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The Organizational Structures of Instructional Design Teams in Higher Education: A Multiple Case Study

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership



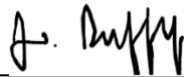
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The Organizational Structures of Instructional Design Teams in Higher Education:
A Multiple Case Study

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Jason Drysdale

November, 2018

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the people in my life who have loved, supported, and guided me through the various phases of my professional and educational career—chief among them, my family. To my mom and dad, your unwavering love and confidence in me has sustained me and given me the strength to move forward. Dad, I followed this path because of the passion for teaching and learning you instilled in me. Mom, you have always helped me to trust my feelings and be confident in who I am. I am so honored and proud to be your son. To my son Clark, you have brightened my world with your joyful laughter and curious mind; I am so excited to see the wonderful ways you will grow and learn! I am so proud to be your dad, and I always will be. Most of all, to my wife Courtney: you are the most intelligent, thoughtful, caring, and loving person that I have ever known. Your joy and tenacity made it possible for us to thrive in the hardest days and months of this journey (and they were plentiful). You are just the best person; I'm so thankful to be your husband. You are, and always will be, my favorite.

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Abstract

This study investigated how organizational structures influence leadership over online learning initiatives for dedicated instructional designers in higher education. A qualitative research method was used for within-case analyses for 3 individual universities and a comparative case analysis of all 3 studied institutions. Purposive sampling was used to identify each university that participated and operated within 1 of 3 organizational structure profiles. Data were collected through document analysis and semistructured interviews with participants in 3 key roles at each institution: dedicated instructional designer, online faculty member, and online learning administrator. The organizational structure that most positively influenced the ability for dedicated instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives was a centralized instructional design team with academic reporting lines. The results showed that decentralized dedicated instructional designers experienced significant disempowerment, role misperception, and challenges in advocacy and leadership, while dedicated instructional designers with administrative reporting lines experienced a high level of role misperception specifically related to technology support. Positional parity between dedicated instructional designers and faculty, in conjunction with implementation of the recommended organizational structure, was found to be critical to empowering designers to be partners and leaders. Several recommendations were produced: (a) instructional design teams should proportionally match the size of the university to ensure that they have time and opportunity to act as leaders in online learning initiatives, (b) dedicated instructional designers should participate or lead online program design initiatives, and (c) leaders of instructional design teams should have direct knowledge or experience with instructional design and online learning.

Keywords: instructional design, organizational structure, leadership, qualitative methods, higher education, online learning

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Online learning has become prevalent in U.S. higher education. Allen and Seaman (2016) discovered that more than one in four students take at least one online course; online courses have become a normal part of university curricular offerings. University faculty and administrators cite online learning as a major initiative at their institutions, often focused on recruitment of new students, promoting instructional innovation, promoting student engagement, and promoting student retention (Fredericksen, 2017). Additionally, 72% of online learning leaders in one study suggested that online learning initiatives, such as developing new programs, often act as a “catalyst for change” (Fredericksen, 2017, p. 10). Online learning is clearly here to stay; however, as the volume of courses and programs increases, many universities face staffing concerns due to the high need for qualified faculty educators, who—in traditional models—often also act as instructional designers on their own courses (Brigance, 2011).

Faculty who teach in both traditional and online courses have identified significant concerns about the quality of online courses, in part due to the lack of sufficient training for faculty to teach and design online courses (Ciabocchi, Ginsberg, & Picciano, 2016). University faculty members are teachers, collaborators, and cocreators of transformative learning experiences, but are not formally trained in instructional design (McQuiggan, 2012). With the expansion of online learning and a stronger focus on student learning, many universities have hired teams of *dedicated instructional designers*—nonfaculty learning professionals with expertise in online course design, pedagogy, and technology—to increase both the quality and quantity of online offerings (Shaw, 2012). These dedicated instructional designers are well suited, due to their expertise and training, to lead online learning initiatives, such as the design, redesign, and evaluation of courses and programs to improve quality. Dedicated instructional

designers operate in a variety of organizational structures; this study examines the influence of these structures on the ability for dedicated instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives in higher education.

Models of instructional design. Dedicated instructional designers focus on implementing many models for conceptualizing learning experiences for students. Lee and Jang (2014) suggested four key elements of instructional design models: function, origin, source, and analysis scheme. These four elements also mirror the stages of the process designers use when approaching learning experiences through a systematic approach. When designing courses, instructional designers consider the audience and intended outcomes of the course, collaborate with subject matter experts or instructors on content, and synthesize this information with pedagogy and best practices into a clear, purposeful path of learning (Brigance, 2011).

There are many models of instructional design that guide this process; one pervasive model is that of analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation (ADDIE), each a stage in the process of creating well-designed learning experiences (Lee & Jang, 2014). Another approach, the eLearning engagement design (ELED), is not a formal framework, but a system of best practices informed by the literature for addressing student engagement through instructional design (Czerkawski & Lyman, 2016). Although design models and approaches such as ADDIE and ELED may seem straightforward, it takes a high level of experience with practical instructional design, broad exposure to instructional technology tools, and a vast knowledge of pedagogy to design a course using these processes. Instructional design processes are valuable in all learning modalities; however, the need for instructional design process is exacerbated in online learning—an environment that relies heavily on the autonomy and self-direction of students, as well as the up-front development of the course (Shaw, 2012).

Organizational structure. Due to the decentralized nature of universities and the autonomy schools and departments often have, the organizational structure of dedicated instructional designers and teams varies widely from university to university (Fredericksen, 2017). These *organizational structures*, characterized by organizational charts, administrative decision-making practices, and the division and location of instructional leadership and authority, play a pivotal role in the ability of dedicated instructional designers to lead and advance online learning initiatives (Fredericksen, 2017). Some universities, such as the University of Central Florida, house designers centrally positioned in a center for teaching and learning, center for faculty development, or a different department dedicated to online learning; others house them in each individual college or school (Center for Distributed Learning University of Central Florida, 2017). Still, other universities may have dedicated designers embedded in schools and colleges while also having a centralized department for instructional design and technology. Some dedicated instructional design teams are housed in human resources departments, while others are in information technology departments or report directly to the provost or a vice chancellor. These differing organizational structures affect the roles designers embody, the perceived value of instructional designers by faculty and administration, and the ability of designers to lead online learning initiatives for colleges and universities in higher education (Intentional Futures, 2016).

Online learning initiatives. *Online learning initiatives* are projects related to the advancement of online learning at institutions of higher education. These initiatives have a wide range of types and foci, including academic initiatives, student success initiatives, enrollment targets, financial stability, and contributing to the strategic goals of the university (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Visibility and demand for online learning initiatives has increased as

enrollments trend upward for online courses (Allen & Seaman, 2017). There is clear demand and interest in the leadership role that dedicated instructional designers may play in these initiatives; however, according to Fredericksen (2017), administrators struggle to allocate resources to instructional design services. Similarly, dedicated instructional designers list collaboration with faculty—a primary mode of change management for online learning initiatives—as the greatest barrier to their work in higher education (Intentional Futures, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The increasing demand for online courses has expanded the role of faculty in higher education, many of whom now act as instructor, researcher, course developer, and instructional designer (Brigance, 2011). Meyer and Murrell (2014) suggested that instructional design models are frequently identified as a common area for faculty development. However, many university faculty members are not formally or adequately trained as instructional designers (Chao, Saj, & Hamilton, 2010). The increased workload of this expanded faculty role, coupled with unfamiliar technologies and a lack of formal educational expertise or training, often leads to a reduction in the quality of online academic courses or courses with a significant online element (Ciabocchi et al., 2016). Many colleges and universities have hired dedicated instructional designers to alleviate this concern because instructional designers are uniquely equipped to lead and collaborate with faculty to improve the pedagogy and design of online courses (Shaw, 2012).

However, not all universities view the role and value of dedicated instructional designers the same way. Much of a designer's ability to affect change in an organization comes from fostering positive working relationships with co-workers and constituents through appreciative inquiry (Kadi-Hanifi et al., 2014). The ability to lead initiatives is also influenced by the designer's position in the organizational structure. Instructional designers in higher education

operate in a variety of organizational structures, each of which may influence the roles designers can assume and either inhibit or enhance their effectiveness in those roles (Tran & Tian, 2013).

The problem to be investigated is that it is currently not known if and how dedicated instructional designers are acting as leaders in online learning initiatives, even though they may be positioned to be effective leaders of positive change in online learning.

Purpose of the Study

This problem of practice warranted a wide-scale exploration of the optimal practices, structures, and roles for instructional designers and teams in higher education. For dedicated instructional designers to act as leaders in online learning initiatives, their ideal roles and place in the organizational structure of colleges and universities must be researched, clarified, and implemented. This line of inquiry has the potential to influence the entire discipline of instructional design in higher education. As universities seek to increase, stabilize, or improve their online programs and courses, instructional design will continue to be at the forefront of the conversation. As such, the purpose of this research was to uncover which organizational structures most positively influence the ability of instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives in higher education.

For this study, a qualitative, comparative case analysis was conducted on three higher education public research institutions with different organizational structures related to dedicated instructional design teams and online learning initiatives. These three universities all had dedicated instructional designers, but different approaches to the structures that organize and inform the work of dedicated instructional designers. Dedicated instructional designers and teams may have a range of emphases related to their specific job tasks and type of work, but all

have a focus on instructional design and collaboration on course and program design with university faculty.

Research Questions

Qualitative studies seek to discover meaning in specific contexts, situations, or systems (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When applying qualitative research methods, researchers choose a central research question to answer through their data collection and interpretation, with a small set of subquestions added to clarify, strengthen, or advance the central question (Creswell, 2014). This study, which focused on the interconnectedness of complex systems in the context of leadership and change, was best suited to a qualitative methodological approach. The following central question and subquestions guided the research design, data collection, and analysis:

Q1. How do organizational structures in a university or college setting most positively influence the ability of instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives in higher education?

Q1a. What are the organizational structures in place at colleges and universities for dedicated instructional designers?

Q1b. How do dedicated instructional designers in varied higher education organizational structures participate in the design, redesign, and evaluation of university courses and programs?

Q1c. How do faculty and administrators empower or disempower dedicated instructional designers when collaborating on online learning initiatives?

Definition of Key Terms

Dedicated instructional designer. Dedicated instructional designers are instructional design professionals in higher education who have full-time appointments, usually as university staff, to design courses and programs (Brigance, 2011). These designers are not faculty who

have experience in instructional design, but are professionals who collaborate with and teach faculty to design and develop courses and programs.

Instructional design. Instructional design is a field of practice focused on the design, development, and implementation of learning experiences, often in the form of modules, courses, and multimedia content (Saba, 2011). Instructional design in higher education differs from academic technology in its primary focus; instructional design focuses on learning enhanced by technology, while academic technology focuses on technologies used for learning.

Instructional design model. Instructional design models are the frameworks, tools, and processes used to create a learning experience, such as a course (Lee & Jang, 2014). These models identify best practices, steps to follow, anticipated timelines, project scope, and other factors that influence the success of designing a learning experience.

Learning management system. A learning management system (LMS) is a web-based platform used for developing and delivering learning experiences with an online component (Saba, 2011). Many traditional and blended courses use an LMS as a part of the learning environment, but most fully online courses use LMSs as their primary environment for learning.

Online learning. Online learning is learning that takes place exclusively in technology-mediated, digital environments rather than in physical spaces (Saba, 2011). Online learning can describe learning that is either synchronous or asynchronous. Online learning has a distinct set of challenges, methods, approaches, styles, and pedagogies that differ greatly from other learning modalities, such as blended learning, mobile learning, and traditional learning.

Online learning initiative. Online learning initiatives are the prioritized tasks associated with online learning in higher education (Fredericksen, 2017). Examples of online learning

initiatives include program development, increasing online student enrollment, technology procurement, and quality improvement for teaching and course development.

Organizational structure. An organizational structure outlines the reporting structure, distribution of power, allocation of tasks and funds, administrative decision making, and division of labor for an organization (Tran & Tian, 2013). Organizational structures are unique to respective organizations; for instance, two public research universities of similar sizes may have drastically different organizational structures.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the study—including the problem, purpose, background, research questions, and key definitions—which focused on the influence of organizational structure in higher education on dedicated instructional designers' ability to lead online learning initiatives. As online learning continues to expand, faculty and administrators struggle to increase or maintain high quality in their courses and programs. Although dedicated instructional designers are well equipped to lead these initiatives, the organizational structures in place at public universities in the United States may positively or negatively influence their ability to lead. Providing an evidence-based recommendation, solution, or proposed structure and role for dedicated instructional designers and teams may change the conversation from problem-based to solution-oriented, moving from exploration of concepts to instituting action-oriented change. This study focused on these organizational structures, seeking to uncover the most effective structures for dedicated instructional designers to be the leaders that faculty and administrators need. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework for the study and synthesizes and evaluates relevant and recent literature related to the problem described in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To position this research study in the existing literature and gain insights into the primary terms and concepts to be explored, a preliminary literature review was conducted on several key search terms, including the following: online learning, instructional design in higher education, organizational structure in higher education, and leadership in higher education. First, these terms were independently searched. Then, the search was expanded to include articles related to two or more of the terms. The results yielded many peer-reviewed articles relevant to the study; the review of literature is categorized based on the primary theme of each related article, starting with a review of leadership theories and practices in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

This study explored the ways in which organizational structures influence leadership over online learning initiatives for dedicated instructional designers in higher education. *Systems theory*, a theoretical approach that describes and explores the ways in which multiple systems interact, provided the strongest theoretical foundation for this study (Patton, 2015). Systems theory offers “conceptual and methodological alternatives for studying and understanding how organizational systems function” (Patton, 2015, p. 139). Universities are complex, multifaceted organizations, with many interconnected and independent systems. As such, grounding this study in a theory that informed the methodology, data collection, analysis, and interpretation through the ways in which the many systems of each organization interact strongly supported the research questions and goals of the study.

Leadership in Higher Education

Universities and colleges are complex organizations, with multiple embedded leadership structures. As a result, leadership in higher education takes many different forms, which may be

different based on the characteristics of each individual university, or even between distinct units in a single organization. As online education has become an integrated and standard part of the culture of many universities, approaches to leadership have shifted to accommodate the physical distance that often exists between learner and faculty, as well as between faculty colleagues, staff, and administration (Nworie, 2012). There are three leadership theories that have shaped the approach universities have been taking in regard to online learning initiatives and instructional design; the foundation, and first, of these theories is transformational leadership (Nworie, 2012).

Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership theory is grounded in “the assumption that the actions of leaders are based on moral, ethical, and equitable consideration of everyone within an organization” (Nworie, 2012, p. 4). By this definition, a transformational leader would be characterized by the ability to cast a vision and articulate a mission for the organization that captures the spirit, passions, expectations, and hopes of the entire community of professionals, inspiring them toward progress on that vision and mission (Nworie, 2012). Nworie (2012) suggested that transformational leaders are well positioned for leadership in distance education because they have a strong ability to “motivate, energize, inspire, and encourage followers” (p. 5). These traits are critical for leadership at a distance because the physical distance between leader and follower—just as with learner and teacher—creates cognitive and emotional distance that can limit effectiveness and transformation (Moore, 2012). Although the theory of transactional distance has critically informed the development of online learning approaches, its focus—that of the exchange of information or experiences characterized by personal connection—may be advanced by a transition from a transactional perspective to a transformational focus. As leaders in online learning engage in leadership at a distance, a

perspective focused on the future—flexible when confronted with rapid change—sets the foundation for meaningful and effective leadership in the digital age (Nworie, 2012).

Transformational leadership has, in part due to the emergence of online learning, become a common leadership structure in higher education (Black, 2015). In this paradigm, leaders are seen primarily as change agents, wielding power through influence and knowledge of the structure of the institution, rather than through transactional means—administering rewards and punishment based on performance (Black, 2015). Transformational leadership, then, is most often used in situations and organizations where building relationships and trust can strongly influence outcomes. Black (2015) conducted a comparative analysis of many such models, designed to address negative perceptions around management practices in higher education, aiming to validate the leadership capabilities framework for use in higher education. This framework, adapted for higher education, is categorized by four themes: vision and goals; hands-on leadership; improvement and learning; and work details and the big picture. Each of these themes incorporates a series of behaviors or practices for higher education leaders derived from leadership models that focus on trust and building relationships, chiefly transformational leadership.

Black (2015) discovered that the framework, although transferrable to higher education, required changes in emphasis and context to be relevant to the type of work and structures present in higher education institutions. Black suggested using this framework for personal leadership development for leaders and professionals of all positions in higher education. Although a useful tool, Black acknowledged that the framework only addresses a narrow view of leadership in higher education, necessitating a deeper look at leadership in context of trends and major shifts in the culture and practices of universities.

Markova (2014) investigated the connection between faculty perception of educational technology and faculty's perception of leadership in education institutions. Markova discovered that faculty perceptions of educational technology are primarily determined by the ways in which they perceive it will influence them personally. Markova (2014) offered one example of this discovery: "higher education faculty are far more focused on being content or subject matter experts, than they are on being experts in the practice or theory of education" (p. 4). To address these challenges, Markova suggested a leadership framework to aid in the adoption of educational technologies, grounded in transformational leadership theory, which focuses on using influence to change organizational culture and practice rather than authority. The framework suggests transformational leadership as the catalyst for organizational changes, instructor motivation, learning process for students, and educational technology adoption (Markova, 2014). Higher education lends itself to these leadership approaches and frameworks; although transformational leadership and derivative frameworks may be the most visible or familiar to members of higher education institutions, similar approaches to leadership that focus on relationships, trust, and influence have also gained traction, and contextualize the leadership culture and practices in higher education.

Authentic leadership. As major change initiatives—including innovations in educational technology and online learning—continue to emerge due to the competitive market of higher education, authentic and intentional leadership practice is increasingly valued in all roles and functions of the university, including instructional design. Authentic leadership theory has been explored as an extension of transformational leadership focused on transparency, trust, honesty, and consistency in decision making (George, 2003, 2010; George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007; Kiersch & Byrne, 2015). Authentic leadership moves beyond the transformation of

organizational practices and culture to also focus on the well-being of individuals and teams. Kiersch and Byrne (2015) administered a survey to 187 employees on authentic leadership, testing how authentic leadership relates to employee stress, turnover intentions, and organizational commitment at the personal and group level; they also explored the connection between justice perceptions on stress, turnover, and organizational commitment. Survey data were analyzed through multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) and suggested a connection between authentic leadership and justice, culminating in a recommendation to utilize authentic leadership approaches to improve workplace equity and fairness (Kiersch & Byrne, 2015). Authentic leadership, as a framework for transparent and trust-centric decision-making practices, provides critical tools for leaders in complex organizational structures, such as those in higher education institutions.

In a case-based study, Opatokun, Hasim, and Hassan (2013) discovered four key predictors pointed toward authentic leadership among administrative staff in a higher education setting: self-awareness, balanced processing of information, an internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency (p. 61). The researchers conducted multiple regression analyses (MRAs) on responses from a 16-question questionnaire administered to 320 participants, with a response rate of 73.4%. Opatokun et al. discovered that self-awareness was the strongest predictor of authentic leadership, and had the highest impact on authentic leadership, but that all four dimensions were positive predictors. The authors suggested that authentic leadership is a critical part of organizational effectiveness in higher education, and particularly valued the role authentic leaders play in re-engaging universities with their moral imperative: devotion to higher learning over one's personal or professional preferences. This case, while focused on a small sample in a single university, demonstrated the importance of authentic leadership in higher

education: effective leaders must have high self-awareness, an internal moral perspective on their work, and strong relational transparency.

Xiong, Lin, Li, and Wang (2016) conducted research on the mediating effect of authentic leadership on the culture and commitment of employees in an organization. The authors defined authentic leadership as “the most important source of authenticity climate,” and as a leader’s expression of ones’ true self (Xiong et al., 2016, p. 831). Xiong et al. suggested that authenticity in a leader sets the culture and climate of an organization and can translate employee trust toward a supervisor into stronger affective commitment—or “the emotional attachment workers feel toward an organization” (p. 830). To test this hypothesis, Xiong et al. administered the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) to 228 participants from 14 randomly selected organizations. In the first study, multilevel modeling analysis supported the hypothesis, but also may have introduced common method bias, which prompted the researchers to conduct a second study with a new population from a random group of organizations. The second study resulted in corroborated results—a moderating relationship on authentic leadership toward trust and affective commitment (Xiong et al., 2016). Although this study was not conducted in a higher education setting, the results suggested a greater need for authentic leadership across different types of organizations. Although neither trust nor commitment are exclusively dependent on the authenticity of leaders, authentic leaders may strengthen trust and commitment to the organization—a vital step in effective change management in any organization, including higher education.

Baer, Duin, and Bushway (2015) explored the role of authenticity in change agent leadership for higher education, citing the need for positive leaderships due to significant changes and disruptions in higher education. Specifically, they cited changes to demographics,

expectations, economics, and technology as the key impetus for authentic change agent leadership (Baer et al., 2015). They suggested that these changes in students and environment demanded changes in priority for universities, focusing on accountability through analytics and authenticity. They also suggested that authentic leaders “establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self-discipline to get results” (Baer et al., 2015, p. 5). Authentic leaders rely on transparency and open communication to develop a sustainable culture characterized by openness to change and innovation (Baer et al., 2015). The authors posited that the changes happening in higher education must be met by bold, authentic leadership, guided by transparency, commitment, and a collaborative approach to leadership and change management.

Shared leadership. Shared leadership has emerged as an effective approach to leadership in many organizational contexts, including higher education. In concert with transformational and authentic leadership theory, shared leadership serves as the basis for much of the leadership functions in higher education institutions that often focus on a convergence of vertical leadership and formal shared governance through faculty bodies and subcommittees (Ciabocchi et al., 2016). Wang, Waldman, and Zhang (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of instances of shared, distributed, and collective leadership—terms used interchangeably for the same general concept of shared leadership—to determine how shared leadership practices influence team effectiveness. The authors established a definition of shared leadership: the distribution of influence and responsibility across all members of a team operating in a primarily informal capacity. Through this definition, the authors sought to uncover the ways in which shared leadership affects team outcomes, taking into account context, vertical and new-genre leadership theories, complexity of work, and differences between process and performance (Wang et al., 2014).

Wang et al. (2014) tested four hypotheses by conducting a meta-analysis of their literature review, coding each article for instances of shared leadership, to measure correlation to team effectiveness in each context listed in their hypotheses: shared traditional leadership, shared new-genre leadership, and cumulative shared leadership. The first hypothesis, which focused on the positive correlation between shared leadership and team effectiveness, was supported by the data analysis. For the second hypothesis, in which Wang et al. suggested a stronger correlation between shared new genre and shared cumulative leadership with team effectiveness over shared traditional leadership, the data supported the hypothesis. In the third hypothesis, the authors predicted that shared leadership related differently to four key elements of team effectiveness to determine how shared leadership most impacts teams. The results confirmed the hypothesis: shared leadership had a stronger relationship to attitudinal outcomes and behavioral processes and emergent states ($p = .45$ and $.44$) than with subjective and objective outcomes ($p = .25$ and $.18$; Wang et al., 2014). Finally, the fourth hypothesis predicted a positive correlation between work complexity and shared leadership; the data supported this hypothesis (Wang et al., 2014).

Through their detailed data analysis, Wang et al. (2014) determined that shared leadership does have a moderately positive relationship with team effectiveness and, in particular, its ability to influence goal achievement through stronger attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, rather than through any type of performance measure. This relationship is particularly true in knowledge-based, complex, and interdependent work—work common in higher education, and particularly with dedicated instructional designers. The authors acknowledged several limitations to the study, including the relatively small sample size of articles for the meta-analysis, leading to a call for further research on the correlation and influence of shared

leadership on team effectiveness (Wang et al., 2014). This article led to a deeper examination of shared leadership and team effectiveness and set the foundation for further study.

Due, in part, to this call for further research, Grille, Shulte, and Kauffeld (2015) explored the relationship between vertical leadership—or a traditional hierarchical approach based on positional authority and decision making—and shared leadership through a 6-point Likert-type scale survey administered to teams with a designated leader, randomly sampled through direct solicitation at university and business conferences (Grille et al., 2015, p. 328). The researchers included both team members and team leaders in their sample, which may be unique compared to other studies on the relationship between vertical and shared leadership (Grille et al., 2015, p. 332). The results did not support a positive relationship between vertical leadership and shared leadership. As a result, the researchers divided the data analysis to reduce methodological challenges—focusing leader responses on their own behavior, and team members' responses on shared leadership—and discovered that vertical leadership and shared leadership have a positive association when team members perceive their leader as prototypical of the team (Grille et al., 2015, p. 332).

Grille et al. (2015) suggested that for shared leadership and vertical leadership to positively inform each other in practice, leaders must represent “the team’s values and attitudes,” and that leaders should receive formal training to this end (p. 333). Beckmann (2017) suggested an approach to integrating shared leadership into formal recognition practices for faculty as a way to address concerns with hierarchical leadership—in which the vertical leader’s values and attitudes conflict with those of teams and individuals in the organization—and to model shared leadership practices to generate positive movement in this direction. Beckmann described how an Australian university, the first to award Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowships

outside of the United Kingdom, enacted shared leadership theory through the application and selection process for HEA fellowships.

Through a mixed-methods case-based study, Beckmann (2017) conducted document analysis, observation, and informal interviews as a participant observer to uncover the ways in which the HEA fellowship process promoted or exemplified shared leadership. Beckmann discovered that the fellowship program encouraged collective engagement, both with facilitators of the fellowship program and with fellows themselves. Additionally, the program facilitated the formation of multimember systems, supportive processes for fellow applicants and evaluators, and expectations around trust, respect, and collaboration for contributions from fellows (Beckmann, 2017). The HEA fellows, fellowship evaluators, and fellowship facilitators acted as a broad network of leaders in different contexts and roles throughout the university, suggesting an implementation of shared leadership through the duration of the fellowship process (Beckmann, 2017). Although this case study effectively demonstrated shared leadership in a specific program at a university, the focus was exclusively on faculty roles in the context of shared leadership, omitting both traditional vertical structures—which were still present at the university used for the case study—and staff involvement in shared leadership practices.

Shared leadership theory has important implications for dedicated instructional designers and leadership in higher education. Although vertical and shared leadership both exist in most university settings, shared leadership often exists in a formal structure of faculty governance, which excludes dedicated instructional designers and other university staff from participating in formal decision-making proceedings and in the direction and growth of their own work. This gap in application necessitates a deeper exploration of literature on the organizational structures

present in higher education to determine the efficacy of these leadership processes in the context of online learning initiatives led by dedicated instructional designers.

Organizational Structure

Leadership practices are influenced by the way an organization is structured; in higher education, the typically decentralized overall structure creates a distribution of power and responsibility that can make change initiatives—including online learning initiatives—a challenge (Ciabocchi et al., 2016). Although an organizational structure may be defined simply as the structural elements that make up the power distribution, decision-making authority, and reporting lines of an organization, Pennisi (2012) indicated that organizational structure influences the vision and mission adopted by the organization, as well as the goals and plans to achieve those goals for members of the organization. Setting visions, missions, and goals for an organization is a function of leadership; as such, structural elements can affect the leadership work of organizations (Pennisi, 2012). In this study, I explored three of these structural elements that are critical to leadership, specifically for dedicated instructional designers, at institutions of higher education: academic or administrative reporting lines, centralization or decentralization of instructional design resources, and consolidated or distributed curricular authority.

Faculty governance. Faculty governance refers to the formal governance over academic freedom, which includes the ability of academic researchers to pursue and conduct teaching and research initiatives based on their own interests; oversight of promotion, dismissal, and tenure practices; and freedom to disseminate research findings publicly (Eastman & Boyles, 2015). Faculty governance has always been intended as a means of protecting faculty from undue influence on what and how they choose to research and teach, both from external constituencies and internal administrators (Eastman & Boyles, 2015). Since its inception, faculty governance

practices have positioned faculty and administrators as somewhat adversarial, which frequently results in conflict between administrative interests—such as increasing enrollments—and faculty interests, such as advancing innovative teaching practices (Eastman & Boyles, 2015).

Nevertheless, faculty governance—particularly in public institutions—is the primary structure for organizing and managing academic practices and practitioners in universities in the United States. Eastman and Boyles (2015) suggested, however, that universities no longer function as public trusts, due to decreased public funding and increases for private and grant-based funding. Eastman and Boyles liken this change to corporatization, with decision-making power and authority resting more in administrative roles as the number of tenure-track educators and researchers decreases. Once again, this dichotomous relationship between faculty and administration suggests strong adversity between the two parties, with decisions from both sides revolving around their own initiatives and interests.

Eastman and Boyles (2015) suggested, as a result of the expansion of administrative roles and the reduction of tenured roles, that faculty governance is more important than ever to maintain freedom of inquiry and teaching. Schoorman and Acker-Hocevar (2013) also adopted this perspective, suggesting that faculty leaders needed to re-conceptualize leadership roles, communication, and practices to intentionally disrupt the corporatization practices of universities. The authors cited massively open online courses (MOOCs) as evidence of the corporatization of higher education and suggested that faculty and administrators alike recognize the need for continued faculty governance to combat such pressures (Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2013). However, they also suggested that most faculty governance bodies are ineffective at governing and require new structures and practices to protect academic freedom, educational quality, and innovation (Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2013).

To this end, Schoorman and Acker-Hocevar (2013) conducted an action research study to address their questions related to the function, tensions, and advancement of faculty governance to promote a resurgence of democratized decision-making practices. Their research centered on an auto-ethnographic evaluation of their own decision-making practices, resulting in an observation that “the challenges of engaging in democracy within an organizational culture characterized by an autocratic, corporate style of governance made us more aware of the subtle changes occurring around us” (Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2013, p. 282). However, the authors did not uncover or suggest any specific changes to faculty governance practices; rather, they discussed the implications of analyzing their own approach and recommended further evaluation by others to discover a better way of approaching faculty governance in an increasingly corporatized structure (Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2013).

Although both of these articles on faculty governance suggested that a severe and troubling shift toward corporatization of organizational structure was happening in higher education, neither article gave action-oriented change recommendations or direct evidence of the organizational shift, instead opting to defend faculty governance as necessary for maintaining academic freedom, quality of education, and innovation (Eastman & Boyles, 2015; Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2013). Regardless, the argument is clear: administrators have increasingly greater decision-making authority, and faculty resist this increased authority through improving and increasing faculty governance practices. The adversarial relationship between faculty and administrators stems from a perception of a shift toward corporatization, which faculty see as a threat to academic freedom (Eastman & Boyles, 2015).

To assess the perceptions of faculty governance leaders regarding online and blended learning, Ciabocchi et al. (2016) sent a survey to members of the American Association of

University Professors (AAUP). The authors cited recent challenges between administration and faculty governance related to online and blended learning as the primary reason for surveying faculty governance leaders. Survey questions included levels of formal approval for blended and online courses, quality of courses by format, and concerns regarding online courses. Ciabocchi et al. (2016) broke down responses by the format in which survey participants primarily teach: traditional or online and blended. The largest concerns related to online learning from all participants were time to develop courses (4.1), academic quality (4.09), and overuse of adjunct faculty (4.09), when measured on a 5-point Likert scale—with 5 signifying highest concern and 1 lowest concern (Ciabocchi et al., 2016). When analyzed further, traditional faculty were more concerned about academic quality and faculty oversight, while online and blended faculty were more concerned about overuse of adjunct faculty and technical support (Ciabocchi et al., 2016).

