart efforts to move the school forward in a unified manner. Ultimately, it is important for board members to "know which lane to stay in [and] trust and respect the knowledge of the educational leader" (survey respondent). Tied to this was a recognition that there is a lack of board training. As one head articulated, "in my current non-profit school I needed to really help the board understand their roles and responsibilities, so a great deal of my work in the past 4 years has been board training/education and helping the board understand the difference between operations and strategy".

The fifth area noted is finance (11). This plays a large part in defining success for a head of school given that the head of school is ultimately responsible for the financial viability of the organization. The head of school must ensure that the organization remains profitable with a stable revenue flow while at the same time meeting the mission and vision of the school. As one head noted, the "one area that really makes boards nervous is an unbalanced budget" (Interviewee 1). This is a key area for success in maintaining the position of head of school, and:

> if they've got a losing record, they gotta go. I mean, it's just an unwritten rule. It's more the finances, if there are multi-year budget deficits and there's no clear strategy to arrest it…. Well, that warning light needs to be key on the dashboard. (Interviewee 1).

Furthermore, it was noted that “finance issues require long-term planning and the ability to nicely say no because the real financial problems created by saying yes don't appear until after the average head's tenure”.

Connected to the importance of finance and the success of a head, it was recognized that many heads do not have a strong financial background. Given their educational background as teachers, it was recognized that heads of school “are not necessarily skilled at finances” (Interviewee 2) as few have financial business experience prior to taking up the post. As noted in Table 19, finance was considered the second most challenging task while in Table 26, financial responsibility ranked second in terms of the top areas a successful head must focus on.

As such, heads recognize the critical importance of their financial responsibilities. Some felt that “those who go into educational leadership have less experience in how to manage a business outside of the education sector and I think that’s where the issue is. That’s where the Achilles heel is… between what the board sees as important and the head of school” (Interviewee 6). Yet, there was not a total sense that a school leader could not overcome this and be successful. While one head noted that a lack of finance credentials can have an impact on securing the position, given the mindset that “oh, you can’t be head of school because you don’t have any experience in financial management" (Interviewee 2), it was felt that “people use that as a gatekeeper type of thing to say” (Interviewee 2) rather than reflecting the true nature of one’s ability to successful manage the financial responsibilities. As Interviewee 1 acknowledged:

> finances are not my major talent and skill. And the way that I have been successful in that area is to make sure that I have a very strong CFO. Not only

> that the CFO is very good, but also that the CFO really cares about supporting me as the incoming Head of School or somebody that they want to work with. So our relationship has to be really stellar. I've spent a lot of time and in all of my schools building that connection and relationship with the CFO. (Interviewee 1)

This was reinforced in the survey when it was noted that "a good business manager is worth their weight in gold. If you find one, bring them with you to your next position". However, it was also recognized that conflict can result between head of school and financial controller. While the relationship between head and board is paramount, the relationship with key finance personnel is equally critical as a poor relationship may lead to the head being undermined and removed since:

> you can certainly do a great job as a head of school as long as you've got somebody in finance that you can trust and knows their stuff and isn't trying to, you know, take your job and want to be the head of school. (Interviewee 9)

Reasons for Leaving Headship

Before examining the reasons for head of school turnover, it would be beneficial to make connections to the international school teacher experience, where much research has been conducted on teacher turnover, where it has been noted that leaving a school is predominantly based on supportive leadership, remuneration, age, and personal circumstances (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Mancuso et al., 2010). More recently, Wong (2020) in a mixed methods study of Hong Kong teachers determined that family matters are by far the most important factor in leaving,

followed by economic factors like cost of living and salary (p. 83). The relationship with superiors did not manifest as a strong indicator for leaving the position in her study. What research has not acknowledged is that school staff, at times, regardless of level, may need to be released from their position. This typically reflects that they are not meeting the minimum standard required for continued employment. It is an area that is difficult to capture as quantitative data may not capture the complexity of teacher or leadership mobility in the international education sector. An effort has been made in this study to capture reasons for leaving tied to termination or non-renewal of the contract noted below.

All three studies (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Mancuso et al., 2010, Wong, 2020) refer to the '*wanderlust factor'* influencing teachers to move on and enjoy new adventures. There is every reason to think that this would impact school leaders also as data from this study determined that the majority have been working in the international school market before taking on the headship role. This reflects that a certain type of individual is drawn to the lifestyle offered by international school employment, regardless of position.

In this study, the most noted reason for leaving a headship, based on response data from all past schools, was issues related to school governance, ranging from 23.8% to 29.5% depending on headship, with an overall average of 26.6% (Table 20). This was followed by salary and career considerations and then family and personal issues. These top three reasons to leave a headship parallel the findings in Benson (2011). Each one of these areas will now be explored in more depth below.

Table 20

Reasons for Leaving Headship (in % and ranking)

Reasons for Leaving Headship	Previous Headship 1	Previous Headship2	Previous Headship3	Overall Average
Issues related to school governance	29.5 [1]	23.8 [1]	27.3 [1]	26.9 [1]
Salary and career considerations	5.7 [3]	21.4 [2]	27.3 [1]	18.1 [2]
Family and personal issues	12.5 [2]	14.3 [3]	0.0	8.9 [3]
Social issues connected to the host country	0.0	0.0	9.1 [2]	3.0 [5]
Economic issues connected to the host country	3.4 [5]	0.0	0.0	1.1
Political issues connected to the host country	4.5 [4]	4.8 [4]	9.1 [2]	6.1 [4]
Cultural issues connected to the host country	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Environmental issues connected to the host country	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.8
Characteristics of the school	3.4 [5]	2.4 [5]	0.0	1.9

School Governance

In terms of school governance being a primary catalyst for change, this was not surprising as it is noted commonly as a primary issue impacting the longevity of heads as outlined in the literature review. This reflects the central role the board plays in the life of a school head. Issues connecting the board with reasons heads leave the position are prevalent at all levels of this research study, including both the survey data and interviewee comments. It was noted that "when it comes to deciding to leave or not leave, it's almost entirely the board" (Interviewee 10) and a "high percentage of times that somebody either leaves because they're fed up or they're fired, it's to do with the board" (Interviewee 4). The relationship between the head of

school and the board, most notably the board chair, is paramount. Data noted above and comments from the survey reinforce this, as respondents note challenges like "destructive Board members with personal agendas" and "toxic proprietary micro-management".

When discussing the reasons for leaving, heads almost invariably mentioned it came down to the relationship with the board. But what factors are driving this negative relationship? It was noted that:

> typically boards are very impatient, with whatever changes are happening in the school, they want it to happen yesterday. And so if it doesn't happen in that way, they become disenchanted with the particular head of school, they start to question his or her skills and talents and abilities and then it just kind of goes down a spiral. (Interviewee 2)

There was recognition that at times there are school leaders who get hired for the role and who do not have the skillset nor personality to be successful, and as such, all blame cannot be placed on the board in every situation. This highly demanding position and the challenges of maintaining the headship may be reflective of the fact that "people get promoted very quickly in positions that they're not necessarily ready to be in, and there's not the support around them to be successful" (Interviewee 5). Furthermore, it was also felt that at times:

> there's a characteristic of a head of school where they're egomaniacs. Instead of working with the board, they're almost too much trying to tell the board what to do rather than using them as a resource and expertise…and I think that it helped that I'm not a Mr. Know-It-All or Miss Know-it-all, but I do see some people like that and …it's not just the board, it's them. (Interviewee 9)

This was reinforced when noted that "if you really think you need to be the hero in the story, I think you're setting yourself up to fail" (Interviewee 5). This lack of experience, or attitude, can certainly impact the ability of a head to maintain their position.

Salary and Career Considerations

The next significant variable impacting a head's decision to leave was salary and career considerations (18.1%). This was noted several times in the comments section of the survey, usually tied in with other variables like board issues or family considerations. While this category ranked very high in the survey results, salary considerations per se was infrequently noted during interviews with heads of school. One interviewee, however, did reference that "one of the reasons I moved was that the financial compensation for what I was doing in [city in Asia] was relatively modest by international or other school standards" (Interviewee 8). Certainly, salary is an important variable when considering any employment decisions. However, it has not been deemed the single most important driving factor (Han & Yin, 2016) as studies have shown more intrinsic factors are important and educators tend to be "mission-driven and motivated by the goals of their organizations" (Hulleman & Barrow, 2010, p. 29). In retrospect, separating salary from career considerations would have been valuable.

Career advancement certainly does play a more important deciding factor. This was noted in both the survey and in the interviews. Career advancement was a strong driving force. It was noted that some heads prefer to "move to a bigger school" for career development or move to a "not-for-profit context". The perspective

is that it is now time for a change and a new challenge. As one head noted, they had "completed set tasks and was ready for a new challenge" while another stated "I've developed the school further, I've put new procedures in place, and the school has been taken forward to a really solid position, and I'm ready to move on because I'm essentially getting stale" (Interviewee 8) recognizing that specific career objectives were met and it was time to move on. Heads of school, as professionals with tremendous experience, are focused on moving forward in terms of their career trajectory by targeting both schools and locations in which they want to work and new experiences which will expand their repertoire of skills.

Family and Personal Reasons

The next largest category was family and personal issues (8.9%). On the survey, most comments beyond the pre-selected options were connected to activities and issues outside of the work domain. This is related to issues around child educational concerns, broader economic challenges, and personal considerations. For example, many comments were manifestations of the wanderlust factor, like "time to experience new challenges" or "looking for a new adventure". Others referred to the specific quality of life issues that impacted the decision to go, given what some heads referred to as hardship placements, stating that the location was "a very challenging place in terms of quality of life", or "twelve years in [a specific developing country] was long enough and I wanted to try something different". There was one comment stated during the interviews in which, when discussing the predecessor, it was noted that "he loved the four years, but he figured four years is enough in this country" (Interviewee 4).

Ensuring that the family is safe and settled was also noted as being very important. Much comes down to "if the family is happy and settled, if the children go to the school" (Interviewee 8), these factors impact how happy and settled heads will be. If the school is not a good fit, as family needs can evolve, then other opportunities will be found. For example, one head noted the reason for leaving was it was a "small school [and they] needed a larger school for my older children". In those cases, family considerations framed the discussions around moving to another school or country to meet the needs of the family. Furthermore, as with any position away from family and friends, there will be push-pull factors which impact the decision to stay or move on (Wong, 2020). There were comments in the survey connected to "moving closer to family" and recognizing the impact "Covid restrictions and enforced separation from loved ones" had on decision-making to relocate. It was articulated during one of the interviews that a:

> key indicator for people to go back to [their home country is if they] have kids or their parents are still alive, and the grandparents want to be near the kids. That often is a big pull for people in terms of family… I know a handful of people just said, you know what, I don't want to do this anymore. I gotta get closer to family, to siblings and parents and grandparent … so I think family plays a big role, too. (Interviewee 4)

Personal issues also played an important factor in the decision to stay or go. Not only career and family but also overall general satisfaction. In many of the interviews, the need for a sense of accomplishment permeated the conversations. If the head felt they had accomplished all that needed to be done, the choice to move schools was clear. If they felt well supported and were functioning in a positive

environment, with further development at the school required, then this could impact their decision whether to continue in the role. If they felt downtrodden and continually challenged, the choice was obvious. That sense of support is critical given that the head of school has:

> the smallest support network in the world because nobody in the school is looking after you. Unless you have one of those rare unicorn boards that actually understands that looking after the head of school is actually one of their biggest priorities. Quite often, it's the opposite, which is, let's push and grill and see how much we can get out of this, which causes stress, which causes people to leave. (Interviewee 5)

Finally, there is also a logistical issue which can impact whether to remain in the position. This relates to the contract itself with the board. Depending on the protocols in place, it may be difficult for heads to know if the board will offer another contract with sufficient time in advance to look for another position if need be. Often head of school openings are advertised a year or more in advance. This means that a head considering a move, or perhaps unsure of the board position for a contract extension, must start the process mid-way through year 2 of a typical 3-year contract. This makes the importance of clear communication and intentions with the board paramount recognizing the hiring cycle for this position. As one head noted:

> I'm at the end of my contract, I don't know what the board is going to do with my contract, so I might as well look somewhere else. And if I find somewhere else that's better, then I can go to the board and say, well, actually, I found this other place you know….so thanks and goodbye. (Interviewee 8)

It may also be a challenge for the head because once a board finds out the head is looking, again since the board's intention is unknown, the possibility for a contract renewal may evaporate as risk increases and confidence decreases from the boards perspective.

Political, Social, and Economic Issues

International schools are in most countries around the globe. One issue that is difficult to avoid, in any country, across time and space, is political issues connected to the host country. Political instability can be defined as "the extent to which the distribution of power within a political system is challenged by internal or external political actors" (Dirks & Schmidt, 2023, p. 4). These can manifest in a range of events within the broader geopolitical landscape and are reflective of "the number of violent political events that have occurred in a country. These violent events could be strikes, riots, coups, and politically motivated killings" (Tarkhani, 2021, p. 693). As foreign workers within a given nation-state, heads of school (and all foreign staff) are not immune to the broader social and geopolitical challenges impacting the overall quality of life. The challenges of a specific host country cannot be underestimated. The fact that some international schools are in countries that are "tremendous hardship posts… [where] most directors [heads] have not even lasted up until Christmas" (Interviewee 10). The political chaos leaves no one untouched, as one head referenced the urgent need to leave the country immediately given "civil war closed the school permanently". It was also noted that heads need to be cognizant of the fact that they are not operating in their home country – there will be significant differences, and "it's very easy to get caught up in, you know, the 'I know better and I

can bring this to the school and I can do this'... and all of that stuff. And you forget that you are in a different country usually than your own country, and you're a guest in that country, and there are laws and requirements of the country, not to mention the culture of that particular country, that you do need to take into consideration and, and have to understand and have to respect and have to be aware of" (Interviewee 2).

Based on the survey results, it was interesting to note that economic and cultural issues connected to the host country ranked very low or not at all in the responses. This may reflect that many heads have been working away from home in many countries for many years and/or the heads without international school experience are drawn to the life of an international educator. Remuneration is not tied to local economic standards so there are financial benefits regardless of location. A recent study on head of school salary found that 71% of heads agreed that their salary was fair for the work provided and 80% agreed their benefits were fair (Council of International School Research, 2023).

Other Reasons for Leaving

It must be noted that a relatively large percentage of respondents noted that there were "other" reasons for their departure. For example, in Previous Headship 1 (38.6%, n=34), Previous Headship 2 (33.3%, n=14), and Previous Headship 3 (27.2%, n=3) selected "other" reasons.

When examining the comments in the "other" section, it was noted that the majority of them were connected to the nine pre-set reasons noted above. However, in many cases, heads wanted to reference several factors for leaving, for example, "a

combination of factors: kids' ages, the right time to move as a family, career advancement, a certain exhaustion with the challenges of that particular school and environment" (Survey Respondent). When examining the comments (n=58), they connected to the following categories: issues related to school governance (24.1%, n=14), salary and career considerations (44.8%, n=26), family and personal issues (10.3%, n=6), social issues connected to the host country (3.4%, n=2), economic issues connected to the host country (3.4%, n=2), political issues connected to the host country (3.4%, n=2), cultural issues connected to the host country (n=0), environmental issues connected to the host country (1.7%, n=1), and characteristics of the school (3.4%, n=2). The only additional category was the impact of COVID-19 (5.2%, n=3), not referenced in the options above but discussed further in the next section.

When compared to Table 20, issues related to school governance parallel the overall results. However, salary and career consideration were much more evident, moving from the overall average of 18.1% in the preselected chart to 44.8% in the comments section. The issues connected mostly with career advancement, with heads moving to take on better opportunities elsewhere, or looking for new challenges. As one head noted,

> it's quite rare that the head comes in and wants simply to be a caretaker. You know, that's not the cycle, the psyche of heads isn't like that, they generally want to make a positive change and a positive improvement to the new school they're coming to, and they also want to keep the traditions alive and so on, but they want to make improvements and changes and drive forward" (Interviewee 8).

Once they achieve their goals, it can be time to move on, "that sense of adventure… that new challenge" (Interviewee 4) driving them to new headships around the globe.

Ultimately, there are many reasons a head of school will move on to another position, reasons that are connected to both professional and personal circumstances. Certainly, issues connected to school governance, the board, career, and family play an important role, and as one head expressed,

> it's a difficult job. I mean, I enjoy it. But you know, it certainly takes a pound of flesh, if you will. I think there are situations where, you know, just what it can take out of you trying to keep climate and morale together is, you know, it's exhausting. And then if you start to not have the support of your board, that's just another Venn diagram that you're in the middle of conflict. And then sometimes, you know, if you've got family, your kids can get involved…. (Interviewee 9)

making it a very complex decision-making process whether to stay or move on.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Given the timing of this study, one cannot ignore the challenges the global COVID-19 pandemic may have had on heads of schools' decision to leave the position. When asked in the survey if the pandemic made you consider leaving your position, only 35.5% (n=54) responded 'yes' while the majority stated 'no' at 58.6% (n=89). In terms of impact on the relationship with the board, 58.6% (n=89) noted no change at all while 33.6% (n=51) believed their relationship improved, leaving only 7.9% (n=12) who noted a worsening relationship. This is quite surprising given the overall impact of the pandemic on health, safety, and government interventions

across the globe not to mention the additional stress. Given the challenges, it would seem boards rallied behind the head and worked together to get through such a difficult time in history. As one head noted, "I was praised for my leadership through the pandemic" while another noted that:

> the COVID-19 pandemic was a major challenge. The Board needed to be more involved in operations, only because it was important that our parent community understood that there was no daylight between me (head of school) and the Board of Directors. [Country school located] did not tightly dictate pandemic-related measures, so we had to operate in a slightly ambiguous context.

