

# From Turnover to Self-Determination: Why Leadership Stability Requires Moving Beyond the Indian Act

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## Traditional Introduction – Entsa sQátsya7



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# About CFNG, and RFNG

- **CFNG**

- Indigenous-led nonprofit supporting Nation rebuilding

- **RFNG**

- National research partnership; CFNG co-directed, SSHRC-funded, to support Nations to transition from the Indian Act using inherent rights-based approaches

- **Community Partners:**

- Dzawada'enuxw First Nation, Lake Babine Nation, Lil'wat Nation, Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government, Peg'pig'lha Council, and the Upper Nicola Syilx Nation.



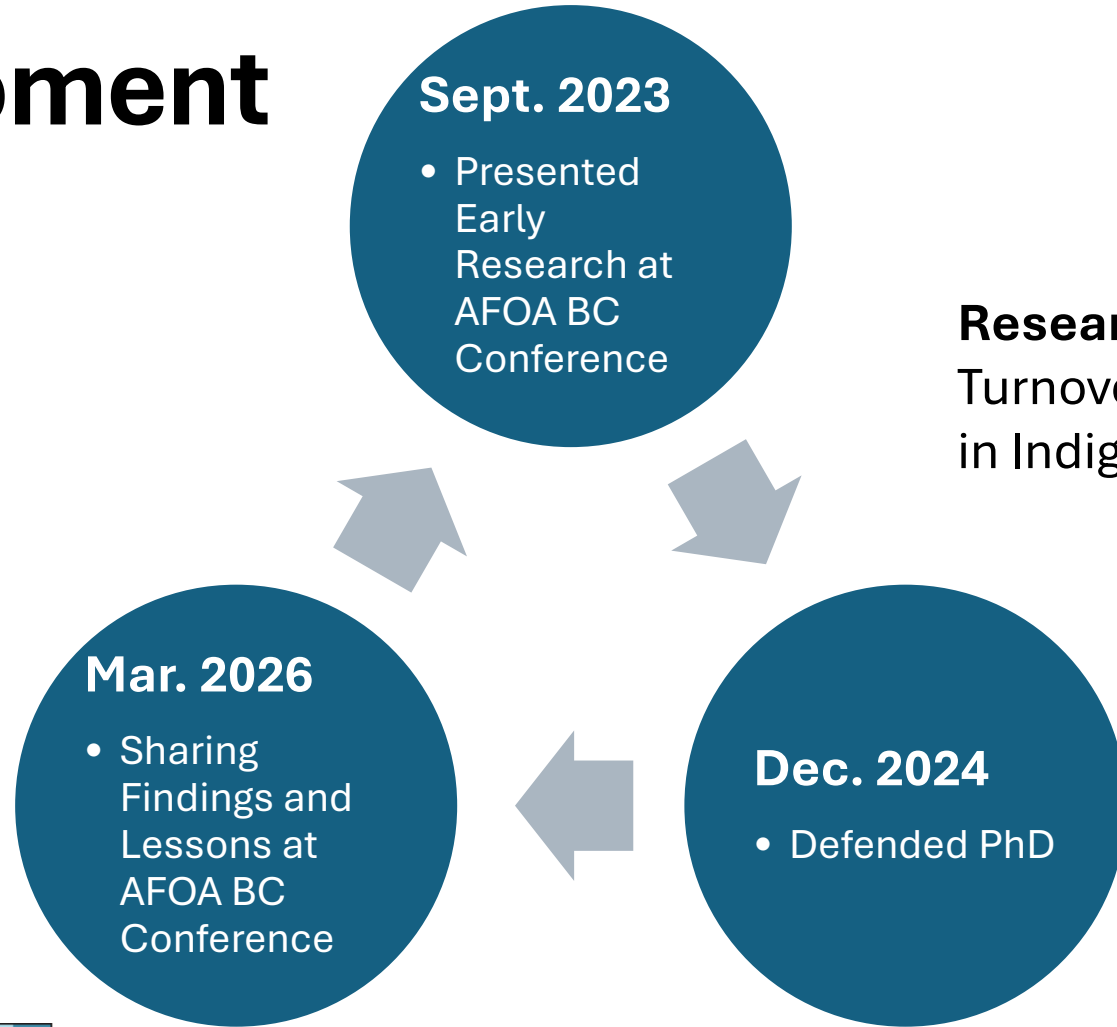
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# From Research to Practice: A Full Circle Moment



## Research Topic:

Turnover and the Retention of Indigenous Executives in Indigenous Organizations



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# A Question for the Room

- **How many of you have experienced leadership turnover in the past 5 years?**
  - Examples:
    - Band Manager/CAO
    - Finance Director
- **And what did it cost your organization?**