The surveys led to nine participants answering a set of open-ended questions; the authors categorized responses to these questions into four themes, including a need for a strong focus on teaching alongside research and a faculty review process for development and approval of blended and online programs (Ciabocchi et al., 2016). This theme characterizes the concern faculty governance leaders have for a stronger influence in decisions related to online and blended program and course development. Although this study did not address any perception of corporatization of higher education, it reinforced the need for greater research on the role organizational structure plays in online learning initiatives, particularly in relation to the development of new courses and programs, which is closely connected to the work of dedicated instructional designers. Faculty governance, however, is only one part of the reporting structure of most universities. To meaningfully assess the influence organizational structure has on leadership over online learning initiatives by dedicated instructional designers, administrative

reporting structure and its relationship with faculty through shared governance must also be considered.

Administrative reporting structure. According to Del Favero and Bray (2005), faculty and administrators have very different perspectives on the function and purpose of their organizations. Little research exists on the actual processes of governance between faculty and administrators, such as the formal distribution of decision-making authority when offering a new program. However, Del Favero and Bray also recognized the significant bias inherent in faculty perceptions of interactions with administrators. The researchers also acknowledged that although tension between faculty and administrators is partially due to organizational culture at individual institutions, it is also due to the organizational structure of universities, which positions administrators and faculty as somewhat adversarial. To determine a way to move faculty and administrators toward a more trusting, mutually respectful, and collaborative approach to shared governance, the researchers identified four key areas of inquiry: the collective interests and self-interests of each group, the types of interactions between faculty and administrators, the literature on the faculty-administrator relationship, and the functional contexts for the faculty-administrator relationship (Del Favero & Bray, 2005).

First, the researchers shared that two cultures—academic and administrative—are widely divergent, and are commonly cited as the key reason for conflict between the two groups (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). Administrators often focus on systems-level concerns, initiatives, and decisions that have a positive impact on the entire organization (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). Faculty, on the other hand, are most characterized by individual motivations, such as funding for research, teaching, and service to the university or department ((Del Favero & Bray, 2005). Administrators also have greater pressure to respond to external perceptions of value and

progress, while faculty are somewhat insulated from this concern in relation to their teaching and research endeavors (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). The authors were clear, however, in assuring that this divergence did not mean that faculty act selfishly and administrators do not; rather, they suggested that the scope and nature of work between the two differs in both type and motivation. Faculty and administrators both care about the success of initiatives and programs, but for different reasons, and with different influence over these decisions.

The next line of inquiry, focused on the characterization of the faculty-administrator relationship in the literature, categorized findings into three divisions: holistic descriptions, participant perceptions, and participant behaviors (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). The first category supported the assertion that faculty and administrators focus on self-interests and collective interests, respectively (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). The second category, focused on perception—specifically, that negative perceptions include suspicion by faculty and lack of respect by administrators; positive perceptions, when present, suggested that collaborative efforts happen with little obstruction (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). Behaviors, the final category, focused on empirical evidence of placation, withholding information, or defensiveness (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). The authors concluded that the literature suggested the administrator-faculty relationship is “dysfunctional and conflict-prone, and this assumption has gone virtually unchallenged in studies of shared governance” (Del Favero & Bray, 2005, p. 63).

The third line of inquiry focused on dispositional contexts for the relationship; the authors synthesized these contexts into a two-axis model: the horizontal axis moves from open conflict to trust while the vertical axis moves from cohesive to fragmented (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). Each quadrant in this model suggested a specific dispositional context in which the faculty-administrator relationship takes place: aggressive discord, fractured dissension, wary

collaboration, and symbiotic functioning (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). Each quadrant represents a context with a different degree of function or dysfunction, though the authors did not suggest the frequency with which each quadrant represents the faculty-administrator relationship.

Finally, the fourth line of inquiry focused on the functional contexts of the relationship; the authors discovered that conflict frequently leads to disputes about authority (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). In short, there is little to suggest that the distribution of authority and responsibility between faculty and administrators has been clearly defined. Much of the conflict around authority and decision making, then, can be attributed to a lack of clarity in the organizational structure, particularly related to the purpose, scope, and authority of administrators and administrative units.

Hoppes and Holley (2014) focused on how challenging situations, such as reductions in funding, influence trust between faculty and administrators in small, private, and nonselective colleges and universities. The researchers conducted a qualitative case study that consisted of interviews with equal numbers of faculty and administrators at a single university; questions focused on four key components of trust: communication, perceived competency and integrity, transparency, and consistency of actions across multiple organizational levels. The researchers discovered that transparency was the biggest indicator of trust for their interviewees, but that trust remained an elusive concept (Hoppes & Holley, 2014). The research supported a lack of trust associated with organizational challenges, and Hoppes and Holley noted that distrust may be exacerbated during these times. The authors recommended greater opportunities for communication to promote transparency to build trust between both parties (Hoppes & Holley, 2014). However, little clarity was achieved regarding the role of administrators in this study; rather, the emphasis was on enabling faculty to focus on teaching and research through building

trust. Little consideration was given to the types of collective and organizational initiatives led by administrators and administrative teams, and how trust or distrust with faculty influenced their ability to lead in times of change.

Del Favor and Bray (2005) set the standard for evaluating the effectiveness of the faculty-administrator relationship in university settings; the authors concluded that little meaningful research had been conducted on this relationship. The balance of authority, level of function or dysfunction, and perception of value and purpose between both faculty and administrators plays a critical role in the success of both parties, and in the success of the entire organization. With no role clarity for administrators and administrative units, it may be difficult for these professionals to feel empowered and dedicated to their work. Additionally, in times of organizational challenge, faculty and administrators may experience heightened distrust, exacerbating an already tepid and conflicted relationship (Hoppes & Holley, 2014). As faculty perceive an increase in administrative positions and teams, while calling for resistance to increased administrative presence and oversight, it is paramount to understand the motivations, interests, and role of administrators and administrative units in higher education, particularly in the context of instructional design and online learning initiatives (Eastman & Boyles, 2015; Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2013).

In a national study on online learning leadership, Fredericksen (2017) described the structure of universities as “loosely coupled systems,” with power primarily resting with faculty (p. 4). This structure demands that online learning leaders adopt a collaborative approach to change management and decision making, centered in transformational leadership (Fredericksen, 2017). Fredericksen described universities as organizations that operate under organized anarchy, an organizational theory which suggests that organizations operate toward uncertain

outcomes, and the process to achieve these outcomes is often ambiguous. To assess the priorities and interests of university leaders regarding online learning in higher education, Fredericksen conducted a national survey of online learning administrators and leaders focused on tasks, initiatives, priorities, barriers, practices, and characteristics of online learning leaders. Roles of these administrators included university presidents, provosts, and directors of centers for teaching excellence; 50% of the participants indicated that they held no faculty role.

Results of Fredericksen's (2017) study revealed that 60% of administrators who manage online learning initiatives often oversee both traditional programs and online programs (Fredericksen, 2017). Most of the participants had teaching experience and management experience, and 75% had one year or more of online teaching experience. Some 62% of participants identified that they had instructional design or curriculum development experience. Fredericksen discovered that these online learning leaders in higher education had three top priorities or issues: faculty development and training, strategic planning for online learning, and staffing for instructional design.

The top strategic goals in online learning are growing enrollments, promoting instructional innovation, and promoting student engagement (Fredericksen, 2017). These strategic goals and challenges for online learning are areas in which dedicated instructional designers are uniquely equipped to lead, in collaboration with faculty and university administrators. However, as Fredericksen (2017) noted, administrators do not know the best way to allocate resources, organize, or empower dedicated instructional designers. As a result, dedicated instructional designers may be working in organizational structures that do not empower or support their growth and leadership; without research on the best structure for

dedicated instructional design teams, their role and funding may continue to be challenges for online learning administrators.

Centralized or decentralized instructional design resources. The University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) conducted a national survey of instructional designers, team leaders, and media specialists regarding their professional background, working environment, and professional development needs (Fong et al., 2017). Out of the 320 invited participants, 114 responded—an approximate response rate of 36% (Fong et al., 2017). Some 68% of participants indicated that they were part of an instructional design and technology team; 55% of these participants identified themselves as instructional designers (Fong et al., 2017). The other 32% of participants were leaders of instructional design teams, a mix of both directors and managers (Fong et al., 2017).

The majority of instructional design teams are comprised of dedicated instructional designers, with an average team size—including leaders—of eight to 11 individuals (Fong et al., 2017). Job titles of survey participants included instructional designer, instructional design specialist, online learning support specialist, and instructional technologist (Fong et al., 2017). The researchers discovered that these instructional design teams participate or lead a wide range of services for their institutions, chief of which is “supporting content experts in course design” (Fong et al., 2017, p. 14). The authors noted a discrepancy in one identified service area: training in online pedagogy. Team leaders had a higher rate of identification for this particular service; 87% of leader participants listed this item as a provided service, while only 78% of team members listed it as a service they provided (Fong et al., 2017). Although the percentage of participants who listed this item as a service is still high for both leaders and team members, the

researchers noted that this discrepancy could indicate some differences between expectation and practice (Fong et al., 2017).

According to Fong et al. (2017), nearly half of instructional designers and teams operate in a centralized organizational structure. Some 25% stated that their team existed as a stand-alone service in a single academic unit or department (Fong et al., 2017). The researchers suggested that the higher rate of centralization of resources may be attributed to the technical nature of instructional design, in which universities often align course design services with IT services to save costs and reduce duplication of efforts (Fong et al., 2017). Although the data supported this reason for organizing instructional design teams both centrally and alongside IT, Fong et al. also assumed that course design work for online environments is, primarily, technical rather than pedagogical. The data they collected on services offered by instructional design teams suggested otherwise: two of the highest listed services, supporting content experts in course design and training on online teaching pedagogy, are not technical services, but pedagogical services (Fong et al., 2017). Again, the researchers' data support this distinction; when asked what professional development topics were most interesting and relevant, the top two answers from team member participants were collaborating with faculty (78%) and adult learning theory and practice (76%; Fong et al., 2017). Additionally, many other services listed from survey participants included both technical and pedagogical elements. Describing these instructional design teams as primarily technical does not reflect the full nature of their work, the reasons for choosing a centralized or decentralized organizational structure, or the degree of empowerment these teams have to lead online learning initiatives.

Legon and Garrett (2017) conducted a nationwide survey of chief online officers at a variety of higher education institution types, including 4-year public and private universities.

The researchers discovered that most online services and support resources are centralized, but curriculum and academics remain decentralized. Legon and Garrett placed this operational model on a continuum between stability and innovation; results indicated that this centralized support structure with decentralized curriculum results in low innovation, but high stability. Little to no attention is given in the research to instructional designers, their roles, or their influence in pedagogy and curricular decisions.

Although little further research exists on the organizational structure of dedicated instructional design teams in higher education, research has been conducted on organizational structure in other organization types and disciplines. Tran and Tian (2013) defined organizational structure as the formally defined framework of the tasks, authority, and relationships of an organization (p. 230). They evaluated the influence of organizational structure and external and internal factors—among them, decentralization of decision making, customer interaction, value of innovation, and intensifying competition—on three groups of organizations (Tran & Tian, 2013). The results indicated that the influencing factors had no direct impact on organizational structure; no research was conducted on the influence of these factors or structures on employee or leadership performance.

The studies conducted on the centralized or decentralized structure of instructional design teams uncovered little more than the current state of affairs. No evidence or research was uncovered related to the value or intentionality of these structures for positioning dedicated instructional designers as leaders in online learning initiatives, or on the reasons for organizing dedicated instructional design teams in a centralized department or decentralized across schools and programs. However, Legon and Garrett (2017) suggested that the overall organization of

program delivery and management may influence the role, function, and initiatives of dedicated instructional designers and online learning leaders.

Organization and management of online programs. Legon and Garrett (2017) also explored the overall structure for program delivery and management as identified by chief online officers. The researchers acknowledged that the data were skewed because study participants could choose more than one structure in their responses. However, the data showed that 71% of 4-year institutions structure their online program management by academic units, while 21% have centralized management of online programs by a dedicate online unit, such as an online or global campus (Legon & Garrett, 2017). Additionally, Legon and Garrett evaluated the ownership practices of different types of institutions related to online curricula, discovering that private 4-year institutions leaned toward institutional ownership of curricula, while public 4-year institutions had a less consistent approach. Some 29% of public 4-year institution participants indicated institutional ownership; 21% indicated shared ownership between faculty and the institution, while 21% also indicated faculty ownership with “case-by-case institutional licensing” (Legon & Garrett, 2017, p. 30). No data were revealed to show correlation between curricular ownership and type or location of program management. This gap in the knowledge base warrants further investigation into the ways in which universities manage, organize, and attribute ownership to online programs and curricula.

Paolucci and Gambescia (2007) conducted a study to determine the existing ways to structure online programs by analyzing the practices of 239 universities that offered at least one graduate degree online. The authors first established the history of structuring online programs from the literature, which consisted of delineating the different types of universities that offered online programs, the structures used to manage online programs at the university and academic

unit levels, and whether centralization or decentralization of online programs was determined strategically or through emergent practices. To effectively categorize the 239 universities they identified, Paolucci and Gambescia created a typology of administrative structures, organizing all investigated universities by either internal or external administrative structures.

This typology of internal and external administrative structure described the location of resources and management—internal meaning all resources are housed within the academic departments, continuing education unit, or distance education unit of the university—and external meaning that some responsibility rests with vendors or other universities (Paolucci & Gambescia, 2007). The vast majority of institutions (62%) housed all resources internally by academic units or departments, and 90% of all universities investigated used exclusively internal administrative structures (Paolucci & Gambescia, 2007). Paolucci and Gambescia (2007) suggested, however, that though their data indicated that existing administrative structures focused on a decentralized approach, the trend at the time suggested the opposite—that new online programs would be structured internally, but through a centralized approach in either a distance learning unit or continuing education unit.

Andrade (2016) similarly addressed the management and development of online programs in higher education, focusing on the macro, or institution level, and micro, or project level, processes and structures that influences online program management. First, Andrade discussed advantages to a centralized structure, in which programs are managed primarily by a team of online learning experts, including dedicated instructional designers. Andrade identified consistency, quality, and cost-effective development as benefits to this model, and noted that administrators preferred a centralized approach. The decentralized approach to program management focused on department-level control and management of online programs, and has

the distinct disadvantage of focusing efforts away from institution-wide efforts, reducing the likelihood of system-wide adoption of cost-effective online learning initiatives (Andrade, 2016, p. 32).

Andrade (2016) also noted that some combinations of centralized and decentralized structure may be in use at universities; such structures often result in collaboration between full-time faculty and dedicated instructional designers, but courses are often taught by contracted faculty. Andrade noted that this blended structure, which introduces outsourcing of teaching or instructional design services, may not result in meaningful institutional change. Finally, Andrade suggested that organizational structure for program management may influence the design and development processes for online programs, and that approaching development without a consistent strategy and structure may have a negative impact on course quality and the student experience.

This suggestion was echoed by Dee and Heineman (2016) when they analyzed the elements that influence academic program design and development. To address the challenging work of developing new online programs, Dee and Heineman proposed a conceptual model for navigating the process of proposing, justifying, and modifying new or existing online programs to meet market-focused and academic needs. The model was predicated on the need to define how the organizational context—or structural, cultural, and power distributions in a university—interacts with the decision context, or the type and scope of the decision and the stakeholders it includes or affects (Dee & Heineman, 2016). The conceptual model articulated how both contexts influence the identification and analysis of data sources, culminating in a clear decision-making process. Although the model itself may not have described every situation, it provided

an overview of the factors that affect adoption and advancement of new, existing, or expanding online programs.

These factors included organizational structure, but Dee and Heineman (2016) only categorized the structures based on academic units and online learning departments, with little further exploration of the interplay or complexities associated with these structures or variations on how power is distributed based on these structures. Dee and Heineman suggested that without knowledge of both the organizational context and the decision context, academic program developers may not be successful in moving forward with the program. One critical element of the decision context that was not explored in this study is ownership over courses and curricula. Ownership policies may incentivize or de-incentivize faculty participation in online program development and management and may play a key role in determining the administrative and organizational structures for online programs.

Hoyt and Oviatt (2013) conducted a national survey of administrators in higher education, specifically at doctorate-granting universities, on the current state of governance, ownership, and incentives for developing and teaching online courses. The authors suggested that ownership over course copyrights is the primary concern for faculty members when considering the inclusion of online courses into curricula. Institutional policy regarding ownership of course materials, whether online, blended, or face-to-face, differs greatly from one organization to the next (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013). For these reasons, Hoyt and Oviatt conducted a survey to uncover policies and practices of additional compensation for online course development and, in light of these factors, faculty perceptions of online learning.

The authors identified a few key types of compensation that were most commonly offered to faculty for developing online courses: additional financial compensation, time to

develop as part of a regular teaching load, release time, and a reduced teaching load (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013). These types of compensation were divided based on whether they were offered campus-wide or in specific schools and departments; the majority of decisions in regard to added compensation were determined at the school and department level, rather than the institutional level (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013). This result may also suggest that curriculum and course ownership played a large role in the types of compensation available to faculty for developing and teaching online courses (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013).

Only 10% of survey participants in Hoyt and Oviatt's (2013) study indicated that faculty held exclusive ownership over their courses; 41% indicated shared ownership, and 36% indicated institutional ownership. Ownership of course material causes conflict between faculty and administrators; faculty perceive administration as infringing on their academic freedom when the institution claims ownership over their work (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013). However, when the university holds no rights over course material, it can result in significant disruption for students when faculty members leave or go on sabbatical. Shared ownership over course content, then, ensures that both parties have some measure of influence and protection over courses and curricula. Hoyt and Oviatt further uncovered that faculty willingness to develop online courses was positively associated with several factors, including higher numbers of incentives ($r = .27$), the amount of administrative support ($r = .19$), and the importance of online learning to full-time faculty ($r = .63$; Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013, p. 175). Although ownership over courses has many implications for the faculty-administrator relationship, as well as the likelihood of an institution developing online programs, it also indicates a strong need for uncovering the types of structures that most support the growth and leadership of online learning initiatives through a collaborative, shared, and mutually respectful approach.

Little research exists on one such structure: the division of internal resources into a dedicated online campus, often called global or online campuses, in public and private 4-year institutions. Such campuses address issues of curricular oversight and ownership, centralization of instructional design teams, faculty governance, administrative authority, and management of programs by separating online learning into its own suborganization, where such decisions are determined differently than on the main or traditional campus (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013). This emerging structure, coupled with the uncertainty of administrators in how to staff and support dedicated instructional design teams, warrants a closer inspection of the role, function, and value of instructional design in higher education (Fredericksen, 2017).

Instructional Design

Although instructional design has been an activity of formal education since the beginning of distance education, it emerged more fully as a formal discipline and profession in higher education alongside online learning. Saba (2011) described the evolution of distance education first through correspondence education, then through major advances in broadcasting, and eventually through the Internet. In each phase of its evolution during the 20th century, distance educators considered the specific and intentional design of learning materials and experiences to serve the unique needs of their students (Saba, 2011). Another thread through each phase of the evolution of distance education was resistance to change and suspicion about the quality of learning experiences offered at a physical distance (Saba, 2011). Dedicated instructional designers in higher education work daily to address these concerns that persist today, even as online learning has become a ubiquitous element of higher education. To maximize effectiveness, including leadership over online learning initiatives, the roles and work of dedicated instructional designers must be clarified and defined.

Instructional designer roles. Instructional designers seem to do a little bit of everything: technology, pedagogy, teaching, training, designing, and developing. Sugar and Moore (2015) sought to uncover the specific practices, roles, and collaboration skills of one instructional designer over the course of a year. This detailed case study on instructional design work in higher education distributed the activities of the designer, collected through detailed daily logs and semistructured interviews, into four categories: design, support, production, and noninstructional design (Sugar & Moore, 2015). Of these four categories the instructional designer spent the vast majority of time doing activities in the design and support categories, including instructional design planning, eLearning module design, learning management system (LMS) support, and webinar support (Sugar & Moore, 2015). The breakdown of activities suggests that a person who identifies as a dedicated instructional designer only does instructional design-related work < 50% of the time (Sugar & Moore, 2015). Although this study had a significant limitation—it only followed one dedicated instructional designer—it also called for more research on the roles of instructional designers, signifying both the need for clarity and the lack of existing vision for the type of work dedicated instructional designers can do in universities.

Kumar and Ritzhaupt (2017) interviewed eight instructional designers in higher education to further uncover the types of work that dedicated instructional designers do. Questions and responses from these structured, qualitative interviews were organized by the following themes, among others: organizational context, general role and responsibilities, course development and improvement, faculty training and communication, and project management (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017). The researchers suggested that these eight instructional designers perceived faculty as their primary audience, and that the work of instructional designers was primarily in

service of faculty. Important skills for instructional designers included a strong educational background in pedagogy and instructional design, project management, and research skills, with technology skills also listed, but as a secondary competency (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017).

Although the researchers suggested that the role of instructional designers is primarily to serve faculty needs, the designers themselves also identified students and the student learning experience as their primary motivation and audience (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017). Although instructional designers certainly work with faculty to serve students, the skills most critical to their work—including project management—indicate leadership tasks, rather than support tasks.

Instructional designers as online learning leaders. This definition of instructional design activities is not universal; while there is certainly debate about the role of dedicated instructional designers in higher education, many universities have clearly defined roles and scope of work for their designers. Brigance (2011) suggested that instructional designers are primarily collaborators and leaders in online course design, partnering with faculty to design their courses as experts in pedagogy, community building, instructional technology, creating learning experiences, and synthesizing these elements into a cohesive course. Rather than support faculty in independently pursuing these many elements, Brigance (2011) suggested that dedicated instructional designers should act as collaborators with faculty, leading the design and development portions of the course and program life cycle, while faculty focus on content expertise, research, and teaching. This vision of instructional design as a practice of leadership shifts the conversation from role development to change management—a critical step for advancing the quality and volume of online courses and programs.

This concept of instructional design as leadership can be readily seen in a variety of contexts. Johnson and Sims (2013) explored the potential of wikis—a tool for shared authorship

and collaboration often seen in online courses—to promote community, connectedness, and learning effectiveness. While the researchers discovered that their wiki tools did moderately improve the level of community in the course itself, they also cautioned against assumptions that technology tools created for community building in online course will succeed at that endeavor (Johnson & Sims, 2013). Rather, they suggested an intentional alignment process between technology tools and instructional strategies to ensure that the design of activities and courses can be realized through the tools in which they are experienced (Johnson & Sims, 2013). This study demonstrated the significant expertise, insight, and experience of instructional design for online learning and the type of instructional leadership possible with a paradigm shift toward instructional design leadership.

Shaw (2012) explored the concept of instructional designers as leaders by outlining the work of leadership in higher education—casting vision, establishing strategic priorities, and developing organizational trust—as the cornerstone of instructional design in higher education. Shaw suggested that, for leadership practices at universities to keep up with the rapid pace of change and growth, particularly in online learning, instructional designers must be positioned and empowered to lead the way through their collaborative and high-impact work in course and program design. Shaw further suggested that the characteristics of instructional design leaders are the same as leaders in other contexts and disciplines: problem solving, critical thinking, adaptability, community and professional engagement, and evaluating the health and progress of organizations. Although many universities choose instead to focus on teaching faculty instructional design skills, this approach “does not provide the necessary skills for faculty to become proficient in instructional design” (Shaw, 2012, p. 2). Shaw suggested that it is not enough to teach faculty instructional design; rather, the collaborative and strategic work and

approach of dedicated instructional designers makes them uniquely equipped for leadership over online learning initiatives. Rather, faculty and professional development should focus on positioning instructional designers as leaders, teaching faculty to strengthen online teaching practices, knowledge of pedagogy, and opening the doors for meaningful collaboration.

Faculty development and instructional design. Meyer and Murrell (2014) conducted a national study of 39 universities to discover their faculty development activities related to online learning. Meyer and Murrell grouped the common types of training present in faculty development into five categories: LMS training, introduction of new technology tools, pedagogy, online resources, and instructional design principles. Study participants completed surveys on the type of content common in their faculty development activities and also in the delivery modality or training type most commonly used. The highest indicated content types related to online learning were assessment of student learning, creating community, LMS training, student learning styles, and instructional design models (Meyer & Murrell, 2014). These content areas were primarily delivered through workshops, one-on-one training sessions, hands-on sessions, and online courses (Meyer & Murrell, 2014). Meyer and Murrell discovered that faculty development topics related to technology were listed as significantly less valuable than those related to pedagogy, teaching, and instructional design. However, no further information was given related to the way faculty would use knowledge gleaned from faculty development sessions related to pedagogy and instructional design. Although these topics are of value for faculty, the authors did not indicate that the work of faculty development is to create self-sufficiency in all topics. Rather, the goal of faculty development is to educate faculty and to improve their online teaching and learning practices; these activities happen best through a collaborative approach (Meyer & Murrell, 2014).

Chen, Lowenthal, Bauer, Heaps, and Nielsen (2017) described the development of a new faculty development program in which faculty participants learned instructional design skills and positioned course design as a collaborative activity between university faculty and instructional designers. The goal was to introduce a new paradigm for course design at Boise State University in which faculty—who remained in control of their courses and content—felt empowered and motivated to design online courses with the help of faculty and designer colleagues (Chen et al., 2017). Although the designer colleagues did not provide individual collaboration for faculty in instructional design, the program positioned dedicated instructional designers as the leaders of the online learning initiative: “51 online courses were developed as a result of the eQIP” (Chen et al., 2017, p. 104). The authors took a unique approach to instructional design leadership, focusing on a scalable change in culture, perception, and process in place of collaborating on individual course designs (Chen et al., 2017). Chen et al. showed the possibilities for growth and change when dedicated instructional designers act as leaders in online learning initiatives. However, dedicated instructional designers are not always positioned as leaders in higher education; there are many barriers that prevent or delay dedicated instructional designers from affecting change and leading online learning initiatives.

Barriers for instructional designers. A report from Intentional Futures (2016) identified several key barriers instructional designers face in their work through a systematic survey of higher education instructional designers. The three biggest obstacles survey participants identified were lack of faculty buy-in, limited time and resources, and challenges with institutional leadership and initiatives (Intentional Futures, 2016). The researchers who prepared this report suggested that, because dedicated instructional designers primarily collaborate with faculty, a lack of knowledge about instructional designers from faculty—and the resulting lack of

interest in partnering with designers—is the biggest barrier to success and growth (Intentional Futures, 2016). The second biggest barrier—time and resources—has been corroborated by university administrators, who also indicated a need for more instructional design staffing while acknowledging a lack of knowledge of how or where to allocate such resources (Fredericksen, 2017). Finally, the third largest barrier—leadership and institutional challenges—indicates that instructional designers are not considered during strategic planning, and that “leadership doesn’t understand the implications of their own plans and initiatives” (Intentional Futures, 2016, p. 15). Further, the report suggested that structures are not in place to integrate and empower instructional designers, both in high-level strategic initiatives and in ownership over their own work (Intentional Futures, 2016).

Additional barriers for dedicated instructional designers include the organizational structures in place at different institutions. Although specific, relevant dimensions of organizational structure have already been discussed, these dimensions may act as significant barriers to the growth and leadership of instructional designers. The faculty-administrator relationship, often at the center of organizational conflict, places dedicated instructional designers directly in the middle (Del Favero & Bray, 2005). Because they usually report to an administrative unit, but work almost exclusively in academic-focused activities, dedicated instructional designers must navigate challenging relationships and situations created by the organizational structure of the university. Additionally, the centralization or decentralization of instructional design teams may act as a barrier to leadership (Fong et al., 2017). Although most instructional design teams are centrally organized, the size of teams and breadth of influence is often not enough to affect lasting change when curricular oversight, ownership, and program management most often rests with individual schools and academic units (Legon & Garrett,

2017). For universities to advance strategic online learning initiatives, these barriers to instructional designers must be better understood and addressed through the lens of organizational structure and leadership.

Online Learning Initiatives

Piña (2008) researched the different factors that influence the institutionalization of distance education in higher education, identifying 30 distinct factors, all of which contributed to institutionalization. Piña defined institutionalization as an idea or innovation becoming permanently embedded as a part of an organization, while adoption is only the acquisition or implementation of an idea or innovation. For online education to be institutionalized at a university, Piña (2008) surveyed two populations: faculty who teach online, and online learning leaders, organized by the academic level of their institutions. The survey consisted of 30 questions in five categories: planning, organization, resources, personnel, and student services. The three highest rated factors were infrastructure, faculty technology support, and instructional design staff, but all 30 factors were categorized as either critical or important by all survey participants (Piña, 2008). This study exemplifies the importance of developing parity between faculty who teach online and online learning leaders, including instructional designers, in the advancement of online learning initiatives. For online learning to become institutionalized, leadership by dedicated instructional designers is the key to success, particularly on two major online learning initiatives: student retention and online course and program quality.

Student retention in online programs. James, Swan, and Daston (2016) conducted a study on student retention for students from community colleges, 4-year universities, and primarily online universities participating in the Predictive Analytics Reporting (PAR) Framework across three delivery modalities: fully face to face, fully online, and blended—

students who take some classes online and some classes face to face. The researchers were primarily concerned with retention rates from the first year of enrollment to the second year and identified a set of variables that could potentially bias the data because the study was not conducted as a controlled experiment.

In community colleges, the researchers discovered that only 30% of fully online students were retained from the first year of study to the second, while blended programs had the highest retention rate of the three modalities at 58% (James et al., 2016). In every other variable tested in the community college group, fully online students had a lower retention rate than students in face-to-face or blended programs. At 4-year institutions, fully online programs also had the lowest retention at 60%; primarily online universities had a similar result, with fully online programs only retaining 31% of students. These data suggest that while a small retention gap between traditional and online programs may exist, online programs offer nontraditional students access to higher education when it was previously unlikely (James et al., 2016). Schroeder, Baker, Terras, Mahar, and Chiasson (2016) corroborated these findings, suggesting that retention rates in online, asynchronous courses are lower than those in other modalities, although they do not approach the degree of difference between modalities. Regardless, the need for higher retention rates for students drives online programs to revisit their practices, including institutional and program-specific approaches to student success. Further, they suggested that ignoring these indicators of retention loss may lead to a worsening of the initial problem, with students becoming increasingly isolated and distant.

Newhouse and Cerniak (2016) asserted that much of the research on student success related to retention has focused on demographic differences, with mixed results on “whether demographic variables, such as gender, ethnicity, and age, affect online student performance” (p.

2). The authors focused their research study on the impact of several predictors of student success on graduation rates in two online professional psychology programs. The researchers discovered four significant predictors that influence graduate rate, the primary statistic used in this study to determine student success: failing courses, academic probation, leaves of absence, and prior graduate school experience (Newhouse & Cerniak, 2016).