Relationships became stronger in crisis and teams pulled together to work through the crisis. As one interviewee noted:

> it only took us probably two months to kind of put our heads around that. I mean, we were moving fast, but it actually made us better as a board and as a school because we didn't plan. We didn't run the school with pandemic in our mind. A big turning point was sitting down with our access point team, our leadership team, and also our board and asking ourselves, what compels families to come to [our school] every day? And we answered that collectively. And those answers became the goals. (Interviewee 3)

Overall, while the pandemic was an unprecedented challenge for school heads, based on the data results and interview comments, the pandemic did not have a tremendous impact on their ability, or stamina, to lead the schools during such an unprecedented crisis. In fact, it was a "thank you for reminding us what our job was or what our purpose is, and that it's just keeping kids feeling safe and secure, which

made us feel safe and secure" (Interviewee 3).

Sudden Departure

The reasons for leaving a headship comprise a very large list. While urgent political turmoil mitigates a quick exit, most heads in this study departed at the end of the contract and with full control over the decision-making process. There were, however, a significant number (23.9%) of cases noted in the survey where the head departed before the end of the contract. For those that left after 2 years (18%, n=16), the reasons were predominantly connected to issues of school governance (5), characteristics of the school (3), salary considerations (2), or family and personal issues (2). An example of the tension between principal and agent was well articulated by Interviewee 7 when noting that "essentially, I was pushing them and they were pushing me until we reached a point where we decided, I'm leaving and they decided I'm leaving and I decided I'm equally leaving". Another respondent mentioned the challenges due to the pandemic and "enforced separation from loved ones". In one extreme case, the head of school departed immediately because of concerns over "my personal safety and reputation [as I was] threatened by deranged parents".

In cases where the head of school only remained for 1 year and then departed (6%, n= 5), the reasons for departure were issues primarily related to school governance (3), political issues connected to the host country (1), or experiencing a disconnect with the school philosophy as the focus was on profit regardless of the quality of service (1). This is where the head starts a new position and quickly realizes that their philosophy does not align with the board. This realization of a

disconnect between head and school was articulated by Interviewee 2, when noting that:

> I think that many heads of schools are not fully aware necessarily of what a particular school environment is like. So even when they go through all the [hiring] procedures … when they enter the school community, and they begin to see what it really is like, and there are unexpected challenges that were not previously shared… so it's kind of a reality moment for an incoming head of school. And unless there is massive support from the board, and from other members of the community… it's easy to begin to feel that "oh, my gosh, this is not what I signed up for". And, you know, heads of school have lots of opportunity to look at other schools and see what's happening and so it's easy to get attracted to another kind of school so that feeling of like, 'okay, wait, what is this and what did I sign up for'? And is this really what I want to be doing? And is there XYZ school down the road that might be better for me?

Termination

A central question in this study relates to the frequency of termination of international school heads. Littleford (2019, 2023), a well-respected school consultant and advisor with over 30 years of experience, and whom almost all interviewees referenced, has stated that in his experience "about 80% of heads are fired at one time or another and most of those in their first 5 years" (J. Littleford, personal communication, June 8, 2024; cf. Littleford, 2023). While similar data was not found in academic research, he acknowledges "the data comes from my own client base of about 7000 schools worldwide, of which the majority are in North

America but a very large number of 'so called' international schools" (J. Littleford, personal communication, January 29, 2023). Bunnell and Gardner-McTaggart (2022a) refer above to the mortality rate of heads of school, implying that heads of school are being figuratively killed off as they are not wanted long-term. In the business sector, "the rate of CEO dismissal has grown substantially in recent years as has the literature exploring CEO dismissal" (Berns et al., 2021, p. 387) and the current rate can be as high as 52% (Sahadi, 2019).

While termination questions were included in this study, the results could not substantiate the experience noted above. Termination of heads noted in the results, both quantitative and qualitative, was quite low. Based on their previous headship, only 10.3% (n=9) noted that they were denied a new contract and 5.7% (n=5) had been terminated during their contract period. Of those terminated within their contract period, 3 had completed two years, 1 had completed four years, and 1 was a long-term head and had completed 13 years at the school. The reason for the dismissal noted in this case was the board wanted a change in direction. Termination was also noted by one of the heads who stated "after two years, I was asked to resign. I was asked to resign because my view and the view of the board didn't really match".

Given that it is "often difficult to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary departures as the precise reason for the separation of the CEO from the firm is rarely accurately disclosed" (Berns et al., 2021, p. 363), the survey attempted to get a deeper understanding by asked for official reasons and perceived actual reasons. Based on their previous headship, respondents noted the following for reasons for non-renewal or termination of contract (Table 21).

Table 21

Reasons for Non-Renewal/Termination of Contract (Previous Headship 1)

Official Reason	Perceived Actual Reason
Non-renewal	
Mutual agreement - unresolvable differences - confidentiality agreement in place. Full severance	Not able to share.
No official reason was given in writing	There were personality and professional issues between the local {country} school Principals and myself
Need for change in leadership	A combination of various factors, external and internal to the school.
I quit, but I left on good grounds with the Board who were supportive. I left on advice from the State Department, my Embassy and lawyers considering the vulnerability all expats have in foreign assignments. - extremely stressful.	N/A
Time for change	Newly appointed Director was eager to build his own team
Not offered a renewal	They wanted somebody new which they could control
No new contract offered	New Director wanted to appoint their own leadership team
Termination	
I was terminated, then re-hired, then 1 year later chose not to renew contract with the school, then terminated again. No official reason given for terminations, but the school owners spread false rumors amongst parent community, which were not taken seriously. Yes... this was a doozy!	{the owners} of the school were involved in unscrupulous and illegal financial and business practices, which my review of finances revealed... owners were upset and terminated my contract.
Friction with three specific members of the Board.	Friction with three specific members of the Board.
I left and handed in my notice as I had a two year contract	For me it was family reasons, poor pay, for profit attitude of the governors, and difficulties with the local bureaucracy.

Table 21 Continued

Official Reason	Perceived Actual Reason
Termination	
Board wanted a "new direction".	New board president and several new members began assuming administrative functions (observing classes, attempting to evaluate teachers, determining salaries, etc.)
The Board decided my contract should be ended in order to maintain good relationship with {adjoining organization}.	I should not have put that decision in their hands.

When examining two previous positions (Table 22), only 4.9% (n=2) noted contract denial and 2.4% (n=1) noted termination during the contract. This reflected a loss of trust with the new board chair.

Table 22

Reasons for Non-Renewal/Termination of Contract (Previous Headship 2)

Official Reasons	Perceived Actual Reason
Non-renewal	
New career opportunity	New chairman didn't like me, [I] was the only really successful Head in the group and I would not kowtow to him and called him out on some of his BS
Leadership restructure	Financial difficulties in group and needed to reduce costs

Table 22 Continued

Official Reasons	Perceived Actual Reason
Termination	
Resignation	I had 27 board members in three years, and three board chairs in three years. Loss of trust with new Board Chair within first two months of her role.

When examining even further back in time to three previous schools, only 1 head of school (9.1%) out of 11 respondents had been denied a contract and no one had been terminated. In this case, the official reason was school reorganization, but the perceived reality reflected direct conflict with the board chair.

Based on the data analysis, termination during the contract or non-renewal of contract was not as prevalent as referenced in the literature. Much of the conflict and resulting termination reflected the interactions between the head of school and the board, its governance and control of the overall decision-making. Termination is also not connected to a lack of experience. Those who were terminated were not new heads. In fact, on average they had more than 12 years of experience (min=6; max = >20) in the role with an average of 6.2 years (min=4; max = 12) at their current school. This does not reflect a level of inability to lead a school but rather the unique conditions present at a given school and the relationship with the board which leads to termination. As noted by one interviewee, "It's really the board that can make that decision [regarding] how long a head is going to be there" (Interviewee 4).

This reality is reflected in the critical relationship between the principal and their agent. When it comes to school governance, "the head of school is the board's only employee" (Interviewee 4). They have the ultimate power to hire and fire the head of school. And in some cases, events happen that are beyond the control of the head but they are held accountable. As one head noted, "we had a number of incidents happen at the school completely beyond anything to do with me. But ultimately, when you're the head of the school, it's a political situation. That's how it works" (Interviewee 10).

When examining termination, it is important to connect it to the theoretical framework of this study. While no studies examining international school

governance through the lens of principal-agent theory were found, there is a significant number emanating from research on business practices. In fact, "the most prominent theory in the literature on CEO dismissal, accounting for approximately 50% of CEO dismissal studies, is agency theory" (Berns et al., 2021, p. 374). This reflects the fact that the focus is on "monitoring [the] relationship between agents and principals, agency theory speaks to the power struggle that emerges between the board, who monitors the firm on behalf of shareholders, and the CEO when dismissal is considered" (Berns et al., 2021, p. 374).

In the business world, Berns et al. (2021) argue that terminated CEO's "experience diminished opportunities for subsequent employment positions and roles" (p. 379) and that "the dismissal of the CEO sends a clear negative signal that appears to stigmatize them and reduces future career opportunities" (Berns et al., 2021, p. 379). However, others have argued that the impact on one's career is not so permanent. In fact, a headline in CNN regarding high terminations for corporate CEO's stated that "the good news [is that] getting fired is not fatal" (Sahadi, 2019) and that "being able to recover quickly also means being able to show a credible pattern of operational success that you've had across your career and having data to back that up" (Sahadi, 2019).

It must also be noted that in the business realm, the termination of a CEO is much more public. While this study provided the opportunity to confidentially include the difficult ordeal of being terminated or having your contract non-renewed, as noted, the numbers were very few. The nuanced interactions between principal and agent in the case of termination of employment are rarely public

knowledge. Based on survey results, termination is confidential, although a few mentioned non-disclosure agreements, and at times, it will be difficult to know:

> how many heads of schools left on their own accord versus how many left because the board asked them to leave. I think that often it's a combination of things. It's not exactly one or the other. It's more like both sides decided that they didn't want to continue. And then they agreed. And so the public announcement is usually around something that will be palatable to the public. And nobody really knows exactly what the conversation was and how it worked. (Interviewee 2)

Termination or non-renewal of contract also did not negatively impact career advancement as those who experienced termination or non-renewal of contract were successful in gaining further employment as a head of school. This reflects the 'here and now' impact of school, board personalities, and context of termination, and not necessarily the skill set and competence of the head. This may also reflect what Bailey (2024) refers to as "elective precarity" meaning that "they continue to enjoy a sense of agency even when experiencing aspects of precarity – and that this places them in sharp contrast to other members of the global precariat" (p. 128).

What is critical, however, before referring to the international school sector as dark, precarious and/or a negative workspace with little longevity, researchers need to reflect on the reasons why heads leave the position and move on. What is significant is that the heads in this study did not leave the field of international school leadership even when they encountered challenging schools and were subsequently released. Rather, what was made abundantly clear in both the survey data and interviews was the benefits of working within the international school

market. As Interviewee 4 noted, “I don't think in all the hundreds of people I've worked with I can count on one hand people leaving because they didn't like the job”.

Summary

The data results and analysis of this chapter focused on the greatest challenges heads of school face in carrying out their duties in operating an international school. Certainly, the centrality of the board is again very prominent, but also the importance of financial responsibility, staffing issues, and the need to navigate around organizational politics. All of these issues can impact the decision as to whether the head remains in the employ of the school or leaves to find a new employer. As noted, the board can play a fundamental role in either making or breaking the head of school. However, there are other important considerations, like salary, career aspirations, family, and personal reasons, which impact the ultimate decision to move on. What was interesting in the findings was the infrequency of sudden departures or terminations especially when compared to frequency of mention in the literature. This is positive given the hardship such action causes not only to the head of school and family, but also to the entire school community.

Chapter VII: Leadership Style, Qualities, and Strategies Needed for Success

What Does it Take to Be Successful?

It is difficult to create a generic profile, based on a prerequisite style, qualities, and strategies, to be a successful head of school at an international school. Certainly, the diversity of requisite needs was acknowledged given that "different schools need different things at different times" (survey respondent) and ultimately it is "not about the role but the fit—the right person for the right school at the right time" (survey respondent). As Interviewee 5 noted:

> I rarely see two Head of School jobs that look exactly the same. So, you talk with one head of school, and they say I'm the head of school and I look after the three principals, the vice principals, the IT Director, and Director of Support Services, but then we have an operations manager that does the finance, the communications, HR, and everything else. And you think, well, from my perspective, you're only running half of the school….and while that's the pointy end of the stick, there's a whole organization that's happening behind. So, I think part of your question is to understand the scope of the job. Because obviously, there's a different skill set.

This reflects the possible variation in responsibilities tied to the head of school across schools within the international school system – both big and small. A leader's skillset needs to change and adjust to the changing requirements of the school, and it is up to the board to ensure that the right person is selected for the

role. The responsibility of the board should go even further, in the sense that there is:

> no head of school, or even CEO, who has everything, there's not. They may have little bits and pieces of different kinds of skills. And so the challenge is, and this goes back to heads of schools fail - or why boards fail heads of schools - and what is the board going to do to get to know the person's strengths and talents and then support them in the areas that they're not so skilled in and then advance them in the areas that they are skilled, so use their skills and then help them to grow their other skills. (Interviewee 2)

So what does it take to be a successful head of school? Certainly, a variety of leadership styles and skills are necessary to meet the demands of all stakeholders, in particular the board as principal, and require the agent to be adaptive to specific contexts. For example, "a head of school has to select an appropriate leadership style for each situation and the people involved, otherwise, it will hinder their ability to lead effectively, and this will determine if others perceived you to be effective or not" (survey respondent). It can be a challenge to ensure one's leadership style can meet the demands of the board while at the same time achieving buy-in from all stakeholders, most notably the teachers, to ensure the board's mandate is successfully implemented. As one respondent noted:

> leadership style is a critical factor in any hierarchical situation because it has a substantive effect on the way in which other people within the hierarchy experience themselves, their role, and their work. In schools, this is an especially sensitive and delicate issue because of the psychology of many teachers, who, as leaders of their own classrooms, tend to have a complex

> attitude to power relations and particularly to finding themselves as subordinates, needing to follow instructions. Learning how to navigate this dynamic is a significant part of success as a school leader.

Leadership style is an important variable in the success of a school leader. 71.9% of respondents felt it had an impact on the success or failure of their role as head of school. It was recognized that the head of school is the "leader [who] sets the tone for the school and its culture". They play a fundamental role in setting the tone for school culture and engagement. However, the skillset derived must be fluid and adaptable not only between schools but also between the individuals' previous experiences. For example, the head of school:

> is a very different role from any other. The skills and experience that often lead one to obtain a headship are NOT the same as those great heads display. For example, people who become heads are often go-getters with an action bias, who execute projects at a high level (often by doing the heavy lifting themselves), and who excel at managing specific tasks or projects. A head of school needs to trust, delegate, and resist the temptation to tightly control or manage everything. (survey respondent)

Connected to this was the recognition that one must use power judiciously, to avoid the need to control and micromanage your staff, given the need to "wield [power] very carefully [by] building a strong culture and trust…[if you go] the other way, your school goes down the tube, and you can't attract quality educators" (Interviewee 9).

The importance of effective communication was a common theme in terms of qualities needed for success. This was reinforced both in the survey and interviews. Yet, the abilities one learns regarding how to effectively communicate may vary

depending on the cultural context. Yet almost all of the heads in this study were western-born and educated yet 78% were working in richly diverse environments of the Global South. As such, it would be expected that there is "a lot of learning and fumbling along the way, but ultimately, it's a lot of communication, transparency, and even having difficult conversations which is very difficult in a different culture" (Interviewee 3). An important strategy identified was to:

> give as much information as possible to the governing body so that they're not taken by surprise by particular issues that might arise or events that occur. Rather than saying, okay, everything's fine, we don't want to bother the governing body with that, it's a question of making sure that there's a really good flow of information into the board. And the subcommittees and the board itself has, even if they don't necessarily read or inform themselves of all the information they're getting, it's more a question of saying, "no, we talked about this issue. I raised this issue with you, you know, six months ago, and this is what we're going to do about it". So, it's more a question of keeping that information stream flowing. (Interviewee 8)

The key here is to avoid any information asymmetry from occurring by ensuring the board is well-informed and appropriate direction received to ensure that the agent is working in the best interests of the principal.

Strategies to achieve success with the board related to the importance of communication as noted but also the fundamental need to build positive relationships. It was recognized that:

> the best times and the best strategies was staying close to the chair. Because whether or not that's a visible thing, it always needs to be an undercurrent,

> your chair needs to know. And whether they're giving you feedback, and you're presenting the new feedback to the governance structure, or whether you're working with them quietly, and they're supporting your voice through the things that they do, [then] if I got the chair, right, I got the board right. (Interviewee 7)

Having the confidence of the chair provided greater legitimacy with the board *en toto* not to mention greater credibility with the school-wide community, in the sense that "when the chair and I were in the same place, my words were double valued" (Interviewee 7). Ultimately, "if you can develop a working relationship with a Board Chair who stays a long time then the Head will be able to remain a long time - cooperation and partnership is key." The need to support one another, as principal and agent, is necessary to ensure effective governance of the school. It is not about power and control but rather the importance of achieving common goals. An interesting point made by one head was that when a parent member joined the board, they must relinquish some power since:

> one of the things that I say about becoming a board member is you're actually giving up some power. As a parent, you can come to me and you can complain. As a board member you're actually giving up some of that power because your job is to support me. (Interviewee 5)

This is interesting and connects to the power dynamic between board and head, as their only real employee, and the need to work as a team as opposed to making their job impossible to do.

Characteristics of an Effective Head

To better understand RQ#3, that being the leadership qualities needed for success, heads of school were asked to identify the three most important characteristics of an effective international head of school within three overarching categories connected to the operations of a school based on Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) extensive work in this area. Key leadership qualities and practices fall into the domains of: i) setting directions; ii) developing people; and iii) developing the organization (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003), with the list of characteristics adapted from the Leader Attributes Inventory (Moss et al., 1994). In the survey, heads of school ranked their top three characteristics for each domain and then selected, based upon their understanding, what they believe would be their board's top three characteristics.