# What the Research Studied

## Topic:

- Turnover of Indigenous executives and band managers
- First Nations and Indigenous organizations in British Columbia and Nationwide

-  **Survey Data (n=35)**  
Executives
-  **Interviews (n=45) & Focus Groups (n=3)**  
In-depth leadership experiences
-  **Analysis**  
Patterns, causes and impacts of turnover, and strategies to address turnover



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# What I Found: Leadership Turnover Is Frequent

## Leadership Turnover Pattern

Short Leadership Tenure > Repeated Transitions > Leadership Instability

## Organizational Impacts

Loss of Institutional Knowledge | Leadership Strain on Staff |  
Disruption to Relationships | Interrupted Strategic and Operational Momentum

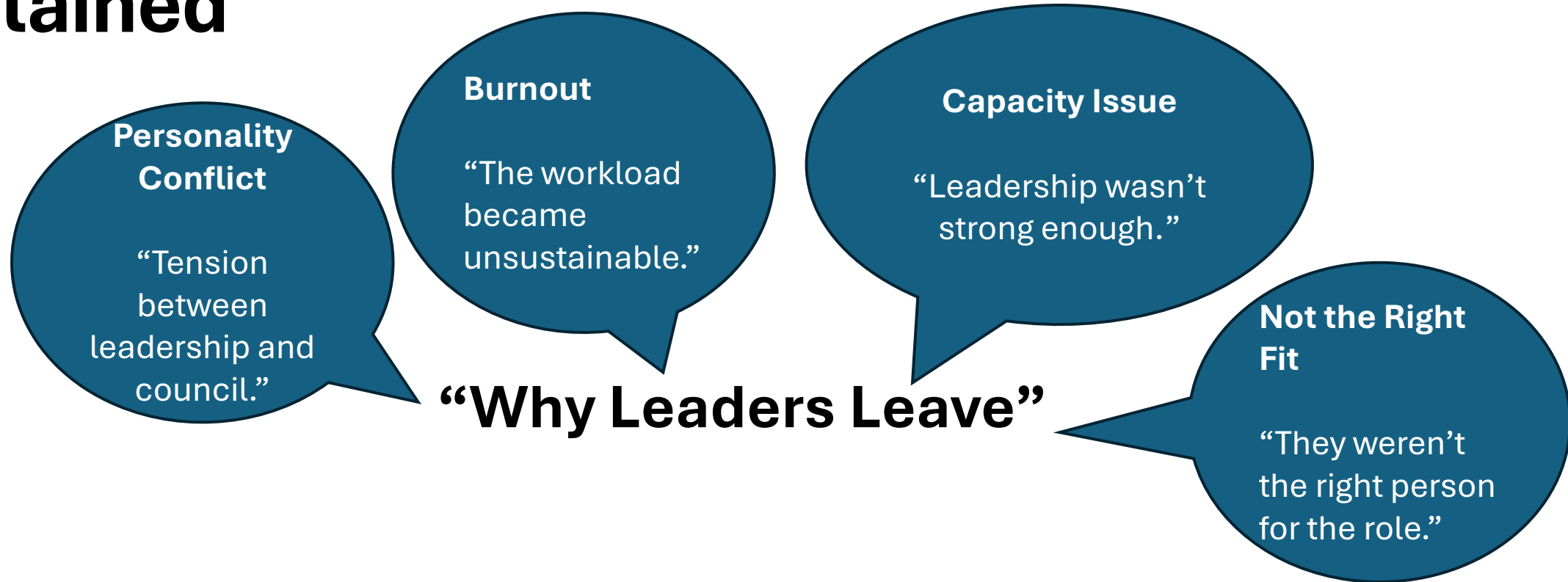


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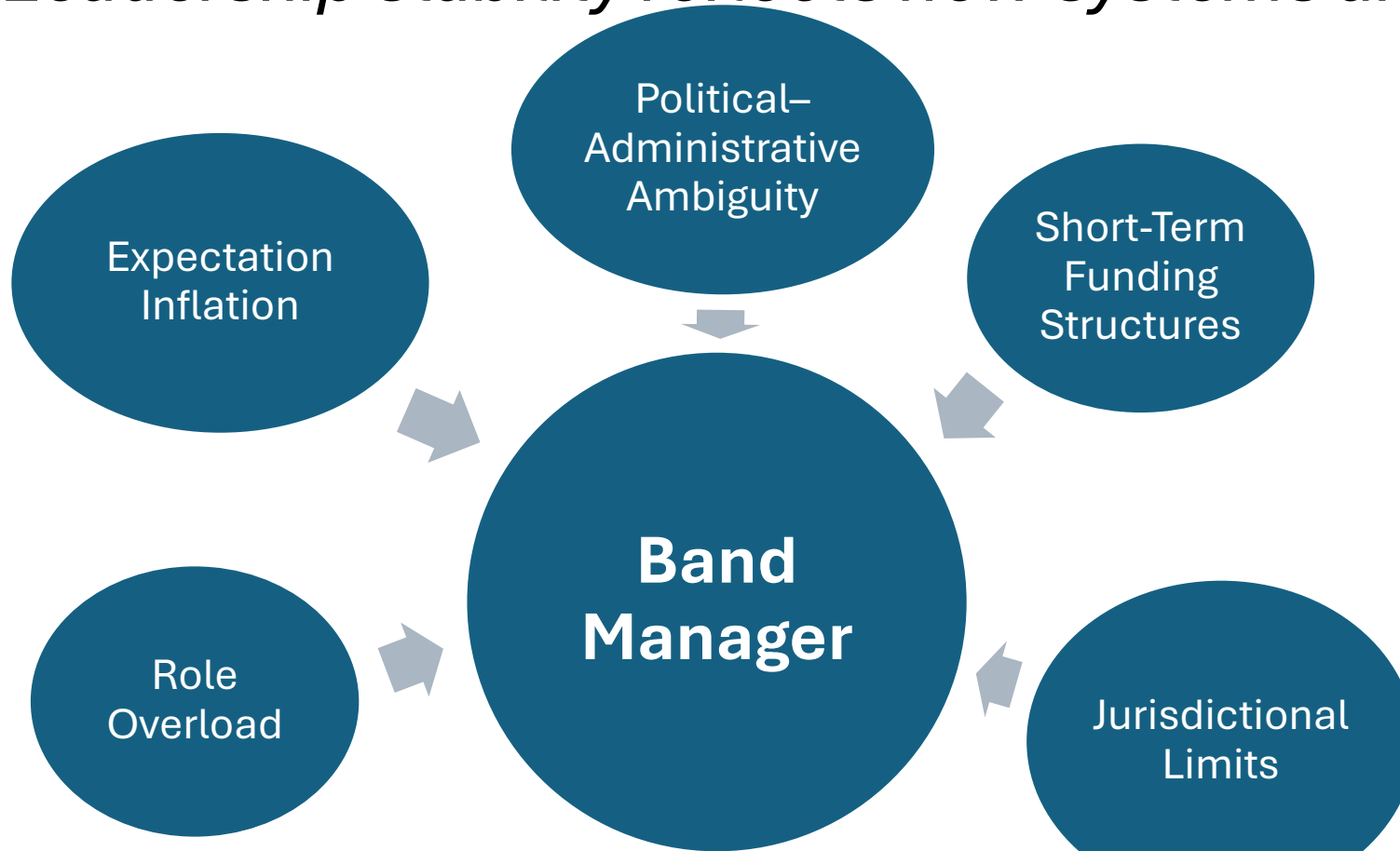