To uncover the elements related to online course delivery that positively influence retention, Schroeder et al. (2016) examined the levels of desired connectivity for online, asynchronous graduate students, with connectivity defined as the development of community and shared involvement. First, they shared the challenges that commonly account for dropouts and lower retention; these reasons include issues with technology, student self-discipline, and a host of others that focus on community and connection—students feeling isolated, disconnected from their institutions, and poor interactions with only faculty (Schroeder et al., 2016). Moore's (2012) theory of transactional distance, a seminal theory for distance education, confirmed that feelings of isolation and a lack of community contribute to lower rates of success and engagement on learning outcomes. To overcome these retention challenges, Schroeder et al. (2016) surveyed 327 graduate students on two areas: social presence and sense of community. They received 100 responses, for a response rate of 31%. Social presence was defined by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) in their community of inquiry model as “the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally as “real” people” (p. 94). Schroeder et al. defined a sense of community as a spirit of belonging, trust, and interaction with others, and synthesized a set of 24 questions to send to respondents focused on these two areas, actualized in four modes of connectivity: program, advisors, instructors, and classmates.

Schroeder et al. (2016) found that students wanted high levels of connectivity with their instructors and advisors, but not with their classmates. Schroeder et al. suggested that, although the level of interest in connecting with classmates was lower than the other categories, it did not mean that students desired no interaction with classmates; they further suggested that this preference indicated a hierarchy of importance: first advisors, then faculty, then the program, and last classmates. Dedicated instructional designers play a critical role in facilitating connection between learners and their classmates, as well as with their instructors, through the collaborative, intentional design of online learning experiences (Bawa & Watson, 2017). As such, student retention in online courses is a critical online learning initiative, one on which dedicated instructional designers have a unique perspective and influence.

Finally, positive indicators of retention also include the support systems in place at universities to ensure the success of students. Milman, Posey, Pintz, Wright, and Zhou (2015) researched graduate students' perceptions of the supports in place for their success in online programs. Survey participants noted that admissions and registrar's offices were the most important supports in place for them, to ensure their matriculation and semester enrollments worked smoothly (Milman et al., 2015). Additionally, nearly all respondents (98.4%) indicated that individual support from instructors was highly important to them; libraries and program advising were also listed as highly important, with 95% and 90.4%, respectively, of participants indicating that they were important supports (Milman et al., 2015). The researchers concluded that all listed supports, save a few—a substantial list—were important to student retention; they recommended further research on ways to strengthen and expand these supports (Milman et al., 2015). Milman et al. showed that student retention is an extremely complex and diverse online learning initiative, requiring the participation, input, and coordination of multiple service areas

within a university. Instructional designers, along with student advisors, program directors, faculty, registrars, and others, play a critical role in supporting the success and retention of online students.

Course quality. Although differences in quality between online and traditional modalities has often been cited as a reason for resisting online learning, learning outcomes between traditional and online courses have been widely accepted to have no significant difference, based on multiple research studies done since online learning became pervasive (James et al., 2016). A popular website, <http://www.nosignificantdifference.org>, compiled many of these stories and articles from faculty and students to visibly disprove the prevalent and incorrect assertion that traditional courses have better results on student outcomes than online courses. However, in part because this belief, though inaccurate, is still pervasive, newer research exists on the quality of online courses in light of alternate modes of delivery.

In one study, researchers evaluated student success in online courses in light of previous experience with online learning (Hixon, Barczyk, Ralston-Berg, & Buckenmeyer, 2016). The researchers used the Quality Matters (QM) Rubric—a faculty-centric tool for evaluating course structure—as the primary instrument, modified to language relevant to students and presented in a Likert-type scale. The researchers discovered that students with previous online learning experience were likely to rate the quality of online courses differently than students without prior experience (Hixon et al., 2016). However, the study used the QM rubric—which exclusively addresses the structure and usability of courses—as the primary determinant of course quality. No considerations to instructional design or pedagogy are included in the QM rubric for the quality of online courses. This significant limitation to the study raises a key concern: the lack of a comprehensive definition of course quality, inclusive of course structure, design, and content.

Without a stable definition of course quality, student or faculty perception of course quality is not an accurately measurable phenomenon. This lack of clarity stems from a flawed understanding of instructional design, which is often discussed as synonymous with instructional technology or information technology (Shaw, 2012).

Another study focused on faculty perceptions of the quality of online and blended courses. Madaus (2013) interviewed 25 faculty members from five higher education institutions; five key themes emerged during qualitative coding passes: technology, faculty workload, interactions with students, student autonomy, and quality of courses. Regarding pedagogy, faculty interviewees primarily noted a significant need for pedagogical rationales for decisions related to technology; for faculty, it is was not enough to teach online because of the availability of the technology, unless there were good pedagogical reasons for choosing to teach online (Madaus, 2013). The next theme, faculty workload, was the most heavily chosen theme of the study; interviewees cited significant concerns of the time it takes to plan, develop, and teach online courses. These concerns included time to respond to students and the laborious task of getting courses ready before students begin the semester. However, faculty interviewees also noted the benefit of flexibility in asynchronous courses, for faculty and students alike (Madaus, 2013). For the next theme, interaction with students, with interviewees noted that online formats give all learners space to contribute and receive feedback, which can be challenging in traditional contexts (Madaus, 2013). The only concern from faculty relative to this theme revolved around the lack of face-to-face time with students; they expressed concern that they would not receive nonverbal feedback or have personal connections with their students (Madaus, 2013).

The final two themes, student autonomy and course quality, focused on challenges and opportunities within online courses that are unique to the modality (Madaus, 2013). Students

must have higher self-efficacy and autonomy to be successful in online courses, which can be a mismatch for some learners. The interviewees did not have any direct concerns with regard to course quality; they did, however, note several benefits of teaching online: a more thoughtful approach to course design, diverse assessment methods, increased feedback, and periodic attitudinal surveys to gauge student growth (Madaus, 2013).

Madaus's (2013) faculty interviewees emphasized the importance of clear, purposeful course design, and that course design is a time-intensive process. There was no question as to whether online courses had the potential for high quality; rather, the suggestion was that intentional decision making regarding pedagogy, realistic expectations for time investment in development and teaching, and ensuring transparency regarding self-efficacy and autonomy for learners are the best ways for faculty to support and engage in high-quality online course design. Each of these elements is an area of direct expertise for dedicated instructional designers. Collaborating with designers when designing and developing an online course can produce higher quality courses, while mitigating or reducing the stresses and frustrations faculty identify as concerns in this study.

Summary

This literature review covered four main topics: leadership in higher education, organizational structure, instructional design, and online learning initiatives. Each area consisted of multiple subtopics, explored in detail in context of this study. While significant research existed in each area, no literature could be found on the convergence of the four, particularly in relation to the work of dedicated instructional design teams in higher education. This gap in literature supports the research question and subquestions, positioning this study to effectively determine the ways in which organizational structure influences the ability for dedicated

instructional design teams to lead online learning initiatives. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

To adequately answer the primary research question and subquestions, a qualitative paradigm was the best fit for this study. Although a quantitative survey may have been sufficient for discovering the types of organizational structures in place for dedicated instructional designers in public research universities, the literature warranted a deeper exploration of the experiences of designers, faculty, and administrators, as well as an evaluation of each organization through a systems theory framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These data have the potential for greater richness and discovery for this study than a quantitative paradigm, which would have provided information on what organizational structures are in place, but not how they influence the work of dedicated instructional designers. Further, a mixed methods approach, while useful for discovering new information through the quantitative portion of the research, would have significantly broadened the study, rendering the qualitative data less effective as a result (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative paradigm, then, best served the purpose of this study and the identified research question and subquestions.

Research Design and Method

Although the identified research questions could have been adequately answered by many different qualitative research designs, a multiple case study analysis provided the targeted scope, detail, breadth, and depth of information and experience that best suited this study. Qualitative case studies provide “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). A bounded system can be an individual, team, organization, or other single entity that is constrained by boundaries (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, a case-based research design facilitated the collection of in-depth information from participants across three cases based on the organizational structure of dedicated instructional

designers or teams at each institution. Although many qualitative case study designs focus on a single case, this study called for a multiple case study analysis between two or more cases—specifically, colleges or universities with dedicated instructional designers structured differently in each organization (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To effectively analyze the data, I conducted within-case analyses for each individual case study, then conducted a comparative analysis.

For this study, a multiple case study analysis was conducted between three public research universities; each university had a different organizational structure for their dedicated instructional design teams to conduct comparisons between the experience of dedicated instructional designers in relation to the organizational structures in which they work. Due to the organizational focus of this study, multiple cases were necessary to adequately analyze the ways different organizational structures influence dedicated instructional design teams. One case would have been insufficient because it would have provided a detailed look at a single organization, but would not reveal differences in structure that may influence leadership potential and process related to online learning initiatives. Additionally, the focus on multiple cases may improve the generalizability of the data, increasing their potential for use and guidance in choosing organizational structures that both empower dedicated instructional designers and support the advancement of institution-level online learning initiatives (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017).

Population

The population for this study consisted of three 4-year universities in the United States. Universities for this study met a short list of criteria to ensure that the research questions could be fully addressed. First, they were nonprofit institutions with both a physical campus and a significant online presence; both private and public universities were considered for this study,

but all three institutions that participated were public universities. Next, the participating universities had to have a Carnegie classification of at least Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research, and must have offered at least one graduate degree online at the master's or doctoral level. This population was appropriate for the problem to be studied and the purpose of the study because it was comprised of the types of organizations for which this study has relevance. For-profit institutions have different organizational structures and challenges, rendering them inappropriate to consider for participation in this study. Additionally, non-research-focused institutions were not included for participation in this study for similar reasons—namely, the differences in both organizational structure and challenges. Finally, universities without at least one fully online program were not considered for participation because they were outside the scope of research for this study, which included a focus on online learning initiatives.

Sampling Method

There are many possible approaches to sampling participants for a qualitative case study methodology. Saldaña and Omasta (2017) suggested that “there are no universal rules that apply to all studies” (p. 94). This study warranted a multicase sampling method to find participants from multiple sites and determine “whether particular findings hold true only at a particular site or more broadly” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017, p. 95). Additionally, I used purposive sampling to identify specific organizations and individual participants to ensure that the data collected were relevant to the research questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017).

One method of purposive sampling is to narrow down potential participants to a particular region of the United States. However, I chose an alternative approach: selecting organizations and participants based on the type of institution, guided by specific purposive sampling criteria. For this study, I chose a purposive sampling method based on the criteria

listed in the population section. Additionally, institutions eligible for this sample had to have at least one fully online program, a team or teams of dedicated instructional designers, and had to fit one of the three organizational structures to be evaluated in this study: a centralized dedicated instructional design team with academic reporting lines and distributed curricular authority, a centralized dedicated instructional design team with administrative reporting lines and distributed curricular authority, or a decentralized or blended-structure instructional design team, with either academic or administrative reporting lines, and distributed curricular authority.

I evaluated approximately 50 institutions to ascertain their compatibility with the study, using purposive sampling. After discovering a university that fit one of the three identified organizational structures, I contacted an individual at that university to explain the study and ask for participation. I stopped contacting potential case sites once three universities (each of which met one of the three unique organizational structure profiles) had agreed to participate in the study.

After selecting the three cases through multicase, purposive sampling, I conducted additional purposive sampling to identify participants for the semistructured interviews at each university, based on the unique attributes of the organization, the needs of the study, and the availability and willingness of individuals in each organization (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). Participants from each case consisted of individuals with one of three distinct roles: dedicated instructional designer, online faculty member, or online learning administrator. I chose to limit the number of participants to three individuals per role at each university to ensure that data collection from each case was feasible for the comparative case analysis, in alignment with Creswell (2014). The number of participants from each case site provided ample data for both

within-case analysis and comparative case analysis, allowed for triangulation of collected data, and supported the identified research question and subquestions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017).

To identify the most appropriate individuals to participate in the study, I selected job title categories, evaluated job descriptions, and reviewed website biographies and additional qualifications, when available. This process took place for each identified role at each case site to ensure consistency and relevancy of all study participants and to ensure the research question and subquestions were sufficiently addressed. I interviewed four professionals from the first university, three from the second, and three from the final university that participated in the study.

Research Materials and Instruments

I developed the research materials based on the identified research question and subquestions. I developed three semistructured interview protocols—one for each role type—with input and guidance from the dissertation chair and committee. The interview protocols were field-tested by a focus group of subject matter experts and by the dissertation chair and committee. The focus group provided feedback on each question to ensure relevance and validity of the instrument. I did not use field notes because none of the participating universities invited me to observe meetings or interactions. No qualitative analysis software was used to aid in the analysis of coded data.

To reduce the inconvenience to participants and myself, all interviews were conducted off-site through video conferencing software. I used Zoom, a video conferencing tool commonly used in higher education, both for familiarity and accessibility of the tool. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, de-identified, and stored on a secured, encrypted hard drive to ensure anonymity and security for all participants. I utilized a transcriptionist for all interviews; all

data, including audio files and finished transcripts, were uploaded to a secure cloud server to avoid exposing the data and participants to greater security risk.

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted a series of semistructured interviews with online learning administrators, online faculty members, and dedicated instructional designers from each of the three participating universities; each interview was scheduled for 60–90 minutes in duration. Interviews were conducted in a semistructured format with a balance of formal questions and follow-up questions, based on participant responses and the discretion of the researcher (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). Interview questions were developed based on the research questions and included topics directly related to the research study: (a) online learning initiatives to be pursued; (b) organizational structure of the dedicated instructional designers and teams; (c) approaches to leadership by administration and designers; (d) quality and type of working relationships with university faculty and staff; (e) program and course design and evaluation practices; and (f) decision-making process by designers, administrators, and relevant governing bodies. These interviews formed the basis of data collection for the study, along with document analysis, which I used to evaluate documents from each university that were relevant to the study, including course syllabi, departmental processes, organizational charts, course design documents, policies, and university websites (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). I also listed direct observation as an optional data collection method; however, I was not given opportunities for direct observation at any meetings for the participating universities. Data collection took place over a total duration of 3 months, and was subject to the schedules and availability of interview participants.

The semistructured interviews, which comprised the majority of the data collected, were transcribed verbatim, de-identified, and coded through three a priori and emergent passes in

process, values, and causation codes (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). Process coding focuses on gerunds to reveal action, participation, and interaction (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017, p. 126). Values coding emphasizes values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017, p. 128). Causation coding is used to analyze causes and outcomes (Saldaña, 2017). These three coding structures are well suited for the identified research questions for this study. The interviews produced a significant amount of data; to effectively analyze such a large quantity of information, organization and intentionality were of critical importance.

Methods for establishing trustworthiness. To ensure the credibility of the study, I chose well-established research methods, including data collection and analysis, as well as a plan for confirming the validity of all instruments used to collect data (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, I familiarized myself with the culture of each participating organization and worked to prevent prolonged engagement to ensure no researcher bias was introduced into the study, as recommended by Shenton (2004). Additionally, I gave research participants opportunities prior to data collection to refuse participation, and encouraged honesty through building a rapport with each participant, in alignment with Shenton (2004).

To support the transferability of the findings from this study, I ensured that all boundaries of the study were clearly described to provide all relevant and necessary information for readers of the study to make informed judgments on transferability to specific situations and contexts (Shenton, 2004). The following items, suggested by Shenton (2004) as critical for making an informed decision on transferability, were clearly stated: the number of organizations, the data collection methods, the number and duration of data collection sessions, and the length of time over which data collection occurred. Dependability of the study, or ensuring that replication of the study will result in similar findings, was assured through the meticulous description of the

research design, details on the process and practice of collecting data, and reflection on the effectiveness of the data collection methods chosen (Shenton, 2004).

Finally, to ensure the confirmability of the study, I chose multiple data collection methods for triangulation of the data, both at individual case sites and during comparative analysis of the data (Shenton, 2004). While triangulation is important to ensure credibility of the study, it is critical to reduce the effect of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). To this end, I committed to rigorous detail of the data collection methods and transparency on the reasons for selecting each collection method, both through a detailed description of the research design and through meticulous reporting on the process of data collection (Shenton, 2004).

Researcher's role. In this study, I acted as both an objective observer of events and processes through document analysis and as subjective participant in semistructured interviews, in which the researcher may guide conversation and questions toward areas of particular interest and relevance to the study. In qualitative research designs, the researcher acts as an active part of the study itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I therefore collected data from participants with whom I had no prior personal relationship to reduce the likelihood of introducing undue bias during data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study was submitted to and approved by the Abilene Christian University (ACU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to any sampling procedures or data collection. All personal data gathered from humans were de-identified, anonymized, and stored on secure, encrypted computers and hard drives; no data were stored in cloud servers that are not HIPAA- and FERPA-compliant to protect all participant information. I approached potential participants with full disclosure of the purpose, methods, and process for protecting all data collected. I

upheld and followed the ethical guidelines set forth by the National Institute of Health (NIH) and Belmont Report to ensure all elements of the study were conducted ethically. I also made sure to receive informed consent from all participants prior to all data collection, and no data were collected until the ACU IRB gave full approval of the research study.

Limitations. Although many universities employ dedicated instructional designers, they do not all share the same definition for the roles and responsibilities of dedicated instructional designers. Many dedicated instructional designers operate as faculty support, while others act as collaborators in the design of courses and programs. Still others may be primarily academic technologists with instructional designer titles. These differences in roles for dedicated instructional designers may have influenced the scope of the study and the selection of cases for the study. Further, existing conditions in each case site, such as changes in leadership or finances, may have influenced the study. Other limitations included the time for data collection, which was dependent on the timelines and schedules of each participating university; the availability of potential study participants; the quality and availability of resources and documentation for document analysis from each university; and the number of participants at each case site required to interview until reaching data saturation.

Delimitations. This study was limited in scope to research universities in the United States; the case selection was intentionally guided by this criterion. This decision provided a focused perspective on the ways organizational structures influence dedicated instructional designers in a large subset of higher education institutions. Additionally, this study addressed specific role types in higher education: online faculty members, online learning administrators, and dedicated instructional designers who all work in online learning delivery models. Although the study may have relevance in traditional university roles and settings outside of online

environments, they were not a direct part of this study. Rank and tenure of faculty participants is a further delimitation of the study; although faculty participants must have full-time appointments, no further criteria related to rank or tenure was provided for potential participants.

Although other methodologies may have been viable options to answer the research questions and address the problem of practice, multiple case studies were chosen as the methodology due to the wider possibility of generalizing the findings of the study. Other methodologies, while valuable, would not have provided sufficient breadth or diversity of data necessary to sufficiently address the research questions and problem of practice. Finally, data collection was conducted at a distance through technologies commonly used in online education. The reason for this delimitation was primarily for convenience, both for myself and for all participants in the study.

Assumptions. I assumed that the interview participants in this qualitative study answered questions honestly. I further assumed that all study participants were honest about meeting the required criteria for participation, including full-time employment status, formal and informal roles in the organization, and the organizational structures in place at each case site. Finally, I assumed that study participants were not motivated to participate for any ulterior purpose, such as personal gain.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the research design, research materials and instruments, population and sampling, methods for data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations for the study. I employed a qualitative, multiple case-based research design of three institutions of higher education with differing organizational structures for their instructional design teams. The population for this study was nonprofit, 4-year public or private institutions of higher education

with a Carnegie classification of Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity or higher and at least one fully online graduate program. A multicase, purposive sampling method was used to select each case; further purposive sampling was conducted at each case site to identify participants from the three identified roles: dedicated instructional designer, online faculty, and online learning administrator.

Data collection procedures consisted of two approaches to ensure triangulation of the data: semistructured interviews guided by field-tested interview protocols, and document analysis on organizational policies, processes, initiatives, and professional materials. Interview data were transcribed, de-identified, and coded using values, causation, and process coding in both a priori and emergent coding passes. I waited to conduct any sampling procedures or data collection until after receiving full approval from the ACU IRB.

A within-case analysis of the first case study, Southeast Public University (pseudonym), is provided in Chapter 4. Within-case analyses of Great Plains Public University (pseudonym) and Midwest Public University (pseudonym) are provided in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. A comparative analysis, which includes all three institutions chosen for this study, is provided in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, I present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for implementation and further study.

Chapter 4: Results From Southeast Public University

Southeast Public University, a pseudonym for one of the three universities selected to participate in this study, is a public research institution founded in 1963 and located in the southeastern United States. Its initial mission was focused on providing advanced education to employees of local engineering and technology organizations, and specifically for the U.S. space program. Southeast Public University officially opened in 1968, with an inaugural enrollment of 1,891—nearly 400 more students than university officials had expected. Significant enrollment growth continued for the institution, particularly through its pioneering work in online learning for higher education. Current enrollments of Southeast Public University exceed 67,000 students across 13 colleges and more than 200 degrees. Some 44% of graduates leave Southeast Public University with no educational debt, and 45% of students who attend are minorities. Southeast Public University has a main campus, a hospitality campus, a health sciences campus, 12 regional locations, and a fully online virtual campus comprised of more than 80 online degrees and certificates.

Southeast Public University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award degrees at all levels: associate, baccalaureate, master's, specialist, and doctoral. The university is also accredited by a host of other scientific, professional, and academic bodies that confer discipline-specific accreditations, including the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). Southeast Public University confers more than 15,000 degrees per year, has more than 12,000 faculty and staff, and holds a Carnegie classification of Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity. The university lists five key values as its guiding

principles for the university, its students, and its employees: integrity, scholarship, community, creativity, and excellence.

Southeast Public University is consistently ranked as one of the top institutions in the United States for online courses and programs, including a 2018 ranking in the top 20 institutions for online bachelor's programs by *U.S. News & World Report*. Within the fields of instructional design and online learning, the institution is respected as a hub of innovation and research because of its consistent record of delivering new research, most recently in the areas of blended learning—best practices in mixed modality education—and adaptive learning, or computer-mediated learning activities that change based on the inputs of the learner.

Southeast Public University has recently gone through an executive-level reorganization for its digital and online learning departments; multiple teams and resources were combined into the new Digital Learning Division. This division is led by a vice provost of digital learning, with direct reporting lines to the provost, and houses approximately 150 staff across all teams. It is comprised of six distinct teams varying greatly in size and scope, and oversees initiatives in multimedia development, classroom technology, mobile learning, and a practice-oriented innovation lab. The largest team, known as the Online Learning Center, has multiple teams that act as the central hub of online learning activity and expertise for the university. Responsibilities of the Online Learning Center include leadership of distance learning policies and strategies, collaboration with internal and external partners in the design and development of courses and programs, faculty development, and research focused on digital education in online and blended modalities. The Online Learning Center houses the instructional design team, which is the largest single team in the Digital Learning Division.

The instructional design team is comprised of a director, three team leads, and 20 full-time, faculty-rank instructional designers varying in experience and seniority. Each team lead oversees personnel related to their specific area of expertise: course design, adaptive learning, or strategic initiatives and professional development. In addition to the three instructional design teams, the director who oversees instructional design also leads teams focused on faculty technical support and university-wide LMS administration (see Figure 1).

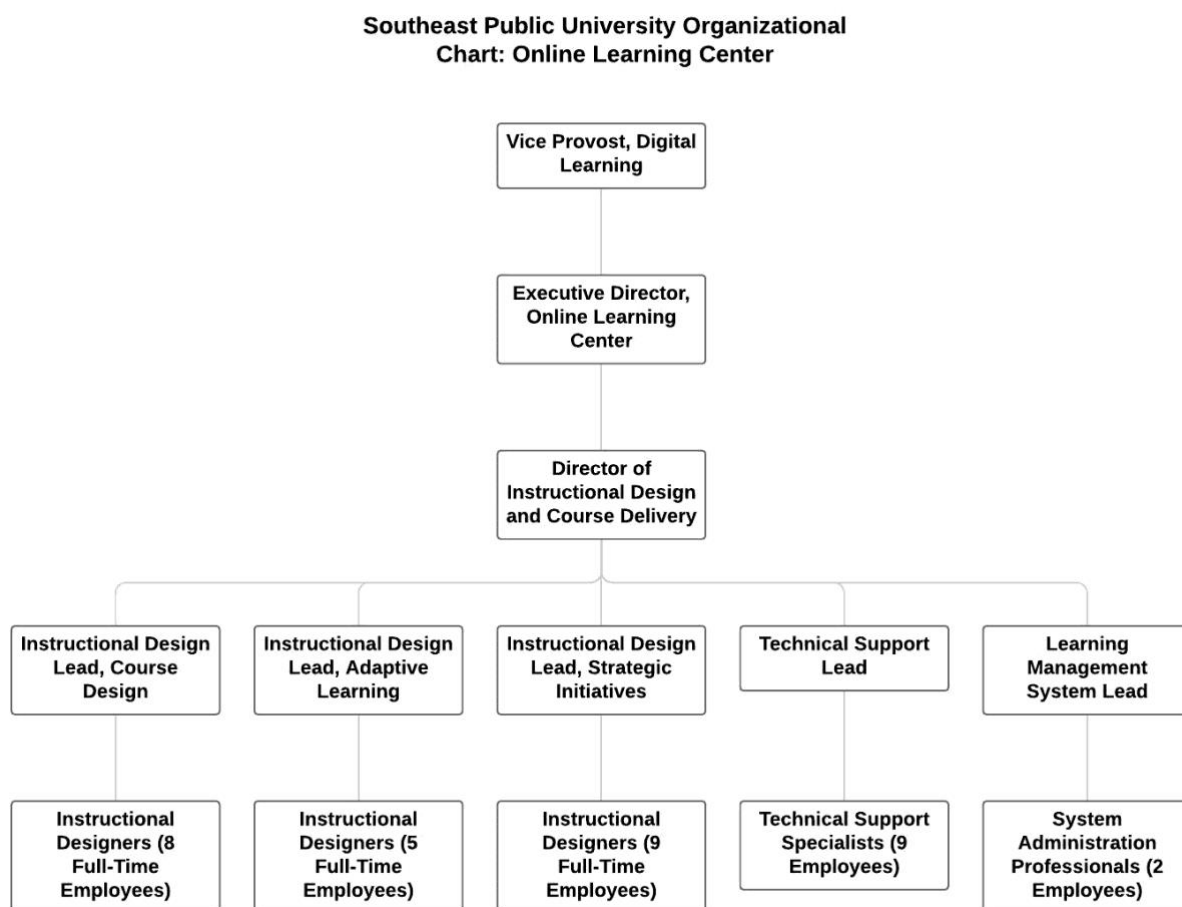


Figure 1. Organizational chart of the instructional design team of the Southeast Public University Online Learning Center.

The primary work of the instructional design team is to facilitate the design and development of online courses with faculty through a consultative design approach and ongoing

professional development. Each instructional designer has a workload of 60 faculty assigned to them by academic discipline. Although each instructional designer may have faculty from a few primary disciplines, there is no formalized relationship between instructional designers and the academic units to which they are assigned. As such, an instructional designer's workload may be consolidated with a few disciplines or distributed more broadly across the university, as needed. As unionized faculty members, all instructional designers at Southeast Public University are under the collective bargaining agreement for the university and, as such, their time and availability is subject to the agreement. Their workload percentages are distributed as follows: 85% on the design of online courses and working with faculty, 10% on scholarly research, and 5% on service to the university.

All faculty who teach online at Southeast Public University are required to take one of two professional development courses prior to teaching. The first course is designed for faculty who are teaching an existing course over which they have no design or development authority. This course is self-paced and covers pedagogical and technological elements of delivering an effective online course. The second course is the flagship of the Online Learning Center, a facilitated professional development course, and is required for faculty who want to develop an original online or blended modality course. The course focuses on pedagogy, technology, and relationships with instructional designers, with the intended goal of coaching faculty in best practices for designing an online or blended course, as well as utilizing the significant expertise of the instructional designers. The time expectation on faculty is a minimum of 80 hours, during which faculty will design and develop their new courses, culminating in a showcase of new courses for each cohort of faculty. These courses act as the starting point and the cornerstone of the relationships between faculty and instructional designers at Southeast Public University.

Both of these courses, as well as other professional development offerings for faculty, are designed, taught, and managed by the instructional design team from the Online Learning Center.

I contacted the executive director of the Online Learning Center to determine whether Southeast Public University fit the purposive sampling criteria and one of the three identified structure profiles of the study. The university met the required criteria as an accredited public doctoral research institution with at least one online graduate program. Additionally, Southeast Public University met the first structure profile: a fully centralized online learning team with an academic reporting structure—in this case, through a vice provost of digital learning—with distributed curricular authority resting in their 13 colleges. The executive director agreed to have the university participate in the study after verifying through their Internal Review Board that no additional review was necessary beyond my existing Internal Review Board approval.

Interviews

The executive director of the Online Learning Center recommended three professionals from each of two role types—dedicated instructional designer and faculty member—and two for administrators, including himself and the vice provost for digital learning, for one-on-one semistructured interviews. Each potential interview participant was contacted via e-mail and provided the informed consent form and a brief overview of the research study. All three instructional designers responded with interest, but two were unavailable to meet within the data collection period for the study. The last instructional designer responded and indicated willingness to participate by signing an informed consent form. Of the three faculty members contacted, only one responded; that faculty member indicated a willingness to participate via the signed consent form. Both administrators responded and agreed to participate, indicated through

the signed consent form. I scheduled 90-minute interviews with each of the four interview participants from Southeast Public University.

Julia (a pseudonym), the dedicated instructional designer interviewed, is an associate instructional designer with faculty rank, organized under the course design subteam. Mike (a pseudonym), the faculty member interviewed, is from Southeast Public University College of Nursing and has an additional role of program director for a high-enrollment online baccalaureate program. Brian (a pseudonym), the executive director of the Online Learning Center and the first administrator interviewed, has direct oversight of each director in the center, as well as supervision of the instructional designers' faculty promotion plan. Demitri (a pseudonym), the vice provost for digital learning—the second administrator interviewed—oversees each unit in his division and maintains a strategic view of operations and decisions in the university as a whole. All interviews were conducted through Zoom, a video conferencing tool. Each participant is identified in this study through pseudonyms (see Table 1).

Table 1

Southeast Public University Participant Pseudonyms

Participant role	Number of participants per role	Participant pseudonyms
Dedicated instructional designer	1	Julia
Online faculty member	1	Mike
Online learning administrator	2	Brian; Demitri

Dedicated instructional designer interview protocol. I used a unique semistructured interview protocol for each role type: one for dedicated instructional designers (see Appendix B), one for online faculty (See Appendix C), and one for online learning administrators (see

Appendix D). Many questions were the same across all three protocols, but addressed different populations based on the perspective of the interview participant.

Analysis overview. I analyzed the responses to these questions across three coding passes, ensuring that each code was relevant to the research questions of the study. In two coding passes, I analyzed responses through emergent codes, focusing on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the participants, in addition to one causation code for exploring causal links between decisions and situational context. In the final coding pass, I analyzed responses through a priori codes, focusing on process codes that signified actions or decisions common across all transcripts. Clear categories emerged from the coding of responses, resulting in a series of common themes. The themes that emerged from Southeast Public University were (a) positive/negative structure, (b) positive/negative relationships, (c) instructional designers as leaders/not leaders, (d) instructional designers as partners/not partners, (e) instances of collaboration or no collaboration, (f) empowerment/disempowerment, (g) scale or growth, and (h) instructional designers as support.