Setting Directions

As such, for 'setting direction' (Table 23), the three most important leadership qualities and practices for the head of school were visionary (92), committed (76), and diplomatic (60). Certainly, the ability to create a shared vision for school improvement has been noted in many studies (Boyd et al., 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Morrison, 2018; Speirs, 2016) given that "when you want something to be different, when you're trying to improve something or create something new, it's really about being clear about your vision, and then really trying to get people on board" (Interviewee 2).

Table 23

Setting Directions (with ranking)

	Most important 1		Most Important 2		Most important 3		Total	
	HoS	Board*	HoS	Board	HoS	Board	HoS	Board
Committed	25 (2)	31 (2)	32 (1)	28	19	30 (1)	76 (2)	89 (1)
Decisive	10	14	11	15	21 (3)	18 (3)	42	47
Dependable	12	28 (3)	14	24	14	18 (3)	40	70 (3)
Diplomatic	20 (3)	9	18 (3)	26	22 (2)	28 (2)	60 (3)	63
Energetic	6	2	4	2	6	6	16	10
Enthusiastic	4	5	12	4	6	12	22	21
Flexible	3	0	21 (2)	12	30 (1)	5	54	17
Intelligent	12	10	14	18	7	10	33	38
Risk Taker	1	0	6	3	8	3	15	6
Visionary	57 (1)	47 (1)	18 (3)	14	17	16	92 (1)	77 (2)

* Board ranking reflects what HoS thinks and not actual board member opinions.

Furthermore, commitment to the school and ensuring the boards goal are met while promoting the visions and mission of the school would play a fundamental role in setting directions. When it came to how the heads thought the board members would choose, their opinion was slightly different, with committed (89) as the most important, followed by visionary (77), and dependable (70). It is interesting that diplomatic played a role for the head but not from the board's perspective reflecting the power relation inherent in the position.

Developing People

When examining the characteristics most important under the domain 'developing people' (Table 24), heads of school felt that it was most important to be a good communicator (92), followed by ethical/integrity (85), and approachable (81).

Table 24

Developing People (with ranking)

	Most important 1		Most Important 2		Most important 3		Total	
	HoS	Board*	HoS	Board	HoS	Board	HoS	Board
Adaptable	5	4	4	3	14	7	23	14
Approachable	29 (2)	27 (3)	29 (2)	14	23 (2)	29 (2)	81 (3)	70 (3)
Charismatic	1	8	2	4	3	3	6	15
Confident	5	14	4	17 (3)	7	14	16	45
Empathetic	24 (3)	6	24 (3)	14	19 (3)	7	67	27
Ethical/ Integrity	48 (1)	38 (1)	21	23 (2)	16	14	85 (2)	75 (2)
Even Disposition	4	5	8	12	6	12	18	29
Good Communicator	23	30 (2)	40 (1)	38 (1)	29 (1)	35 (1)	92 (1)	103 (1)
Respectful	11	11	17	15	29 (1)	21 (3)	57	47
Tolerant	0	2	0	4	2	3	2	9

* Board ranking reflects what HoS thinks and not actual board member opinions.

It is interesting that tolerant (2) barely registered as an important characteristic of an effective international head of school. It has been noted that

tolerance can be essential to assisting individuals to be successful leaders (Gurr, 2017, Morrison, 2002; Pont et al., 2008).

Other key characteristics like 'adaptable' and 'empathetic' were low or mid on the selection list. This is interesting given that when Bunnell and Gardner-MacTaggart (2022b) examined key characteristics of school heads desired in job advertisements for ETIS schools, they found that emotional intelligence, and in particular, empathy, was a high value. Their study corroborates the importance placed on good communication skills, approachability, and of "moral or ethical character" (p. 9). These characteristics were also selected in the same order for the board ranking by heads of school.

Developing the Organization

When turning to the characteristics most important under the domain 'developing the organization' (Table 25), heads of school felt that being a team-builder (83) was the most important. This would reflect the leader's ability to lead the school and accomplish the goals as directed by the board. Without support from the senior leadership team, the teachers, and all stakeholders, success would be very challenging if the head was fighting upstream against each of these groupings.

The second most important character was future-focused (75), a recognition of the importance of continuous progress for the school in terms of student growth, student success, school reputation, and financial stability. The third characteristic was problem-solver (60). This also makes sense as the head of school must navigate many situations across many areas from teaching and learning to infrastructure, HR, transport, and finance to ensure all school operations are smooth, safe, and viable.

Heads perspective on board members placed accountability (84) as the most important, followed by future-focused (67), and achievement-oriented (66). This focus for the board reflects their priorities in terms of the need to ensure that the head is responsible for the decisions made and working towards making the school better in the outcomes noted above.

Table 25

Developing the Organization (with ranking)

	Most important 1		Most Important 2		Most important 3		Total	
	HoS	Board*	HoS	Board	HoS	Board	HoS	Board
Accountable	15 (3)	45 (1)	14	19	14	20 (2)	43	84 (1)
Achievement-Oriented	13	27 (2)	13	27 (1)	10	12	36	66 (3)
Organized	10	6	10	18	16	12	36	36
Future-Focused	34 (2)	26 (3)	27 (1)	26 (2)	14	15	75 (2)	67 (2)
Insightful	12	3	9	7	3	1	24	11
Motivator	6	1	22 (2)	1	14	13	42	15
Persistent	2	4	6	5	17 (3)	8	25	17
Problem Solver	13	15	21 (3)	21 (3)	26 (1)	28 (1)	60 (3)	64
Team Builder	39 (1)	8	21 (3)	11	23 (2)	16 (3)	83 (1)	35
Responsible	6	11	6	11	12	20 (2)	24	42

* Board ranking reflects what HoS thinks and not actual board member opinions.

Key Areas to Focus on for Success

In the survey, heads of school were asked to select from a pre-set list what they believed to be the 'top' five areas a successful head must focus on. The top result (Table 26) selected was the importance of developing an appropriate vision for the school. As Kotter (2005) argues "the best leaders balance short-term results with long-term vision" (p.6). A developed vision "means that the individual (or group) has a clear understanding of where they want to be and can develop an operational plan on how to get there" (Morrison, 2018, p. 515).

The second most important was financial responsibility. Again, this has come up frequently in both survey and interviews as the success of the head is very much connected to the financial viability of the organization and this can be an area where the head does not have a lot of experience. As Interviewee 6 noted when referring to fiscal responsibility of the head:

> I think that's where the problem starts because educators don't see and don't like to call schools businesses, though, if you look at the definition of business… school sits within. Yes, it's sometimes not-for-profit, but not-for-profit is a tax terminology. It does a lot of good, yes, but still, there is a lot of money… and you have to know how to manage your business.

The next two areas, student success and teacher hiring, were tied. These are important variables in the success of a head as quality teacher recruitment is key to ensuring the school has top talent to meet the academic requirements and student success should always be at the forefront of school improvement initiatives. In both cases, the head must take the lead on setting high standards and outcomes for both areas. In fact, "the overwhelming body of opinion over the last 30 or so years is that

the prime task of leaders is to bring about change in order to maintain and enhance organizational success" (Burnes & By, 2012: 239).

Table 26

Top Five Areas a Successful Head Must Focus On (with ranking)

	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Fourth choice	Fifth choice	Total
Ability to motivate others	16 (3)	12	10	13 (2)	17 (1)	68 (5)
Carrying out board designated tasks	3	1	2	6	9	21
Delegation of tasks	1	5	5	4	7	22
Developing supportive networks	2	3	3	11	8	27
Development of an appropriate vision	44 (1)	19 (2)	12	6	6	87 (1)
Ensuring policies and procedures are understood and followed	3	7	15 (2)	10	15 (2)	50
Ensuring school enrollment is maintained or increased	2	10	11	10	10	43
Implementing change	1	8	12	12 (3)	13 (3)	46
Keeping the school "current"	3	2	2	4	4	15
Financial responsibility	13	17 (3)	21 (1)	18 (1)	10	79 (2)
Maintaining or enhancing school reputation	6	11	11	8	13 (3)	49
Spearheading school improvement initiatives	6	8	9	11	11	45
Student Success	38 (2)	12	8	7	6	71 (3)
Teacher hiring	5	28 (1)	13 (3)	18 (1)	7	71 (3)
Teacher training	3	3	10	6	5	27

The final area selected was the ability to motivate others. Certainly, as a school leader, the head of school must be able to motivate those under their leadership, from the senior leadership team to teachers, and all employees of the organization. In addition, they must diplomatically motivate members of the board, as the educational expert, to make decisions which work in the best interests of the operations of the school and support the school's vision and mission. This is certainly a challenging area as noted above given the power the board and board chair have over the head within the principal-agent relationship. One thing that is clear is being a head of school is not an easy job. There are many competing interests and ensuring the continued progress of the school takes teamwork. The skillset to make this happen is both deep and complex. There is not a cookie-cutter solution to meet the demands of such varying roles, personalities and expectations. While it would be wonderful to have a simple recipe to handle the challenges of leading an international school, that is unrealistic. As one head noted:

> it's like a kindergarten book, you know, get along and play well with others…. there are some things that you think are just so obvious, like just being a good person. That should be easy, but it is a tough, tough job. But I don't know that there's a menu that's going to make somebody successful. I think there's a range of things to draw upon. And at any different situation, if you're chameleon enough that you can draw on these in these situations, you're probably going to find success. (Interviewee 9)

When heads of school were asked in the survey about specific strategies they found effective in addressing the challenges noted above, there were several consistent answers. First and foremost, communication (31) was deemed essential

and directly connected to the importance of building strong relationships (17) resulting in transparency (11), trust (9), consistency (8), honesty (6), and patience (5). The nuances of implementing effective strategies to maximize the development of positive working relationships with the board were articulated in each interview. Heads of school noted that it was imperative that the foundation of their relationship between principal and agent had to be founded on trust, honesty, and communication. As one head noted, there needed to be a "no-surprises relationship, in both directions [and that they would] meet once a week, ideally in person for an hour" (Interviewee 1). Another discussed the challenges, and reflected that "there were a lot of surprises in the way they [the board] communicated. Last minute stuff, nothing along the way in the journey of the work. And I think that's what ruined the relationship with my predecessor. And so I made it very clear, there must be communication in the process of our work, I can't tolerate any surprises, and my commitment to them would not surprise them" (Interviewee 3). However, it was also recognized that this is not an easy task, and requires heads to be "an effective communicator, having a clear understanding of what we're here to do and how we do it. And being able to effectively communicate that with a board takes a certain skill set" (Interviewee 5).

The board was referenced repeatedly (56) in terms of relationships and interactions but also the necessity of understanding roles and governance practices (12) and minimizing the rogue agendas and organizational politics involved. Boards will have their agendas, and these agendas will change over time, as new issues arise, new members join, and board chairs change.

For the head to be able to manage these changes effectively is important. Certainly, the skillset noted above will be beneficial, but also recognizing that flexibility and understanding is important. The board is the employer and assisting the board to understand issues from an educator's perspective is a requirement; however, trying to understand where they are coming from will be a necessity for survival in the position. As such, arrogance and ego will only result in adding further difficulties to the relationship. It was noted that it is important to be "humble but confident… [and] take the time to connect with people and build relationships" (survey respondent). Connected to this is the importance of establishing a very effective senior leadership team where the head of the school can nurture and support them. A strong leadership team is essential since:

> if your leadership team ultimately doesn't support you, as the head of school, you're kind of dead in the water. Because even if you want to impress the board, and you want to do a good job, and show the board everything that you can do, these are the people you have to work with to make things happen. And if that relationship isn't good, then how will you ever be successful? (Interviewee 2)

This was also noted in Bunnell and Gardner-MacTaggart's (2022b) research where they note that "the ability to work within a team is most strong" (p. 11).

In addition, there was recognition that board training (15) would be an effective way to build a positive working team. One comment summed up many strategies by noting that "the most effective strategies I have used is communication often and clearly, openly and honestly, and transparently with compassion to all stakeholders. I am a firm believer it is the soft skills that make or break a school

leader" (survey respondent). However, it is important to recognize that not one strategy will necessarily work in all contexts and heads need to be flexible and read the situation of a given school. As another respondent pointed out, based on the challenges of the job, "I'm still searching. Realizing that it is a lot of 'give and take'" (survey respondent).

Building a network of support with other heads of schools was also noted (4). This reflected the sense of isolation faced by many heads of school, as developing relationships within a school can lead to complications and perceptions of preferential treatment, inequity, privilege, and resentment (Caprino, 2018; Durrah, 2023; Laker et al., 2020). As an example, one head noted that "I had to not make any close friends. Live as if I were on an island, alone" (survey respondent). To alleviate the sense of isolation, and the need to create professional linkages, another head recognized that "the best thing I have done so far is to reach out to other HoS. The advice and ability to work through some of the issues with them have been invaluable" (survey respondent). This form of collaboration with other heads (6) was interlinked with the need to engage in professional development, headship training (9), and working with a coach (6). Heads also needed to ensure that their philosophy was aligned with the vision and mission of the school. It was noted that the head must have a "very clear vision of what a high-quality education consists of and [is] equally clear that every aspect of school plays a part in providing that high-quality education" (survey respondent). Furthermore, when the head of school's "personal vision is entirely aligned with the mission and vision of the school so that it is easy for me to commit my time and energy to serving the schools' interests" (survey respondent).

When examining key areas to focus on, a head of school has many responsibilities when running the operations of an international school. Some tasks can be defined as leadership while others as management. As noted in the literature review, Roberts and Mancuso (2014) in their study of job advertisements determined the primary focus for boards when recruiting a new head of school concentrated on managerial skills. This is very interesting given the shift in focus in academe from *management* to *leadership* of educational organizations (Bush, 2008) as noted in the literature review section. While a Head of School needs both leadership and managerial skills, given the responsibilities of a Head of School, as noted above, leadership should be front and centre while many of the managerial tasks can be assigned to subordinate roles within the organization.

As such, as part of this study, a goal was to explore head of school perspectives on the leadership-managerial aspect of their role and if that could negatively impact the principal-agent relationship thus decreasing a leader's tenure at the school. According to respondents, 94.2% (n=146) of school heads placed themselves firmly in the leadership role. This was replicated in their perception of how the board viewed their role, with 83.9% (n=130) being viewed as leaders and not managers. This is fascinating given the Roberts and Mancuso (2014) results of boards wanting managers over leaders. Interestingly, 44% of the heads who selected they were more 'managers' than leaders believed their board viewed them as 'leaders'. When examining the data, eight of the nine heads who selected managers were supported by the fact that they felt they spent most of the time (greater than 56%) working on managerial tasks.

It has also been argued that leaders want to initiate change to make the system better. As quoted above, “one of the greatest motivating factors in people’s passion for taking the lead of an organisation [is the] belief in the ability to institutionalise ‘change’ - change that will improve or redefine the organisational objectives” (Morrison, 2013, p. 418). When discussing the role of the head of school in terms of integrating the leadership component of making a ‘change for the better’, it was made very clear by Interviewee 8 that “you really do get that opportunity to make a really positive difference”. Furthermore:

> I think what hasn’t changed is that you’ve got this real sense of opportunity to be able to change things and really make a difference to students, to staff, to your communities as a whole. And that’s the reason why people go into international education. And it’s the reason they go into international school leadership. I think that’s the driving force. (Interviewee 8)

To accomplish this, a head of school requires the trust of the board and must be allotted sufficient power and control as the school leader to meet the stated objectives. In some cases, heads are not empowered to get the job done, as exemplified by “I’m actually going to move because I’m afraid that I don’t have enough power” (Interviewee 7). However, “if you believe from the outset that, just like coaches of football teams, your tenure is short, fragile and uncertain, anything better than that is a success” (survey respondent). And, if and when all strategies have failed, the result may be that it is time to move on.

Summary

This concludes the results and data analysis sections. A tremendous amount of data was collected in this study, both from the survey and interviews. Framed by the need to determine current tenure rates for international school heads while deconstructing the issues and contexts impacting a head's ability to retain the position, the other important area researched is what it takes to be successful in the role. This chapter has provided a current understanding of issues related to the research questions which can provide greater insight into the reasons for heads leaving an international school. Overall, it can be determined that one leaves the position as head of school for many reasons connected to both the internal and external factors which reflect the nuanced relationship a head develops with a school, the board, its locale, key stakeholders, and the overall ethos of the school community. What is abundantly clear from the research is that the head of school, while working within a very challenging sector, is provided numerous opportunities so that if one school is not meeting their professional or personal goals, or conversely, they are not meeting the expectations of the board, the head will move on and there are opportunities for them to continue working at this level at another international school.

Chapter VIII: Implications for Practice - Summary and Recommendations

This chapter presents a summary of the major findings of this study. As noted, there has been tremendous growth recently within the international school market with a corresponding increase in leadership opportunities. However, taking on a headship at an international school is fraught with challenges, the most recognized one being maintaining the position. In past studies, the average length of tenure ranged from 2.8 years (Hawley, 1994, 1995) to 3.7 years (Benson, 2011). A high termination level has also been acknowledged, with 80% of heads being fired at one time or another and most of those in their first 5 years (Littleford, 2019, 2023). Reflecting this reality within the literature, and given that more than a decade has passed since the last study, there was justification to examine the current tenure-termination situation. At the same time, it was important to untangle the complexity of issues facing international school heads while explicating strategies to support their success within the international school system.

The purpose of this research was to better understand the issues and challenges impacting the tenure of international school heads in terms of short tenure and early termination as identified in the literature. These were framed and guided by principal-agent theory in terms of the relational interaction between key stakeholders, in particular the board and the head of school, competing interests, and the concomitant power dynamics inherent in all relationships. Each research question will be addressed below with a summary of findings, followed by recommendations, limitations, suggestions for future research, and conclusion.

Research Question 1

What is the current average length of tenure and reasons for turnover for international school heads?