# How Leadership Turnover Is Commonly Explained



# Turnover Is a Governance Outcome

*Leadership stability reflects how systems are designed.*



**“You cannot retain leaders in a system that was never designed to support them.”**

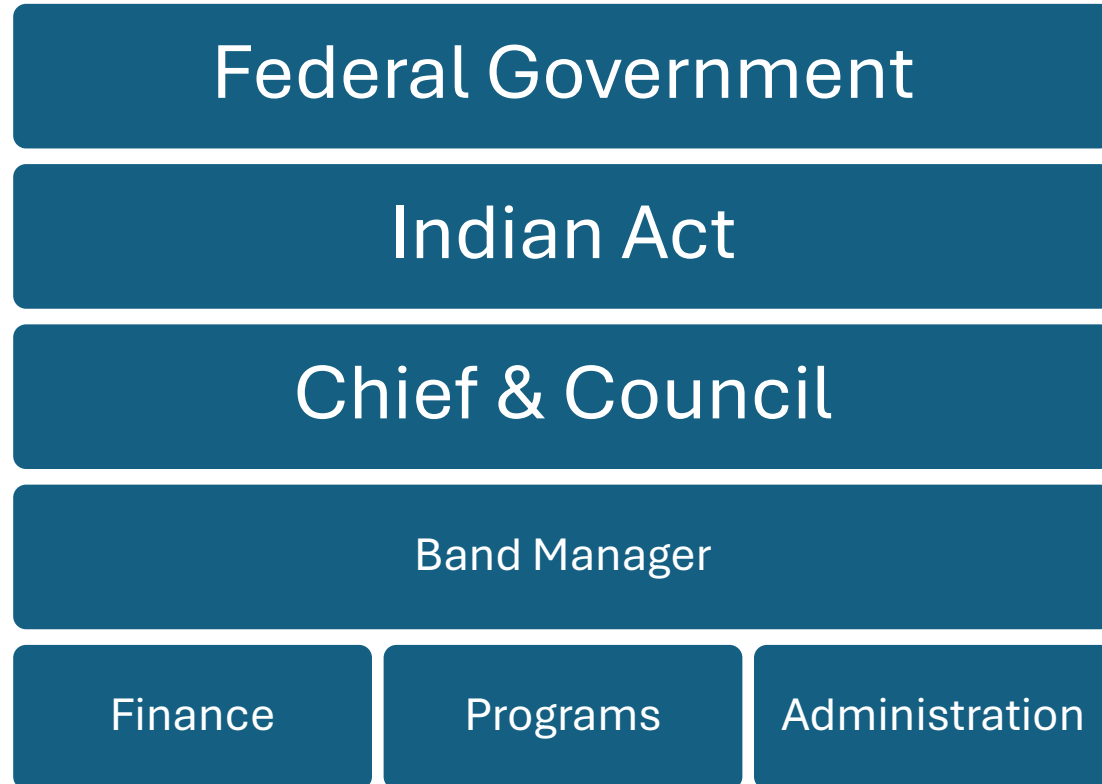


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# Where Do These Pressures Come From?

## *The Governance Structure Matters*



### **Structural Constraints**

1. Delegated Authority Structure
2. Political–Administrative Tension
3. Limited Jurisdiction Over Core Systems
4. Funding System Complexity

**This governance structure concentrates pressure on administrative leadership.**



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# Managing Turnover Realistically

*The goal is organizational resilience, not permanent leadership.*

## Succession Planning

- Preparing future leaders and leadership transitions before they occur.

## Knowledge Capture Systems

- Ensuring organizational knowledge and documentation are preserved.

## Transition Protocols

- Clear processes for leadership transitions to reduce disruption.

## Governance Continuity Planning

- Maintaining institutional direction during leadership change.



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# What Changes When Nations Exercise Jurisdiction

*Leadership stability improves when governance systems are strengthened.*

Indian Act Governance Model	Inherent Self-Government / Exercising Jurisdiction
Delegated Authority through Federal legislation	Authority grounded in inherent rights
Political-administrative ambiguity	Clear governance roles and responsibilities
Short-term funding cycles	Longer-term planning cycles
Limited law-making authority	Nation-developed laws and policies
Pressure concentrated on individuals	Governance systems support leaderships



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# How CFNG and RFNG Support This Work

*Supporting Nations in rebuilding governance systems grounded in inherent rights*

## Governance Workshops

- Nation-led governance training
- Leadership and council roles
- Governance policy development
- Practical tools for governance systems

## Jurisdiction & Law-Making Support

- Supporting Nations developing their own laws
- Governance frameworks grounded in inherent rights
- Transitioning beyond Indian Act structures

## Governance System Design

- Clarifying governance roles and responsibilities
- Strengthening administrative-political relationships
- Designing governance policies and institutions

## Research & Knowledge Mobilization

- RFNG national research partnership
- Podcasts, briefing notes, reports
- Sharing governance lessons across Nations



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# Retention Strategies: Necessary but Not Sufficient

*Organizations are already working to support leadership stability.*

- Competitive Compensation
- Flexible Work Conditions
- Capacity Building
- Clear Job Expectations
- Performance Systems

**These strategies matter — but they cannot fully overcome structural pressures.**



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# What This Means for Leaders in This Room

*Leadership stability is shaped by governance systems—not just individuals.*

## Turnover is Not Only a Leadership Problem

- Leadership turnover often reflects structural pressures, not simply individual capacity or performance.

## Governance Clarity Supports Leadership Stability

- Clear governance roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes help reduce pressure on executives and administrators.

## Leadership Stability Takes Time

- Transitions away from the Indian Act and toward stronger governance systems are long-term processes.



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# Leadership Stability Reflects Governance Design

Leadership stability is not only about finding the right leader. It is about building governance systems where leaders can succeed.

- Leadership turnover often reflects structural pressures
- Governance clarity strengthens leadership conditions
- Transitions beyond the Indian Act are complex and ongoing
- Strong governance systems create the conditions for leadership continuity and resilience.



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# Resources

- **RFNG Website:** <https://carleton.ca/rfng/>
- **CFNG Website:** <https://fngovernance.org/>
- **Inherent Rights, Informed Voices Podcast:** <https://www.youtube.com/@InherentRights>
- **BC First Nations Executive Tenure Survey Report 2022-2023:** <https://fnps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/BC-FIRST-NATIONS-EXECUTIVE-TENURE-Survey-Report-2024.pdf>



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# Kukwstum'kalap (Thank you all)

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