The theme of positive/negative structure related to the organizational structure in place positively or negatively informing one's success, work, well-being, or perception. The theme of positive/negative relationships was defined as perception of the relationships in the organization as either positive or negative, and as influencing the organization in positive or negative ways. The theme of instructional designers as leaders/not leaders was defined as a belief that instructional designers play/do not play a clear leadership role in the organization. The theme of instructional designers as partners/not partners related to actions that indicated that instructional designers were treated or not treated as experts, consultants, and partners who are equal in value and influence with faculty. The theme of instances of collaboration or no collaboration was

defined as actions that indicated that collaboration was or was not happening in the organizational culture or situation being discussed. I defined the theme of empowerment/disempowerment as actions that empowered or disempowered the interviewee or a situation that shows empowerment or disempowerment happening in the organization. The theme of scale or growth related to decisions, situations, or outcomes that were influenced or caused by growth or the size of the university or its resources. Finally, the theme of instructional designers as support was defined as attitudes that indicated that instructional designers acted as or were treated as support staff with low expertise, rather than collaborators toward a shared vision/mission. These themes are also summarized in the coding matrix found in Appendix E.

Positive or negative structure. When asked if the organizational structure of the university contributed to or inhibited success in the organization, all four participants indicated that, while small concerns may occasionally come up, the structure itself was largely positive and contributed to success in their individual roles, as well as to the success of the institution itself. There was a common perception that the Online Learning Center had earned its broad institutional support through demonstrated expertise and evidence of effectiveness. The instructional designer participant stated,

We didn't just ask for money, we had the statistics to show why and how it was going to make him [the president of the university] look better, and so we always just really had support. Because we grew and we could prove it. (Julia)

The online faculty participant noted that the structure allowed for many decisions to be made by committee in each individual college, with recommendations being taken seriously by administrators operating at the institutional level: "it really is very supportive. And outside of my individual college, Southeast Public University is very pro distance education" (Mike). Brian provided historical context, outlining the journey by which the Online Learning Center

was reorganized. It initially existed under the information technology division, which also reported through the provost. Brian shared the following:

More recently, with its own division of digital learning, it's kind of out from under the IT shadow or umbrella. But it's still under the provost. And, so, I think that second part of it, it's framed as a fundamentally academic serving enterprise, not as a technology function. (Brian)

Demitri also suggested that the digital learning division, due to its academic reporting structure through the provost, helped the online learning portion of the university to be recognized as "a solution to problems or as a toolset for accomplishing objectives. So that I think is good. I think we get great support from our senior administration" (Demitri).

All participants indicated that the university president and senior leadership were significant supporters and advocates of online learning. Demitri focused on that support as evidenced by the substantial size of their online learning operation, a sentiment echoed by the other participants, and the perception change around online learning that has happened since the recent creation of the digital learning division:

I do think there is a perception change. And maybe I'm projecting a little bit. But the fact that we got moved into our own division, and the division is called digital learning by our now president, I think is a statement about what he thinks about the importance of it. And he talks about it all the time, so that helps as well. Talks about digital learning all the time. And I think that helps to elevate the fact, the, elevate what we do to that earlier point that I made, that it's a strategy to accomplish the institution's missions. (Demitri)

While each participant focused on the organizational structure from the perspective of senior leadership, they each also focused on the structure from their own level or position of authority. Julia, the dedicated instructional designer, focused on the structure of her team and the Online Learning Center, specifically smaller scale reorganizations within the instructional design team that were made to better align designers with projects, under more direct leadership by a team lead. Mike focused on the College of Nursing and the nature of shared governance between faculty and the dean of nursing, as well as the nature and authority of the curriculum

committee. Both administrator participants focused exclusively at the senior leadership level of the institution, indicating a separation in thinking between roles that sit lower in the reporting structure and those that report higher up.

When asked about the clarity of roles for both instructional designers and online learning administrators, participants indicated that the roles for instructional designers were clearly defined. The organizational structure, according to participants, strengthened role clarity specifically for instructional designers, as relayed by Demitri:

Yeah, it's mostly my team, I would say. They're pretty centralized. We don't have instructional designers or other administrators embedded in colleges, or something like some schools do. We've tried to centralize everything. And what we've tried to do is just provide, like really awesome service to kind of keep that at bay, because I get that request every so often. Like, "I want an ID in my college." But that, I think that limits our ability to serve the greater good if we had people kind of just out everywhere.

The intentional centralization of administrative resources, specifically online learning resources and teams, indicated a deep commitment to institutional goals and a perspective that instructional designers were critical to those goals and the mission of the university at large. In addition, the centralization of instructional designers and online learning resources reinforced the separation of authority between faculty and administration—specifically between institution-level initiatives and curricular authority. Demitri stated, "So, anything that might have academics associated with it, that might be considered an academic decision, rests with the deans. So ultimately, whether a program goes online, who teaches it, is the chair and the dean's decision." Further, Demitri suggested that his role as a senior online administrator was to act as an advisor to deans and program chairs and an advocate for the teams under the digital learning division. He noted that there was "a strong culture of faculty autonomy and academic freedom, and we have to work from that level of influence as opposed to authority" (Demitri). This statement suggested that a culture of respect and collaboration between faculty and

administrators was both desirable and active at the institution. Mike also focused on the division of authority, suggesting that online learning initiatives, specifically “the large-scale stuff around student success really should be at the university level” (Mike). In short, Mike focused on the authority of administrators, and Demitri focused on the authority of faculty; both came to positive conclusions about the division of authority, which suggested that the structure of the university supported and empowered them in their respective areas of focus.

For all interview participants, a recurrent focus on the status of instructional designers as faculty uncovered both positive and negative aspects to this unique structural element. Demitri stated, “In fact, our instructional designers are faculty. We have a unionized faculty here. And they are covered by the collective bargaining agreement. They have a promotion plan. They’re nontenure, uh, noninstructional. Kind of like librarians.” Julia brought up her faculty status in the first question of the interview and revisited it multiple times. Specifically, she recognized the research emphasis in her work, and that it both advanced the reputation of the university externally and helped build parity between the teaching faculty and instructional designers. Mike expressed this same position, noting that as faculty, the dedicated instructional designers maintained the same rank as other faculty, which “gives them equal footing in the political world” (Mike). According to all participants, dedicated instructional designers held equal value and voice with faculty, including in the determination of their time investment for promotion activities, as informed by their unionized status.

Julia detailed the breakdown of her time as a faculty instructional designer: 85% on working with faculty, 10% on scholarly research, and 5% on service. The breakdown of responsibilities reflected the promotion plan mentioned by Demitri. This distribution of responsibilities came somewhat recently to ensure the dedicated instructional designers remained

focused primarily on their work with faculty, while also respecting their rights and status as unionized faculty (Brian). Brian further noted that this change was a direct result of both administrators and instructional designers unintentionally neglecting the complexity of holding unionized faculty status:

We didn't necessarily, for a long time, recognize the bargained rights and responsibilities of our faculty instructional designers. We just didn't. None of us who were involved on either side, faculty or administrator, really didn't, we weren't clued in enough. (Brian)

While the unionized faculty status held significant value for dedicated instructional designers at Southeast Public University, it also created unique challenges. Demitri noted that the unionized faculty status of instructional designers sometimes slowed down or got in the way of critical decisions for the department, and occasionally made him question the level of trust that the designers had in him as the leader of their division:

And I think we have a really good, you know, relationship between the administrators of this unit and the folks doing the work, like the instructional designers. But, every once in a while, something pops up like that, and you're sort of like, you know, really? Do you really think I'm trying to infringe on your rights? I'm just, we're just trying to build courses [laughter]. And then we have the conversation, everything is fine. (Demitri)

Julia shared a similar challenge: instructional designers are not regularly consulted on their availability prior to commitment to new projects by the administrators of the digital learning division. While Demitri expressed a belief that time commitment challenges were a result of the unionized faculty status of the instructional designers, Julia indicated that it was more an issue of preparation and awareness of the existing workload of the instructional designers. She did note, however, that "we're not given anything and then not able to do a good job at it. It's just that, we'd like to prepare for it more" (Julia). Julia also noted that when she expressed concerns about workload, the administrators of the division were receptive and supportive of changes to ensure the quality of work remained high. All participants indicated

that the faculty status of instructional designers was generally positive, and helped to situate instructional designers in a more favorable place within the structure of the institution.

The structure theme only included one largely negative element, expressed by Demitri: the financial model of the institution was not designed to support and scale the Online Learning Center and Digital Learning Division. The budget model was somewhat recently revised in a few key ways: standardizing the cost of a credit hour across all modalities, and returning revenue generated through credit hours to the college of origin. However, this budget model change did not affect central administrative units like the Digital Learning Division; as a result, it is funded exclusively through distance learning fees, which are far lower at Southeast Public University than at institutions much smaller in size. The budget model, then, has become a significant challenge for the administrators, and Demitri noted, “if I can’t get the fee increased, we’re going to have to make some hard decisions because we’re kind of overspending our revenue right now.” However, Demitri also recognized that their funding and support is still significant, and that even without budget model changes or an increase in distance learning student fees, the digital learning division is well funded and well situated within the structure of the organization.

Positive or negative relationships. The second theme focused on the nature of relationships between the three role types interviewed: dedicated instructional designers, online faculty members, and online learning administrators. Instances of negative relationships were rare. Julia indicated that there are rarely instances of negativity in relationships between faculty and dedicated instructional designers—primarily when faculty misinterpret or do not understand the role instructional design. This lack of understanding became problematic when a faculty member expected Julia to provide technical support, which is outside the scope of her work. However, Mike relied on her status as a faculty member to help reinforce her role and the value

of a shared relationship between faculty and instructional designers: “Because we are faculty, I think it helps with our relationship that we have with our faculty who we are working with. I think I feel like it’s more a peer-to-peer relationship than it is tech support.” Further, Mike shared that he had an extremely positive 12-year working relationship with a previous designer, and has an equally as positive relationship with the designer with whom he currently works.

Relationships between instructional designers and faculty, according to both interview participants, have been positive, except for the challenges with misinterpreting the role of dedicated instructional designers as technical support.

In regard to relationships between faculty and administrators, Mike suggested that conflict only happened between faculty and administrators when administrators attempted to influence academic decisions. The example he gave focused on “when they [administrators] attempt to make generic institution-level policies and procedures that don’t fit the discipline” (Mike). Mike only experienced frustration with relationships between faculty and administration when decisions negatively affected his teaching. However Mike indicated that the majority of the time, administrators did not make decisions that adversely affected his teaching. Rather, the administrators enacted a faculty advisory committee to establish a forum for faculty leaders to provide input and direction on decisions that affected them and their students. As a member of this advisory committee, Mike shared that dedicated instructional designers, as faculty members, also served on the advisory board, ensuring that administrators had the input and perspective of relevant stakeholders before making pervasive decisions. He indicated a clear commitment from administrators to open communication and shared his belief that Southeast Public University is a collegial and positive environment: “But I work with a lot of people who’ve been at other

schools. And they swear that they are never leaving here, because it's such a positive, collegial, nice, environment. We play well in the sandbox here" (Mike).

Finally, when asked about the relationships between administrators and instructional designers, all participants shared that they were overwhelmingly positive; the only challenges regarding relationships between the two were related to the collective bargaining agreement, as shared in the previous section on structure. Although there were examples shared of relationships either turning or being negative, they were the overwhelming minority; all interview participants shared the same perspective as Mike that Southeast Public University is a collegial environment, conducive to good relationships and collaboration.

Collaboration. For the purposes of this study, the collaboration theme focused on situations or decisions when collaboration did or did not happen. Demitri provided some historical context to the collaborative work of the Online Learning Center. He shared that prior to the current structure of the Online Learning Center, three distinct units existed in the same space: one focused on strategic planning for online alongside college deans, one focused on research, and one focused on course design. Questions of authority were raised when the strategy-focused team would commit resources from the course design team without having direct oversight. There was a clear need for collaboration and realignment of resources to accomplish that collaboration. Demitri shared that he was brought to Southeast Public University and immediately tasked with consolidating those three units; that new unit became the Online Learning Center. From the structural perspective, the Online Learning Center—and by extension, the Digital Learning Division—were partially created to align and facilitate collaboration between units with similar goals and foci.

Beyond this historical context, there were three primary contexts in which collaboration was explored by the interview participants: online program development, course design, and strategic initiatives. For program design, the collaboration happened primarily between online learning administrators and faculty. Both Brian and Demitri noted an exception, however, in the design and development of the Master of Social Work program. The dean of the college had decided to put the program fully online, and they were converting courses into nontraditional terms to accommodate a different audience of learners. This project required significant expertise and guidance from dedicated instructional designers; Demitri assigned a dedicated instructional designer as a project lead who coordinated the work of two other instructional designers, and that person also “kind of had a bird’s eye view of the whole thing, served as the relationship manager with the social work folks” (Demitri). Brian also mentioned the master of social work degree project, and similarly indicated that a dedicated instructional designer acted as a point person for the project. This example, however, was not the norm, even though both administrators acknowledged that the dedicated instructional designers both enjoy and had significant expertise in program-level design management.

Mike suggested that, while collaboration certainly happened between administrators and faculty for new programs, dedicated instructional designers were not involved in curriculum and program design until individual courses needed to be designed. When asked about dedicated instructional designers consulting on program design, Mike stated,

No, the framework of the entire program, no, no. No, we’re not set up to be able to do that. Although that’s an interesting premise. But no. Scaffolding of the programs is all up to us in our curriculum committees.

The idea of dedicated instructional designers working on program design seemed familiar and desirable to both online learning administrators, but unfamiliar to Mike. When asked about the possibility of collaboration on program design, Julia similarly suggested that program design

work has been an optional and rare opportunity for instruction designers, only available when a faculty member in a position of authority asked for consultation related to program design. Julia also brought up the Master in Social Work degree as one example, but when asked to clarify about the involvement of dedicated instructional designers in collaboration on programs, she stated, “Yeah, I wouldn’t say the instructional design team is involved very much in that. Again, I think those are initially done with our exec team out to the faculty and, and their exec team” (Julia). Although dedicated instructional designers hold faculty positions and equal value and influence to other faculty, participating in curricular work was outside the scope of their current and expected responsibilities, but not outside their scope of expertise.

Although the Master of Social Work program was one good example of collaboration happening between all three role types interviewed, the prevalent theme was that dedicated instructional designers rarely participated in program design projects. However, all participants recognized the significant collaboration that happened between faculty and dedicated instructional designers in the design of individual courses. When asked about the ways that dedicated instructional designers work with faculty on courses, Brian stated, “I don’t really do pithy, but I’ll give you a one-word answer to that: interdependently.” Faculty, dedicated instructional designers, and online learning administrators alike saw dedicated instructional designers as key collaborators with faculty in course design. Brian went further on a related question: “I think primarily, at the end of the day, it’s about building a relationship with the teaching faculty who are designing and teaching our online and blended courses. I mean, that’s, I think that’s the center of the bullseye” (Brian).

Demitri described the collaboration between faculty and dedicated instructional designers as “professional peers working together with the same objective.” Julia echoed this perspective,

suggesting that dedicated instructional designers work primarily one-on-one as equal collaborators with faculty: “we are partners in crime.” Further, the dedicated instructional designers acted as the liaisons to other services offered in the Online Learning Center. Demitri revealed that the reason for this approach was to ensure that dedicated instructional designers had opportunities to advise faculty before committing resources, specifically when they requested video production or instructional games for their courses. Mike described collaboration with a previous dedicated instructional designer when working on an LMS transition. He and the dedicated instructional designer acted in a symbiotic relationship, each teaching the other new things about the technology, and working together to solve challenges as they arose (Mike).

Each of the four interview participants described the course design work of dedicated instructional designers as collaborative, and shared instances of that collaboration in action. In terms of online learning at Southeast Public University, collaboration has been most present in the one-on-one work of design courses between faculty and dedicated instructional designers. Less frequent, but critical to the success of the institution, is collaboration on strategic initiatives between online learning administrators and faculty leaders.

Such collaboration on strategic work has been consistently initiated by Demitri; he shared that he meets with every dean every semester to discuss data, growth trajectories, and strategies. He posited that each college is unique, and has unique needs that drive those conversations. Demitri, when expanding on those meetings with each dean, shared his role in the collaborative efforts: “And my job, I see, is to figure out how to align the resources of the Digital Learning Division to help accomplish each dean’s objectives.” Dedicated instructional designers, though less commonly involved in strategy discussions, also had the potential for strategic impact (Brian). It was clear to all participants that the division of authority between academic and

administrative teams at Southeast Public University required close collaboration on strategic initiatives; the pervasive perception, according to participants, was that collaboration is a critical part of the identity and practice of both the Digital Learning Division and the Online Learning Center, and that it extends to key constituents within the university.

Instructional designers as partners. In the theme related to partnership, I examined situations, decisions, and actions in which dedicated instructional designers were treated or not treated as experts, consultants, and partners with influence and value equal to faculty. Dedicated instructional designers and faculty at Southeast Public University have acted as partners in the design of courses, united through the shared mission of quality teaching and student success. When discussing the clarity of roles for dedicated instructional designers, Mike suggested that the instructional designer with whom he had been working acknowledged her lack of content knowledge expertise about nursing, and that such a separation in skills and experience helped ensure that the relationship did not become contentious, “because we don’t ever get into discussions about what is and what is not correct on subject matter” (Mike). A distinct separation of skills and expertise, from Mike’s perspective, was critical to him seeing the dedicated instructional designer as a partner during collaborative course design work. This collaboration is consistent with the workload distribution of dedicated instructional designers, discussed by Demitri; designers are often assigned to faculty by college, but collaboration with faculty across the university is based on need, as subject matter expertise is not a prerequisite for instructional designers who operate primarily in a consultative role. Mike asserted that this distinction of expertise prevented disputes on content, and made partnership a more likely outcome.

Julia had a different perspective related to partnership. She emphasized her background as a teacher, and that many of her instructional designer colleagues shared that common background experience. When discussing how that shared background influenced her work alongside other designers, Julia shared that this was her primary motivation for working as an instructional designer, and felt commonality with her colleagues on this shared mission: “we all want, not only for the faculty to be successful, but [also] in our hearts, we want the students to be successful.” Julia expressed that partnership among dedicated instructional designers emerged from a shared desire to help students be successful. Mike also acknowledged that dedicated instructional designers have a positive impact on student learning by ensuring that the design and the technology implementation in courses helped students focus on learning the content.

The focus on teaching as a critical attribute for dedicated instructional designers was intentional; from the earliest days of instructional design at Southeast Public University, there was a commitment to hiring design professionals who also had some measure of teaching experience. Brian was initially brought on as an instructional designer, the second or third one hired when Southeast Public University first started offering courses online. He shared some pertinent historical context: the leader of the online learning team at the time advocated for hiring dedicated instructional designers into faculty pay-grade positions, to ensure that they hired people who could develop commonality with faculty. This approach was to ensure that dedicated instructional designers could “not just speak to, but knew what it was to have students, and do grading, and develop assignments. Independent of the field of instructional design” (Brian). This long-standing commitment to teaching experience in instructional designers contributed to both the unionized faculty status of dedicated instructional designers and their perception and work as partners with faculty in student success.

Although Mike and Julia had different perspectives on the reasons for partnership, both expressed a belief that dedicated instructional designers acted and should act as partners with faculty. Further examples of this demonstrated partnership include a voluntary course auditing service offered by the instructional design team in which faculty can have their courses recognized by the state as either quality or high quality (Mike). This designation is achieved through evaluation against a rigorous rubric, and happens through partnership with a dedicated instructional designer. Julia mentioned another, although less common, example of partnership: instructional designers and faculty conducting and presenting on original research. Although there were instances in which dedicated instructional designers, faculty, and administrators did not see or treat designers as partners, the significant majority of shared experiences indicated a culture of partnership. When partnership did not occur in the experiences shared by participants, it frequently stemmed from misinterpreting the role of dedicated instructional designers as technical support.

Instructional designers as support. When asked about the most challenging parts of working with dedicated instructional designers, Brian stated that “misperceiving that [online instructor] role leads to a lot of trouble. And, so a lot of what we do is trying to get on the same page.” He suggested that to understand the role of a dedicated instructional designer, faculty must also understand their own roles as both an instructor and a person responsible for the design of a course in partnership with a professional instructional designer. He further shared,

A lot of faculty don't really understand what an instructional designer is. And so, that's a different kind of misperception. But that's a challenging thing between those two roles. That is a challenge in having instructional designers. And that is a challenge in working with faculty. (Brian)

As an example, Brian shared a situation in which the role of dedicated instructional designers was misinterpreted by a faculty member with whom the Online Learning Center had worked for many years:

We were doing a panel thing a few months ago, and she didn't mean anything by it, but sort of, not even flippantly, just sort of in passing, I won't be able to do it justice. But, she sort of in a passing comment equated the work of instructional designers with, like, visual design. With like, making stuff look good. It's like, "Huh. She's been around a long time. Worked very deeply. Knows a lot. About us, and everything." When talking to colleagues, she said, "Oh yeah, you know, and they can help you make it look good." So that's what you think an instructional designer does. (Brian)

This example clearly showed faculty perceiving dedicated instructional designers as technical support. Although it is no longer a primary role, Julia noted that instructional designers at Southeast Public University, herself included, used to do technical support for faculty. To free up time for the instructional design team to focus on consultative work with faculty, administrators from the Online Learning Center removed technical support from the purview of dedicated instructional designers and created a new team to handle technical support. Julia said of the decision, "We just, we weren't getting any of the other stuff we needed to get done done because, again, we were [taking calls] for moving buttons" (Julia). However, after the new team was created, Julia still received technical support calls, and—even though they were outside her scope of work—did not mind answering them for her assigned faculty. From her perspective, helping with technical support was in service to the relationships she was working to build with faculty (Julia).

Still, even with a recent history of working as technical support, Julia expressed that she does not see technical support as the role or primary responsibility of dedicated instructional designers. Demitri, when asked what the most important role was for dedicated instructional designers, stated,

If I had to boil it down, I would say to serve as expert consultants to faculty, if I had to like, maybe, put it on a bumper sticker. They really do have expertise in instructional design for online learning that faculty often don't have. (Demitri)

Although Mike indicated that he sees dedicated instructional designers as partners, he also noted that many faculty may not. Instead, he suggested “that they see them as minions to whom they can send a Word document and say, ‘Make this pretty page on my website’” (Mike). When asked if the norm for faculty was seeing dedicated instructional designers more as leaders or as support, he said, “Probably support. Yeah, more support” (Mike). This misperception of the role of dedicated instructional designers was pervasive, from Mike's experience. Even though Julia did not see her role as technical support, she repeatedly used the word *support* to describe her work and the work of the instructional design team. I noted a disconnect between the roles described—consultative, collaborative, and using significant expertise in online learning—and the vernacular used to describe what dedicated instructional designers do. Although it is clear that both dedicated instructional designers and online learning administrators saw the instructional designer role as consultation and not support, the broader faculty perspective—confirmed by both Mike and Brian—did not reflect this reality. This reality led to a critical question, addressed by the next key theme: are dedicated instructional designer seen as leaders at Southeast Public University?

Instructional designers as leaders. When asked about the kind of leadership role dedicated instructional designers play at Southeast Public University, Demitri stated, “I think there's a kind of leadership that we have that's based on expertise. That kind of leading from the middle. That everybody in the unit has.” He recognized that positional leadership carries weight with it, but that leaders existed at different levels of the organization as well—including dedicated instructional designers. He explained the notion of leadership based in expertise further:

Because we are the experts. We live and breathe online learning 24 hours a day. I know you [a faculty member] don't. We have people in the room who are national experts on things. And we are going to tell you the research-based best practice. You know, take our advice. It's to your benefit. (Demitri)

Brian noted a similar kind of leadership that dedicated instructional designers enacted—specifically, leading faculty through influence:

Well, if leadership is influence, then each of those roles has a lot of influence on, ultimately on the successful design and hopefully [*sic*] the successful learning experience of our students in those online learning environments. Just different levels, right? (Brian)

He described these levels of leadership from highest to lowest: faculty who teach have the most influence, with dedicated instructional designers a close second, because of their ability to impact faculty. Brian placed online learning administrators at a distant third in their leadership related specifically to students, but noted that their leadership was most valuable and visible at strategic levels. He gave the decision to have a formalized, mandatory faculty development program as an example of online learning administrator leadership, which had less immediate impact, but made a significant difference in the long term (Brian). He noted that faculty had the most impact on leadership in the short term, through their teaching relationship with students; dedicated instructional designers fell somewhere in the middle, having meaningful impact on both the short term through coaching faculty, and the long term through their work with administrators (Brian). Brian's perspective on dedicated instructional designers leading from the middle, with influence on both sides, was consistent with Demitri. It was clear that the online learning administrators from Southeast Public University saw dedicated instructional designers as leaders and treated them as such.

Although Mike was a vocal and strong advocate of dedicated instructional designers as leaders, he also noted that his perspective—as with his perspective on technical support—may

not be consistent with a large portion of faculty at Southeast Public University. From his experience, he observed the following:

The correlate to that is, the longer someone's been in academia, the more support they see [dedicated instructional designers]. The shorter they've been in academia, the more leadership they see in them. And that's just a purely anecdotal, observational, guess of mine. But I have different faculty members in my head and how they respond to their [dedicated instructional designers] and chatter in the faculty meetings about what they can and can't do. Do or don't do. (Mike)

While this anecdotal account did not preclude other faculty from seeing dedicated instructional designers as leaders, it also showed that their status as leaders was not pervasively recognized. This lack of recognition is consistent with Mike's observation regarding dedicated instructional designers and technical support—namely, that faculty perception was inconsistent, leaned toward negative, and was largely dependent on the level of familiarity and experiences faculty have had working with dedicated instructional designers.

According to Julia, she did consider herself and her colleagues to be leaders in two specific contexts: teaching and technology. She framed this sentiment through a need to be current on trends and research related to teaching and technology in higher education, and suggested that faculty needed to be leaders in their content area knowledge and research, but less so on teaching and technology, due to their busy schedules and time constraints (Julia). However, by this definition of leadership, Julia saw her leadership role as contingent on the lack of expertise of faculty—she filled in the gaps. When coupled with her further comments on leadership that focus on mutual respect garnered through her faculty status and commitment to research, I noted a dichotomous perspective on leadership—one which emerged out of need to overcome a perceived deficiency, and one which came out of the status and expertise of the dedicated instructional designer (Julia). While each perspective is not mutually exclusive, they belied Julia's belief that dedicated instructional designers are and should be leaders in their own

right; the former perspective significantly narrowed the scope of potential for dedicated instructional designers to act as leaders at Southeast Public University. Still, Julia believed that dedicated instructional designers were and should be leaders, regardless of where the need and opportunities for leadership emerged. However, Mike and Julia both shared one major potential barrier to advancing instructional design leadership: the significant scale and growth of Southeast Public University.

Scale and growth. When asked about what changes would be desirable related to online learning at Southeast Public University, Julia shared that what she wanted to change—time and availability to work with faculty more deeply on their courses—could not happen, due to the size of the institution and the need to scale resources and processes to accommodate a wide population of faculty:

I think because of our size, sometimes we get a little too systematic. Just to kind of handle our masses . . . I mean, I have 60 faculty, and they're always coming up with new classes. And, so I get them up and running, we really do heavy development on the syllabi, and all those pages, and then, like I said, the first module. And then after that, it's hopefully mimicking that module, and giving some other sustainable assistance to go through. (Julia)

Demitri noted that Southeast Public University is one of the largest universities in the United States. Due to the scale of the university, there were too many faculty for dedicated instructional designers to be able to spend deep amounts of time with them in the design and development of courses. As such, Julia expressed that all decisions around teaching, technology, and time investment for dedicated instructional designers had to be scalable:

People actually tease me around here because I talk about the three Ss all the time: systematic, scalable, and sustainable. And every time we talk about a new project or a new initiative, I'm like, "You have to go through all three of those with me and tell me how they're going to work and what's going to happen." (Julia)

The need for scalable projects, according to Julia, made it challenging to spend an adequate amount of time working with faculty as partners on their courses. Rather, to

accommodate the number of faculty who needed to consult with a dedicated instructional designer, they focused interactions on the professional development courses and one-on-one time up front when requested by faculty (Julia). To make the best use of that time, the instructional design team developed templates to use with faculty—or for faculty to use independently—as starting points, and as a way to ensure that resources were systematic, scalable, and sustainable (Julia). Julia suggested that the intention was to make consultations scalable for faculty and dedicated instructional designers who needed to be conscious of their time investment on each course, while also ensuring that courses designed were of a high quality. Their solution, in conjunction with offering deeper design services as available, was to create scalable tools that would account for both the need for scale and concerns about quality.

Demitri corroborated this approach independently, by sharing that there has even been a concern from academic deans regarding staffing and the quality of online courses due to the pace of growth. The academic deans had expressed “some concern about being about to staff sections and, and we want to make sure we have good quality support services for students” (Demitri). This concern about staffing was not unwarranted; a related challenge, he noted, was student-to-faculty ratio (Demitri). To keep the ratio appropriate, Southeast Public University hired more than 200 faculty in 2 years (Demitri). Demitri further expressed that the growth was not as rapid as it could be, because the budget model changes did not affect central administrative units, so they were not able to increase the pace of growth. Although Demitri noted that this controlled growth was possibly a good thing, to keep the level of quality as high as possible within their resources, he also suggested that a budget model change, and further growth would still benefit the university.

Another issue related to scale was raised when discussing the relationships between faculty and administrators. Demitri noted that, while relationships are generally positive, moments of frustration can be exacerbated by the need to address change at scale. He used the example of pay raises, and suggested that to provide raises, the university must “make sure that, as an institution, you can afford it across the entire institution” (Demitri). Issues of scale were discussed with Mike as well, and he noted that one positive element of the size of the university was the ability to no longer charge distance learning students fees that were purely benefiting on-campus students; his change has saved students \$150/class (Mike). Mike also indicated a measure of pride in the size and growth of the university when sharing a story about a professional colleague from a different institution. The colleague was sharing that they recently launched their fifth online program; Mike found it amusing, as Southeast Public University has more than 80 online degrees and certificates.

This assertion was not intended to belittle the colleague, but to point out that Southeast Public University operated on such a different scale, and that they had overcome challenges with which other institutions still struggled. The last comment related to scale from Mike focused on his ability to admit students to his program. He shared that he has no enrollment restrictions, and that he admits “hundreds of people” (Mike). Although there were unique issues that arose due to the significant growth and scale of Southeast Public University, all participants took this growth as less of a difficulty, and more of an opportunity. Their size and scale allowed for opportunities to reduce burdens on students, reach more students, and scale services to accommodate a wider range of stakeholders. Further, they provided possible solutions for the issues associated with their size and scale, such as adjusting the budget model and growing teams. Rather than seeing the scale of the university as a problem, participants looked at it as empowering.