Central to this study was to update the length of average tenure for a head of school given the time between the previous two studies of Hawley (1994, 1995) and Benson (2011). Much has changed within the international school market since these studies were published. This study found that the average tenure for a head of school was 4.8 years. When compared to the previous studies, this was an increase of 2.0 years (Hawley, 1994) and 1.1 years (Benson, 2011). This is significant since on average heads were completing close to 5 contract years. More importantly, it was also determined that there were many variables which can increase or decrease the length of tenure.

In this section, key variables impacting tenure will be summarized. The type of international school a head worked at can have a direct impact on the average length of tenure. It was determined that tenure was longer at a not-for-profit school (5.4 vs 3.3 years) in comparison to a for-profit school. Based on the findings, heads of school preferred to work at not-for-profit schools. This statement can be justified based on the longitudinal data, which demonstrated, over the past three positions held, a shift from for-profit schools to the not-for-profit school market. This is interesting given the substantial growth in the for-profit sector over the past two decades and the resulting increase in headship positions available. The results could reflect the scope of international school heads who participated in this study as access and knowledge were focused on the three accreditation organizations (CIS,

NEASC, and WASC). Also, it may be an indication of why heads leave their position as they prefer to move out of the for-profit sector.

This may also highlight governance differences between a school board composition at a not-for-profit school compared with a private owner(s) at a for-profit school. While the challenges of maintaining the position may be similar, the complexities of navigating a large, in most cases, parent board with competing agendas and personal interests, as noted in the survey and by all interviewees, cannot be underestimated. Yet, this is where school heads want to be. This could be reflected in the size, history, and prestigious nature attached to these schools as reflective of an elite traditional international school (Bunnell & McTaggart, 2022a). Furthermore, while this is where they want to be, based on data results, they are finding more success at not-for-profit schools in terms of average length of tenure.

Another factor impacting the average length of tenure was the overall number of headships an individual held. An increase in headships noted a decrease in the overall average tenure length per school. This ranged from 5.1 years for one headship to 3.8 years for four headships. The benefits of remaining longer in the position have been noted above, and connected to retention is continuity, which is important since:

> it is absolutely disruptive for your faculty and your parents when new leadership comes in. It just constantly erodes at your foundation. So continuity… everybody should strive for continuity, whether you love the person who runs the school or not, as long as we are all acting ethically and moving in the same direction. (Interviewee 3)

This could also reflect the increase in a stepping-stone pattern as heads work towards a particular set of schools based on location, curriculum, size, and perceived prestige.

Geographical location has always been a factor impacting how long an individual remains in the position. This is not limited to the education sector, in general, or the heads position, in particular. Some locations are just easier to adjust and live based on social, political, and economic conditions. Some are most definitely hardship posts, faced with poor economic conditions and political upheaval. Recognizing that there will be limitations when examining the comparative results (Table 27) between Hawley (1994), Benson (2011) and this study, it is nevertheless interesting that between Hawley (1994) and now, almost 30 years later, head of school tenure has increased for all regions: Africa (+2.0 years), the Americas (+1.9 years), Asia (+2.2 years), and the Middle East (+2.1 years) have all had a substantial increase. Europe did not see a significant increase (+0.3 years); however, there was an increase of 1.2 years when compared to Benson's (2011) study which found a lower tenure for this region.

Benson's study (2011), while showing an increase in the overall tenure length in Africa, the Americas, and Asia, found a comparative decline in Europe and the Middle East in comparison to Hawley's (1994) findings. Furthermore, Benson (2011) did not find a significant range between regions in comparison to the results found in both Hawley (1994) and this study.

Table 27

*Comparative Tenure by Region and Study**

By Region	Average tenure (in years)		
	Hawley (1994) (n=196)	Benson (2011) (n=83)	Current Study (2024) (n=170)
Africa	1.9	3.5	3.9
Americas	3.1	4.0	5.0
Asia	2.5	3.8	4.7
Europe	4.8	3.9	5.1
Middle East	3.4	3.0	5.5

*Adapted from Benson, 2011, p. 93

One can see that the regional tenure differences in Benson (2011) are minimal, with only 1 year separating the shortest tenure (3.0 years in the Middle East) from the region with the longest tenure (4.0 years in the Americas). Conversely, Hawley (1994) found a significant range from 1.9 years (Africa) to 4.8 years (Europe), representing a 2.9-year difference. While a sizable range was also noted in this study, from 3.9 years (Africa) to 5.5 years (Middle East), the gap between the shortest and longest tenure was not as great as it only represented 1.6 years.

Given that there have been changes to tenure over time within the regions around the globe, there is value in examining the ranking by region for comparative purposes. It is also evident that the Middle East has made a significant increase in the average length of tenure comparatively when placed next to Benson's (2011) results. While the Middle East has seen great gains in head of school tenure, the fact

that it ranked in last place in Benson (2011) and first place in this study is intriguing. While there was only a 0.4-year difference between the Middle East tenure in Hawley (1994) and Benson (2011), the relative ranking difference is quite astounding. There is no explanation in Benson (2011) as a regional ranking comparison was not made. However, the increase in tenure for the Middle East could reflect the enormous opportunities now available in this region for international school heads. This is reflective of the fact that the Middle East, most notably the United Arab Emirates, has one of the most international schools of any region (Keeling, 2015) and "continues to be the leading subregion of the world for the enrolment of children in international schools (ISC Research, 2023b, p. 19).

While there are noted challenges working in this region, with "many issues complicating staff recruitment in the Middle East: gender issues, obtaining a visa (this goes through several Ministries, validation of documents, with changes to rules every now and then), bringing your family over etc." (Speirs, 2016, p. 36) or that "life is not fair and wages are not all equal in the Middle East, albeit the same job may be being done" (Speirs, 2016, p. 25), it does not seem to have impacted how long heads are working at schools in the region. This could also be reflective of the remuneration packages offered, including tax-free income, in addition to providing the third highest average net salary package in the world, after North America and East Asia (Council of International School Research, 2023).

Given the regional differences, schools and accrediting agencies should provide additional training and support for new heads to the social, cultural and political realities of the area. This would perhaps ease the adjustment and allow for continued support and dialogue in the transition and maintenance of the head for a

longer term, albeit recognizing that some issues, like national political turmoil, fall beyond the purview of the school's governing bodies.

In Hawley (1994), it was determined that there were only two individual characteristics which were predictive of duration, that being: i) nationality, and ii) previous teaching experience working at an international school. Hawley (1994) determined that non-US nationals remained in the position longer with a "predicted median duration of longer than six years for the school head who is not a U.S. citizen and 3.7 years for the U.S. citizen" (p. 16). This is interesting given the target population was specific to those heads working in U.S accredited international schools. Certainly, the impact of one's nationality on how long a head remained at a school has changed since Hawley's study, where non-American heads remained in the position longer. Today, US national heads are the ones who not only remained the longest but were dominant in number. Hawley's (1994) explanation was that perhaps non-U.S nationals have "roots in the country in which they are employed and are less likely to move from one school to another" (p. 16). This is a possibility, yet it represents a variable which could impact any individual nationality working overseas and would be impossible to determine without requesting spousal demographic information which was not acquired during this study.

Canadians interestingly held the shortest tenure. While boards may be looking for heads with a sense of humour (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014), and while Canadians may exhibit more "self-defeating humor" or "self-enhancing humor" (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022a, p. 15), this has not translated into increased longevity for Canadians as they are not sticking it out as long as their other Anglo-Saxon counterparts.

As noted above, the other key characteristic which impacted tenure was if the head of school had worked as a teacher at an international school. Hawley (1994) found that the "estimated median duration is 3.5 years for school heads who have no international school teaching experience and a median of 4.2 years for those with five years of international teaching experience" (p. 16). This would make sense given that this international school experience should provide heads with a better understanding of the issues impacting schools not to mention the typical challenges faced by their leaders. Yet, the tenure of international school heads who had no previous international school experience was 1.3 years longer at 5.9 years compared with those having international school experience at 4.6 years. However, it is important to note that while they were entering the market with no previous international school experience, they were entering it with many years of both teaching and leadership experience from other systems. These leaders, while a minority in this study, are a cadre of professionals parachuting into the ever-increasing international school market opportunities, by exiting their national or state system, and thereby meeting the demand. Given that 62.1% were between 45 and 54 years of age and 24.1% were between 55 and 64 years of age could represent retirement from their home country's education system and engagement in the international school market. This may also reflect why they remain longer in their first school as this shift from the national system to the international system is not a long-term career of moving to larger or more prestigious schools. That process of moving up in size and prestige may be more representative of a younger, early international school career-oriented school leader.

Another key area that may impact tenure and can be connected to the 'moving on' cycle is the very foundation of employment itself – the recruitment practice. The data demonstrated that most heads were recruited externally yet tenure was longer when promoted internally to the position. This was also demonstrated in Benson's (2011) study given that those "who were internally promoted to the position had stayed for 5 years, while those who were externally recruited remained for 3.6 years" (p. 97). Why do most international school boards prefer external recruitment when there may be highly qualified candidates currently under employment? This could reflect the belief that new leaders will bring in new perspectives, or that they are coming in clean with no prior relationships with staff (this is especially important if the board mandate is to make substantial changes including terminating staff), or they are bringing a particular skillset or program successfully implemented at their previous school which is not present at the school. Isomorphism within the sector has been emerging (Fertig, 2007) and is certainly well and strong today within the international school system (Bunnell & Hatch, 2021; Machin, 2019).

Yet, the benefit of decreasing turnover within short durations has been identified in the literature yet there remains a belief that bringing in someone new to lead the organization is preferable. It is time-consuming and costly to recruit a new head of school, so it raises the question as to why boards feel this way. Schools should be cultivating and training a cadre of senior leaders to be able to step in and take the headship, having a solid understanding of the school's vision and mission, directions, and challenges. This practice of external recruitment by the board is by design perpetuating the cycle of a revolving door for heads of school. Why would a sectional principal or equivalent, who enjoys the school and community, need to

leave to find a headship just because they are not by default considered 'in the running' against external candidates?

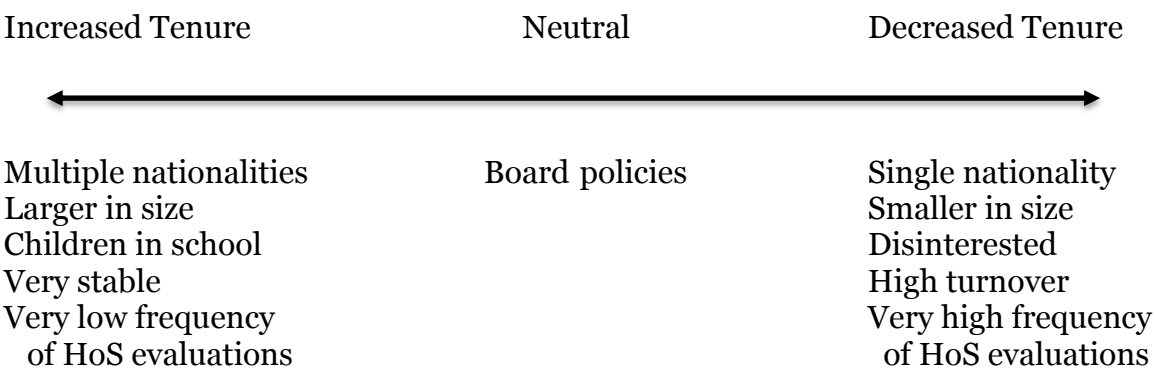
A final area connected to tenure and why heads leave the position was the impact and influence of the school's board of directors. It can be said with confidence that the world of the international school head, in that principal-agent relationship, is thoroughly connected to the relationship with the board and success is both defined by and controlled by the board. In both the survey and every interview conducted, everything came back to the board. It was repeatedly noted that "the head and board chair relationship is key" (survey respondent), that "maintain[ing] a good relationship with board chair and board" (survey respondent) was vital for survival, and one's success can be linked to a "very positive and constructive relationship with my board of governors" (Interviewee 8).

In this study, a resounding number of heads reported to a board of directors. Whether at their longest-held position (95.2%) or shortest (80.2%). Even though there are more for-profit international schools in existence, given the high percentage of not-for-profit, IB, and accredited schools in this study, this reflected that many of the respondents were working in elite traditional international schools (ETIS). As such, the governing structures and interactions between the principal and agent directly impact tenure. What was very clear from this study was the primacy of the international school board. Great power rests in their hands yet it is important to recognize that key governing body characteristics have an impact on the tenure of the school head. In Figure 7, these characteristics are noted and the impact on tenure, whether longer, shorter, or neutral, are presented. Everything from board composition, size, children studying at school, board turnover, and frequency of

head evaluation can impact tenure. The only variable which had a neutral impact is if the board has policies in place to guide it.

Figure 7

Board Characteristics and Impact on Tenure



Based on the aforementioned items, the board structure and composition of members can impact the tenure of an international school head. This creates a very interesting model if a school board was investigating which variables can potentially increase the length of tenure for their school head. Certainly, this is not a set-in-stone formula, yet, based on a previous study (Hawley, 1994), it does provide some surprising differences. For example, the first three variables under decreased tenure were found to increase tenure in his study. One would expect that a complex board comprised of many members and many nationalities with children in the school would be a recipe for disaster, amplifying a multitude of differing agendas coming

from competing sub-groups. Yet, the results of this study did not support this scenario.

As such, these results could provide some insight into how school governing bodies can adjust board characteristics to enhance the longevity of the head. However, this only reflects part of the problem. There is a need to better understand the motivation for a head to leave the position. In this study, the top three reasons for head turnover reflected issues related to i) governance, ii) salary and career considerations, and iii) family and personal issues. Governance reflects the relationship and challenges inherent within the principal-agent relationship and the need for the head to keep the board well informed (to avoid information asymmetry), to complete the board mandate in good faith (to avoid both agency costs and moral hazard), and to ensure the inter-personal interactions are both positive and beneficial. As noted by Turner and Müller (2004), communication is key to ensuring adverse selection does not happen. In the findings, heads were very clear that the board must "never be out of the loop" (Interviewee 10) and all board interactions must have provided "clear purpose and rigorous communication with great clarity" (Interviewee 1). The only recourse when these are not met is for the board to increase agent monitoring. This action was noted by heads in the form of micromanagement and interference and resulted in some heads stepping down from the role.

Certainly, salary and career considerations impact the movement of staff in any occupation across time and space. In many cases, if you want a bigger or better position, with greater responsibility and remuneration, it will require moving to another school. This movement is amplified by the preference for external

recruitment over internal promotion as noted above. This also reflects the structural nature of the international school environment where most schools are decoupled from any transnational organization. If an international school head is successful, there is typically nowhere to move up in the corporate sense. They are at the top of the hierarchy. Given the limited mobility at this level horizontally, heads will shift vertically to other schools based on size, location, remuneration, and school reputation (Hawley, 1994; Benson, 2011). For a career professional, it makes sense that new opportunities, challenges, and locations will lure them to leave their current school. At some point, they may find a school, as Interviewee 8 did, which is "a good match… in terms of my ambition". When they do, they stay. When they don't, they leave. For a board looking to recruit long-term heads, this could remain a challenge depending on the overall school environment. However, the board could prioritize the development of a positive working environment, with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, with support and training for both the head and board, to ensure the level of engagement is constructive and beneficial to the mission of the school.

The third reason for leaving a school is related to family and personal issues. If a school, location, and/or working conditions did not meet the needs of the family, heads started to look elsewhere. Family safety and a school which met the educational needs of their children were both identified as very important in the decision-making process regarding the continuance of work at the school. These push factors impacted the decision to move on regardless of whether or not the position was rewarding. As Interviewee 10 noted when discussing the challenges for families when living in a country with little infrastructure:

> It was a hardship post. But we did enjoy it as a family. And as an individual. We like the city. We like the food. We like the students and the people we worked with. And we didn't leave because we didn't like it, although there was hardship, but my son was going into university. And we felt after four years in the country that basically doesn't have internet and almost no access to the outside world, is that he needed for his future to be able to have a skill set in technology, which my kids didn't have. And the kids in the country [didn't have]. Many of them had never seen YouTube before. And never a YouTube video because there's not enough bandwidth to see it. (Interviewee 10)

So, if the social, political, and economic conditions are not right for the head of school or their family, the need to move on and seek employment elsewhere is very strong.

A fundamentally important outcome of this study was that while heads of school transitioned from school to school, they were not exiting from the international school system. The career trajectory remained as an international school head. Perhaps this reflects the level of satisfaction one gains from working in this field. International schools are not as dark and precarious as some authors argue (Caffyn, 2011, 2018) nor are they found to be a "largely unappealing and unattractive area of education involving much precarity and insecurity" (Bunnell, 2021b, p. 559). On the contrary, as one long-term head noted in terms of working at international schools… "I would think there's a very high rate of satisfaction level of working internationally…. [and] I think there's much more love of the job as an international school head than you know" (Interviewee 4). This positive reflection was noted in both in the survey and during interviews and can be summarized with

the following comment: “I think your findings probably will be there’s a lot more good than bad about being an international school head” (Interviewee 4).

When envisioning the negative side of working within the international school system, it can reflect the precarity of termination or non-renewal of contract. The concern is that a decision by the board, without cause, and recourse, can end one’s employment. It can certainly create a heightened sense of insecurity. However, based on the results of the survey and discussions with the interviewees, it was determined that the termination of heads either during or at the end of a contract was not a significant occurrence. In fact, only 10.3% (n=9) noted that they were denied a new contract and 5.7% (n=5) had been terminated during their contract period. This is substantially different from the experience noted by Littleford (2019, 2023). Nevertheless, the comments noted from heads regarding termination in most cases represent the challenges inherent in the principal-agent relationship, where the development of trust is critical, communication essential, and the need to maintain a separation between governance and operations fundamental. Too often board members negate their own defined policies and cross the line to make the headship a very challenging job.

To summarize the current state of international school head tenure and reasons for turnover, the overall average length of tenure increased to 4.8 years. There were many factors which impact tenure, both internal and external to the school, not to mention many reasons connected to family and career aspirations of the head. Even with a challenging position, heads were remaining in the international school system and moved positions accordingly. The results would support Bunnell’s posit that “the attrition-rate could be low” (Bunnell, 2021, p. 9). As

one respondent noted, “It’s not always an easy job, especially when your contract is cancelled or not renewed without cause or reason. However, it’s a great job and it’s a real privilege to be head of an international school. I would not change it for the world!”

Research Question 2

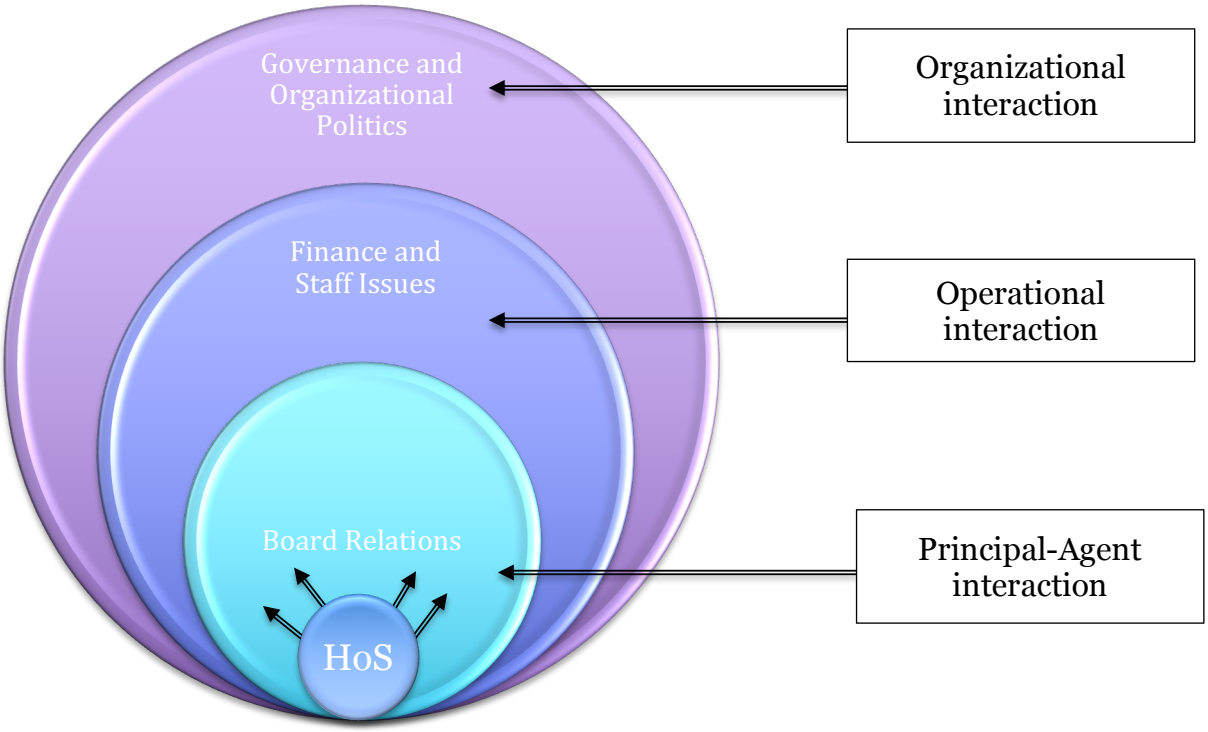
What challenges are faced by international school heads and how does it impact tenure?

Research question 2 focused on better understanding the challenges faced by international school heads and how those challenges could impact tenure. As noted in the survey, “the position is fulfilling but also incredibly demanding. I don't think people outside the realm of international education (and probably a lot of those in international education) have any real concept of the challenges a head of school faces daily” (survey respondent). When examining the key challenges faced by a head of school, the survey results highlighted i) board relations; ii) finance and staffing and staff-related issues (tied); and iii) governance and organizational politics (tied). Based on these diverse issues, the head of school must negotiate successfully three key overlapping areas, that being principal-agent interaction, operational interaction, and organizational interaction (Figure 8). And it is these areas which heads have identified as being the most challenging, and, if predominately negative, could “take away the life force of the organization” (Caffyn, 2018, p. 500). It is also connected to the importance that “leaders need to be active and powerful boundary agents, spanning and regulating organizational borders” (Caffyn, 2018, p. 505). The boundaries between principal and agent, governance and operations, and

organizational member communities both internal and external to the school must be maintained. Yet, this is where the potential conflict lies in wait, as "whether they are conceptual, physical, or political, boundaries are border wars waiting to happen" (Stone, in Flessa, 2009, p. 343).

Figure 8

Areas of Greatest Challenge for Head of School



When it comes to principal-agent interaction, the primary challenge is developing a positive working relationship with the board, ensuring transparency, and maintaining effective communication. These interactions are directly connected to the principal-agent relationship and are impacted by information asymmetry,

moral hazard, adverse selection, potential lack of trust, and managing competing agendas between the two parties.

When asked 'what were the main issues impacting your relationship with the board', it is important to acknowledge that a substantial number of heads (23.5%) noted that they had no major issues with the board, that the board was "extremely supportive and they know their role in the school" (survey respondent). This was also reflected in the following comments, where "the Board and [head] enjoy a very strong relationship of trust and mutual respect. We have approached all situations with a mission-driven mindset, which allows us to see eye-to-eye about what is most important for the community" (survey respondent) or "both boards I have worked with have been supportive. We have focused on creating a learning board, strong relationships developed, and clear focus on purpose - measuring mission, fiduciary oversight and setting strategic direction" (survey respondent). These comments exemplified successful management of the relationship between principal and agent whereby a positive environment was established and the focus was on the strategic goals of the school. However, the positive comments were certainly in the minority, representing only 22% of comments on board issues in the survey.

Yet, for the remaining majority, board relations and principal-agent interactions dominate the list of challenges given the tremendous power and control vested in the board. While experiences can be positive and productive, as noted above, many comments focused on the negative challenges of personalities, agendas, power, and control which resulted in "a living nightmare [with] vested interests determining decisions; everything was personal; short-sightedness and selfishness dominated" (survey respondent). This connects directly to competing interests and

boundary wars occurring at this level. It was recognized that heads want to ensure there is a clear delineation between governance and school operations. As frequently noted, board members would cross the governance-operations boundary into the operational side of the school and undermine the head of school. At an operational level, the interaction between head of school and the board plays a fundamental role, yet the head must also be highly proficient ensuring that efficient operational interactions on other key challenges like staffing issues and financial profitability are successful.

In addition, overall governance and organizational politics reflect an additional overlay of the challenges to daily operations and interactions with the board. As one respondent noted, “the board will ask for change, but then will get community pressure from the changes. They don't fully realize the personal and political consequences of the change they've asked for” (survey respondent). The attempt by board members to get involved with the daily operations of the school can test the relationship in both hierarchical directions - between head and board and head and staff. Furthermore, organizational politics by any stakeholder, whether it be a board member, staff, or parent, can negatively impact the organizational relationships and interaction within the school community. Heads were very familiar with these issues, as comments noted that it was important that there remained an “understanding of the various politics involved [and] not taking things personally” (survey respondent) and, when dealing with the school board, the need “to navigate the terrain with a considerable political suaveness that was often an internal stress - but the only way to survive” (survey respondent).

While most of the noted challenges above focus on micro-organizational variables, key macro-organizational issues did not manifest as significant reasons for cutting one's tenure short. Even something as all-encompassing as a global pandemic did not have a profound impact on heads of school in terms of maintaining their position and getting the job done. Stressful, complicated, and challenging, yes, but there was not a tremendous exodus of international school heads as a result. While 35.5% had considered leaving their post during the pandemic, an equal number recognized improved relations with the board (33.6%) during this traumatic time in history. Other social, political and economic factors also did not have a significant impact on tenure as heads noted satisfaction in remuneration, comfort with living in different cultures, and external political issues had little impact unless grave situations like civil war and political coups.

Finally, it is also important to recognize that each area noted as the greatest challenge for heads - board, finance, staffing, governance, and organizational politics - are interrelated, and each can negatively or positively impact the head of school in terms of effectiveness and survivability. Ultimately, it comes back to the principal-agent relationship, and "if you can develop a working relationship with a Board Chair who stays a long time then the head will be able to remain a long time - cooperation and partnership is key" (survey respondent).

Research Question 3

What are the key leadership styles, qualities, and strategies needed to successfully maintain one's position as an international school head?

Leadership styles can be fluid and reflective of context or situation. The goal of this study was not to examine the various theories surrounding leadership styles in the literature but rather to see if heads of school are cognizant of how they use leadership style to meet the goals and objectives of the organization. This is certainly the message noted by heads in the survey and reflects the pragmatism required for success. As one head noted, "I use different leadership styles according to the situation and people l am working with" (survey respondent) yet another recognized that "sometimes this works positively. Other times, it does not" (survey respondent). This approach reinforces the reality of working in an international school where the needs and directions of the school can be very specific and school-based. The comment noted earlier that "different schools need different things at different times" (survey respondent) is very accurate.

Heads of school are highly educated in the world of leadership, as reflected in the advanced degrees and extensive professional development. They recognize that their leadership style will impact their role as head of school. In the survey, most comments regarding leadership style concentrated on the need to have a positive approach to leading the school where the focus is on trust, empowerment, transparency, delegation, and relationships which ultimately promote a culture of learning. While several heads noted leadership categories like servant, distributed, or situational, for most respondents it was not a theoretical classification but rather

practical skills necessary to be a successful head of school which were most regarded. It is a functional approach to the leadership realities and a recognition that a one-style approach does not work.

When theory meets practice, it can be a challenge to find a balance in style which meets both the organizational goals and individual preferences. When setting directions, heads prioritized the leadership qualities and practices connected to setting a vision, being committed to the mission and goals of the school, and ensuring that diplomacy was used to achieve them. This two-way relationship focused on communicating progress and results to ensure the board was well-informed thereby mitigating any potential information asymmetry that could easily result.

When developing their staff, the priority focus was on being a good communicator, ensuring their actions were guided by integrity, they were ethical in decision-making and actions, and that to maximize relationship development, they remained approachable. As the leader of the organization, the ability to develop the organization, on both the academic and business side, is critical. As such, for the head of school, key priorities for success reflected team-building skills to ensure an effective leadership and teaching team which was focused on the future to ensure continuous growth and development. It is the head of the school who binds vision and practice to guide the school in the direction set by the board, yet "vision on its own is not enough – leaders need to work to ensure that action arises from the vision. The vision should not remain an elusive entity separate from day-to-day practice" (Morrison, 2018, p. 516). This is where setting directions, developing people, and developing the organization intersect to wholistically provide direction

and strategies for success. Effective strategies interweave with the important characteristics of leading a school, connected to the importance of communication, relationship building, and trust. Heads require patience in working with the board but also have the confidence and skill to nurture good governance and leadership at all levels within the organization.

Finally, there is a recognition of the reality that leading a school is fraught with many challenges, both internal and external to the school. There will be differing agendas, competing interests, and challenges for the head to deal with at all levels. The key is that the head must be a competent problem solver to navigate these difficult issues and the board must recognize and honour that, within the principal-agent relationship, the board has empowered the head, based on knowledge and experience, to operate the school on their behalf.

Recommendations

As part of this study, one of the goals was to provide recommendations to better support heads in navigating the challenges of leadership within the international school system, which may, in turn, help to increase the average tenure and decrease the revolving door approach to the position. The tenure of international school heads has increased since 2011 yet at 4.8 years it lags behind other senior positions like corporate CEOs. Also, research has identified leaders should remain seven (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009) to 10 years (Blackwood, 2018) in the position to maximize effectiveness and for implemented changes to become well entrenched within the school culture. It has also been argued that "CEOs generally should leave the job after 9.5 years—a point at which, many

believe, performance typically plateaus" (Citrin et al., 2019). So there is room for improvement.

Given the principal-agent relationship and the power of the board over the defined success or failure of the head, perceived or real, necessitates a deeper review of the governance structures at international schools. Governance policies and protocols need to be enhanced to ensure that boards do not extend their jurisdictional actions into areas designed to be controlled by the head of school. The comment noted by Benson (2011) that "at one level or another, many [of the chief administrators] are frustrated particularly by issues related to the board and [the fact] that they keep happening over and over again" continues to resonate within the international school community. Heads need to be protected against boards which overextend their sphere of influence and control. This is a governance issue. This is not a new issue. Educational organizations supporting international schools recognize this is an issue and have increased professional development for board members. But the issue in many cases comes down to personal agendas and the need for power and control which derail collective support for school governance and improvement. There needs to be greater oversight and control mechanisms which increase the efficacy of school board governance and protect heads of school, while also ensuring that the head of school, vis-à-vis an evaluation process, is efficiently doing the scope of work required.

Furthermore, there seems to be a mindset that the revolving door approach to leadership is just fine the way it is. Relative short contracts and no commitment to dedicate sufficient time and energy to examine ways to increase the stability and longevity of heads of school has established a system designed to perpetuate a model

of short-sightedness. This approach is "not good for the school. It's totally not right, but this is how it goes" (Interviewee 6). However, it should be in the board's interest, and the interests of the entire school community, to engage a candidate as head of school who will be committed to implementing the strategic plan and seeing it through. Yet, the current system reinforces the message that "most schools did not refer to wanting anyone who might stay long term" (Bunnell and Gardner-McTaggart, 2022a, p. 12) and the revolving door becomes a self-fulling prophecy whereby the head feels a sense of success if they last longer than one contract. In whose interests does this benefit?

The following recommendations have been constructed by examining the current tenure situation in conjunction with the challenges and recommendations noted by experienced heads of school. There will be separate recommendations for heads of school, boards, and the international school system in general.

Head of School Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, the key recommendations to improve the longevity of the head of school and to make the journey less challenging, the prospective head of school needs to:

- Conduct an extensive evaluation of the school to ensure the school is a good fit for both them and family (if applicable)
- Understand all current challenges, whether board-related, academic, operational, or financial and review the strategic plan (or board-designated goals) to ensure their skill set matches the targeted actions in the plan

- Examine board governance structure, size, stability, nationalities, policies, and other variables noted that impact head of school tenure
- Meet with the current board chair and head of school to better understand principal-agent relations, current challenges, and communication protocols in place to ensure smooth and efficient working relations
- Have a detailed understanding of the head of school evaluation process

If the position is offered and accepted,

- The initial contract cycle should be for a 5-year term with built-in extension negotiations in year 3 to provide employment stability for the head and sufficient notice to the board if the decision is to leave the position
- Subsequent contract length should be negotiated between 3 to 5 years
- Sufficient onboarding for the head before or very early into the commencement of duties to support not only acclimatization to the school but acculturation to the community
- Ongoing professional development in leadership and board governance
- Ensure an annual head of school evaluation process is in place as part of ongoing professional learning

The selection process of a school by head should be as thorough and detailed as the search selection for a head by the board. If selection compatibility was more accurate perhaps heads would remain longer at the school.

The goal for international school boards cannot be to hire a head of school with a short-term cycle predetermined. This has created the mentality of a revolving

door framed in a positive light whereas research has shown the negative impact of frequently changing leaders on many aspects of school. As the employer of the head of school, and given its direct principal-agent relationship, it is incumbent on boards to ensure due diligence is implemented to hire the best candidate for the current school requirements, and once hired, to support them for the long term. There cannot be the mindset to "let's push and grill and see how much we can get out of this" (Interviewee 5).

International School Board Recommendations

The key recommendations to improve the longevity of the head of school from the board's perspective are to:

- Consider recruiting from within and not default to external candidates – both internally promoted and first-time heads have longer tenure
- Focus on prior leadership experience and successes and not necessarily international school teaching experience
- Review the school's governance model based on variables which impact head of school tenure, including governance structure, size, stability, nationalities, policies and other variables noted in the study
- Ensure policies are in place and oversights set to keep the board's focus on governance and not operations of the school
- Establish clear guidelines for an annual evaluation of the head of school
- Implement mandatory board training and enact policies to mitigate against member self-interest and other unethical behaviours

- Formalize the process to ensure clear communications between head of school and board
- Conduct exit interviews with outgoing heads to review and reflect on past interactions with suggestions for improvement
- Keep remuneration package competitive, provide ongoing professional development opportunities, and keep the dialogue open regarding continued employment (do not leave them in the dark as to the board's intentions)

If the international school is governed by an owner, and not a formalized board, the owner can still benefit from the noted recommendations to ensure that the relationship between head and owner is positive, productive, and mutually beneficial.

International School System Recommendations

There are two other very important recommendations which do not fit into either category noted above but are more reflective of where the international school system is currently yet must go. Both are connected to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in the hiring practices of international schools. Recently, research has focused on the negative impact of 'whiteness' in international schools (Bailey, 2024; Gardner-McTaggart, 2021; Gibson & Bailey, 2023; Xu, 2023). EDI policies are slowly becoming more common at international schools, with a focus on providing an open and inclusive school environment, promotion of student agency, and equitable hiring practices. As one major international school recruitment agency noted in 2020,

> in failing to recognize the impact of systemic racism and bias on those we serve, Search Associates has fallen short in helping highly qualified candidates of color obtain positions in some of the best international schools worldwide. We have also fallen short in actively using our influence to help shape a more inclusive and diverse international school community. (Search Associates, 2020)

Furthermore, the Council of International Schools has also begun the conversation, with a greater focus on "how schools can develop inclusive & equitable HR practices" and is now providing a workshop for member schools with the goal "to explore and consider hiring policies and practices that minimise bias, increase inclusivity, widen the candidate pool, and create a warm, welcoming, and equitable recruitment and interviewing process and community" (Council of International Schools, 2023).