Empowerment and disempowerment. The empowerment and disempowerment theme was defined by me as the researcher as actions that empowered or disempowered the interviewee or a situation that which shows empowerment or disempowerment happening in the organization. Empowerment proved to be a critical and intentional element of the organization from the early days of the Online Learning Center; Julia noted that there has always been a practice in place to evaluate decisions, using data, to determine a path forward. This commitment to informed decision making established a purpose-driven approach to change. Julia further shared that she was empowered by her status as a faculty member to pursue scholarship and research opportunities. She noted that there were different expectations based on one's rank as a faculty instructional designer:

So, for example, if you were at the entry-level instructional designer, they'd want you to be presenting locally at conferences. If you're the mid-conference, or mid-tier instructional designer, again, they want you to present, but it's more at state or local, and then top tier would be international-type, either publications or presentations, peer-reviewed. (Julia)

Further, the work that the dedicated instructional designers do has been recognized externally, including recognition by the state and a grant for their flagship professional development course. From the internal organizational perspective, Julia shared that online learning administrators solicited and valued the perspectives of dedicated instructional designers; they also had representation on the advisory council, which included representatives from each college across the university (Mike). However, online learning administrators also made decisions without consulting dedicated instructional designers first; Julia suggested that this behavior was not an issue of authority or influence with the online learning administrators, but a need and a desire to be consulted on projects that affect their existing projects and commitments. Although this activity was a disempowering event, Julia also noted that the online learning administrators were "absolutely receptive" to feedback regarding their workload and availability

for new projects (Julia). As such, situations in which dedicated instructional designers were not consulted about their workload was solved through proactivity from the designers and receptivity from the administrators. Few other instances of disempowerment between online learning administrators and dedicated instructional designers were mentioned; rather, the culture and practices in place in the Digital Learning Division and Online Learning Center adopted empowerment as a critical element consistently characterizing the relationships and work between different teams in the organization.

The biggest instances of disempowerment shared by Julia had to do with situations between dedicated instructional designers and faculty. Julia shared one example in which a faculty member with whom she was working asked for help creating a word search activity in a course. When she told the faculty member that this was expected for them to do independently, the faculty member instead suggested that they would skip the activity, due to a lack of time to create it. Julia suggested that the responses there are based on the level of relationship she has with a faculty member; sometimes, she would go ahead and create it, while other times she would defer to a future semester when the faculty had more availability. Although the decision was ultimately hers, Julia still felt that managing those relationships—when receiving pressure to do work that was not her responsibility—was disempowering. However, this example was the exception, not the rule—she noted that, in relationships with faculty, “I respect them, they respect me” (Julia). Finally, when asked what the biggest challenges of work with faculty were, Julia shared that many faculty were “here for different agendas and online teaching is not necessarily one of them, but they have to do it” (Julia). She suggested that this lack of motivation and commitment stemmed from faculty not using the instructional design resources available to them and resulted in negative learning experiences for students.

From the faculty perspective, Mike felt most empowered by positive communication practices, such as when online learning administrators solicited feedback from the faculty “on the ground” perspective. This solicitation for feedback happened formally through the distance learning advisory board. He further noted that the positive, collegial atmosphere made Southeast Public University a desirable place to work, and that the coaching he received from dedicated instructional designers related to their pedagogy-mediated technology expertise was empowering because it freed him to focus on his content and students (Mike). He did share that when disempowerment from administration did happen—which was uncommon—it centered around administrators involving themselves in academic choices (Mike). One specific example was when an academic coach was hired to provide advice to faculty and asked them to use calendar features to help their students with time management. According to Mike, this request was a disconnect because his students—many of whom were nurses with years of experience—did not struggle with time management. Such instances of disempowerment were rare, and generally, faculty feel empowered by their administrators, according to Mike.

The first online learning administrator participant, Brian, spent time discussing ways in which he tried to empower his employees, and specifically the dedicated instructional designers from the Online Learning Center, rather than sharing the ways he felt empowered by others. He shared that the dedicated instructional designers on his team felt that having a leader who was also an instructional designer was helpful and empowering. Brian had a wide breadth of experience, including several years as an instructional designer; he noted that he did not come from a strictly teaching or information technology background, such as others in a similar position at different institutions. This shared work experience, he noted, was both helpful and

not helpful enough because his experience as a designer was different than the experience of being a dedicated instructional designer at Southeast Public University now (Brian).

Another key topic related to empowerment discussed by Brian was the intentional decision to remove technology support as a responsibility for the dedicated instructional designers. He shared that this decision was predicated on the need for designers to have more availability and focus when working with faculty; as the technology support needs scaled, it became necessary to move that responsibility to a new team (Brian). That trend has continued, as during the interview, Brian mentioned another group—whom he called the instructional development team—that further took project management and logistical duties off of the plates of the dedicated instructional designers. Reflectively, he noted that many of those responsibilities had reverted, and that it may be time to reevaluate to ensure that the designers were not overloaded (Brian).

Brian showed a clear commitment to empowering the dedicated instructional designers from the Online Learning Center. He also reflected on the ways in which dedicated instructional designers may become disempowered, and shared—once again—that misperception of the role of dedicated instructional designers has led to disempowerment. In one example, he shared that some faculty have been more receptive to taking advice from other faculty, rather than from an instructional designer:

In that kind of a situation, there's much more credibility, and collegiality and esprit de corps, and so forth. In the dedicated professional instructional designer situation, that's not always the case, right? It's like, you're other. (Brian)

In short, he suggested that faculty have often not seen dedicated instructional designers as one of them, even though they both share the same faculty status and significant expertise as higher education professionals. That sense of otherness contributed to concerns about disempowerment for dedicated instructional designers.

In contrast, Demitri shared more about his own empowerment, and how he tries to impart that empowerment to other teams and individuals in his organization. He first noted that the board of trustees and the current chair both valued online learning and the work of the Digital Learning Division; this respect was evidenced by Demitri sharing that he has been given considerable autonomy to try new things. One way that he disseminated this empowerment to his organization was through the decision to assign faculty to dedicated instructional designers based on college and academic discipline: “We try to assign them by discipline as much as we possibly can. Because getting to know that department and discipline is really valuable. So you kind of get to know their rhythms and the personalities” (Demitri). This organization decision was made to empower dedicated instructional designers, specifically to ensure that they could learn more about their faculty and the organizations they work alongside.

Overall, there was a clear culture of empowerment present at Southeast Public University between online learning administrators and dedicated instructional designers. Although faculty sometimes disempowered dedicated instructional designers through role misperception and expectations around technology support, they generally experienced positive, empowering relationships, according to the interview participants. This culture of empowerment benefitted and positively affected each individual who was interviewed.

Summary

I interviewed four professionals from Southeast Public University: two online learning administrators (Brian and Demitri), one dedicated instructional designer (Julia), and one online faculty member (Mike). Data were analyzed through emergent and a priori code passes in values, process, and causation codes, and then organized into eight themes. The themes were (a) positive/negative structure, (b) positive/negative relationships, (c) instructional designers as

leaders/not leaders, (d) instructional designers as partners/not partners, (e) instances of collaboration or no collaboration, (f) empowerment/disempowerment, (g) scale or growth, and (h) instructional designers as support. Although there were some instances of negativity related to both structure and relationships, participants broadly indicated that both the organizational structure and relationships between different roles—faculty, administrator, and instructional designer—were largely positive and contributed to a culture of collegiality and growth. Similarly, instances of collaboration were frequent, and indicated respect of the division in authority and expertise between professionals of different roles. Collaboration happened most between faculty and dedicated instructional designers when designing courses, and between faculty and administrators when proposing and designing new programs.

Although dedicated instructional designers were seen as both partners and leaders by the interview participants, they also noted a significant challenge around misperception of the role of dedicated instructional designers, chiefly by faculty members. This misperception of instructional design as technology support was influenced by technical support being a previous responsibility of dedicated instructional designers; this misperception has since been changed, but the perception has persisted among groups of faculty, possibly those with less recent experience and less engagement with dedicated instructional designers. Many of the challenges shared by interview participants focused on the significant size and scale required to conduct online learning at Southeast Public University. Instructional design decisions were vetted through three lenses—systematic, scalable, and sustainable—while administrators noted growth would slow down without changes to a budget model that positively benefitted academic units, but not central administration units. Finally, there was a pervasive sense of empowerment between all role types, with a few notable exceptions—chiefly, dedicated instructional designers

were disempowered when faculty misperceived their roles, failed to utilize instructional design services, and did not see dedicated instructional designers as faculty colleagues.

Within-case analyses of Great Plains Public University and Midwest Public University are provided in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, respectively. A comparative analysis, which includes all three institutions chosen for this study, is provided in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, I present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for implementation and further study.

Chapter 5: Results From Great Plains Public University

Great Plains Public University, a pseudonym for one of three universities selected to participate in this study, is a public research institution founded in 1908 and located in the Great Plains region of the United States. Initially a coeducational college founded by the local Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Great Plains Public University was founded to offer an educational environment that was available to anyone who wanted to pursue higher education. In 1930, local voters approved acquisition of the college, making it the first and only institution in the city operated and funded by the municipality. Bolstered by a robust continuing studies program, Great Plains Public University experienced significant enrollment growth that necessitated a location change, which positioned it at the center of the city. In 1968, Great Plains Public University became a part of the Great Plains System, a state-funded office that managed and led public education institutions across the state, while maintaining the distinct culture, offerings, leadership, and faculty of each individual campus.

Great Plains Public University holds an enrollment of approximately 16,000 students, including full- and part-time students. Some 38% of its recent freshman class were first-generation learners, and 32% were from ethnic minorities. Nearly 50% of all students of color from the Great Plains System attend Great Plains Public University; 86% of its student body are in-state residents. Across its six colleges, Great Plains Public University offers more than 200 distinct academic programs, situated on three campuses in the metropolitan area. Eight undergraduate programs and eight graduate programs are offered fully online, as well as 11 certificate programs. At the time of this study, Great Plains Public University had about 2,200 faculty and staff, with a student-to-faculty ratio of 17:1 for undergraduate students. Great Plains Public University holds a Carnegie classification of Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research

Activity. It is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), as well as a host of program-specific accreditations, including the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and the American Library Association (ALA).

Great Plains Public University ranks in the top 20 institutions for online bachelor's programs by *U.S. News and World Report*, and has been ranked as the top institution for military friendliness by *Military Times* for 3 years in a row. As a member of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (CUSU), Great Plains Public University has a reputation as a model metropolitan university; it provides significant value to the local metropolitan area, acting as a leader in culture, research, and developing an educated workforce. The mission and vision of the institution reflect this commitment to excellence in the city, nationally, and globally; the university aims to become the premier metropolitan university in the United States. Great Plains Public University has six primary values: excellence, engagement, inclusion, discovery, integrity, and spirit.

Great Plains Public University is known as an emerging leader in online learning specifically for metropolitan universities, but does not hold any particular distinctions of excellence in instructional design from outside organizations. Although its faculty and dedicated instructional designers participate in scholarly research and conferences around online learning, the institution itself is not well known throughout the professional discipline of instructional design in higher education. The team of dedicated instructional designers at Great Plains Public University is housed in the Office of Digital Learning, which is led by a director of digital learning who holds a dual reporting structure through information technology (IT) and academic affairs. The team consists of two full-time instructional designers, one full-time lead

instructional technologist, an open educational resources librarian with dual reporting to the library, and one student recruiter for online programs; all of these positions report directly to the director of digital learning (see Figure 2).

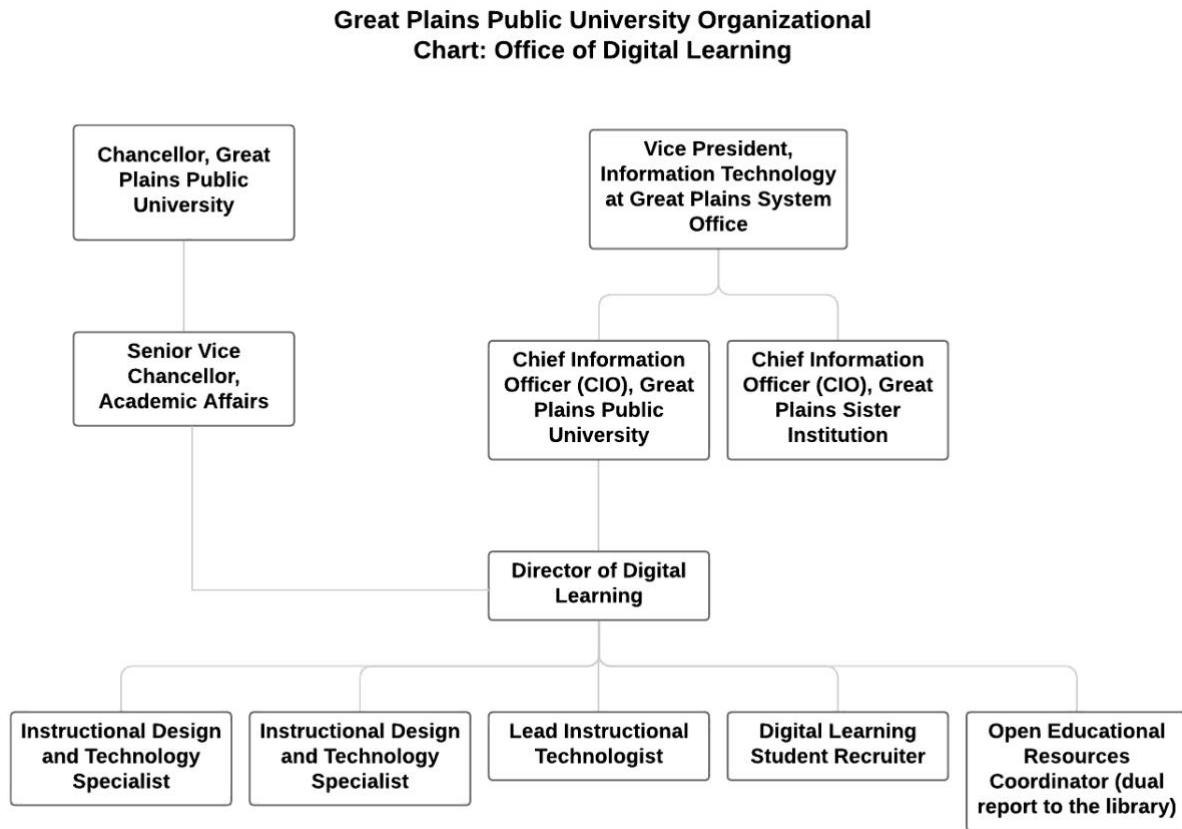


Figure 2. Organizational chart of the Great Plains Public University Office of Digital Learning.

In addition to the team led by the director of digital learning, the Office of Digital Learning has cofunded a liaison program with the senior vice chancellor of academic affairs aimed at increasing awareness of instructional design and online learning at Great Plains Public University. There are eight faculty liaisons for instructional design with representation from each college at Great Plains Public University. These liaison positions are not dedicated instructional designer positions; rather, they are appointed faculty members who are actively

working to promote and engage their colleagues around online learning in partnership with the Office of Digital Learning.

The Office of Digital Learning is structured under the Office of Information Technology and has no reporting ties to academic affairs, other than through the director of digital learning. The dedicated instructional designers on the team have a wide range of responsibilities, including designer-led trainings and one-on-one meetings focused around the use of the LMS; this responsibility has formed a large portion of the work of the team over the last year, as Great Plains Public University recently changed to a new LMS. Course design is also an important part of the role of dedicated instructional designers at Great Plains Public University; both of the dedicated instructional designers design and develop online courses with faculty but are not assigned to specific colleges or departments. Rather, the two dedicated instructional designers take courses and questions as they come in, based on faculty interest and the busyness of the season, with semester starts being the busiest time of the academic year. The faculty at Great Plains Public University are unionized; however, the dedicated instructional designers do not have faculty status or appointments. Although the dedicated instructional designers have significant overlap in work type and responsibility with the lead instructional technologist, they tend to specialize more in pedagogy and design, while the technologist focuses more on training, running pilots, and systems implementation in direct collaboration with the larger IT team.

Great Plains Public University has recently reorganized its Office of Information Technology through a consolidation effort led by the Great Plains System. Each Great Plains System institution previously had its own department for information technology; however, over the last 2 years, all information technology teams were centralized at the system level, including the information technology team at Great Plains Public University. Although the director of

digital learning reports to a department with the Great Plains System, she and her team exclusively work for Great Plains Public University and are primarily aligned through administrative reporting to the CIO.

I contacted the associate vice president of digital education from the Great Plains System to determine whether one of the institutions under its purview fit the purposive sampling criteria and one of the three identified structure profiles of the study. After receiving a recommendation for Great Plains Public University, I contacted the director of digital learning at the school to discuss participation in the study. I discovered that the institution met the required criteria as an accredited public doctoral research institution with at least one online graduate program. Great Plains Public University met the second structure profile for the study: a fully centralized online learning team, with an administrative reporting structure and distributed curricular authority resting in its six colleges. The director of digital learning agreed to have the university participate in the study after verifying through the Internal Review Board of the university that no additional review was necessary for cross-institutional research beyond my existing Internal Review Board approval.

Interviews

The director of digital learning recommended one dedicated instructional designer, two online faculty members, and herself as the online learning administrator for one-on-one semistructured interviews. Each potential interview participant was contacted via e-mail and was provided the informed consent form and a brief overview of the research study. The dedicated instructional designer responded and indicated her willingness to participate on a signed informed consent form. Of the two online faculty members contacted, only one responded; that faculty member also indicated her willingness to participate via the signed

consent form. The director of digital learning also agreed to participate and indicated as such through the signed consent form. I scheduled 90-minute interviews with each of the three interview participants from Great Plains Public University.

The dedicated instructional designer interviewed (Dora) has a formal title of instructional design and technology specialist. The faculty member interviewed (Anna) is from the Great Plains Public University College of Education, teaches in the online bachelor's of science in library science degree, and serves as a faculty liaison for instructional design. The director of digital learning (Carla) leads the Office of Digital Learning and works in both academic and administrative spheres of influence to promote the growth of online courses and programs at Great Plains Public University; she also oversees all of the learning technologies used at the institution, specifically for the portion of her role associated with the Office of Information Technology. All interviews were conducted through Zoom, a video conferencing tool. Each participant is identified in this study through codes that represent their respective roles (see Table 2).

Table 2

Great Plains Public University Participant Pseudonyms

Participant role	Number of participants per role	Participant pseudonyms
Dedicated instructional designer	1	Dora
Online faculty member	1	Anna
Online learning administrator	1	Carla

The interview protocols used for semistructured interviews with all participants were the same as those used for Southeast Public University, discussed in Chapter 4. The interview

protocols for each role type—dedicated instructional designer, online faculty member, and online learning administrator—are included in Appendix B, C, and D, respectively.

Analysis overview. I analyzed the responses to the questions from each interview protocol across three coding passes, ensuring that each code was relevant to the research questions of the study. Interview transcripts were analyzed through the same codes and themes used in the analysis of participant responses from the other two cases in this study. In two coding passes, I analyzed responses through emergent codes, focusing on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the participants, in addition to one causation code for exploring causal links between decisions and situational context. In the final coding pass, I analyzed responses through a priori codes, focusing on process codes that signified actions or decisions common across all transcripts. Clear categories emerged from the coding of responses, resulting in a series of common themes. The themes that emerged from Great Plains Public University are (a) positive/negative structure, (b) positive/negative relationships, (c) instructional designers as leaders/not leaders, (d) instructional designers as partners/not partners, (e) instances of collaboration or no collaboration, (f) empowerment/disempowerment, (g) scale or growth, and (h) instructional designers as support.

The theme of positive/negative structure related to the organizational structure in place positively or negatively informing one's success, work, well-being, or perception. The theme of positive/negative relationships was defined as perception of the relationships in the organization as either positive or negative, and as influencing the organization in positive or negative ways. The theme of instructional designers as leaders/not leaders was defined as a belief that instructional designers play/do not play a clear leadership role in the organization. The theme of instructional designers as partners/not partners related to actions that indicated that instructional

designers were treated or not treated as experts, consultants, and partners who are equal in value and influence with faculty. The theme of instances of collaboration or no collaboration was defined as actions that indicated that collaboration was or was not happening in the organizational culture or situation being discussed. I defined the theme of empowerment/disempowerment as actions that empowered or disempowered the interviewee or a situation that shows empowerment or disempowerment happening in the organization. The theme of scale or growth related to decisions, situations, or outcomes that were influenced or caused by growth or the size of the university or its resources. Finally, the theme of instructional designers as support was defined as attitudes that indicated that instructional designers acted as or were treated as support staff with low expertise, rather than collaborators toward a shared vision/mission.

Positive or negative structure. When asked if the organizational structure of the university contributed to or inhibited success in the organization, each participant indicated a different perspective on the value of the organizational structure for the Office of Digital Learning. Carla suggested that for her work related to learning technology, through her administrative reporting line, the organizational structure was positive:

On the IT side, absolutely. On the IT side, it fast-forwards my success. I feel like I have a direct channel to our vice president for IT. I sit on our senior leadership team. I feel like the ideas I'm trying to bring forward matter, and absolutely turn into something very quickly. (Carla)

However, when discussing the academic side of her reporting structure, she shared that she is often over-affiliated with IT, to the extent that it can interfere with initiatives under her purview that are purely academic in nature (Carla). This over-affiliation with IT was primarily a challenge with administrators from academic affairs, and not directly with faculty (Carla). Carla posited that the faculty largely see her as the innovation person, and that the academic side of her

organizational structure was positive for helping develop relationships with faculty. The challenges primarily rested, according to Carla, with other administrators:

Advancing the things that I'm bringing as an institutional academic priority, that doesn't always happen. I think it's kind of like, they all recognize we do online, we do online well, we need to do it. But I don't feel like it's a priority of other administrators. Particularly in academic affairs. And I think it's because of that IT affiliation. (Carla)

When asked for specific examples of initiatives that had been challenging because of this reporting structure and difference in priorities, Carla shared that instructional design as a whole was challenging because of the territorial nature of academic decision making at Great Plains Public University. When dedicated instructional designers are perceived as infringing on faculty territory, "that's where then I feel like [it] gets sort of dismissed into IT, or there's a little bit of friction with, like, 'Why don't they report to us?'" (Carla). The implication—that dedicated instructional designers should report to faculty through academic affairs—was not unfamiliar to Carla. She shared that this notion of decentralized instructional design has precedent within the Great Plains System: no other institutions in the system had their instructional design teams centralized within IT.

Dora also recognized that housing instructional designers centrally within IT was unusual. Similarly to Carla, she considered it to be positive, "because I am very tied into what's going on with the technology decisions here on campus" (Dora). She further cited her administrator-level access to the LMS as evidence of the association with IT as beneficial, sharing that some of her colleagues at other institutions in the Great Plains System do not have the same access, and encounter barriers due to their separation from IT (Dora). Both Dora and Carla considered the organizational structure—specifically their administrative reporting line—to be of benefit to the technology-centric aspects of their roles.

Dora acknowledged that some people at Great Plains Public University may not understand why dedicated instructional designers would be organized under IT; her justification, however was “there’s only two of us and we’re supporting roughly 1,100 faculty” (Dora). To Dora, the chief benefit of being organized under IT, from the perspective of her role as a dedicated instructional designer, was the ability to scale services with a small team: “You know, it’s not that I support these colleges and [the other instructional designer], my colleague, supports these other colleges. It’s just whomever happens to be available takes the calls, takes, you know, the e-mails, makes appointments.” This statement suggested to me that the value of being centralized under IT, as a dedicated instructional designer, was less about the association with IT and more about the benefits of having a centralized instructional design team, regardless of reporting lines. The centralized organizational structure ensured that Dora and her colleague could offer their expertise to a broad base of constituents, which became even more important due to the low prioritization of online learning by academic administrators, as described by Carla.

Although the challenges regarding online learning as a priority primarily lay in the academic affairs portion of Carla’s reporting structure, they extended to Anna as well, specifically due to the decentralized nature of the entire campus. In contrast to the IT department, colleges and programs are largely described as independent from one another and from the centralized administrative resources (Anna). Anna shared that this decentralized nature proffered significant independence for her and her colleagues, but also made it difficult to systematize decisions and resources across all programs and colleges (Anna). However, Anna also suggested that the recent reorganization of the Office of Digital Learning—specifically when Carla was given authority over the dedicated instructional designers and online learning

overall—has improved challenges experienced under the previous leadership. One such challenge was proactivity in connecting with faculty. Previously, Anna had to reach out to connect with someone from the Office of Digital Learning; there was little to no active engagement from the dedicated instructional designers or their leaders. Since the reorganization, however, the relationship has become more mutual, and both faculty and dedicated instructional designers reach out to collaborate on online courses. Anna further noted that the Office of Digital Learning did not previously have the infrastructure to move initiatives forward, but since the reorganization moved them under the system-centralized IT department, things have steadily been improving for her and her faculty colleagues.

One example Anna shared was the faculty liaison initiative, which was designed to improve the access and visibility of the office of digital learning and to promote engagement between faculty and dedicated instructional designers. Anna noted that she holds the liaison role for the College of Education, and that her work in this role focused on building visibility for services and offerings from the dedicated instructional designers, as well as answering questions her colleagues have about the LMS and associated technologies. However, Anna also noted that the decentralized nature of their campus even made it difficult for her to gain clarity on her own role as a faculty liaison: “You know, like I said, we’re a decentralized campus in a lot of ways. So, we’re all probably doing our own thing. And that’s part of that challenge, is everybody does something a little bit differently” (Anna). She further noted that the organizational culture of the Office of Digital Learning used to be far less inviting, and that the impetus was on faculty to come to the dedicated instructional designers. She suggested that this culture is changing, but that other faculty may not even be aware of how the reorganization affected the dedicated instructional designers (Anna).

Anna shared that this organizational structure for the Office of Digital Learning—with reporting lines to IT—was largely unknown by faculty and put the impetus on faculty to reach out for input and collaboration from the dedicated instructional designers (Anna). Anna even mentioned that she herself was unsure whether or not the dedicated instructional designers were housed under the system-centralized IT department. This ambiguity further indicated that the organizational structure—though beneficial to technology decision making and access—did not benefit Dora and Carla in relation to their respective work with faculty and academic administrators at Great Plains Public University.

Dora identified further ambiguity, specifically in the roles of both dedicated instructional designers and online learning administrators. When asked how clearly defined the roles were for online learning administrators, she said that she could not answer the question, other than to share that her supervisor, Carla, was heavily involved in digital learning: “I don’t know a ton about what she does, though. Most of the time, she just does it” (Dora). The ambiguity extended to her relatively new colleagues, the lead instructional technologist and the online student recruiter: “Yeah, I’m not 100% sure what either of those positions do, specifically. They’re delightful people. [Laughter] I don’t know much more beyond that” (Dora). Dora indicated that, of the six people in the Office of Digital Learning, she could not describe the roles of any beyond herself and her dedicated instructional designer colleague. Regarding their roles, Dora described them as “about as fuzzy as you can get. [Laughter] There’s a whole lot of ‘other duties as assigned’” (Dora). Carla, however, indicated that there were a few areas of distinct clarity around the dedicated instructional designer role—specifically, that they worked with faculty on course grants, and only worked on online courses (Carla). She also recognized that, for a team of two, the scope of work for the dedicated instructional designers was insurmountable, and had to

be mediated by clear boundaries. From Carla's perspective, the most important boundary was to not provide instructional design services for faculty who teach face-to-face courses. Although Carla felt that the role of dedicated instructional designers was clear, that perspective was not fully shared by the other two participants from Great Plains Public University.

Dora, when asked about challenges with working with online learning administrators, shared, "I don't think the administration always knows what we do and why what we do is so valuable to the institution" (Dora). She further shared that Carla has been somewhat removed from the day-to-day work of the dedicated instructional designers:

She does solicit opinions, input, from the core group of us. Again, because sometimes she's, she's removed enough from what we do on a daily basis that she needs our input to just know what's going on. But she definitely, I mean, she demonstrates how much she values the contributions that we make. (Dora)

Although Carla has clearly shown that she valued the dedicated instructional designers and considered them of critical importance to the work of her team, there was still a lack of clarity around their roles. Anna echoed this lack of role clarity for the dedicated instructional designers, suggesting that their roles are evolving, and that the biggest challenge for role clarity is a lack of communication and visibility. However, when asked what the most important role is for dedicated instructional designers, Anna suggested a clear vision for their value and purpose: "You can't get away from the training thing. And, you can't get away from that. But, I would hope for a more collaborative role in helping with course development" (Anna). She saw the role of dedicated instructional designers as collaborative in nature, coupled with leveraging expertise to train faculty in the pedagogical use of technology for online courses.

Carla shared a similar perspective, suggesting that the most important role for dedicated instructional designers was to show faculty the possibilities in online learning—specifically, helping change the negative perception and experiences some faculty have had with online

learning (Carla). She described the two dedicated instructional designers on her team as approachable and able to build trust by honoring the vulnerability of faculty who come to them for help: “Because I hear some of the questions that they get from faculty, and I’m like, ‘Oh man, they wouldn’t ask me that’” (Carla). Dora expressed a similar commitment to building trust and taking care of faculty: “I get to hold their hand when they’re not quite sure what they’re doing. I get to alleviate their fears when they’re petrified” (Dora). Although all three participants described a lack of role clarity for dedicated instructional designers, all three participants also had a clear vision for how the role should look at Great Plains Public University. This clarity indicated that the organizational structure, although positive for the technology-focused portions of the Office of Digital Learning, inhibited work related to academic affairs, and specifically the work of dedicated instructional designers.

Positive or negative relationships. The next theme focused on the nature of relationships between dedicated instructional designers, faculty, and online learning administrators. All three participants indicated that the culture of the organization was positive, and that Great Plains Public University was a great place to work. Dora indicated that the relationships and environment at Great Plains Public University were generally positive:

The relationships, for the most part, are pretty good because there is a good deal of mutual respect. This, this place feels like family, which is mostly good, you know, every now and then you get the, you know, tiffs among factions. But for the most part, it is very, very friendly, very family-like. It’s an incredibly good environment to work in.

When asked about the state of relationships, Anna stated:

It’s easy to navigate this campus. And if you want to get involved outside your department, you can. . . . And so, they are pretty approachable in a lot of ways, if you want to get to know the administrators, you can. And hopefully that will continue.
(Anna)

Conversely, Anna suggested that there was always a go-between person limiting direct access to many administrators, which made it difficult to work with them: “Well, you don’t work

directly with them. So there's that" (Anna). This statement contradicted her earlier assertion that administrators were approachable, but was targeted toward specific individuals. Anna further shared that, while the relationships between administrators and faculty are generally positive, it was largely dependent on their openness to consulting faculty on key, pervasive decisions. Several key administrators from Great Plains Public University were retiring, and so Anna was uncertain if that culture of openness and consultation would continue. The only other example of negative relationships shared by Anna focused on communication; she shared that "one side never feels like the other one tells them stuff soon enough. So again, it's a communication thing" (Anna).

Carla had a slightly different perspective, and shared that a few administrators acted as gatekeepers, which faculty did not appreciate. However, she largely agreed that relationships between the two populations were generally positive. Both Carla and Dora shared that the faculty at Great Plains Public University are unionized; they each independently indicated that the unionized status of faculty made it difficult for administrators and dedicated instructional designers to make anything related to academic affairs required for faculty. Carla said, "We don't use the word 'required' hardly ever. And mandates don't really happen" (Carla). Dora specifically suggested that it would be incredibly difficult to require faculty to take a professional development course prior to teaching online due to their unionized status (Dora). Even so, the unionized faculty status was perceived less as a challenge to building and maintaining positive relationships, and more as a challenge to enact change at a pace agreeable to both administrators and faculty.