While a deep review of this topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it would be remiss to negate inclusion in this section given the noted results above. As such, I have two additional recommendations. First and foremost, there needs to be an increase in the hiring of female heads of school. All leadership positions in fact. While the overall percentages have increased in the past several decades, it is still not representative of the international school community. Rather, "women are underrepresented in boards and heads of school, while are overrepresented in teachers" and a "teacher is 1.6 times more likely to be female than male" (Neyra, 2021). It is time school boards acknowledge this and adjust future hiring practices to ensure gender parity is achieved. However, it cannot end there. Rather, there are more complex structural issues which must be acknowledged and transformed. As Somerville argues, "parity is a noble goal but in itself does not mean equality"

(Global Health 5050). Strategies for achieving gender equity must be enacted within international schools to eliminate discriminatory power relations. If international schools are going to promote equity and justice, they must embody those same principles in their actions.

Associated with the above-noted inequality within the international school system, equity in diversity must also be addressed. There needs to be an increase in the cultural diversity of heads (not to mention all leaders and teachers) to mirror the cultural diversity of students attending international schools. A rate of almost 85% white, dominated by Anglo-Saxon countries, is staggering given that the majority of international schools are in the Global South, educating a large number of students who are not from that demographic. The 'whiteness' which is propagated, promoted, and marketed must change. Students benefit from diversity in the teaching population just as they do from diversity in the classroom in general. If international schools are going to be internationally minded, they must be internationally represented.

Limitations of the Study

With any research study, there are going to be limitations, both in terms of design and results. In terms of methodological limitations, while the survey was very effective in attaining relevant data from a representation of school heads from across the globe, the number of responses was only 177 whereas the goal was 312 (or more). This was a little disappointing but not surprising given the challenges associated with maximizing survey response rates. As such, even though there was a good

representation from the many regions as noted, the sample size may limit the generalizability and transferability of the findings.

Furthermore, an additional limitation is the focus on the type of international school. As noted in Chapter 2, there are several types of international schools. While the lines defining the differences are becoming more blurred year by year, this study focused predominantly on heads working at the top echelon of elite traditional international schools (ETIS), defined by curriculum, governance, and accreditation. As such, the findings and conclusions cannot be a representation of the general population of international school heads.

It is acknowledged that this research is focused on the head of school perspective, and as such, reflects their worldview in terms of opinions around the research questions. The results therefore reflect more phenomenologically their perceptions based on individual experience. As such, a possible limitation is a potential 'self-perception vs. reality' dichotomy that may impact the validity of the data.

Concerning the qualitative methods, given that interviewees were not blindly selected, but rather came forward with the interest to participate, respondent bias may be an issue. Furthermore, during the interviews, there is always a possibility that the interviewer will respond to questions under the premise that this is what the researcher is looking for in terms of the answer. Initially, I was concerned that this factor may impact the depth of commentary. I was unsure if I as the researcher, being a fellow member of a leadership team at an international school, may impact perceptions of 'me' as being part of the group, positively or negatively, in terms of the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Or that responses may be less critical

because I am a member of the international school leadership community. However, responses appeared to be very candid and open, and connections were made to my experience as a school leader which I felt strengthened the connection positively.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is recognized that additional research on leadership challenges in international schools is warranted (Bunnell, 2018; Calnin, et al., 2018; Keller, 2015). While this study focused on issues surrounding the current tenure of heads of school and concomitant challenges in maintaining the headship, several questions emanating from this study warrant further exploration. There are five questions in particular:

1. Why do boards continue to predominantly recruit externally rather than develop leadership from within the organization?
2. Why do heads with no international school teaching experience have a longer tenure?
3. Why does a greater number of board nationalities increase head of school tenure?
4. Why does the nationality of the head impact tenure? and
5. Why are international schools underrepresented by female leaders and continue to propagate "whiteness" in leadership?

It would be valuable to have greater insight into the reasons and implications for the difference in results found in this study.

Furthermore, given that a preponderance of issues arise from the principal-agent relationship, directly with the board and its involvement, and given the

centrality of the board to many of the issues identified in this study, it would be beneficial to further our understanding through research on issues between head and board with the inclusion of board members specific to where the school heads are employed. Integrating data collection from both the head and board members of the same school would have the benefit of limiting the impact of the head's 'self-perception vs. reality' perspective noted above and enhance the understanding with the inclusion of the board's perspective. This will also address some of the other areas noted for further research.

And finally, building on the final question noted above, the issue of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in the workplace of international schools warrants further research and policy development to ensure that the ideals of internationalism are truly reflected in practice.

Conclusion

With the exponential growth of international schools in the past two decades, school leaders have been provided with increased opportunities to take on headships around the globe. Yet, research has demonstrated that there are many challenges inherent in the role. One of the key challenges is the ability to maintain the headship. Based on previous studies, the average tenure ranged from 2.8 years (Hawley, 1994, 1995) to 3.7 years (Benson, 2011). This study has determined that the average tenure for an international school head has increased to 4.8 years which, in essence, is close to completing a 5-year contract. This is positive in the sense that short tenure for international school heads has not been deemed beneficial. Beyond actual tenure

length, many variables have been identified that impact tenure, both negatively and positively.

This study has also elucidated many issues and challenges impacting the tenure of international school heads. It has added to the body of knowledge a better understanding of the tenure-termination situation while at the same time providing insight into the complexity of issues facing international school heads. These challenges reflect principal-agent issues surrounding governance and board relations, finance, staffing, and the impact of organizational politics. There are many issues addressed in this study with potential strategies to support heads of school within the international school system.

As such, I hope that the findings from this study will inform current and aspiring heads of school in addition to school boards and international school accreditation organizations with the recommendations to address important structural challenges which continue to impact their ability to retain the position. It is the ultimate goal that there is greater stability in the market and fewer unnecessary challenges so that boards and heads can focus on what is really important – and that is the students!

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Instrument

Doctoral Study: Survival at the top: Issues and challenges affecting the tenure of international school heads

Conducted by: Allan Richard Morrison, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Dear Colleague,

My name is Allan Morrison and I am a principal at an international school in Hong Kong. I am also a doctoral candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto examining the issues and challenges impacting the tenure of Heads of School[2] within the international school system. I am reaching out to you given your current role as Head of School and appreciate your input so that we better understand the challenges faced by those in your position.

Research is recognizing that the challenges faced by international school heads can be enormous. The literature notes that one of the most frequently recognized challenges is the ability to retain the headship. In previous studies the average length of time in the position has ranged from 2.8 years to 3.7 years, with a potentially high termination rate. As such, the ability to successfully navigate the waters of international school headships and maintain one's position is an important skill.

To gain greater insight into this issue, and to validate the current situation, my research will examine the tenure of international school heads as guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the current average length of tenure and reasons for turnover for international school heads?
2. What challenges are faced by international school heads and how does it impact tenure?; and
3. What are the key leadership styles, skills, and strategies needed to successfully maintain one's position as an international school head?

[2] While titles given to staff in leadership roles in international schools vary, this research is only focused on the top tier position, often called Head of School, but can also be referred to *inter alia* as Director, Headmaster, Principal, Executive Principal, or CEO.

My research will utilize a mixed-method approach consisting of an initial survey followed by a limited number of in-depth interviews. My goal is to better understand the issues impacting the tenure of international school leaders and, more importantly, develop a strategic framework designed to support heads in being more successful leaders within the international school system. An executive summary of the data will be shared with your accrediting organization so that we can all learn from the results presented.

I appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. It will take approximately 30 minutes. Please note that this survey is both confidential and anonymous. By voluntarily completing the survey you are providing informed consent. While your experiences are valuable and your input appreciated, please note that you are under no obligation to respond to any question, and you are free to exit the survey at any time. The questions in this survey do not have a mandatory response requirement. However, please note that once the survey has been submitted, your answers cannot be withdrawn as the identification of the participant and corresponding data is not possible.

If you are interested in discussing further the challenges faced by international school heads, I will be conducting a limited number of interviews to deepen the understanding of this issue. Please email me directly at allan.morrison@mail.utoronto.ca and I will follow up with you. Please do not place any identifying comments within the survey itself.

Thank you for your support in this research.

Sincerely,

Allan Morrison
Doctoral Candidate, International Educational Leadership Program
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Section 1: Head of School Experience

The following questions aim to gain insight into the length of tenure and reasons for the turnover of international school heads.

Pre1. Are you a Head of School, defined as the most senior position within your school and directly responsible to the school's Board of Directors or owners?
☐ Yes ☐ No (*if no, please exit the survey and do not submit*)

Pre2. Which accrediting organization does your school belong? (Select all which apply)

☐ CIS ☐ NEASC ☐ WASC ☐ Other

Pre3. How many years have you been a Head of School of an international school?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 …

Pre4. How many international schools have you been Head of School at?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 …

Most Recent International School:

1.1.1. How many years (including current year) have you been Head of School at your present school?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 …

1.1.2. Location of school (country)

1.1.3. Is the school…
☐ For-profit
☐ Not-for-profit

1.1.4. Were you…
☐ promoted from within
☐ recruited externally

1.1.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 …

1.1.6. What curriculum does the school use?
☐ AP
☐ Australia
☐ Canada
☐ IB
☐ IPC
☐ UK
☐ US
☐ Other

If you have only been Head of School at one school, please continue to Section 2

Previous Headship 1

1.2.1. How many years were you Head of School?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 …

1.2.2. Location of school (country)

1.2.3. Is the school…
☐ For-profit
☐ Not-for-profit

1.2.4. Were you…
☐ promoted from within
☐ recruited externally

1.2.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?

☐1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 …

1.2.6. What curriculum did your school use? Select all relevant options.

☐ AP
☐ Australia
☐ Canada
☐ IB
☐ IPC
☐ UK
☐ US
☐ Other

1.2.7. What were your reasons for leaving the Head of School position at this school? Select all relevant options.

☐ Issues related to school governance

☐ Salary and career considerations

☐ Family and personal issues

☐ Social ☐ economic ☐ political ☐ cultural ☐ environment issues of the host country

☐ Characteristics of the school

☐ Other - Explain:

1.2.8. Were you denied a renewal contract?
☐ Yes ☐ No

1.2.9. Were you terminated within your contract period?
☐ Yes ☐ No

1.2.10. If yes to either of the last two questions, what were the official reasons?

1.2.11. What do you feel were the actual reasons?

Previous Headship 2 (if applicable)

1.3.1. How many years were you Head of School?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ...

1.3.2. Location of school (country)

1.3.3. Is the school...
☐ For-profit
☐ Not-for-profit

1.3.4. Were you...

☐ promoted from within
☐ recruited externally

1.3.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ...

1.3.6. What curriculum does the school use? Select all relevant options.
☐ AP
☐ Australia
☐ Canada

☐ IB
☐ IPC
☐ UK
☐ US
☐ Other

1.3.7. What were your reasons for leaving the Head of School position at this school? Select all relevant items.
☐ Issues related to school governance

☐ Salary and career considerations

☐ Family and personal issues

☐ Social ☐ economic ☐ political ☐ cultural ☐ environment issues of the host country

☐ Characteristics of the school
☐ Other - Explain:

1.3.8. Were you denied a renewal contract?
☐ Yes ☐ No

1.3.9. Were you terminated within your contract period?
☐ Yes ☐ No

1.3.10. If yes to either of the last two questions, what were the official reasons?

1.3.11. What do you feel were the actual reasons?

Previous Headship 3 (if applicable)

1.4.1. How many years were you Head of School?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ...

1.4.2. Location of school (country)

1.4.3. Is the school...
☐ For-profit
☐ Not-for-profit

1.4.4. Were you…
☐ promoted from within
☐ recruited externally

1.4.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?
☐ N/A ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 …

1.4.6 What curriculum does the school use? Select all relevant options.
☐ AP
☐ Australia
☐ Canada
☐ IB
☐ IPC
☐ UK
☐ US
☐ Other

1.4.7. What were your reasons for leaving the Head of School position at this school? Select all relevant items.

☐ Issues related to school governance

☐ Salary and career considerations

☐ Family and personal issues

☐ Social ☐ economic ☐ political ☐ cultural ☐ environment issues of the host country

☐ Characteristics of the school

☐ Other - Explain:

1.4.8. Were you denied a renewal contract?
☐ Yes ☐ No

1.4.9. Were you terminated within your contract period?
☐ Yes ☐ No

1.4.10. If yes to either of the last two questions, what were the official reasons?

1.4.11. What do you feel were the actual reasons?

1.4.12. Would you like to relate any experiences prior to the past four positions?

Section 2: Board Composition

The following questions examine your school board characteristic.

Characteristics of Board composition at your **longest duration school**:

2.1. The number of years at this school? ____

2.2. Is/was there a Board of Directors? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.3. If not, who do/did you report to? _____

2.4. If yes, how many Board members are/were there?

2.5. Is/was the Board's role defined in a set of written policies? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.6. How many different nationalities are/were on the board?

2.7. Do/did any of the Board members have children in the school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.8. If yes, what percent of board members have/had children in the school?

2.9. Are/were you evaluated by the Board? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.10. If yes, how frequently?

2.11. How was the turnover of board membership?
☐ stable (little if any turnover within 3 year period)
☐ medium (new members every two years) or
☐ high turnover (new members every year)

Characteristics of Board composition at your **shortest duration school**:

2.12. Number of years ____

2.13. Is/was there a Board of Directors? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.14. If not, who do/did you report to? _____

2.15. If yes, how many Board members are/were there?

2.16. Is/was the Board's role defined in a set of written policies? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.17. How many different nationalities are/were on the board?

2.18. Do/did any of the Board members have children in the school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.19. If yes, what percent of board members have/had children in the school?

2.20. Are/were you evaluated by the board? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.21. If yes, how frequently?

2.22. How was the turnover of board membership?
☐ stable (little if any turnover within 3 year period)
☐ medium (new members every two years) or
☐ high turnover (new members every year)

2.23. Additional comments on board issues:

Section 3: Challenges of being Head of School

The following questions examine the key challenges faced by international school heads in maintaining their position.

3.1. In your experience, what are the three (3) greatest challenges of being a Head of School? (Please select three general areas with 1 = most challenging)

Board Relations
Finance
Governance
Host Country
Organizational Politics
Parents
Policies and Procedures
School Culture
Staffing and Staff-related Issues
Students
Transient Nature of the School
Other - Please Specify Other

3.2. Were there specific strategies you found effective in addressing the challenges noted above?

3.3. What were the main issues impacting your relationship with the Board/Owner?

3.4. What specific strategies did you find effective in addressing the challenges faced as a Head of School?

3.5. Do you see yourself as a Leader or a Manager in your role as Head of School?
☐ Leader ☐ Manager

3.6. Based on your experience, does your Board view your role as a Leader or a Manager?
☐ Leader ☐ Manager

3.7. In general, what percent of your time would you say that you manage (in contrast to leading)?
☐ <10%
☐ 11-25%
☐ 26-40%
☐ 41-55%
☐ 56-70%
☐ 71-85%
☐ 86-100%

3.8. Has the COVID-19 pandemic improved or worsened your relationship with the Board? ☐ improved ☐ worsened ☐ no change

3.9. Has the COVID-19 pandemic made you consider leaving your position as Head of School? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 4: Leadership Skills Necessary for Success

This section examines the key leadership strategies needed to be successful as a Head of School.

4.1. As Head of School, do you feel you received adequate formal training for the role?
☐ Yes ☐ No

4.2. If yes, what formalized school leadership training do you have?

4.3. Do you believe your leadership style impacts positively or negatively your role as a Head of School?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Sometimes
☐ I Don't know

Explain…

4.4. What would **you** identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective International Head of School within the following subgroup[3] connected to the operations of a school? (Please select 3 and rank them with 1 = most important)?

Setting Direction	**Developing People**	**Developing the Organization**
Committed	Adaptable	Accountable
Decisive	Approachable	Achievement-Oriented
Dependable	Charismatic	Organized
Diplomatic	Confident	Future-Focused
Energetic	Empathetic	Insightful
Enthusiastic	Ethical/Integrity	Motivator
Flexible	Even Disposition	Persistent
Intelligent	Good Communicator	Problem Solver
Risk Taker	Respectful	Team Builder
Visionary	Tolerant	Responsible
Other (please specify)	Other (please specify)	Other (please specify

4.5. What do you think your **Board** identifies as the three most important characteristics of an effective International Head of School?

Setting Direction	**Developing People**	**Developing the Organization**
Committed	Adaptable	Accountable
Decisive	Approachable	Achievement-Oriented
Dependable	Charismatic	Organized
Diplomatic	Confident	Future-Focused
Energetic	Empathetic	Insightful
Enthusiastic	Ethical/Integrity	Motivator
Flexible	Even Disposition	Persistent
Intelligent	Good Communicator	Problem Solver
Risk Taker	Respectful	Team Builder
Visionary	Tolerant	Responsible
Other (please specify)	Other (please specify)	Other (please specify

4.6. What do you believe are the 'top' five areas a successful Head must focus on? (Please select five tasks and rank them from 1 to 5 with 1=most important)

☐ Ability to motivate others
☐ Carrying out board designated tasks
☐ Delegation of tasks

[3] Adapted from Leithwood and Riehl (2003)'s *What we Know About School Leadership*. Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University.

☐ Developing supportive networks
☐ Development of an appropriate vision
☐ Ensuring policies and procedures are understood and followed
☐ Ensuring school enrollment is maintained or increased
☐ Implementing change
☐ Keeping the school “current”
☐ Financial responsibility
☐ Maintaining or enhancing school reputation
☐ Spearheading school improvement initiatives
☐ Student Success
☐ Teacher hiring
☐ Teacher training
☐ Other - Please specify "other"

4.7. Do you have any final comments, suggestions or insights to share regarding the role of an international Head of School in being able to retain their position?

Section 5: Demographic Information

The information on this page will be used to generate a general description of the survey respondents.

5.1. Which gender do you identify with?

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Prefer to self-describe as _____
☐ Prefer not to say

5.2. What is your age?

☐ 25 to 34
☐ 35 to 44
☐ 45 to 54
☐ 55 to 64
☐ 65+
☐ Prefer not to respond

5.3. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?

☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ Black or African American

☐ Hispanic or Latino
☐ Native American
☐ White or Caucasian
☐ Multiracial or Biracial
☐ A race/ethnicity not listed here
☐ Prefer not to respond

5.4. What is your nationality? _____

5.5. What is your highest educational degree attainment:

☐ Bachelors ☐ Masters ☐ Doctorate

5.6. How many years have you been a licensed teacher?
☐ <5
☐ 5-10
☐ 11-15
☐ 16-20
☐ 21-25
☐ > 26

5.7. How many years have you been a school administrator (Vice Principal or higher)?
☐ <5
☐ 5-10
☐ 11-15
☐ >15

5.8. How many years have you been an international school administrator?
☐ <5
☐ 5-10
☐ 11-15
☐ >15

5.9. Were you a teacher at an international school before entering into a leadership role?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your contribution is gratefully acknowledged. As noted in the email, if you are interested in discussing further the challenges faced by international school heads, I will be conducting a limited number of interviews to deepen the understanding of this issue. Please email me directly at allan.morrison@mail.utoronto.ca and I will follow up with you.

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol and Questions for Head of School

Doctoral Study: Survival at the top: Issues and challenges affecting the tenure of international school heads

Conducted by: Allan Richard Morrison, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Information Letter & Informed Consent Form for Interview Participants

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in an interview for my research on the issues and challenges impacting the tenure of Head of School[4] within international schools. Your input as Head of School is critical to increasing our understanding of these issues. You have been selected for participation due to your extensive experience as a Head of School.

To gain greater insight, and to validate the current situation, my research will examine the tenure of international school heads as guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the current average length of tenure and reasons for turnover for international school heads?
2. What challenges are faced by international school heads and how does it impact tenure?; and
3. What are the key leadership styles, qualities, and strategies needed to successfully maintain one's position as an international school head?

This interview will be approximately 45 -60 minutes. Please note that all data collected in this study is both confidential and anonymous. While your thoughts are valuable in understanding these questions, you are under no obligation to respond to any question you would rather not answer and you are free to exit the interview at any time.

---

[4] While titles given to staff in leadership roles in international schools vary, this research is only focused on the top tier position, often called Head of School, but can also be referred to *inter alia* as Director, Headmaster, Principal, Executive Principal, or CEO.

It is the intention that each interview will be audio taped and later transcribed to a Word document; you have the choice of declining to have the interview taped. You will be assigned a number that will correspond to your interviews and transcriptions. Your transcript will be sent to you to read in order for you to add any further information or to correct any misinterpretations that could result.

The information obtained in the interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (+852) 6548-9880 at allan.morrison@mail.utoronto.ca

You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Flessa at joseph.flessa@utoronto.ca Finally, you may also contact the U of T Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Allan Morrison, Ed.D. Candidate
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Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
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Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6
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Supervisor:
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Consent Form for Participation in Research Study

Doctoral Study: Survival at the top: Issues and challenges affecting the tenure of international school heads

Conducted by: Allan Richard Morrison, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

I, _____, have read the information letter regarding this research project and understand what is being asked of me in terms of my voluntary participation. I have also reviewed the guiding questions and all concerns have been addressed.

I understand that the anticipated time commitment for participation is approximately 45-60 minutes and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

I also understand that all data collected in this study will remain confidential and anonymous in perpetuity.

Finally, I give my permission _____ (initial) for the interview to be recorded and transcribed. I understand that the transcript of my interview will be sent to me for review and approval, and I will receive a copy of the research study once it is completed.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the information provided for the study *Survival at the top: Issues and challenges affecting the tenure of international school heads a*s described herein. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this research study. My signature recognizes consent to participate.

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

For your reference:

Pre-questions

Question 1: *Could you tell me how long you have been a Head of School?*
Question 2: *Where are you currently working and how long have you been there?*
Question 3: *At how many schools have you been Head of School?*
Question 4: *You have {stayed in our current position for many years or moved from headship to headship frequently}, why is that?*

Semi-Structured Questions

Question 1: *What do you think is an ideal length of tenure for an international school head? Why?*
Question 2: *Do you agree with the statement that international school heads are often terminated early and/or do not have their contracts renewed? If yes, why do you think this happens?*
Question 3: *How would you define an 'effective' school head?*
Question 4: *From your perspective, what have you done to help ensure your effectiveness as a Head of School?*
Question 5: *Conversely, are there things you've done or haven't done that you feel have negatively impacted your effectiveness as a school leader?".*
Question 6: *What are the greatest challenges you face as an international school head?*
Question 7: *How have these challenges impacted your ability to effectively lead?*
Question 8: *What impact/role do you think the board has on your ability leading schools at your level?*
Question 9: *What do you think are the key leadership qualities required to successfully maintain one's position as an international school head?*
Question 10*: Is there any additional information you would like to add that has not been covered?*

Appendix 3 – Survey Data

Pre1. Are you a Head of School, defined as the most senior position within your school and directly responsible to the school's Board of Directors or owners?

Head of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100	177
No	0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	177 0

Pre2. Which accrediting organization does your school belong? (Select all which apply)

Accreditation	Response Percent	Response Count
CIS	47.3	80
NEASC	20.7	35
WASC	24.3	41
Other:	48.5	82
ACSI	0.57	1
BC (Can)	0.57	1
BSO	0.57	1
COBIS	1.14	2
Cognia	0.57	1
EARCOS	0.57	1
ECIS	0.57	1
FOBISIA	0.57	1
IBO	7.39	13
Independent	0.57	1
Indonesia	0.57	1
MEP (National Educational Ministry	1.14	2
MSA	6.25	11
Nordic Network	0.57	1
None	0.57	1
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	169 8

** Greater than 100% since some schools have accrediting membership in more than one organization*

Pre3. How many years have you been a Head of School of an international school?

Years as HoS	Response Percent	Response Count
1	9.0	16
2	9.6	17
3	9.6	17
4	5.6	10
5	7.3	13
6	5.1	9
7	4.5	8
8	4.5	8
9	2.8	5
10	10.7	19
11	4.0	7
12	4.0	7
13	4.0	7
14	3.4	6
15	2.3	4
16	3.4	6
17	2.3	4
18	1.1	2
19	0.6	1
20+	6.2	11
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	177 0

Pre4. How many international schools have you been Head of School at?

Number of Schools	Response Percent	Response Count
1	49.7	88
2	27.1	48
3	15.8	28
4	6.8	12
5	0.6	1
6	0.0	0

7	0.0	0
8	0.0	0
9	0.0	0
10	0.0	0
11+	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	177 0

Most Recent International School:

1.1.1. How many years (including current year) have you been Head of School at your present school?

Years as present school	Response Percent	Response Count
1	17.8	31
2	17.2	30
3	12.1	21
4	15.5	27
5	9.8	17
6	4.0	7
7	5.7	10
8	3.4	6
9	1.1	2
10	3.4	6
11	1.1	2
12	2.3	4
13	2.3	4
14	1.1	2
15	1.1	2
16	0.0	0
17	1.1	2
18	0.0	0
19	0.0	0
20+	0.6	1
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	174 3

1.1.2. Location of school (country)

Location of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Region		
Africa	20	34
Asia	39.4	67
Australia/NZ	0	0
Caribbean	3.5	6
Central & South America	7.1	12
Europe	21.8	37
Middle East	6.5	11
North America	1.8	3
Prefer not to respond	0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	170 7

1.1.3. Is the school…

	Response Percent	Response Count
For-Profit	22.9	40
Not-for-Profit	77.1	135
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	175 2

1.1.4. Were you…

	Response Percent	Response Count
promoted from within	27.0	47
recruited externally	73.0	127
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	174 3

1.1.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?

Years at School before Headship	Response Percent	Response Count
N/A	27.4	17
1	14.5	9
2	9.7	6
3	6.5	4
4	11.3	7
5	3.2	2
6	1.6	1
7	1.6	1
8	3.2	2
9	3.2	2
10	4.8	3
11+	12.9	8
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	62 115

1.1.6. What curriculum does the school use?

Curriculum	Response Percent	Response Count
AP	32.0	56
Australia	0.0	0
Canada	2.9	5
IB	64.0	112
IPC	8.6	15
UK	14.3	25
US	46.3	81
Other		17
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	174 3

Previous Headship 1

1.2.0 Were you a Head of School at another school?

Previous Head of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	53.3	88
No	46.7	77
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	165 12

1.2.1. If yes, how many years were you Head of School?

Previous Headship 1 Years at School	Response Percent	Response Count
1	5.7	5
2	18.2	16
3	21.6	19
4	17.0	15
5	8.0	7
6	8.0	7
7	4.5	4
8	2.3	2
9	4.5	4
10	2.3	2
11	1.1	1
12	3.4	3
13	2.3	2
14	1.1	1
15	0.0	0
16	0.0	0
17	0.0	0
18	0.0	0
19	0.0	0
20+	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	88 89

1.2.2. Location of school

Location of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Region		
Africa	15.9	14
Asia	31.8	28
Australia/NZ	0.0	0
Caribbean	1.1	1
Central & South America	11.4	10
Europe	21.6	19
Middle East	12.5	11
North America	5.7	5
TOTAL	Answered	88
	Skipped	89

1.2.3. Is the school…

	Response Percent	Response Count
For-Profit	35.2	31
Not-for-Profit	64.8	57
TOTAL	Answered	88
	Skipped	89

1.2.4. Were you…

	Response Percent	Response Count
promoted from within	18.1	16
recruited externally	81.9	72
TOTAL	Answered	88
	Skipped	89

1.2.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?

Years at School before Headship	Response Percent	Response Count
N/A	25.0	5
1	10.0	2
2	25.0	5
3	10.0	2
4	5.0	1
5	15.0	3
6	0.0	0
7	5.0	1
8	0.0	0
9	0.0	0
10	0.0	0
11+	5.0	1
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	20 157

1.2.6. What curriculum did your school use? Select all relevant options.

Curriculum	Response Percent*	Response Count
AP	24.1	21
Australia	1.1	1
Canada	0.0	0
IB	66.7	58
IPC	9.2	8
UK	20.7	18
US	41.4	36
Other	6.9	6
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	87 90

* Greater than 100% since some schools offer more than 1 curricula

1.2.7. What were your reasons for leaving the Head of School position at this school? Select all relevant options.

Reasons for Leaving Headship	Response Percent	Response Count
Issues related to school governance	29.5	26
Salary and career considerations	5.7	5
Family and personal issues	12.5	11
Social issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Economic issues connected to the host country	3.4	3
Political issues connected to the host country	4.5	4
Cultural issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Environmental issues connected to the host country	2.3	2
Characteristics of the school	3.4	3
Other (please specify)	38.6	34
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	88 89

1.2.8. Were you denied a renewal contract?

Denied Contract	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	10.3	9
No	89.7	78
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	87 90

1.2.9. Were you terminated within your contract period?

Terminated within Contract	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	5.7	5
No	94.3	83
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	88 89

1.2.10. If yes to either of the last two questions, what were the official reasons?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	12 165

1.2.11. What do you feel were the actual reasons?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	13 164

Previous Headship 2 (if applicable)

1.3.0 Were you a Head of School at another school?

Previous Head of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	54.5	42
No	45.5	35
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	77 100

1.3.1. How many years were you Head of School?

Previous Headship 2 Years at School	Response Percent	Response Count
1	4.8	2
2	16.7	7
3	14.3	6
4	21.4	9
5	16.7	7
6	9.5	4
7	2.4	1
8	0.0	0
9	2.4	1
10	7.1	3
11	2.4	1
12	0.0	0

13	0.0	0
14	0.0	0
15	0.0	0
16	0.0	0
17	2.4	1
18	0.0	0
19	0.0	0
20+	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	42 135

1.3.2. Location of school (country)

Location of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Region		
Africa	19.0	8
Asia	26.2	11
Australia/NZ	2.4	1
Caribbean	2.4	1
Central & South America	14.3	6
Europe	19.0	8
Middle East	7.1	3
North America	9.5	4
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	42 135

1.3.3. Is the school…

	Response Percent	Response Count
For-Profit	38.1	16
Not-for-Profit	61.9	26
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	42 135

1.3.4. Were you…

	Response Percent	Response Count
promoted from within	26.2	11
recruited externally	73.8	31
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	42 135

1.3.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?

Years at School before Headship	Response Percent	Response Count
1	27.3	3
2	27.3	3
3	9.1	1
4	18.2	2
5	0.0	0
6	9.1	1
7	0.0	0
8	0.0	0
9	0.0	0
10	0.0	0
11+	9.1	1
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.3.6. What curriculum does the school use? Select all relevant options.

Curriculum	Response Percent	Response Count
AP	19.5	8
Australia	0.0	0
Canada	4.9	2
IB	56.1	23
IPC	22.0	9

UK	29.3	12
US	39.0	16
Other	4.9	2
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	41 136

* Greater than 100% since some schools offer more than 1 curricula

1.3.7. What were your reasons for leaving the Head of School position at this school? Select all relevant items.

Reasons for Leaving Headship	Response Percent	Response Count
Issues related to school governance	23.8	10
Salary and career considerations	21.4	9
Family and personal issues	14.3	6
Social issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Economic issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Political issues connected to the host country	4.8	2
Cultural issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Environmental issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Characteristics of the school	2.4	1
Other (please specify)	33.3	14
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	42 135

1.3.8. Were you denied a renewal contract?

Denied Contract	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	4.9	2
No	95.1	39
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	41 136

1.3.9. Were you terminated within your contract period?

Terminated within Contract	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	2.4	1
No	97.6	40
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	41 136

1.3.10. If yes to either of the last two questions, what were the official reasons?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	3 174

1.3.11. What do you feel were the actual reasons?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	3 174

Previous Headship 3 (if applicable)

1.4.0 Were you a Head of School at another school?

Previous Head of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	28.2	11
No	71.8	28
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	39 138

1.4.1. How many years were you Head of School?

Previous Headship 3 Years at School	Response Percent	Response Count
1	9.1	1
2	9.1	1
3	18.2	2

4	36.4	4
5	18.2	2
6	0.0	0
7	9.1	1
8	0.0	0
9	0.0	0
10	0.0	0
11	0.0	0
12	0.0	0
13	0.0	0
14	0.0	0
15	0.0	0
16	0.0	0
17	0.0	0
18	0.0	0
19	0.0	0
20+	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.4.2. Location of school (country)

Location of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Region		
Africa	18.2	2
Asia	27.3	3
Australia	0.0	0
Caribbean	0.0	0
Central & South America	27.3	3
Europe	18.2	2
Middle East	9.1	1
North America	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.4.3. Is the school…

	Response Percent	Response Count
For-Profit	36.4	4
Not-for-Profit	63.6	7
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.4.4. Were you…

	Response Percent	Response Count
promoted from within	27.3	3
recruited externally	72.7	8
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.4.5. If promoted from within, how many years had you been at the school before assuming the headship?

Years at School before Headship	Response Percent	Response Count
1	0.0	0
2	0.0	0
3	66.7	2
4	33.3	1
5	0.0	0
6	0.0	0
7	0.0	0
8	0.0	0
9	0.0	0
10	0.0	0
11+	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	3 174

1.4.6 What curriculum does the school use? Select all relevant options.

Curriculum	Response Percent	Response Count
AP	10.0	1
Australia	0.0	0
Canada	0.0	0
IB	50.0	5
IPC	0.0	0
UK	30.0	3
US	30.0	3
Other	10.0	1
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	10 167

* Greater than 100% since some schools offer more than 1 curricula

1.4.7. What were your reasons for leaving the Head of School position at this school? Select all relevant items.

Reasons for Leaving Headship	Response Percent	Response Count
Issues related to school governance	27.3	3
Salary and career considerations	27.3	3
Family and personal issues	0.0	0
Social issues connected to the host country	9.1	1
Economic issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Political issues connected to the host country	9.1	1
Cultural issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Environmental issues connected to the host country	0.0	0
Characteristics of the school	0.0	0
Other (please specify)	27.3	3
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.4.8. Were you denied a renewal contract?

Denied Contract	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	9.1	1
No	90.9	10
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.4.9. Were you terminated within your contract period?

Terminated within Contract	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	0.00	0
No	100.0	11
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	11 166

1.4.10. If yes to either of the last two questions, what were the official reasons?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	1 176

1.4.11. What do you feel were the actual reasons?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	1 176

1.4.12. Would you like to relate any experiences prior to the past four positions?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	3 174

Section 2: Board Composition

The following questions examine your school board characteristic.