While the relationships between administrators and faculty were widely agreed to be positive, relationships between dedicated instructional designers and faculty were far less

consistent between interview participants. Dora repeatedly indicated that she worked with the same faculty members multiple times, and that they trusted her and sought out her perspective and expertise (Dora). While she did acknowledge that some faculty were harder to work with than others, she generally indicated a positive perspective regarding relationships between designers and faculty. Dora shared that the hardest parts about working with faculty were related to technology; low levels of technology proficiency made it difficult to work with some faculty members. She facetiously said, “Some of them should have retired 20 years ago” (Dora). This statement was less intended as a slight against the professional acumen of the faculty, and more an indication that a lack of technology proficiency had the potential to make relationships negative between faculty and dedicated instructional designers, specifically when the role of dedicated instructional designers is misinterpreted as a technology-centric role. Anna expressed a desire to work more closely with dedicated instructional designers, and that relationships were not negative, but could be more positive if they had time to build deeper relationships (Anna). She further shared that this limited relationship was not because of a lack of interest, but rather a lack of availability; the small size of the team prohibited the dedicated instructional designers from working more closely with a wide range of faculty (Anna).

When asked about the most challenging parts of working with faculty, Carla shared a drastically different perspective than either Dora or Anna. She shared that the most polarizing part of working with faculty was their power structure: “They can dismiss us, and not have any love lost, right? They can be like, ‘Oh, that’s for somebody else, I’m not interested, no thank you’” (Carla). This statement indicated frustration with faculty not valuing the role of Carla or her team, and resisting change based on their base of power as faculty. This power structure,

which positioned faculty above their administrative partners, extended to dedicated instructional designers in alarming ways. Carla shared one key example:

I think also, a lot of my staff, when they get down, they talk to me about not being “in the club.” And that faculty sometimes remind them of that. So, I had an instructional designer the other day, who knew a particular faculty member tended to take a longer time. So, instead of just scheduling an hour, she’d reserved an hour and a half. Well, then she had another appointment. And, so, at like the 80-minute mark, she was saying, “You know, I’m really, I’m, I’m sorry I have to wrap this up, I’ve got another appointment.” And the faculty member just kind of looked at her and said, “Do you need me to write you a note?” (Carla)

This anecdote revealed a problematic and negative relationship between the faculty member and the dedicated instructional designer. Carla considered this a clear situation of classism, which characterized many of the relationships she has witnessed between the dedicated instructional designers on her team and faculty:

I find that interesting myself, right, like faculty members who are some of the leaders with some very progressive things around classism, and sexism, and racism, but then kind of have some classist things they do that reinforce what makes staff members sometimes feel like they’re less than. And that happens. That happens with my team frequently, actually. That’s probably their number one complaint actually. Like, when one of them will come in here with their head down that they’re having a bad day, that’s what’s happened, in one way, shape, or form. (Carla)

Through this situation, it became clear to me that while many relationships between faculty and dedicated instructional designers are positive, there remains a pervasive culture of hierarchy at Great Plains Public University that categorically positions faculty above dedicated instructional designers. Although this reality may be partially mitigated by dedicated instructional designers affecting change through influence and their unique expertise, it was also clear to me that this culture was exacerbated by the lack of role clarity for dedicated instructional designers, the disproportionately small size of the instructional design team, and the organizational structure of the Office of Digital Learning at Great Plains Public University.

Instructional designers as support. The next theme related to the perception of dedicated instructional designers as primarily technical support for faculty. Partially due to the direct reporting association with the consolidated Office of Information Technology, dedicated instructional designers at Great Plains Public University have a significant role for technology support as part of their core responsibilities. This added role has been more apparent over the last year for the dedicated instructional designers because the Office of Digital Learning has been responsible for implementing the new LMS adopted by Great Plains Public University (Carla). Both of the dedicated instructional designers migrated courses and content from the previous LMS and, according to Carla, they were still moving content over on the last day of the previous contract. Aside from the LMS conversion and migration work, Dora also spoke to the technology support work she did as part of her every day responsibilities. When asked about prioritization of tasks and projects, Dora said,

Sometimes, there will be, you know, an urgent need from a faculty. “Something is broken in my class. It needs to be fixed. The students need to have access to it 20 minutes ago.” That sort of thing will obviously become a priority. (Dora)

She posited that because they are a small team, they get additional support from other staff members from IT who are not dedicated instructional designers, but have experience with technology support for online courses (Dora). The dedicated instructional designers also took support calls and e-mails from faculty focused on technology questions and facilitated training sessions focused on the use of technology, and specifically the major tools available to faculty at Great Plains Public University (Dora). However, Dora also noted that they are available to spend larger amounts of time with faculty doing support—specifically, walking them through how to develop a course using the LMS. In one such example, Dora shared that she spent 2.5 hours with a faculty member who wanted to learn how to set up his course independently: “He’s gonna turn it over to me, I can almost guarantee you, because he’s not that comfortable with

technology. But that's okay. That's what he wanted at the time" (Dora). This example indicated that Dora considered it her role to offer support to the faculty member on his terms, rather than on hers—a clear attestation of designers acting as technical support for faculty.

Carla corroborated this perspective when asked about the ways in which dedicated instructional designers work on courses and curriculum at Great Plains Public University:

So, most of the time what that looks like is, a faculty member will say, "Oh wow, I am not very techy, sometimes I think that my document means something that it doesn't mean." Like, a lot of our faculty think you can save in Canvas. There's these weird disconnects. And that is the starting place for a lot of our instructional design.

Carla considered technical support—specifically, helping faculty make sense of documentation and disconnects between their experience and the functions of the technology—the starting point for much of the work around instructional design at Great Plains Public University. While this did not suggest that support for technology was the exclusive role of dedicated instructional designers, it did present that technical support is the foundation for the work they do: it brought faculty into contact with dedicated instructional designers and acted as the primary pipeline for connecting. Carla further shared that when doing pedagogical-focused work, the dedicated instructional designers would often help faculty improve the look and feel of their courses, or "try to dress it up a bit" (Carla). Dora echoed this perspective, sharing that her work on curricula focused exclusively on normalizing the look and feel of online programs, rather than any sort of pedagogical work around course sequences or programs (Dora). While technical support was not the exclusive role of dedicated instructional designers, it was clearly the most prominent—and most utilized—service offered by the team of designers.

Anna, when asked whether or not the dedicated instructional designers played a leadership role at Great Plains Public University, suggested that the two designers acted primarily as support. She further suggested that, although the dedicated instructional designers

would prefer to have a mix of technology support and pedagogical work, their current focus was almost exclusively about support (Anna). She suggested that there had been a large number of trainings led by the dedicated instructional designers, specifically focused on the use of the LMS; this training was attributed to the LMS migration as the critical need for faculty (Anna). When coupled with the small size of the digital learning team, she shared that “basic needs take up a lot of their time. And so, for them to do much beyond that is challenging” (Anna). Although all three participants expressed a similar view for the value of instructional design at Great Plains Public University, the realities of a small team, an LMS migration, and roles focused heavily on technology precluded the dedicated instructional designers from focusing their time and expertise on pedagogical work. As a result, the opportunities and examples of dedicated instructional designers acting as leaders, rather than as support, are few and far between.

Instructional designers as leaders. When asked about the anticipated reaction from faculty if dedicated instructional designers assumed more learning and leadership-focused roles, Anna suggested that it would likely be a mix of responses: some faculty would welcome it, some would be territorial and resist, and others would not have a strong opinion. When asked her perspective on the leadership roles that administrators, designers, and faculty play, Anna focused primarily on administrators and designers, describing them both as support: “So, it’s kind of a hierarchy of support. Here’s some support, now, I’ll get out of your way so you can do stuff” (Anna).

Anna further suggested that for dedicated instructional designers to be an effective support to faculty, they must also lead—specifically, lead faculty toward best practices in online learning, rather than waiting for issues to arise. She was hesitant to describe the dedicated instructional designers as leaders and posited, “I’m not sure they see themselves as leaders, and I

think that would be helpful to them” (Anna). To Anna, use of the word support was not mutually exclusive to use of the word leadership; she described them in tandem, with support as the key mission, and leadership as the vehicle. This tandem relationship was her perspective across all levels of administrative authority for online learning—from top administrators to dedicated instructional designers. Regardless of semantics, Anna clearly believed that the dedicated instructional designers were not acting as leaders, but also thought that it would be beneficial for them and for faculty alike for that to change.

Dora expressed several times that she held no formal or informal leadership role at Great Plains Public University. However, she also suggested that her expertise in instructional design, along with her past experience as an online student, positioned her well to influence faculty decisions around instructional design and pedagogy (Dora). She further shared that some faculty, particularly those who have worked with her frequently, ask for her consultation on design decisions they have made in their courses. This behavior clearly demonstrated that there was a trusting relationship between Dora and many faculty—a sign of acting as a leader through influence. Dora also suggested, contrary to her assertion that she holds no formal leadership, that she acted as the *de facto* leader for her small team of instructional designers, specifically during the busiest seasons of the academic year:

I am, I am the one that [*sic*] takes charge of the smaller group of us, though, and I will wrangle everyone and, you, it’s like, “Okay we need to plan for fall. What are we doing for the fall? Let’s get together. Let’s talk about it. Bring up your calendar; we need to make sure that we get this all set up.” So, it’s not a formalized leadership role. I’m just kind of bossy sometimes. [Laughter] (Dora)

Dora dismissed taking leadership initiative as being bossy; however, this stance diminished the value of the role she played on her team in initiating and organizing strategic planning for the fall semester start. Although this behavior did not as show leadership alongside faculty in her direct work as a dedicated instructional designer, it did show leadership initiative

on the internal design team for the Office of Digital Learning. Further, Dora shared that the instructional design team have developed a course quality rubric, synthesized from the Open SUNY Center for Online Teaching Excellence Quality Rubric (OSCQR) and the Canvas Course Evaluation Checklist. This synthesized rubric focused primarily on course structure as a measure of quality, but also used a rating system focused on three levels of sophistication: expected design standards, best practices that add value to the student experience, and exemplary design that elevates learning. This rubric formed the basis for conversations with faculty around course quality and acted as a means to move away from technical support and toward pedagogical, leadership-focused design work.

I noted that there was clearly leadership potential, and possibly interest, from Dora; however, the culture and decisions made by administrators throughout her 17-year tenure de-incentivized leadership because she was not included on decisions that directly affected her role and work prior to the reorganization. One example of being excluded was shown through the reorganization itself. When asked whether she was consulted or included on the decision to restructure her team under a new supervisor and under the system-centralized IT office, she offered context: “We were called into a conference room, while the two individuals who were let go were being let go, and told, ‘By the way, this is how it will be moving forward’” (Dora). Additionally, when asked why the organization had structured the instructional design team the way they did, she stated, “I don’t really even know. It’s always been this way. I mean, as long as I’ve been here, it’s been this way. So, that’s a really good question [Laughter]” (Dora). Throughout her long tenure at Great Plains Public University, Dora had not been consulted, or even informed, of why she and her teammates were structured the way they were—and they were not included when that structure was changed. This exclusion reinforces a negative

perception around the value of instructional designers as leaders, and to me, partially explained the hesitance from Dora to identify herself as a leader, even though she noted several instances of influential leadership with faculty and her colleagues.

Carla also shared her perspective on the role of dedicated instructional designers as leaders at Great Plains Public University. When asked the question about leadership roles for administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers, Carla expressed that she has tried to provide opportunities for leadership for her team, but that no one on the team has been interested in pursuing them:

The times I ask them, “Hey, can you play a leadership role in this community of practice?” “Hey, you know, would you maybe be interested in an assistant director title?” It’s very much, across the board, with the particular group I have right now, that they’re like, “Can you just let me do my job?” (Carla)

She expressed confusion over this response from her team, including the dedicated instructional designers, but wanted to respect their wishes due to the significant amount of work to be done by such a small team (Carla). I noted two things about this interaction: first, that Carla did not consider working with small groups of faculty to be leadership-oriented work and second, that the resistance to adopting leadership-focused work by her team was fueled by the inordinate workload they experienced due to their disproportionately small team size. In conjunction with Dora’s experiences with being excluded from decisions that directly affected her, these reasons verified that, while all participants experienced instances of leadership by dedicated instructional designers, the overarching culture of Great Plains Public University was not one of overt and intentional leadership for and by the dedicated instructional designers. However, this lack of intentional leadership by dedicated instructional designers did not preclude them from acting as partners with faculty, specifically during the major LMS transition and with the course consultation and grant services recently proffered by the Office of Digital Learning.

Instructional designers as partners. There were far more instances shared of dedicated instructional designers acting as partners than there were of dedicated instructional designers acting as leaders. Carla reiterated the course quality rubric as one example of partnership between faculty and dedicated instructional designers. She also outlined the online course development grants program, and subsequent expectations, which positioned dedicated instructional designers as partners with faculty (Carla). In that program, it is required for faculty to sit down for an initial meeting with an instructional designer to walk through expectations, course goals, and receive a copy and overview of the course quality rubric (Carla). Although faculty subsequently had the opportunity to design and build their courses independently, they also had the option of having a dedicated instructional designer participate in the development of the course (Carla). Although the development portion, when done by instructional designers, was described more as a support function, the grant requirement focused on meeting one-on-one with a dedicated instructional designer clearly evidenced a perspective from Carla that dedicated instructional designers are partners with faculty. Carla also shared that the team worked with “frequent flyers,” or faculty who regularly reconnect with a dedicated instructional designer to partner on their courses (Carla).

Anna similarly suggested that dedicated instructional designers acted as partners to faculty, although she also noted that this situation had not always been the case—and that the team restructuring that occurred has helped move the Office of Digital Learning more toward partnership (Anna). She again noted that this partnership was initially due to a lack of manpower and infrastructure, both of which remained challenging, but that both had improved in the years since Carla assumed leadership over the dedicated instructional designers (Anna). She also expressed that it would be more difficult for some of the people on the instructional design team

to be trusted by faculty than it was for one particular team member who previously held a position in Anna's college. She suggested that it was easier for this person to gain trust and be seen as a partner because he had already worked alongside faculty from the College of Education. When asked how she would recommend alleviating this challenge, Anna suggested that the dedicated instructional designers again needed to take initiative, rather than wait for faculty to come to them: "You've gotta say, 'Hey, there's this great thing, I think it can help you.' You've gotta be a little bit of a salesperson. And, I think they're just getting to that" (Anna). Finally, Anna also stated that she has worked with dedicated instructional designers as partners specifically to alleviate the time constraints that made teaching online challenging. She suggested that her workload was much heavier up front than with face-to-face courses, and that meeting with a dedicated instructional designer to plan and organize her course helped to improve that time investment.

Dora also shared several instances of partnership between dedicated instructional designers and faculty, beginning with the mix of training facilitation and one-on-one meetings she had as part of her role. Faculty who came to facilitated training sessions were invited to come and bring any questions they had regarding their courses, positioning the dedicated instructional designers in a consultative role (Dora). The one-on-one meetings occurred in different locations—sometimes at the faculty member's office, and sometimes at the dedicated instructional designer's office. Dora suggested that her background in education and pedagogy was incredibly beneficial to her role, and helped her to be "more comfortable interacting with people and explaining technology in ways that were a little less frightening" (Dora). In kind, Dora also shared that many faculty have "come to see the value of having someone with the experience that I do, as a resource, and I have actually, they will advocate for me as well"

(Dora). Faculty recognized the value of partnership with a dedicated instructional designer, to the extent that they were willing to advocate on behalf of the designers, when needed. Dora consistently presented this tone of partnership throughout the interview, with a few notable exceptions. One such instance arose when discussing the unionized faculty status at Great Plains Public University. Unlike Carla, who interpreted the course grants as a means of partnership with requirements to hold faculty accountable to standards of quality, Dora suggested that the grants were a way to ensure quality not through partnership, but through compliance:

But oh, by the way, if you're going to take our money, you're going to play the game by our rules. And so there are a few stipulations. They have to sit down with one of us and go through that course rubric. They have to attend certain training sessions with us.
(Dora)

Although the outcome may have been the same—course grants with requirements to ensure quality—the tone and perspectives differed greatly between Carla and Dora. Whereas Carla saw an opportunity for increasing quality through partnership, Dora saw a chance to increase quality through compliance. This perspective was, however, the outlier in the interview with Dora; the vast majority of responses around working with faculty focused on partnership rather than on compliance. Although dedicated instructional designers were not considered to be leaders at Great Plains Public University, they were certainly considered to be partners—and that sense of partnership translated to many instances of collaboration, as well as a few situations where collaboration did not happen due to a difference in authority and influence.

Collaboration. I chose to differentiate between collaboration and instructional designers as partners for two key reasons: not all instances of collaboration happened with the involvement of an instructional designer, and a value of partnership did not always translate to an action of collaboration. Anna first mentioned collaboration in context with the Office of Digital Learning and the Great Plains Public University Library. The two organizations cofunded an Open

Education Resources (OER) coordinator position to address a major trend in the field of higher education through collaboration. Cofunding this position, according to Anna, was an attempt to combine complimentary perspectives to promote adoption of OER resources on their campus. From Anna's perspective, collaboration was necessarily at the center of not only the OER initiative, but also the entire culture of decision making and leadership at Great Plains Public University, specifically due to their decentralized structure. She likened collaboration on program development—which in her experience included marketers, dedicated instructional designers, administrators, and faculty members—to the role of an online instructor: “I create an environment that I hope . . . will help the students be successful, and I think our campus administration does the same. But then it is partly my responsibility as well” (Anna). In summation, the administrators, marketers, and dedicated instructional designers created the environment and structure for new online programs to be successful, but it was also the responsibility of faculty to take that environment and deliver a quality program. As such, Anna saw collaboration as not only important, but also necessary, in both the culture of the university and specifically when creating new online programs.

Anna did make a clear distinction, however, that collaboration did not mean decision making was an exclusively democratic process. Rather, she suggested that different populations of professionals wielded different power. For program development, she shared that curriculum decisions, both small and large, were made at the department and college level, as well as the decision for program modality. However, she also noted that the Office of Digital Learning, as well as other administrators, established initiatives to encourage new online program development (Anna). Anna suggested that this encouragement—or nudging or pushing—were

evidence of both collaboration and of respect for the unique roles and responsibilities of both faculty and administrators at Great Plains Public University.

Carla also discussed collaboration in program development, breaking it down into a few different levels of collaboration based on the phases of their program development process. First, administrators and faculty collaborated at the big picture level, both to identify a program to put online and to envision its success, both for meeting student needs and for meeting the needs of the university (Carla). She specifically mentioned that collaboration in this phase focused on market demand, working through approval channels, and establishing a shared purpose (Carla). She suggested that, at this level, dedicated instructional designers were not involved in the collaboration, but were aware of the possibility of the program going online. Once the program had been solidified, the dedicated instructional designers began consulting with Carla:

They start to inform me as far as their sort of perception and awareness of faculty in that unit. And their sort of assessment of where faculty in that unit are. Will they need a lot of work? Are they already doing really innovative things? Which is helpful. (Carla)

As the program development progressed, dedicated instructional designers were then brought in first for workshops, then for one-on-one meetings with faculty. They were also involved in templating courses across the entire program, although Carla noted that this task was a relatively new and less common, though desirable, initiative. After the program has successfully gone through all approval channels—including college-, university-, and system-level curriculum committees—Carla described another significant wave of collaboration:

And then once it gets approved, there's kind of another flurry of collaboration where, you know, they'll kind of do another, faculty will ask for more support right then. "Okay, how do we do this?" And then a lot of that pulls into a lot of my other staff, which is like, the marketing of it, the recruitment of it, the student support of it, so. But yeah, that's generally a very collaborative process. (Carla)

Finally, Dora also addressed collaboration during program development, suggesting that collaboration does happen in program development between faculty and administrators. She posited, however, that the dedicated instructional designers do not get involved at the program level, but are much more involved at the course level (Dora). This distinction corroborated both Carla and Anna's experiences with program development as a critical hub of collaboration, but at different stages, based on expertise and responsibility. However, Dora indicated a desire to be involved earlier in the process for program development, particularly with programs that only need a few courses to be put online before they can offer a fully online degree (Dora). Similar to the theme related to partnership with instructional designers, Dora had a consistent tone and examples of collaboration throughout the interview; her work one-on-one with faculty was described as collaborative, reinforcing the perspective that dedicated instructional designers are largely treated as partners alongside faculty. She also noted collaboration happening internally in the Office of Digital Learning, though primarily between the two dedicated instructional designers and the lead instructional technologist (Dora).

Dora also noted a few key situations in which collaboration did not happen. The first example focused on working with unionized faculty: "There is very little governance of what happens in online classes and how those are developed. We can make recommendations until we're blue in the face. They do not have to take them" (Dora). This statement harkened back to Dora's perspective on partnership and compliance, specifically around the course development grants. I concluded that the comment came not from a place of actively preventing collaboration, but of frustration for not having her voice and expertise respected and honored. As such, this example was a clear instance where collaboration could happen, but did not, due to

the difference in authority and responsibility between dedicated instructional designers and faculty members.

Scale and growth. Although Anna identified Great Plains Public University as a medium-sized institution, issues of scale and growth consistently emerged with all three participants. Related to growth, participants acknowledged a need and interest in growing online programs for a few key reasons. Dora noted that moving courses online was the only viable solution for a landlocked university to grow student enrollments. Additionally, issues around the budget model and budget changes were discussed by all three participants relative to growth. Carla shared that shifting to a responsibility-centered budget model was a critical initiative for Great Plains Public University to be pursuing. In this budget model, colleges and departments receive portions of tuition generated by enrollments in their programs. Carla indicated that changing the budget model was of paramount importance “because it enables the growth of online programs. If they [colleges] don’t have enough coming back, there’s not a lot of desire to do that extra work, even though the demand is clearly there from students” (Carla).

Carla suggested that the current budget model, in which colleges do not receive tuition back from enrollments, created a disconnect: it de-incentivized the pursuit of new online programs because the growth would not directly benefit the college (Carla). However, faculty recognized that their online classes filled up quickly, indicating that demand from students for online courses was high (Carla). Carla believed that for Great Plains Public University to grow, a budget model change was essential. Dora mentioned the budget of the university as well, but focused more on the budget cutbacks that were the impetus—or at least an influencer—of the centralization and consolidation of IT under the Great Plains System. She expressed that it has been difficult for everyone, and that there was a significant focus on finding efficiencies and

saving the university money. These two issues of growth—budget cuts and the need for a new budget model—also characterized the primary issue related to scale that was explored by all three interview participants: the size and resources of the Office of Digital Learning.

Anna repeatedly discussed the challenges for dedicated instructional designers, and more broadly the Office of Digital Learning, as stemming from a lack of manpower and infrastructure to sustain the breadth and scope of their workload (Anna). She suggested that the infrastructure concern was partially solved when Carla assumed leadership over the Office of Digital Learning; however, the office is still understaffed, and as a result, primarily focused on scalable solutions to account for their lack of staffing. Dora suggested a few key examples of this situation: administrative access to the LMS as a means of affecting change broadly through trainings and direct access to courses, the synthesized course quality rubric that allows dedicated instructional designers to influence course design without direct input beyond an initial meeting, and course development grants through which the Office of Digital Learning could select courses they anticipate will be successful through required work alongside dedicated instructional designers. When asked about the possible need for a larger team around instructional design, Carla suggested that the existing team does not always feel too small:

Right now, they're tired. Like, right now, I am absolutely fighting fatigue and I, like, I feel I am oversensitive right now to asking them to do one more thing. I, I get really concerned about that when it's towards the end of the summer and their lives are also gonna blow up again here in a couple weeks. I think that's very symptomatic of the LMS change, more so than business as usual.

Carla's perspective was that the size of the team only seemed too small because of the sheer volume of work associated with the LMS change. Dora did suggest that the LMS change was one of the largest initiatives in which she had participated as a professional; she also reiterated that they are a team of two dedicated instructional designers serving a faculty body of 1,100, which suggested to me that the work of the dedicated instructional designers was focused

more on technology and scalability out of necessity, due to the small size of the team. Dora further stated, “We try to juggle as many of the balls as we can as long as we can. [Laughter] I mean, we are a small team” (Dora). Although the issues related to budget availability and scalability of resources are complex, participants indicated that the scale of resources—specifically through the Office of Digital Learning and the instructional design team—was insufficient to accommodate the number of faculty, the breadth of responsibilities for both pedagogy and technology, and the need to grow enrollments through online program development.

Empowerment and disempowerment. I defined the empowerment and disempowerment theme as actions that empowered or disempowered the interviewee or a situation that shows empowerment or disempowerment happening in the organization. Carla indicated an instance of empowerment early on in the interview, specifically when discussing her reporting relationship to the CIO. She expressed feeling as though her ideas mattered, and that her work was both honored and validated by the leadership position she held within the central IT organization. However, she conversely—and immediately—indicated that she was often overly affiliated with IT, leading to disempowerment for the academic side of her position. For Carla, disempowerment happened almost exclusively through her academic work and reporting structure (Carla). She expressed that her relationships with faculty were positive, and that her reporting through IT empowered her to pursue initiatives of value to the university. Her work directly with academic administrators, then, was the primary challenge and avenue of disempowerment.

One other key instance of disempowerment came from her description of the previous culture of the Office of Digital Learning. She expressed some trepidation about answering the

question, but chose to do so, and shared that the previous leader of the digital learning team, prior to Carla assuming leadership, adopted a passive approach to enacting change, putting the impetus on faculty to find what they needed: “and no one ever came, because they didn’t have the information. I don’t know that skill sets were aligned. I don’t know if there was a vision for the future” (Carla). I gleaned from this response that the previous individual with oversight in digital learning was an ineffective leader and set a culture and expectation that disempowered dedicated instructional designers and faculty alike.

As the current leader of that team, Carla had to work to overcome that culture of disempowerment, and although it has greatly improved, according to Anna, interview participants also indicated that there was a ways yet to go until the culture fully shifted. Dora, when discussing empowerment, affirmed Carla’s leadership of the Office of Digital Learning, suggesting that in the last 2 years, she has felt empowered to take initiative and solve challenges, which was not the case under the previous leadership (Dora). When further asked about what administrators and faculty did that empowered or disempowered her, Dora shared that simple appreciation of her value and accomplishments—such as a thank you note—made her feel empowered. She shared an example of this action, when a faculty member with whom she had worked e-mailed her and the CIO to tell them how much Dora had helped him with his course (Dora). She further shared that being asked to give input was empowering, and that she did not feel as though “the faculty or the administration here do anything to make me not feel empowered for the most part. It’s not the sort of environment where people throw up roadblocks” (Dora).

When asked the same question, Anna referred to the small size of her program and the autonomy that comes with a decentralized university structure (Anna). She considered the

autonomy empowering, but acknowledged that isolation often accompanied that autonomy, making her feel disconnected and “kind of ignored. And it would be nice if I had a little more this or that. But, on the other hand, I can kind of do whatever” (Anna). Anna seemed conflicted between the empowering benefits of a decentralized structure, and the disempowering detractors of the structure. Ultimately; however, this conflict reinforced her assertion that collaboration and shared decision making was necessary for success at Great Plains Public University.

Summary

I interviewed three professionals from Great Plains Public University: one online learning administrator (Carla), one dedicated instructional designer (Dora), and one online faculty member (Anna). Data were analyzed through emergent and a priori code passes in values, process, and causation codes, and then organized into eight themes. The themes were (a) positive/negative structure, (b) positive/negative relationships, (c) instructional designers as leaders/not leaders, (d) instructional designers as partners/not partners, (e) instances of collaboration or no collaboration, (f) empowerment/disempowerment, (g) scale or growth, and (h) instructional designers as support. I concluded that the organizational structure, although recognized as positive by two participants, negatively influenced perception and role development for dedicated instructional designers—reinforcing their roles as support rather than leadership—and impeded the ability for the online learning administrator to affect positive change through the academic side of her reporting structure. Further, the ambiguity around the reorganization and current organizational structure by the faculty participant indicated a significant need for improved communication and organizational clarity. When positive, the reporting lines to IT benefitted the Office of Digital Learning due to increased access to

technologies vital to online learning and the demands of scaling services to a large audience through a small team.

Relationships at Great Plains Public University were largely positive between administrators and faculty; however, the relationships between dedicated instructional designers and faculty were characterized by classism and a negative hierarchy of authority. This disempowering culture limited the scope of influence for the dedicated instructional designers and overshadowed the many positive relationships between faculty and dedicated instructional designers that existed at the institution. Great Plains Public University had a broad culture of collaboration due to its largely decentralized structure, specifically for colleges and academic departments. Dedicated instructional designers were also seen and treated as partners and they, in kind, treated faculty as partners. The unionized status of faculty caused tensions related to requiring training and measures for quality, but they have not resulted in a change in culture aware from the prevalence of collaboration. Finally, the university needed to change its budget model to grow online enrollments and to incentivize colleges to put more programs online. This issue of growth was associated with issues of scale, specifically the small team size for dedicated instructional designers who partner with a large population of online faculty.

A within-case analysis of Midwest Public University is provided in Chapter 6. A comparative analysis, which includes all three institutions chosen for this study, is provided in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, I present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for implementation and further study.

Chapter 6: Results From Midwest Public University

Midwest Public University, a pseudonym for one of three universities selected to participate in this study, is a public research institution founded in 1956 and located in the Midwest region of the United States. The local city in which Midwest Public University is situated formed Midwest Public University from two local universities after the legislature decided the city would benefit from having a major university within city limits. The university experienced drastic enrollment growth, with 20,000 students by 1970. In 1972, the state founded a university system to unify the two existing university systems in the state; as a result, Midwest Public University shared a research mission with its sister institution from another city and continued to grow in both size and reputation for research and high-quality education.

Midwest Public University holds a current student body enrollment of approximately 27,500 student across 194 academic programs and a nearly \$700 million annual operating budget. The budget consists of 24% financial aid, 19% from state appropriations, and 30% from student tuition. With 1,600 faculty and staff, Midwest Public University has 15 schools and colleges, 11 of which reside on the main campus of the university; it boasts five additional campuses—one dedicated to a science research facility, one to cross-disciplinary innovation, one to the School of Public Health, and two dedicated to freshman and sophomore students. Midwest Public University also has a significant online presence, boasting 30 programs and certificates with 850 courses fully online. The institution also offers all general education required courses online through a dedicated 60-credit sequence intended to give students flexibility, regardless of their chosen undergraduate program.

Midwest Public University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), along with a host of other program-specific accreditors, including the National Association of

Schools of Music (NASM) and the Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA). It holds a Carnegie classification of Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity, a change in category up from the moderation classification, due to its strong research contributions in recent years. It is ranked 94th in best online bachelor's programs and 150th in best online graduate education programs by *U.S. News and World Report*. The vision statement of Midwest Public University emphasizes research, sustainability, and a commitment to being the best place to learn and work for students, faculty, and staff. The university espouses eight key values, including statements on collaboration, a caring environment, open inquiry, ethical behavior, diversity, transparency, good stewardship, and pride in the institution itself. Midwest Public University belongs to the Midwest System of Universities, a unified university system which includes 13 4-year universities and 13 2-year campuses that are affiliated with seven of the 4-year institutions. The Midwest System operates under a single Board of Regents that governs system-wide decisions, policies, and funding.

Midwest Public University is nationally and internationally known for its excellence in research for distance education and technology, specifically through a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Through this grant, the university established a research center focused on cross-institutional research and collaboration; the center focuses specifically on student access and success in online learning and on developing evidence-based research for online learning practices and technology implementation. The Center for Teaching and Learning, the centralized unit in which institution-level instructional design professionals are housed, does not have the same degree of national recognition, although its members have published widely on their work, including professional development courses and pedagogical practices. The Center for Teaching and Learning went through a reorganization in 2014; in the

reorganization, a team focused on face-to-face learning consultations merged with the unit dedicated to online learning consultations and technologies. They were consolidated under a single director and are organized in a flat structure without hierarchy, other than the director herself. As such, the organizational chart of the Center for Teaching and Learning includes professionals who work alongside faculty in any modality at Midwest Public University, along with technology support professionals and an LMS administrator (see Figure 3).