Characteristics of Board composition at your **longest duration school**

2.0 I have been Head at only one school.

Head of School	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	49.7	88
No	50.3	89
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	177 0

2.1. The number of years at this school?

Years at School	Response Percent	Response Count
1	6.7	11
2	9.7	16
3	7.9	13
4	13.9	23
5	12.1	20
6	6.1	10
7	7.3	12
8	4.2	7
9	4.2	7
10	5.5	9
11+	22.4	37
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	165 12

2.2. Is/was there a Board of Directors?

Board of Directors	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	95.2	157
No	4.8	8
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	165 12

2.3. If not, who do/did you report to?

TOTAL	Answered	13
	Skipped	164

2.4. If yes, how many Board members are/were there?

Board Size	Response Percent	Response Count
1	0.0	0
2	1.3	2
3	5.1	8
4	8.2	13
5	10.8	17
6	14.6	23
7	13.3	21
8	6.3	10
9	13.9	22
10	6.3	10
11	4.4	7
12	4.4	7
13	1.9	3
14	2.5	4
15	1.3	2
16+	5.7	9
TOTAL	Answered	158
	Skipped	19

2.5. Is/was the Board's role defined in a set of written policies?

Board role defined?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	86.3	138
No	13.7	22
TOTAL	Answered	160
	Skipped	17

2.6. How many different nationalities are/were on the board?

Nationalities on Board	Response Percent	Response Count
1	18.8	30
2	20.0	32
3	14.4	23
4	23.8	38
5	11.9	19
6	6.9	11
7	1.3	2
8	1.3	2
9	0.6	1
10	0.0	0
11+	1.3	2
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	160 17

2.7. Do/did any of the Board members have children in the school?

Board children at the school	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	77.2	122
No	22.8	36
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	158 19

2.8. If yes, what percent of board members have/had children in the school?

Board members with Children attending School	Response Percent	Response Count
>=9%	4.8	6
10-19%	7.1	9
20-29%	11.1	14
30-39%	5.6	7
40-49%	4.0	5
50-59%	7.9	10

60-69%	7.9	10
70-79%	10.3	13
80-89%	9.5	12
90-100%	31.7	40
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	126 51

2.9. Are/were you evaluated by the Board?

HoS evaluated by Board	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80.5	129
No	19.5	30
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	159 18

2.10. If yes, how frequently?

Frequency of evaluation	Response Percent	Response Count
Every 3 years	1.6	2
Every 2 years	3.1	4
Once a year	84.4	108
Twice a year	7.8	10
Every 6 weeks	0.8	1
Informally	2.3	3
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	128* 47

* One respondent did not include frequency

2.11. How was the turnover of board membership?

Board Turnover	Response Percent	Response Count
Stable (little if any turnover within 3 year period)	57.2	91
Medium turnover (new members every two years)	22.0	35
High turnover (new members every year)	20.8	33
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	159 18

Characteristics of Board composition at your **shortest duration school**:

2.12. Number of years

Years at School	Response Percent	Response Count
1	16.3	14
2	25.6	22
3	23.3	20
4	16.3	14
5	8.1	7
6	7.0	6
7	2.3%	2
8	0.0	0
9	0.0	0
10	0.0	0
11+	1.2	1
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	86 91

2.13. Is/was there a Board of Directors?

Board of Directors	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80.2%	69
No	19.8%	17
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	86 91

2.14. If not, who do/did you report to?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	16 161

2.15. If yes, how many Board members are/were there?

Board Size	Response Percent	Response Count
1	0.0	0
2	1.5	1
3	5.8	4
4	10.1	7
5	7.3	5
6	8.7	6
7	17.4	12
8	7.3	5
9	13.0	9
10	8.7	6
11	4.4	3
12	4.4	3
13	1.5	1
14	0.0	0
15	1.5	1
16+	8.7	6
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	69 108

2.16. Is/was the Board's role defined in a set of written policies?

Board role defined?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	77.6	59
No	22.4	17
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	76 101

2.17. How many different nationalities are/were on the board?

Nationalities on Board	Response Percent	Response Count
1	20.0	15
2	14.7	11
3	25.3	19
4	18.7	14
5	10.7	8
6	6.7	5
7	2.7	2
8	1.3	1
9	0.0	0
10	0.0	0
11+	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	75 102

2.18. Do/did any of the Board members have children in the school?

Board children at the school	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.3	58
No	23.7	18
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	76 101

2.19. If yes, what percent of board members have/had children in the school?

Board members with Children attending School	Response Percent	Response Count
>=9%	3.4	2
10-19%	5.1	3
20-29%	8.5	5
30-39%	6.8	4
40-49%	0.0	0
50-59%	6.8	4
60-69%	6.8	4
70-79%	10.2	6
80-89%	8.5	5
90-100%	44.1	26
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	59 118

2.20. Are/were you evaluated by the board?

HoS evaluated by Board	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.3	58
No	23.7	18
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	76 101

2.21. If yes, how frequently?

Frequency of evaluation	Response Percent	Response Count
Every 3 years	0.0	0
Every 2 years	0.0	0
Annual	87.9	51
Bi-Annual	10.3	6
Every 6 weeks	1.7	1
Informally	0.0	0
Other	0.0	0
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	58 118

2.22. How was the turnover of board membership?

Board Turnover	Response Percent	Response Count
Stable (little is any turnover within 3 year period)	44.0	33
Medium turnover (new members every two years)	32.0	24
High turnover (new members every year)	24.0	18
TOTAL	Answered	75
	Skipped	102

2.23. Additional comments on board issues:

TOTAL	Answered	30
	Skipped	147

Section 3: Challenges of being Head of School

The following questions examine the key challenges faced by international school heads in maintaining their position.

3.1. In your experience, what are the three (3) greatest challenges of being a Head of School? (Please select three general areas with 1 = most challenging)

	Most challenging 1		Most challenging 2		Most challenging 3		Total	Weighted average
	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=		
Board Relations	50.0	26	23.1	12	26.9	14	52	1.8
Finance	37.0	27	35.6	26	27.4	20	73	1.9
Governance	33.3	17	33.3	17	33.3	17	51	2.0
Host Country	30.0	12	35.0	14	35.0	14	40	2.1
Organizational Politics	38.9	21	25.9	14	35.2	19	54	2.0
Parents	23.5	8	29.4	10	47.1	16	34	2.2
Policies and Procedures	11.1	2	33.3	6	55.6	10	18	2.4
School Culture	32.0	8	24.0	6	44.0	11	25	2.1
Staffing and Staff-related Issues	32.9	28	45.9	39	21.2	18	85	1.9
Students	0.0	0	66.7	2	33.3	1	3	2.3
Transient Nature of the School	20.0	5	32.0	8	48.0	12	25	2.3
Total						Answered		154
						Skipped		23

3.2. Were there specific strategies you found effective in addressing the challenges noted above?

TOTAL	Answered	133
	Skipped	44

3.3. What were the main issues impacting your relationship with the Board/Owner?

TOTAL	Answered	140
	Skipped	37

3.4. What specific strategies did you find effective in addressing the challenges faced as a Head of School?

TOTAL	Answered	131
	Skipped	46

3.5. Do you see yourself as a Leader or a Manager in your role as Head of School?

HoS view of role	Response Percent	Response Count
Leader	94.2	146
Manager	5.8	9
TOTAL	Answered	155
	Skipped	22

3.6. Based on your experience, does your Board view your role as a Leader or a Manager?

Board view of role	Response Percent	Response Count
Leader	83.9	130
Manager	16.1	25
TOTAL	Answered	155
	Skipped	22

3.7. In general, what percent of your time would you say that you manage (in contrast to leading)?

% time managing	Response Percent	Response Count
<10%	2.6	4
11-25%	13.6	21
26-40%	30.5	47

41-55%	26.0	40
56-70%	18.2	28
71-85%	7.8	12
86-100%	1.3	2
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	154 23

3.8. Has the COVID-19 pandemic improved or worsened your relationship with the Board?

Impact of COVID-19 on relationship with Board	Response Percent	Response Count
Improved	33.6	51
Worsened	7.9	12
No Change	58.6	89
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	152 25

3.9. Has the COVID-19 pandemic made you consider leaving your position as Head of School?

COVID-19 made you consider leaving position	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	35.5	54
No	58.6	89
Maybe	5.9	9
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	152 25

Section 4: Leadership Skills Necessary for Success

This section examines the key leadership strategies needed to be successful as a Head of School.

4.1. As Head of School, do you feel you received adequate formal training for the role?

Adequate formal training	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	55.6	85
No	44.4	68
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	153 24

4.2. If yes, what formalized school leadership training do you have?

TOTAL	Answered Skipped	99 78

4.3. Do you believe your leadership style impacts positively or negatively your role as a Head of School?

Leadership style and impact on role	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	71.9	105
No	1.4	2
Sometimes	19.9	29
I don't know	6.8	10
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	146 31

4.4. What would **you** identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective International Head of School within the following subgroup connected to the operations of a school? (Please select 3 and rank them with 1 = most important)?

Setting Directions: What would you identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective head of school within the following subgroup?

	Most important 1		Most important 2		Most important 3		Total	Weighted average
	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=		
Committed	32.9	25	42.1	32	25.0	19	76	1.9
Decisive	23.8	10	26.2	11	50.0	21	42	2.3
Dependable	30.0	12	35.0	14	35.0	14	40	2.1
Diplomatic	33.3	20	30.0	18	36.7	22	60	2.0
Energetic	37.5	6	25.0	4	37.5	6	16	2.0
Enthusiastic	18.2	4	54.6	12	27.3	6	22	2.1
Flexible	5.6	3	38.9	21	55.6	30	54	2.5
Intelligent	36.4	12	42.4	14	21.2	7	33	1.9
Risk Taker	6.7	1	40.0	6	53.3	8	15	2.5
Visionary	62.0	57	19.6	18	18.5	17	92	1.6
Total					Answered		150	
					Skipped		27	

Developing People: What would you identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective head of school within the following subgroup?

	Most important 1		Most important 2		Most important 3		Total	Weighted average
	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=		
Adaptable	21.7	5	17.4	4	60.9	14	23	2.4
Approachable	35.8	29	35.8	29	28.4	23	81	1.9
Charismatic	16.7	1	33.3	2	50.0	3	6	2.3
Confident	31.3%	5	25.0	4	43.8	7	16	2.1
Empathetic	35.8	24	35.8	24	28.4	19	67	1.9
Ethical/ Integrity	56.5	48	24.7	21	18.8	16	85	1.6
Even Disposition	22.2	4	44.4	8	33.3	6	18	2.1
Good Communicator	25.0	23	43.5	40	31.5	29	92	2.1
Respectful	19.3	11	29.8	17	50.9	29	57	2.3
Tolerant	0.0	0	0.0	0	100.0	2	2	3.0
Total					Answered		150	
					Skipped		27	

Developing the Organization: What would you identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective head of school within the following subgroup?

	Most important 1		Most important 2		Most important 3		Total	Weighted average
	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=		
Accountable	34.9	15	32.6	14	32.6	14	43	2.0
Achievement-Oriented	36.1	13	36.1	13	27.8	10	36	1.9
Organized	27.8	10	27.8	10	44.4	16	36	2.2
Future-Focused	45.3	34	36.0	27	18.7	14	75	1.7
Insightful	50.0	12	37.5	9	12.5	3	24	1.6
Motivator	14.3	6	52.4	22	33.3	14	42	2.2
Persistent	8.0	2	24.0	6	68.0	17	25	2.6
Problem Solver	21.7	13	35.0	21	43.3	26	60	2.2
Team Builder	47.0	39	25.3	21	27.7	23	83	1.8
Responsible	25.0	6	25.0	6	50.0	12	24	2.3
Total					Answered		150	
					Skipped		27	

4.5. What do you think your **Board** identifies as the three most important characteristics of an effective International Head of School?

Setting Directions: What would your Board identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective head of school within the following subgroup?

	Most important 1		Most challenging 2		Most challenging 3		Total	Weighted average
	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=		
Committed	34.8	31	31.5	28	33.7	30	89	2.0
Decisive	29.8	14	31.9	15	38.3	18	47	2.1
Dependable	40.0	28	34.3	24	25.7	18	70	1.9
Diplomatic	14.3	9	41.3	26	44.4	28	63	2.3
Energetic	20.0	2	20.0	2	60.0	6	10	2.4
Enthusiastic	23.8	5	19.1	4	57.1	12	21	2.3
Flexible	0.0	0	70.6	12	29.4	5	17	2.3
Intelligent	26.3	10	47.4	18	26.3	10	38	2.0
Risk Taker	0.0	0	50.0	3	50.0	3	6	2.5
Visionary	61.0	47	18.2	14	20.8	16	77	1.6
Total					Answered		146	
					Skipped		31	

Developing People: What would your Board identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective head of school within the following subgroup?

	Most important 1		Most important 2		Most important 3		Total	Weighted average
	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=		
Adaptable	28.6	4	21.4	3	50.0	7	14	2.2
Approachable	38.6	27	20.0	14	41.4	29	70	2.0
Charismatic	53.3	8	26.7	4	20.0	3	15	1.7
Confident	31.1	14	37.8	17	31.1	14	45	2.0
Empathetic	22.2	6	51.9	14	25.9	7	27	2.0
Ethical/ Integrity	50.7	38	30.7	23	18.7	14	75	1.7
Even Disposition	17.2	5	41.4	12	41.4	12	29	2.2
Good Communicator	29.1	30	36.9	38	34.0	35	103	2.1
Respectful	23.4	11	31.9	15	44.7	21	47	2.2
Tolerant	22.2	2	44.4	4	33.3	3	9	2.1
Total					Answered		145	
					Skipped		32	

Developing the Organization: What would your Board identify as the three most important characteristics of an effective head of school within the following subgroup?

	Most important 1		Most important 2		Most important 3		Total	Weighted average
	%	n=.	%	n=	%	n=		
Accountable	53.6	45	22.6	19	23.8	20	84	1.7
Achievement-Oriented	40.9	27	40.9	27	18.2	12	66	1.8
Organized	16.7	6	50.0	18	33.3	12	36	2.2
Future-Focused	38.8	26	38.8	26	22.4	15	67	1.8
Insightful	27.3	3	63.6	7	9.1	1	11	1.8
Motivator	6.7	1	6.7	1	86.7	13	15	2.8
Persistent	23.5	4	29.4	5	47.1	8	17	2.2
Problem Solver	23.4	15	32.8	21	43.8	28	64	2.2
Team Builder	22.9	8	31.4	11	45.7	16	35	2.2
Responsible	26.2	11	26.2	11	47.6	20	42	2.2
Total						Answered	146	
						Skipped	31	

4.6. What do you believe are the 'top' five areas a successful Head must focus on?
(Please select five tasks and rank them from 1 to 5 with 1=most important)

	First choice		Second choice		Third choice		Fourth choice		Fifth choice		Total	Weighted Average
	%	n=	%	n=.	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=		
Ability to motivate others	23.5	16	17.7	12	14.7	10	19.1	13	25.0	17	68	3.0
Carrying out board designated tasks	14.3	3	4.8	1	9.5	2	28.6	6	42.9	9	21	3.8
Delegation of tasks	4.6	1	22.7	5	22.7	5	18.2	4	31.8	7	22	3.5
Developing supportive networks	7.4	2	11.1	3	11.1	3	40.7	11	29.6	8	27	3.7
Development of an appropriate vision	50.6	44	21.8	19	13.8	12	6.9	6	6.9	6	87	2.0
Ensuring policies and procedures are understood and followed	6.0	3	14.0	7	30.0	15	20.0	10	30.0	15	50	3.5
Ensuring school enrollment is maintained or increased	4.7	2	23.3	10	25.6	11	23.3	10	23.3	10	43	3.4
Implementing change	2.2	1	17.4	8	26.1	12	26.1	12	28.3	13	46	3.6
Keeping the school “current”	20.0	3	13.3	2	13.3	2	26.7	4	26.7	4	15	3.3
Financial responsibility	16.5	13	21.5	17	26.6	21	22.8	18	12.7	10	79	2.9

Maintaining or enhancing school reputation	12.2	6	22.5	11	22.5	11	16.3	8	26.5	13	49	3.2
Spearheading school improvement initiatives	13.3	6	17.8	8	20.0	9	24.4	11	24.4	11	45	3.3
Student Success	53.5	38	16.9	12	11.3	8	9.9	7	8.5	6	71	2.0
Teacher hiring	7.0	5	39.4	28	18.3	13	25.4	18	9.9	7	71	2.9
Teacher training	11.1	3	11.1	3	37.0	10	22.2	6	18.5	5	27	3.3
Total									Answered Skipped		146 31	

Section 5: Demographic Information

5.1. Which gender do you identify with?

Gender	Response Percent	Response Count
Female	34.3	50
Male	63.0	92
Transgender	0.0	0
Non-binary/non-conforming	0.0	0
Prefer not to respond	2.7	4
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	146 31

5.2. What is your age?

Age	Response Percent	Response Count
25 to 34	0.7	1
35 to 44	13.7	20
45 to 54	39.0	57
55 to 64	37.0	54
65+	8.2	12
Prefer not to respond	1.4	2
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	146 31

5.3. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?

Ethnicity	Response Percent	Response Count
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.4	2
Black or African American	1.4	2
Hispanic or Latino	3.4	5
Native American	0.7	1
White or Caucasian	84.9	124
Multiracial or Biracial	2.1	3
A race/ethnicity not listed here	1.4	2
Prefer not to respond	4.8	7
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	146 31

5.4. What is your nationality?

Nationality	Response Percent	Response Count
Armenia	0.7	1
Australia	4.7	7
Bahamas	0.7	1
Belgium	0.7	1
Canada	14.2	21
Colombia	0.7	1
Costa Rica	0.7	1
Dominican Republic	0.7	1
El Salvador	0.7	1
France	0.7	1
Ireland	3.4	5
Italy	1.4	2
Mexico	0.7	1
Myanmar	0.7	1
Netherlands	2.7	4
New Zealand	0.7	1
Norway	0.7	1
Serbia	0.7	1
South African	1.4	2
Switzerland	0.7	1
United Kingdom	21.6	32
United States	41.2	61
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	139 38

5.5. What is your highest educational degree attainment:

Education	Response Percent	Response Count
Bachelors	4.8	7
Masters	63.9	94
Doctorate	31.3	46
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	147 30

5.6. How many years have you been a licensed teacher?

Licensed Teacher	Response Percent	Response Count
<5	1.4	2
5-10	2.8	4
11-15	2.8	4
16-20	14.5	21
21-25	19.3	28
> 26	59.3	86
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	145 32

5.7. How many years have you been a school administrator (Vice Principal or higher)?

School Admin	Response Percent	Response Count
<5	4.2	6
5-10	12.5	18
11-15	29.9	43
>15	53.5	77
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	144 33

5.8. How many years have you been an international school administrator?

Int. School Admin	Response Percent	Response Count
<5	12.2	18
5-10	21.8	32
11-15	23.8	35
>15	42.2	62
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	147 30

5.9. Were you a teacher at an international school before entering into a leadership role?

Int. School Teacher	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	79.5	116
No	20.5	30
TOTAL	Answered Skipped	152 31