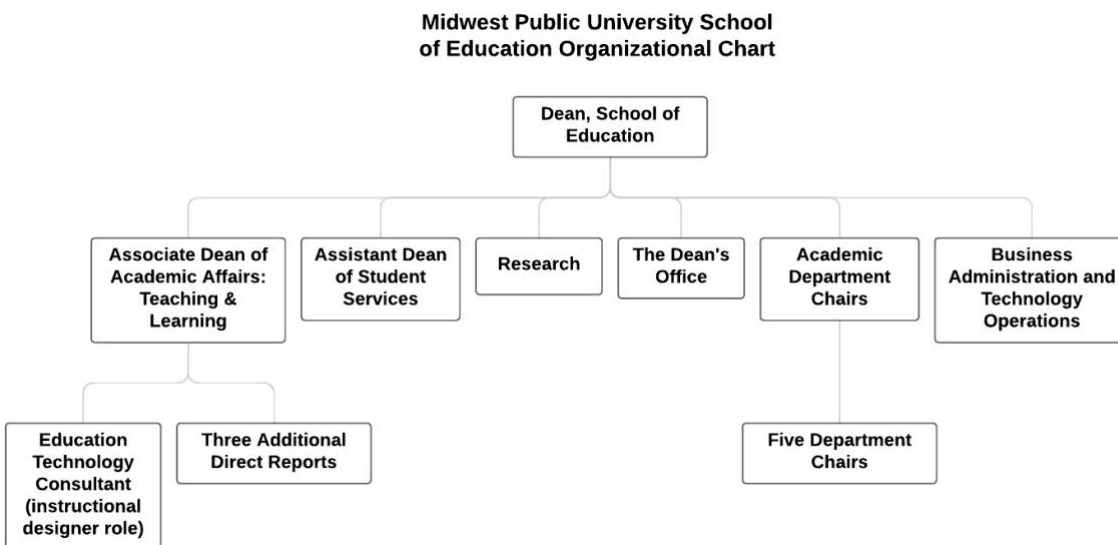


Figure 3. Organizational chart of the Midwest Public University School of Education.

The roles for dedicated instructional designers at the Center for Teaching and Learning vary widely, based on need and availability. Dedicated instructional designers at the Center for Teaching and Learning primarily focus on one-on-one consultation for faculty members of any modality, specifically around pedagogy and teaching practice. The dedicated instructional design professionals on this team are known as teaching, learning, and technology consultants to differentiate them from a culture-specific definition of an instructional designer, which at Midwest Public University, was known historically as a role specifically for full development of online courses on behalf of faculty, rather than a partnership role based on pedagogical and

online learning expertise. However, teaching, learning, and technology consultants are included in this study because they fit the role of dedicated instructional designer, as defined for this study. All teaching, learning, and technology consultants from the Center for Teaching and Learning must have terminal degrees and significant teaching experience; no direct education in instructional design is necessary, although the work of this team is, at its core, instructional design.

Midwest Public University operates with a blended organizational structure for dedicated instructional designers: several operate in the centralized Center for Teaching and Learning, but many others are decentralized in individual schools or colleges. Not all schools or colleges at Midwest Public University have dedicated instructional designers on staff. Individual academic units are encouraged to hire dedicated instructional designers, specifically when they aim to put new programs online or revise existing online programs, although adoption of this structure varies between individual schools and colleges. The roles for these individuals vary greatly, depending on the school or college itself, its resources, and their discipline-specific needs. The example used in this study, the Midwest Public University School of Education, formerly had a team of graduate assistants, two full-time dedicated instructional designers, and an educational technologist on staff. Over the last 5 years, all but one of those positions have been eliminated, resulting in a single instructional design and technology professional maintaining all aspects of educational technology and instructional design for the school as a full-time remote employee. This individual reports to the associate dean of academic affairs for teaching and learning and operates as the only dedicated instructional designer among 150 faculty and staff. An

abbreviated organizational chart represents the organizational structure for the dedicated instructional designer in the Midwest Public University School of Education (see Figure 4).

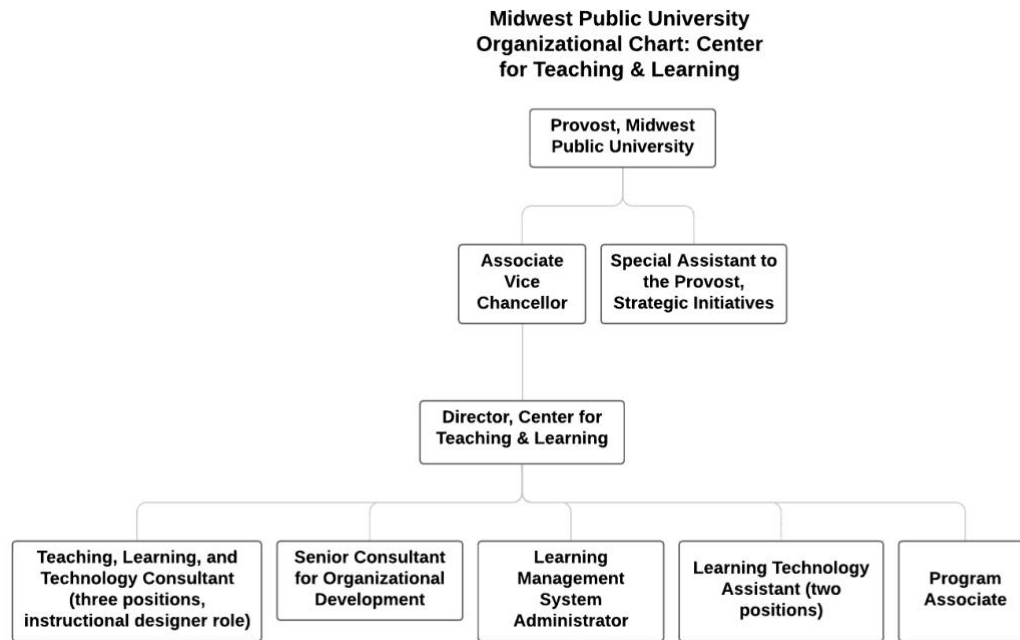


Figure 4. Organizational chart of the Midwest Public University Center for Learning & Teaching.

The dedicated instructional design professional at the Midwest Public University School of Education holds a consolidated role for technology and pedagogy and is known primarily as an educational technology consultant. In this role, the instructional design professional focuses on school-wide initiatives such as assessment and accessibility, as well as coaching faculty through technology and pedagogy needs in all modalities. Although this professional's title does also not directly reference instructional design, his position fit the definition of dedicated instructional designer used for this study.

As Midwest Public University was going through an LMS transition at the time of this study, the dedicated instructional designers in both the centralized unit and those decentralized across schools and colleges were working heavily on the migration, which included trainings for

faculty, movement of content, and setting up campus-specific policies and procedures. The decision to move to a new LMS was managed by the Midwest System, with consultation and input from each of its campuses, including Midwest Public University.

I contacted the former director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, now the director of research in distance education and technology, to determine whether Midwest Public University fit the purposive sampling criteria and one of the three identified structure profiles of the study. I discovered that the institution met the required criteria as an accredited public doctoral research institution with at least one online graduate program. Midwest Public University met the final structure profile for the study: a blended structure for dedicated instructional designers with a centralized online learning team and decentralized dedicated instructional designers in individual schools and colleges; an academic reporting structure; and distributed curricular authority resting in its 15 schools and colleges. The director of research in distance education and technology agreed to have the university participate in the study after verifying through the Internal Review Board of the institution that no additional review was necessary for cross-institutional research beyond my existing Internal Review Board approval.

Interviews

The director of digital learning recommended two decentralized dedicated instructional designers, one centralized dedicated instructional designer, two online faculty members, and one online learning administrator. Each potential interview participant was contacted via e-mail and provided the informed consent form and a brief overview of the research study. One decentralized dedicated instructional designer declined to participate and the other indicated his agreement to participate on a signed informed consent form. The centralized dedicated instructional designer responded and indicated his willingness to participate on a signed

informed consent form. Neither of the two online faculty members contacted responded; I solicited further names, and contacted two additional online faculty members, but both did not respond to the requests. The online learning administrator responded and indicated her agreement to participate through a signed informed consent form. Although no online faculty members agreed to participate from Midwest Public University, all four participants interviewed held a teaching role of one type or another. I scheduled 90-minute interviews with each of the three interview participants from Midwest Public University.

Sid (a pseudonym), the decentralized dedicated instructional designer interviewed, has a formal title of educational technology consultant. Alex (a pseudonym), the centralized dedicated instructional designer, holds a formal title of teaching, learning, and technology consultant. Alex was interviewed using the online learning administrator interview protocol because he has an additional overload role for which he is collaborating on program development for the university. When asked which role he believed would be a better representation of his perspective and work at Midwest Public University, Alex chose to be interviewed using the administrator protocol. Finally, Nina (a pseudonym), the online learning administrator interviewed, holds a formal title of special assistant to the provost for strategic initiatives and works primarily on business and program development-related projects for online learning, including marketing, funding, and facilitating development of new online programs and services. All interviews were conducted through Zoom, a video conferencing tool. Each participant is identified in this study through pseudonyms to ensure anonymity (see Table 3).

Table 3

Midwest Public University Participant Pseudonyms

Participant roles	Number of participants per role	Participant pseudonyms
Decentralized dedicated instructional designer	1	Sid
Centralized dedicated instructional designer	1	Alex
Online learning administrator	1	Nina

The interview protocols used for semistructured interviews with all participants were the same as those reported in Chapter 4. The interview protocols for each role type—dedicated instructional designer, online faculty member, and online learning administrator—are included in appendices B, C, and D, respectively.

Analysis overview. I analyzed the responses to the questions from each interview protocol across three coding passes, ensuring that each code was relevant to the research questions of the study. Interview transcripts were analyzed through the same codes and themes used in the analysis of participant responses from the other two cases in this study. In two coding passes, I analyzed responses through emergent codes, focusing on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the participants, in addition to one causation code for exploring causal links between decisions and situational context. In the final coding pass, I analyzed responses through a priori codes, focusing on process codes that signified actions or decisions common across all transcripts. Clear categories emerged from the coding of responses, resulting in a series of common themes. The themes that emerged from Midwest Public University are (a) positive/negative structure, (b) positive/negative relationships, (c) instructional designers as leaders/not leaders, (d) instructional designers as partners/not partners, (e) instances of

collaboration or no collaboration, (f) empowerment/disempowerment, (g) scale or growth, and (h) instructional designers as support.

The theme of positive/negative structure related to the organizational structure in place positively or negatively informing one's success, work, well-being, or perception. The theme of positive/negative relationships was defined as perception of the relationships in the organization as either positive or negative, and as influencing the organization in positive or negative ways. The theme of instructional designers as leaders/not leaders was defined as a belief that instructional designers play/do not play a clear leadership role in the organization. The theme of instructional designers as partners/not partners related to actions that indicated that instructional designers were treated or not treated as experts, consultants, and partners who are equal in value and influence with faculty. The theme of instances of collaboration or no collaboration was defined as actions that indicated that collaboration was or was not happening in the organizational culture or situation being discussed. I defined the theme of empowerment/disempowerment as actions that empowered or disempowered the interviewee or a situation that shows empowerment or disempowerment happening in the organization. The theme of scale or growth related to decisions, situations, or outcomes that were influenced or caused by growth or the size of the university or its resources. Finally, the theme of instructional designers as support was defined as attitudes that indicated that instructional designers acted as or were treated as support staff with low expertise, rather than collaborators toward a shared vision/mission.

Positive or negative structure. According to Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, there were some significant challenges related to the organizational structure of the Center for Teaching and learning after its restructure to consolidate face-to-face

consultants and online consultants into one team. Alex shared that there was a gap in day-to-day operations as a result of their flat team structure: “I feel like with a little bit more, not oversight, but a little bit clearer management and clear goal-setting, that we could operate more efficiently, which would help us not feel so behind” (Alex). He noted that this sentiment was not a result of any deficiency in the director of his team; he described the director’s role as very outward-facing, and although she acted as an advocate for her team’s work across the university, there remained a gap in operational leadership (Alex). Alex further noted, “I think it’s been a long-standing feeling among myself and many other members of the group that having, sort of a mid-management-type associate director position would be sort of helpful, a day-to-day kind of person.”

This lack of day-to-day leadership for the Center for Teaching and Learning resulted in occasional conflict about responsibilities and project leadership; Alex also attributed to this perceived conflict to the director of the unit being a 75%-time appointment, with her other duties as a faculty member and researcher taking a portion of her time away from her work with the Center for Teaching and Learning. This lack of direct familiarity and consistent engagement with her team led to frustration for Alex and his teammates; when coupled with the budget cuts Midwest Public University had recently enacted, it produced low morale for the team, as well as challenges around role definition and leadership over specific projects. Alex shared that the role of teaching, learning, and technology consultant had been a challenging one for which to find qualified candidates because the range of skills required did not often match up with candidate expectations:

It’s been a very difficult role to hire for, because we have sort of, you know, we have a PhD preferred [qualification], with all of this teaching experience. And we want people to be able to have a pedagogical background, but still be willing to basically be part of a help desk, take on initiatives that they don’t know anything about. (Alex)

Without more direct leadership over the day-to-day operations of the team, the role definitions became unclear and created minor internal conflict (Alex). Alex also shared that, due to the entire team consisting of professionals with terminal degrees, members of the team are used to a fair amount of autonomy; I garnered from this perspective that the issue was not with an inability to work independently, but that the lack of daily leadership made it difficult to find both shared and independent focus. Alex stated, “I think the nature of the work, and the service work that we do just requires a little bit more [management].” Alex suggested that the team was spread out and not very focused because each person on the team did not have a specific window of expertise for which they were explicitly responsible: “We share so much of this, that we kind of all do everything. . . . 5% of my job description, it’s like 50% of my job. And I’m just doing whatever needs to be done.”

To further set the context for the type of instructional design work that the Center for Teaching and Learning did, Alex shared that he and his team have always used a “teach-to-fish model,” primarily evidenced by their voluntary professional development course in which faculty can receive a certification in online or blended teaching. This course acted as the starting point for many, but not all, consultations with faculty for Alex and his colleagues. The intent behind this teach-to-fish approach was both to accommodate the decentralized nature of Midwest Public University and to scale available resources, which had been dwindling due to budget cuts (Alex). Alex shared that he believed it was of critical importance that the team worked as a group, rather than a loosely connected group of independent consultants. Although he was marginally critical of the organizational structure due to its lack of operational leadership, Alex also noted that the centralized nature of their team was a positive, sharing that the employees of the Center for Teaching and Learning hold the same university role-type as most of the faculty

with whom they work—they are academic teaching staff. Alex noted that this peer relationship was critical to his success daily, but also in specific projects he oversaw, such as the development of a peer review process that he offered to schools and colleges as a consultant. Alex described the role as one in which he would advise departments how to implement a peer review process to ensure the quality of online courses; his status as a peer made this activity an easier prospect to be seen and respected as an expert (Alex).

Nina, the online learning administrator participant, lauded the approach of the Center for Teaching and Learning to faculty development, suggesting that their decentralized structure, although in contrast to many other universities that consolidated their online programs under a fully dedicated unit, had been both successful and productive of meaningful research. She called this structure “a much more matrixed structure.” Nina shared that because of this matrixed structure, she operates mostly through influence: “I’m not able to deploy 50 people and, ‘You all go off and do that.’ I work through the power of persuasion and shared vision to get goals.” She also provided some context for the decision to structure online learning under an academic reporting line. Previously, online learning was structured under the Department of Continuing Education at Midwest Public University; it was moved under the provost to set oversight of it above divisions, which often delayed decision making on critical needs such as marketing and website development (Nina). She suggested that this move to centralize online learning under the provost has been helpful and improved their ability to make decisions, but that curricular support of online learning was still embedded directly in schools and colleges (Nina). She suggested that the role definitions between dedicated instructional designers that were decentralized and those that were centralized were clear (Nina). Alex corroborated this perspective, stating, “Those roles tend to be, they’re well-managed and they’re very specific

because they have a smaller audience they're working with." However, Sid, the dedicated instructional designer from the School of Education, shared that his role was not well-defined. Sid noted that as the only person in his organization with direct work related to instructional design and technology, he often struggled with both advocacy for his value as well as focusing on instructional work, rather than technology support that fell outside the scope of both his role and his expertise.

The decentralized nature of Midwest Public University meant that having dedicated instructional designers in each academic unit was common; however, Nina noted that the disparity between schools and colleges was evident—specifically, that not all schools had chosen to hire dedicated instructional designers:

I think where there can be a little bit of muddiness is the disparity across the schools and colleges. Because some deans historically made significant investments and others didn't, and then subsequently some of the ones who didn't launched some online programs, but they didn't necessarily invest in infrastructure as much. (Nina)

This disparity was evident in the School of Education, as noted by Sid; he shared that while many schools and colleges were doing fine in recruitment and retention, his school had been struggling: "There's no custodial service anymore, and everybody just got rid of their phones, and just, all these money-saving things. Or getting rid of whole teams of people. Not replacing them and putting it all in one person." Sid noted that other positions were eliminated and then consolidated into his role. He shared that as people left his team, the positions were not backfilled, and some individuals did not have their contracts renewed. Although all of Midwest Public University was experiencing financial strain, the experiences of the decentralized dedicated instructional designer were unique because he was isolated as the sole person in a larger organization.

Sid shared that the initial reason for hiring a dedicated instructional designer in the School of Education was convenience, coupled with an interest in the School of Education being the leaders on campus with work related to pedagogy in any format. However, budget constraints challenged this vision, and relegated Sid to a solo role in which he held significant autonomy, but also created role perception issues from faculty—specifically in regard to his level of pedagogical and online learning expertise. Sid stated, “They keep saying, like, ‘You’re a tech guy,’ and I’m, like, ‘I’m really not, I’m really not. And I cannot fix your phone, and I do not know anything about printers, and servers and [laughter] whatever.’” He further noted that without colleagues to help him, and without role clarity, he was forced to start refusing to help people to have time to focus on his primary role:

So the more I’m able to delegate or kind of pass those things off or just refuse to do them, the more [time] I’m having to do some of these bigger projects that really take advantage of my skills that I learned. (Sid)

Sid indicated that it has taken considerable time for him to be able to refuse work and delegate tasks to student workers, and that he was still struggling with it. Sid’s experiences as a decentralized dedicated instructional designer, although positive when he was able to do work directly related to his skills and experience in pedagogy and online learning, were largely negative because his role was overshadowed by the technical support needs of the School of Education, the financial difficulties that led to the dissolution of his team, and the negativity of relationships with many faculty who would not see him as a peer with expertise in online teaching and learning.

Relationships positive or negative. Sid’s perspective on relationships with the faculty in the Midwest Public University School of Education may be summed up by his brief statement on his role: “I think people are so blinded by whatever it is that they think I do.” He shared several instances of faculty not trusting him to do his work, expecting him to perform technology-related

tasks that did not involve pedagogy or instructional design, and faculty who did not respect him as an equal educator. One such instance, he noted, was between a faculty member with whom he worked as a graduate assistant, his role prior to becoming a full-time employee at the School of Education. Recalling the situation, Sid stated,

There's one faculty member who I worked with when I was a graduate assistant. And I think she's still under the impression that I'm the same person I was 10 years ago, when I started. And I'm very different now. . . . So, we have a lot of tension and yeah, she steps over me and goes to my supervisor to tell, whatever. Like, "You won't believe what Sid did. He did this, and I don't think Sid knows what he's doing." And I'm like, "Why do you just come and talk to me? We are equals now, whether you like it or not." (Sid)

Sid experienced issues like this one frequently; he also shared that faculty would ignore the flowchart he made along with the business technology team to delineate responsibility and who to contact for help. He also shared that the dean of the School of Education is not well-liked, and that the dean largely contributed to a negative culture; Sid even went as far to say that, when he quits his job sometime in the future, he will cite the primary reason as the toxic leadership from the dean. However, Sid said that he has a good relationship with his direct supervisor—the associate dean of academic programs—and that she will often take things to the dean on behalf of Sid. He further shared that there are some faculty, specifically those who know his background in education, have expressed confidence in his ability to do pedagogically focused work (Sid). He also shared that some people rely on him for convenience, but that he knows he can push back on them to take more ownership of technology-related tasks themselves. These instances reflect a wide mix of positive and negative relationships between the decentralized dedicated instructional designer and the faculty and administration of the School of Education.

When asked about the centralized instructional design unit at the Center for Teaching and Learning, Sid shared a mixed perspective on their relationships with him. He suggested that the

association with them is largely helpful because it gives him some colleagues at the university who do similar work to his own. However, he shared one example of a negative relationship with the Center for Teaching and Learning, which focused on Sid experiencing the same misinterpretation of his role that he often experiences with faculty in the School of Education. He shared that when he called the Center for Teaching and Learning, the student workers did not know him or recognize his expertise, and treated him as though he was a novice (Sid). He also shared,

I have felt a little funny about that, when working with the central group in that, they will come, they will say, “Well, we’ll offer to help you teach about pedagogy.” And I’m like, “I don’t know if I need you to train me on pedagogy.” So that same experience, that same thing that I was getting from the faculty, I have been, have been on the other end of it. Like, I, like feeling like they’re stepping on my feet, kind of thing. (Sid)

Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, did not share much related to relationships between the centralized and decentralized dedicated instructional designers, other than to note that the decentralized positions were well-defined from his perspective, and that the decentralized dedicated instructional designers participate in the online program council, an institution-wide council that provided feedback and guidance on decisions regarding online learning at Midwest Public University. Instead, Alex focused primarily on relationships between the Center for Teaching and Learning and faculty. He shared that he, as well as his colleagues, experience primarily peer relationships with faculty, and that it was of critical importance to their work (Alex). He described himself as a consultant without any sort of authoritative role, but was rather someone who faculty could ask questions of and rely on to be up to date on trends and effective practices (Alex).

When discussing his colleagues at the Center for Teaching and Learning, Alex shared that early on in the reorganization, some people acted territorial; this behavior was eventually alleviated and became much easier once the team had a solidified identity, including new e-mail

addresses that reflected the name and presence of the consolidated team. He shared that he had positive relationships with both the director of his team and the special assistant to the provost, under whom he had an overload role working directly on online programs (Alex). When asked to share about the relationships between administrators and faculty, Alex suggested that the relationships were largely positive, with a few small caveats around increasing class sizes and pockets of resistance to online learning. Nina, the online learning administrator participant, echoed this sentiment, sharing that she could only recall one instance of negativity in which a faculty member expressed frustration and resistance about the move toward online learning. She stated, “It’s like, well, that, the moment for that debate was in 2000. It was not in 2014, which was when this happened. And so no, that’s it. That’s what I can remember [laughter] as far as controversy with us” (Nina).

On the whole, relationships at Midwest Public University are quite positive between the centralized dedicated instructional designers, administrators, and faculty. However, the decentralized instructional designer often experienced frustration, misinterpretation of his role, dismissive behavior related to his expertise, and toxic leadership associated with both a faculty member and the dean of the School of Education. While those in centralized positions had a space for advocacy for their work externally through the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, Sid, the decentralized designer, had no such advocacy. Even still, the budget constraints, lack of clear roles, and challenges inherent in the blended organizational structure of Midwest University contributed to a sense of disempowerment for both the centralized and decentralized dedicated instructional designers.

Empowerment or disempowerment. Although Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, shared that relationships were largely positive, there were elements that

negatively influenced his ability to feel empowered to pursue meaningful work within his direct role as a teaching, learning, and technology consultant. The pervasive need for a day-to-day operations leader contributed to feelings of disempowerment. Alex stated that he and the Center for Teaching and Learning team “don’t have representation on any certain group that’s going to have a big impact. It’s really about informing our director, and then sending that up a little bit.” Although he and others on his team participated in the online program council, Alex saw it more as an avenue for receiving information, rather than an opportunity to share and pursue new projects or work.

Conversely, Alex considered his overload work with the special assistant to the provost was an area of direct empowerment, and as a role that positively informed his career development, as well as his interest in working at the program level. He further shared that he and his colleagues feel disempowered by their rare involvement in program-level work; he suggested that they had both the knowledge and expertise to inform decision making at a higher level of authority and could have been contributing more than they were (Alex). He also stated, “It’s really so distributed that it’s hard to even imagine, you know, a kind of group getting together on a formal basis to do this kind of thing” (Alex). While there was clearly interest in doing more work at the program level for new online programs, that role was limited to just Alex in his overload work. There was a clear sense of disempowerment associated with this limitation of the scope of work for centralized dedicated instructional designers; the same sense of disempowerment extended to the decentralized designer participant as well.

Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer, talked about a faculty member who has consistently received poor evaluations on his course, but refused to make changes that would clearly benefit students. The question related to key online learning initiatives, and Sid

was discussing the importance of two initiatives that he had been trying to implement: a course quality rubric and a new end-of-course evaluation instrument. He shared the course as an example of one that would benefit from both, but also expressed that he would not be able to advise faculty on how to implement results because of his position as a nonfaculty member (Sid). He expressed that while he could help faculty collect better data, he had no authority to influence how they use it, specifically citing promotion and tenure criteria as an avenue that incentivizes faculty to change (Sid). I interpreted this comment to reflect a desire for both the quality and evaluation initiatives to positively affect tenure as a means of gaining adoption; however, this option was likely an avenue closed off to Sid because he was not a faculty member. Sid also expressed feelings of disempowerment when faculty misinterpreted his role as one primarily focused on technical support. He gave several examples of this misinterpretation in passing, including being asked to set up virtual video conferencing rooms and captioning videos—both tasks for which he has created instructional resources to aid faculty in doing the work themselves (Sid).

Sid also shared two key examples of disempowerment happening with senior administrators in the School of Education. In the first example, he discussed the relationship dynamic between faculty and the dean, suggesting that to keep relationships positive for both, he would do things for the dean of which faculty were not aware, and he would do things for faculty of which the dean was not aware (Sid). He expressed that this behavior ensured the negative relationships between the faculty and the dean did not affect his work; however, the act of intentionally keeping one party out of communication with another related to projects was a sign of negative relationships that led to disempowerment. The second key example centered on Sid's direct supervisor, the associate dean of academic programs, who he described as a people-

pleaser who would not stand up for him and does not always understand his role and work. Sid articulated a plan he developed for migrating courses and programs into the new LMS that Midwest Public University adopted.

He shared that the timeline was consistent with other schools and colleges on campus, and that he created a document to disseminate to faculty through the curriculum committee and department chairs (Sid). However, when he shared the document with his supervisor for approval, she approved the document but decided to present the information to faculty herself instead of entrusting it to Sid. Sid expressed confusion at this situation:

So I created this document. We talked about it just a few days ago, actually. And I got it approved and it's all good. And now she's going to be the one to communicate it. And she's going to go through department chairs. And again, so I think that kind of move is, another kind of taking me out of the leadership chair, the seat at the table. And I don't know why. Actually I don't. Because it just happened, I'm not sure how I necessarily feel about it. And whether maybe, I need to have a conversation about it. (Sid)

I noted that this action was a clear example of disempowerment; Sid created a timeline, planned an initiative, and developed a deliverable to support it, which was then taken out of his purview and communicated to faculty by his supervisor instead. Although Sid also shared examples of empowerment throughout the interview—such as his relative autonomy in his role and his supervisor being supportive of initiatives he wanted to pursue—the overwhelming majority of anecdotes and situations shared indicated a strong sense of disempowerment for Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer participant.

Nina, the online learning administrator participant, operated at a different level than the other two interview participants from Midwest Public University. As such, her perspective focused more on institutional initiatives than on the direct work of supervising dedicated instructional designers. Her direct reports did not include dedicated instructional designers, except for Alex, who worked with her on online programs through his overload role (Nina). She

spoke highly of Alex's work and suggested that he and the other centralized dedicated instructional designers had a tremendous amount of creativity and expertise when relaying a story about a course one of the other dedicated instructional designers taught. The course, which was focused on apocalyptic fiction, included a live role-playing game about a zombie attack:

It just struck me just what tremendous creativity there was on display, and how, that's what's exciting about what we do. It's that potential for real creativity, to do things in ways that previously weren't possible because there are new ways of doing them with new tools. So, I think that's the incredible promise of really skilled instructional designers. (Nina)

Although Nina did not directly supervise dedicated instructional designers, her perspective was one of advocacy and support for the value, expertise, and influence of instructional designers. This clear sense of empowerment, however, did not make its way to either the centralized or decentralized instructional designers; rather, the organizational structures in place prevented them from moving into the type of creative leadership roles Nina mentioned as the true promise of skilled instructional designers.

Instructional designers as leaders. Both Sid, the decentralized designer, and Alex, the centralized designer, shared examples of projects, initiatives, and consultations that showed clear leadership skill and potential in their respective contexts. Sid provided an overview of the course quality initiative and evaluation instrument projects he was pursuing, which he said were framed around the need by the School of Education to improve recruitment and retention. When asked if he considered his work in course quality an influence in retention and recruitment, he posited that the evaluation instrument he developed had a more indirect influence, through giving faculty the means to make more informed decisions about their courses through the lens of the student experience (Sid). Regarding the course quality initiative, he suggested that this project held more potential to directly influence retention because better quality courses encourage students to stay. He cited low course quality in some critical courses as one reason for the low retention

rates of Midwest Public University School of Education (Sid). He suggested that courses that are not well-designed incentivize students to pursue other institutions or alternatives for licensure, specifically in the teacher education programs at the School of Education (Sid). He gave another example of a poorly designed course for which students were expected to read material, then submit assignments to a drop box, with no direct interaction between learners or instructors.

Sid's insights into the quality of courses at the School of Education as well as his significant expertise in online learning positioned him well to lead initiatives around course quality; however, as a nonfaculty member, these initiatives were not within his purview. He discussed working with the curriculum committee for the School of Education to build buy-in for his projects; when they approved, it was easier for him to gain traction. He was not, however, a member of the curriculum committee, nor did he have authority to require the new evaluation instrument or course quality initiative be used by faculty. When coupled with the disempowering culture, isolation as the only dedicated instructional designer in a school of 150 employees, and broad scope of responsibilities in his consolidated position, Sid's opportunities for leadership were few and far between, even when his potential for leadership—in areas sorely needed by the School of Education—were significant.

Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, similarly exhibited many instances of leadership, both in his role as a teaching, learning, and technology consultant and in his overload work focused on online programs. In one initiative, he described how the Center for Teaching and Learning developed a toolkit for faculty who had been identified as teaching courses with high drop, fail, and withdrawal (DFW) rates (Alex). They started by identifying the high DFW rate courses for each department, and then created the toolkit with an explicit goal:

reduce DFW rates in the identified courses by 20%. He expressed that it was an important issue because of retention concerns at Midwest Public University:

Even though we focus so much in our center on teaching, student success is really at the heart of that. And I feel like this has been a great way to provide very concrete ways that instructors can make those changes. (Alex)

However, even though this project had been led by the centralized dedicated instructional designers, the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning was the person who disseminated the data and offered the toolkit to faculty. Although it may not be uncommon for a director to disseminate information gathered and produced by her team, Alex noted that the reason for her taking the lead for presenting to each department was that it was coming from a peer (Alex). Alex stated several times in the interview that he experienced peer-to-peer relationships with faculty; however, that relationship was not honored in this particular initiative. Although the work was done primarily by dedicated instructional designers, I noted that the opportunity for broader exposure as leaders on a critical initiative was not fulfilled.

Alex shared information about additional projects for which he had taken the lead, such as a summer courses website designed to resonate with students across the state; working on seed funding and growth for new online programs through his work with Nina, the special assistant to the chancellor; and teaching the voluntary professional development course offered in the Center for Teaching and Learning, with approximately 130 faculty having taken and completed the course (Alex). It became clear to me that Alex, as the centralized dedicated instructional design participant in this study, had significantly fewer barriers in place to acting as a leader at Midwest Public University. Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer, experienced far greater challenges to his leadership potential, compounded by both his status as a nonfaculty member in an academic unit and the lack of advocacy and empowerment from his direct supervisor and administration.

Nina, the online learning administrator participant, supported and advocated for instructional design leadership through her funding of Alex's overload role. Additionally, she noted the intentional decision to hire dedicated instructional designers with terminal degrees and teaching experience: "They are PhD-prepared folks who teach themselves. So, they're not purely about the tool, but rather about the learning that happens with the tools" (Nina). I identified this statement as an interest in elevating the role of dedicated instructional designer at Midwest Public University; rather than pursuing a separate organizational structure that gave dedicated instructional designers authority, Nina shared that they purposefully hired highly qualified dedicated instructional designers to ensure parity with faculty, both in status and in expertise (Nina). This choice indicated to me a clear commitment from Nina to positioning dedicated instructional designers, at least those in the centralized team, as leaders. Furthermore, Nina expressed an openness to project proposals from members of the Center for Teaching and Learning:

And so, for example in [the Center for Teaching and Learning], instructional designers will occasionally just come to me with a proposal for something. They observed something that could be improved. And we'll talk about it, and it will move into a project basis, and that person will head up the project. Occasionally that will be entail overload for the person, but sometimes not. (Nina)

Nina was a positive and consistent proponent of having the centralized dedicated instructional designers act in leadership roles at Midwest Public University. This commitment was also consistent with her perspective on leadership more broadly at the institution (Nina). As a largely decentralized institution, she believed that the best way to lead at Midwest Public University was through collaboration and partnership.

Collaboration and instructional designers as partners. When asked about collaboration between administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers in the creation of new online programs, Nina stated, "I think, yeah, yes it does happen. I'd say it's very

authentic collaboration.” She further shared that the way collaboration happened for new online programs mirrored the collaboration between faculty and the dedicated instructional designers from the Center for Teaching and Learning. The goal was to provide initial funding, through an application process for seed funding provided by Nina’s office, and have faculty connect with the Center for Teaching and Learning to go through the professional development course as a cohort (Nina). Her suggestion was that this process reflected both the decentralized nature of Midwest Public University as well as a desire for faculty to establish peer relationships with the centralized dedicated instructional designers. When further asked about the leadership roles for administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers at Midwest Public University, Nina stated,

I think in general, if leaders who are effective at [Midwest Public University]—and we do have effective leaders in place at this point—are very collaborative. They are open to new ideas, and to recognizing that good ideas come from anywhere within the organization. That leaders aren’t just at the C level, they’re, you know, at any place in the organization. Someone can exhibit leadership ability and have that ability be nurtured. (Nina)

She reiterated this commitment to collaborative leadership, suggesting that a top-down, hierarchical structure would not work well at Midwest Public University. When discussing the organizational structure of the university, she shared, “We do big things, but the pace is a little bit slower, or we do it in partnership” (Nina). This sense of partnership extended to dedicated instructional designers; when asked what the most important role was for dedicated instructional designers at Midwest Public University, Nina suggested three: understanding the potential of online learning; modeling good online pedagogy, design, and teaching; and patience. All three roles or qualities were focused on partnership, specifically through coaching faculty on online learning practices as peers devoted to student success in a unique instructional medium.

The theme of partnership for instructional designers came up frequently for Alex as well; most instances of collaboration or partnership focused on relationships between the centralized dedicated instructional designers and faculty (Alex). He mentioned that consultations were a critical part of the work at the Center for Teaching and Learning; one such example of a consultation was with a faculty member who was teaching online for the first time. Alex sat down with him and listened to the faculty member's plan for assessing students. He stated,

My role in that situation is to kind of, you know, talk through what I think would be best for his particular class and offer some advice and some resources in that process. So it's not a kind of thing where I would say, "Okay, I'm going to follow up with you in 2 weeks and make sure you're where you're at." (Alex)

The professional development course for faculty taught by the dedicated instructional designers reinforced the partnership between faculty and dedicated instructional designers (Alex). He shared that the certification portion of the course was determined through a course review by someone from the Center for Teaching and Learning, and then again from a previous certificate recipient. This positioned dedicated instructional designers on equal ground with faculty, acting as expert reviewers of an academic course for faculty who elected to participate. Similar to Nina, Alex also considered decision-making to be a shared process at Midwest Public University. When asked who should have primary decision-making authority for online learning initiatives, Alex shared an example: the summer courses website project he led. When discussing the key stakeholders involved in that project, he stated,

I know as I'm mentioning the different roles the team gets bigger, and it means that fewer decisions are made. But I think that these are a lot of the groups that have a very vested interest I seeing students succeed. (Alex)

Alex acknowledged that shared decision making can slow down progress, but also noted that it was critical to involve people who had a vested interest in each project. As a professional who worked from a base of influence, as required by the decentralized structure of Midwest Public

University, leading through a collaborative, partnership-focused model was critical to success of initiatives, including the summer courses website that Alex referenced.

In the Midwest Public University School of Education, Sid experienced collaboration and partnership quite differently than the other two participants. Sid shared that the type and quality of his consultations with faculty were largely dependent “on the faculty member, and how well I know them, and whether they know my past as an educator versus they think I’m a tech guy. So that’s been an ongoing struggle” (Sid). He further shared that many faculty in the School of Education, and two departments in particular, were resistant to taking advice from him about teaching online:

They are teachers. And they didn’t want to be told how to teach. Whether it was more efficiently using technology, or more, in more engaging ways, or whatever the stuff that I could bring and offer. They didn’t care, they didn’t want to talk about it [laughter] with me. (Sid)

From Sid’s perspective, many of the faculty in the School of Education did not see him as a partner, and were not interested in collaborating with him on their courses or other projects. Sid primarily noted instances of collaboration happening with his direct colleagues before his team was dissolved; he also mentioned collaboration between himself and the Center for Teaching and Learning, as well as other decentralized dedicated instructional designers:

I have such a close relationship with the centralized people, and the, the other people like me who are decentralized. I guess it’s that those relationships and working so closely together has been, I don’t know if it’s contributed to my success. But I think it’s, uh, it’s been nice [laughter]. (Sid)

I noted that this comment spoke less to direct collaboration on projects and initiatives but indicated a sense of camaraderie between Sid and others in roles similar to his, whether centralized or decentralized. Sid clearly valued that sense of community and partnership between himself and other dedicated instructional designers, but also noted that the nature of his job was such that those relationships were not likely to positively influence his success within

the School of Education (Sid). Most of the comments Sid made about his work with faculty at the School of Education were not focused on leadership or partnership, but on overcoming a negative perception of his work as primarily about technical and technology support.

Instructional designers as support. Sid frequently indicated that faculty confused or misinterpreted his role as technical support. His solution for overcoming this dilemma was to change the scope of his work over time, based on what he could manage during the busiest times of the academic year. For instance, he created a calendar that faculty could use to reserve a virtual conference room, of which the School of Education has licenses for six. Sid noted, “People can reserve a [virtual conference] room. Anyway, I don’t need to. I don’t need to show you how to create a calendar event.” His solution for this frequent request was to create a guide for faculty to use, or to direct them toward student workers: “We have faculty support people who do these mundane tasks for you, if you need help. So stop coming to me about it just because it has the word “zoom” in it or the word “technology” in it” (Sid). I noted a clear tone of frustration from Sid when discussing this particular issue; he further indicated that these solutions were important for him to be able to focus on the bigger projects that used his skills as a dedicated instructional designer. Still, Sid noted that having to direct requests for technical assistance was a persistent challenge, and recurred with many different technologies beyond video conferencing. As the sole person responsible for instructional design and technology at the School of Education, Sid had no colleagues or supervisory support to help him keep his role focused on the bigger projects that he believed would add more value to the school (Sid).

Sid also indicated that he provided support on technology for students in the School of Education, managed through a separate e-mail address that students can use to contact him. Sid suggested that he did not mind providing support to students when it was related to the LMS or

associated technologies, but that students also contacted him for help in traditional IT tasks, such as e-mail or operating systems. I noted that student support is not a typical function of dedicated instructional designers, and that this added workload—on top of providing technical support to faculty—was likely a result of the dissolution of Sid’s original team of dedicated instructional designers and graduate assistants.

Related to support, Sid also indicated that he had a difficult time communicating changes to his role to faculty who had come to expect his help on technology. Even when he communicated those changes more broadly, and provided alternative solutions, faculty would continue to seek out his help (Sid). I noted that, ultimately, despite Sid’s efforts to delineate his work based on his expertise as a dedicated instructional designer, the faculty from the School of Education still perceived him to work primarily in technical and technology support, which undermined both his significant experience and expertise as an educator and dedicated instructional designer.

Sid shared one final anecdote that clarified this reality. When asked about his role with curriculum and program design, Sid revealed that he had never been consulted on a new program for the School of Education. He remembered that a previous colleague of his had briefly been consulted when a program went online, but that it consisted of a last-minute courtesy. Sid stated, “I don’t even know what I would say now, if they asked me that same question. Because it wasn’t anything specific, and it certainly wasn’t collaborative.” He further stated that he had been excluded from collaboration on program design; this reality reinforced my perception that faculty saw Sid’s role as technology support, rather than as an expert in pedagogy and instructional design.

In regard to the centralized dedicated instructional designers acting as technology support for faculty, Alex stated, “A percentage of my time is spent doing technical support for instructors. And usually that is not direct technical support, but I’m sort of like on an escalation path.” The Center for Teaching and Learning housed a level of help desk support that Alex mentioned would come to him and the other dedicated instructional designers if they needed additional help solving faculty problems with technology (Alex). Beyond this initial mention of technology support, I only noted two additional instances of technology support in the interview—one during a conversation about faculty consultations, in which Alex shared that faculty sometimes ask questions about the LMS during those meetings, and once more when he stated that candidates for positions in the Center for Teaching and Learning had to “still be willing to basically be part of a help desk.”

I noted that although Alex discussed technology support, it seemed to be a peripheral responsibility in his role as a dedicated instructional designer. Nina corroborated this perspective by suggesting that the professionals from the Center for Teaching and Learning went beyond just use of the technology tools and focused on practices and pedagogies that make tools useful for learning (Nina). I noted a stark contrast between the centralized dedicated instructional designers and the decentralized instructional designers at Midwest Public University: while the decentralized designer, Sid, was perceived mostly as a technology support professional, the centralized designer, Alex, was perceived mostly as an online pedagogical expert. This disparity in roles highlighted the inherent challenges of leadership and partnership for decentralized dedicated instructional designers.

Scale and growth. In the final theme of the interviews, I considered responses that related to issues of scale and growth at Midwest Public University. For Sid, the decentralized

dedicated instructional designer, issues of growth were primarily focused on the significant need for growth in the School of Education, while issues of scale were related to the downsizing and eventual dissolution of the instructional designers, save for Sid himself. I noted that the broad scope of responsibilities Sid possessed in his role were a reflection of the reduction in staff, and that many of Sid's decisions about his work were to accommodate the need for scalable solutions. Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, noted that scale was also a determining factor in the way the Center for Teaching and Learning approached consultations with faculty. Nina echoed this statement, suggesting that they did not have a large team of instructional designers and, as a result, they chose to adopt a model of instructional design focused on teaching faculty to become more self-sufficient.

Alex and Nina were both committed to and interested in the growth of online courses and programs at Midwest Public University. Alex worked on growing online programs alongside Nina in his overload role; when asked what he would like to see change at the institution, Alex stated,

I would like to see us continue to grow our programs where it makes sense. And I think our, we have that online seed funding that we use annually. . . . Basically, it goes toward faculty buyouts or stipends to do redesign. (Alex)

Nina shared that Midwest Public University may have as many as 8,500 students taking online classes in any given term; this number speaks to the scale of offerings at the university, and that there is sufficient demand for growing the available online courses and programs. She also expressed that the university most experiences student growth “in pockets of the population that tend to be less well-prepared for college. So that's a challenge, and we have to meet that challenge” (Nina). Nina indicated further that the complexity and size of the organization presented challenges; she specifically mentioned the Center for Teaching and Learning, and that time is their most lacking resource:

We could use another six of these people, and we don't have them. You'd like everyone to have a completely fabulous experience and soak up as much of the [instructional designer's] time as possible, but there are other people behind you. You know, so it's not a limitless resource. (Nina)

Nina repeatedly indicated that decisions around online teaching and learning were often made because of issues of scale and growth. One example she shared was a self-paced pedagogy designed by a faculty member at Midwest Public University; she also mentioned adaptive learning, which was used intermittently, though not across the whole campus, to address issues of scale in lower level math courses. Ultimately, the themes related to scale and growth uncovered that decisions at Midwest Public University often revolved around the availability and scarcity of resources, as well as the large size and complexity of the organization.

Summary

I interviewed three professionals from Midwest Public University: one online learning administrator (Nina), one centralized dedicated instructional designer (Alex), and one decentralized dedicated instructional designer (Sid). Data were analyzed through emergent and a priori code passes in values, process, and causation codes, and then organized into eight themes. The themes were (a) positive/negative structure, (b) positive/negative relationships, (c) instructional designers as leaders/not leaders, (d) instructional designers as partners/not partners, (e) instances of collaboration or no collaboration, (f) empowerment/disempowerment, (g) scale or growth, and (h) instructional designers as support. I concluded that the organizational structure related to decentralized dedicated instructional designers negatively influenced both role development and leadership potential for the decentralized dedicated instructional designer participant. The centralized dedicated instructional designer participant had a more leadership-focused role, but experienced challenges related to the flat organizational structure within his unit, the Center for Teaching and Learning. The online learning administrator interviewed

provided a high-level look at the structure and work of Midwest Public University, and widely supported and empowered the centralized dedicated instructional designers to take on leadership roles and projects that reflected their significant expertise in online teaching and pedagogy.

Relationships at Midwest Public University School of Education were characterized by a culture of disempowerment for the decentralized designer; I uncovered instances of toxic leadership by the school administration, and relationships between faculty and the decentralized designer were characterized by a misinterpretation of the designer's role and distrust of his expertise and value as an online pedagogical and design expert. Relationships between faculty, administrators, and the centralized dedicated instructional designers were largely positive; the centralized designers were typically seen as peers by faculty, and senior administrators such as the special assistant to the provost frequently advocated for their value and increased leadership on major institutional initiatives around online learning.

A strong culture of collaboration and partnership existed for the centralized dedicated instructional design team, partially out necessity because of their flat organizational structure. This collaborative leadership approach was also the status quo for the online learning administrator because of the decentralized nature of Midwest Public University. However, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer experienced little collaboration or partnership in the School of Education and was most often relegated to a support role, often because of the absence of colleagues or sufficient resources. Scale and growth were both critical drivers of decisions around online learning at all levels of the university, including in the School of Education. I concluded that, although the organizational structure broadly empowered and supported the centralized dedicated instructional designer, it negatively affected the

decentralized designer's ability to act as a leader, advocate for his role, and partner with faculty on course and program design.

A comparative analysis that includes all three institutions chosen for this study is provided in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, I present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for implementation and further study.

Chapter 7: Results From the Comparative Analysis

There were three universities included in this study: Southeast Public University, Great Plains Public University, and Midwest Public University. Each of the three universities met a different structure profile that I identified. Southeast Public University met the first structure profile as an institution with centralized instructional design resources, distributed curricular authority, and an academic reporting structure for the instructional design team. Great Plains Public University fit the second structure profile as an institution with centralized instructional design resources, distributed curricular authority, and an administrative reporting structure for the instructional design team. Midwest Public University fit the final structure profile as an institution with both decentralized and centralized instructional design resources, distributed curricular authority, and an academic reporting structure. All three institutions met the purposive sampling criteria as 4-year nonprofit universities with at least one online graduate program, a Carnegie classification of at least Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity, and having both a physical campus and a significant online presence.

Southeast Public University boasted 67,000 students enrolled across 200 programs, with 800 of those programs delivered fully online. Southeast Public University recently underwent an executive-level reorganization that placed the Online Learning Center under a new Digital Learning Division, led by a vice provost of digital learning. The Online Learning Center housed the instructional design team, as well as teams focused on LMS administration and technical support. The dedicated instructional designers were organized into three subteams, each with a unique focus: adaptive learning, course design, or strategic initiatives and faculty development. The dedicated instructional designers at Southeast Public University hold faculty rank and a promotion plan; their primary design work was consultative in nature, and they were expected to

participate in research and services activities as part of their faculty roles. The dedicated instructional designers primarily worked in a consultative capacity through one-on-one meetings with faculty and through teaching professional development courses focused on best practices in instructional design for online learning. Faculty at Southeast Public University were required to take at least one of these courses to receive access to the LMS; they were required to take another course if they wanted to design or redesign an academic course that was taught online. I interviewed four professionals from Southeast Public University: Julia, a dedicated instructional designer; Mike, an online faculty member and program director; Brian, an online learning administrator and the leader of the Online Learning Center; and Demitri, an online learning administrator and the vice provost over the Digital Learning Division.

Great Plains Public University had an enrollment of 16,000 students across more than 200 academic programs, with eight undergraduate programs, eight graduate programs, and 11 certificates offered fully online. Great Plains Public University housed its two dedicated instructional designers under the Office of Digital Learning, which was led by a director with dual reporting to academic affairs and information technology; the Office of Digital Learning, however, was directly structured underneath the information technology department and had no direct reporting relationship to academic affairs. Dedicated instructional designers at Great Plains Public University did not hold faculty status. Their responsibilities included trainings, one-on-one meetings with faculty, and course design. Recently, Great Plains Public University underwent an LMS transition and, as such, the work of the dedicated instructional designers had largely revolved around technology training and support. Neither dedicated instructional designer was formally assigned to specific programs or colleges; rather, they both took calls and meetings based on prior relationships and availability. I interviewed three professionals from

Great Plains Public University: Dora, a dedicated instructional designer; Anna, an online faculty member and program director; and Carla, an online learning administrator and the director of digital learning.

Midwest Public University had 27,500 student enrollments across 194 academic programs, 30 of which were fully online. They had 850 fully online courses and offered all general education courses online to give students flexibility in their program choices. The centralized dedicated instructional designers at Midwest Public University were housed in the Center for Teaching and Learning; this team underwent a reorganization in 2014, in which they adopted a flat reporting structure and consolidated the face-to-face experts with the online experts into one organization. As a result, all dedicated instructional designers reported directly to the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and worked on both online and face-to-face courses at Midwest Public University. The roles of centralized dedicated instructional designers varied based on need; each designer worked primarily through one-on-one consultations and the primary faculty development course focused on online learning. All centralized dedicated instructional designers were required to hold terminal degrees and have significant teaching experience, although they did not have faculty status.

The decentralized dedicated instructional designers at Midwest Public University had various roles, titles, and responsibilities that were dependent on the individual school or college, and not all schools and colleges at Midwest Public University had a dedicated instructional designer on staff. For this study, I included the dedicated instructional designer of the School of Education; his role largely focused on technology support, while course design and consultation were a peripheral set of responsibilities when time and relationships with faculty allowed. The decentralized instructional designer reported to the associate dean of academic programs, and

previously was one of five employees on a team focused on online technology and pedagogy. However, budget cuts and personnel changes reduced the size of the team to just the dedicated instructional designer included in this study. I interviewed three professionals from Midwest Public University: Sid, a decentralized dedicated instructional designer from the School of Education; Alex, a centralized dedicated instructional designer with an overload role for online program administration; and Nina, an online learning administrator focused on strategic initiatives.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to uncover which organizational structures most positively influenced the ability for instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives in higher education. The research intended to explore the experiences of professionals in three primary roles for higher education—dedicated instructional designers, online faculty members, and online learning administrators—to gain insights into the ways in which their organizational structures influenced empowerment, roles, and leadership opportunities for dedicated instructional designers. I used the following primary research question and subquestions to focus the study:

Q1. How do organizational structures in a university or college setting most positively influence the ability for instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives in higher education?

Q1a. What are the organizational structures in place at colleges and universities for dedicated instructional designers?

Q1b. How do dedicated instructional designers in varied higher education organizational structures participate in the design, redesign, and evaluation of university courses and programs?

Q1c. How do faculty and administrators empower or disempower dedicated instructional designers when collaborating on online learning initiatives?

This chapter focuses on a comparative analysis of the three universities included in this study, inclusive of interview data collected and analyzed from each institution. Results from the comparative analysis have been organized according to the research questions of the study, beginning with the subquestions and culminating in the results that directly addressed the primary research question.

Research subquestion Q1a. For research subquestion Q1a, I focused on participant responses that related to the organizational structure of the instructional design and online learning resources at their respective institutions. Participants from Southeast Public University indicated that the organizational structure through which they operated was largely positive. Dedicated instructional designers were viewed as peers and leaders by Mike, the online faculty member participant, and both of the online learning administrators also indicated that the faculty status of instructional designers had a positive impact on their effectiveness as consultants in course design. The dedicated instructional designer indicated that her team, and the entire Digital Learning Division, enjoyed clear support from the senior administration of the university, including the president (Julia). Brian, the executive director of the Online Learning Center, further shared that the creation of the Digital Learning Division separated his team from the information technology organization at Southeast Public University, and that this alignment reinforced their work as primarily academic, rather than technology-centric. Demitri, the vice provost of the Digital Learning Division, further suggested that the reorganization improved perception of the division as a strategic change to advance the mission of the university. This purposeful move away from information technology was in stark contrast to Great Plains Public

University, where the participants were exclusively aligned with IT and indicated that, although it was often detrimental to their academic-focused work, they considered the association positive.

The director of digital learning at Great Plains Public University suggested that the association with IT gave her a voice with senior leadership, and that her goals and initiatives were valued and respected by her IT supervisor and colleagues (Carla). However, she also shared that academic administrators tended to over-associate her with IT; Carla expressed that this became challenging when pursuing new program development, or when building buy-in with academic administrators on initiatives that were not related to technology. Dora, the dedicated instructional designer from Great Plains Public University, similarly expressed her positive perspective on working within IT. She shared that her administrator level access to the LMS would not have happened without an association with IT. However Anna, the faculty member participant, was not confident that the Office of Digital Learning, which included the dedicated instructional designers, was organized under IT. She shared that since the Great Plains System had restructured IT centrally, she was not sure of how the Office of Digital Learning was structured, other than that they were dedicated to the Great Plains Public University campus. This confusion, coupled with the over-association with IT that both Carla and Dora acknowledged, suggested to me that the alignment to an administrative reporting line was negative to the academic-focused roles and responsibilities of the Office of Digital Learning, and specifically the dedicated instructional designers.

According to Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, Midwest Public University had organized instructional design resources and teams under the provost since they began; no mention of an administrative reporting structure came up with any participant. The participants indicated, through their responses about the decentralized nature of Midwest Public

University, that the work of the Center for Teaching and Learning had always been academic in nature, and had been treated as such. Rather, the participants focused on two other elements of their organizational structure: the blend between centralized and decentralized dedicated instructional designers, and the flat reporting structure adopted in their recent reorganization.

The decentralized dedicated instructional designer from Midwest Public University, Sid, shared that he had lost his entire team over the last few years due to budget cuts. As the only person remaining focused on instructional design at the School of Education, Sid shared that he experienced great autonomy, but also such a broad scope of work that faculty were often confused about his role. He specifically mentioned that he was frequently contacted for technical support—often related to systems that had no educational focus—because he had subsumed so many different roles and responsibilities. Although Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, had a relatively clear and focused set of responsibilities, Sid did not experience the same. He had no immediate colleagues and his supervisor rarely understood what he did, so he struggled with advocacy and managing a change toward more pedagogical work, which was both his training and his interest (Sid). Although Alex shared that he thought the decentralized dedicated instructional designers had a clear scope of work due to their smaller audience, Sid indicated that the opposite was true. I noted that this division in instructional design resources—partially centralized and partially decentralized—contributed greatly to feelings of isolation and a lack of advocacy for Sid, as well as a role that was almost exclusively focused on technology, rather than pedagogy.

Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, also expressed dissatisfaction with the flat organizational structure within his immediate team; he noted a lack of direction, day-to-day leadership, and focus that made it difficult for each person on the team to be an expert in a

specific area. Although they were all highly skilled as both online teachers and instructional designers, the need for being well-versed in many areas of their work overshadowed the interest for each dedicated instructional designer to specialize in specific skills or research interests. The participants from both Southeast Public University and Great Plains Public University did not express any similar concerns; the organizational structure of their centralized teams were both lauded as positive and empowering, and reinforced their value through constructive and effective leadership by their direct supervisors.

I uncovered that the organizational structures present at each institution critically affected the role development, professional advocacy, campus reputation, and opportunities for leadership experienced by the dedicated instructional designers at each institution. For all three universities, dedicated instructional designers who were centralized had more opportunities for leadership, and experienced some measure of professional advocacy from both their colleagues and supervisors. The decentralized dedicated instructional designer, however, had to exclusively advocate for himself, and had little to no opportunity for leadership that was not subsumed by a faculty member or administrator in the School of Education. The dedicated instructional designers with academic reporting structures experienced more positive role development as well. Southeast Public University had a large team of designers with clear scope and purpose as consultative partners, equal with faculty and critical to the mission of the university, and enjoyed a broadly positive reputation of their work and expertise, both internally and externally.

Midwest Public University had a team of dedicated instructional designers formally titled teaching, learning, and technology consultants, and worked exclusively through one-on-one consultation as coaches in pedagogy and implementation of technology through instructional design. Similarly, they were respected and valued internally, and were described by Nina as

highly creative and talented individuals with plenty of potential for leadership. However, at Great Plains Public University, the administrative reporting structure severely limited the dedicated instructional designers' ability to focus on pedagogical work because their association with technology made it difficult for academic administrators to see even their director as a person focused on academic endeavors, rather than technological initiatives.

Finally, a key but previously unidentified structural element emerged from participants at all three institutions: positional parity with faculty. At Southeast Public University, parity was formalized, with dedicated instructional designers having full faculty status and promotion plans. At Midwest Public University, all centralized dedicated instructional designers were required to have terminal degrees, and held positions as academic teaching staff—the same designation most of the faculty with whom they worked also held. Great Plains Public University, however, had no formal or informal parity in positions between faculty and dedicated instructional designers. This lack of parity exacerbated issues of classism noted by Carla, the online learning administrator, as well as by Dora, the dedicated instructional designer.

Research subquestion Q1b. For research subquestion Q1b, I focused on participant responses that revealed how dedicated instructional designers participated in the design, redesign, and evaluation of online courses and programs. At all three institutions that participated in this study, program-focused work was uncommon or nonexistent for dedicated instructional designers. Both Brian and Demitri, the online learning administrators from Southeast Public University, discussed one program that included consultation from a dedicated instructional designer, specifically a graduate degree in social work. For this project, Demitri assigned a dedicated instructional designer as the project lead; this person consulted with faculty from the program and acted as the lead for the other two dedicated instructional designers who

were also designing courses for the program. However, both Brian and Demitri acknowledged that this example was an outlier, and that dedicated instructional designers rarely participated in program-level design work, even though they were both eager and trained to do so.

At Great Plains Public University, the dedicated instructional designer participant shared that the only program-centric work she did was to normalize the look, feel, and structure of online courses in specific programs; this task included no pedagogical work and was only beginning to take shape with one or two online programs across campus. At Midwest Public University, Alex—the centralized dedicated instructional designer—held an overload role under the special assistant to the provost and was focused on helping online programs grow enrollments and the quality of their programs. However, this role was not part of his normal responsibilities as a dedicated instructional designer. Alex’s colleagues did not work on online program design, but focused exclusively on providing consultation for individual courses and faculty. Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer at Midwest Public University, also had little to no experience working on the design of fully online programs. When asked about collaboration on programs, he shared that a previous colleague had been consulted once before, but mostly as a courtesy (Sid). He further expressed that he had been excluded from collaboration on programs, and that even if faculty asked him his perspective, he would not know what to say because the request would likely also be more of a courtesy. This response indicated to me that, although dedicated instructional designers are both skilled and interested in program design, it is often overshadowed by the needs of individual faculty and courses.

All three institutions shared that the dedicated instructional designers worked with faculty through consultative work, although each institution varied in its emphasis on this part of their dedicated instructional designers’ roles. At Southeast Public University, the consultative,

partnership-focused work was the most critical part of the role of dedicated instructional designers. Each designer was assigned to faculty from different schools and colleges across the university; although they were often assigned several faculty in the same school, there was no formal assignment to individual academic units. Rather, the dedicated instructional designers measured their workload based on the number of individuals with whom they worked on course design. When the dedicated instructional designers at Great Plains Public University worked in consultation with faculty, the work typically focused on technology rather than on pedagogy.

All three participants from Great Plains University had a clear vision for the role of dedicated instructional designers as collaborative consultants on pedagogy, but the reality was far less clear. Dora, the dedicated instructional designer, shared that her role was very unclear, and that it changed based on the immediate needs of faculty and the availability of her or her colleague. As a team of two professionals working with a faculty body of 1,100, Dora expressed that it was challenging to scale their services and maintain a focus on pedagogy and consultation. As such, her work with faculty, although occasionally pedagogical in nature, was often focused on scaling and improving the use of technologies for online learning, such as the LMS.

Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer from Midwest Public University, faced a similar challenge as the only instructional design professional in the School of Education, which had a combined 150 faculty and staff. He was excluded from collaborative work with faculty, and primarily acted as technology support, save for a few key initiatives he instituted, including a focus on improving course quality and developing a new evaluation instrument for end-of-course surveys (Sid). These initiatives, however, were carried and championed not by Sid, although he did the work, but by his supervisor and the curriculum committee from the School of Education. Alex, on the other hand, acted exclusively in a consultative role with

faculty as the centralized dedicated instructional designer. The word consultant was even in his formal title; he and his colleagues primarily worked one-on-one with faculty, and although they also held roles as Tier 2 technology support and frequently answered technology-related questions, the format allowed for pedagogical consultation. Nina, the online learning administrator from Midwest Public University, described the team's work as focused on learning, rather than on technology for the sake of technology. Although members of the Midwest Public University Center for Teaching and Learning experienced challenges related to their roles because of the flat organizational structure, they also exhibited a clear focus on instructional design and consultation with faculty in course design.

Regarding the evaluation of courses and curricula, the participants from all three universities shared that they did not have any influence, access, or control over the way courses and programs were evaluated for effectiveness, both for faculty and for the course design itself. Although several participants indicated their interest in this capacity, this was not the status quo for any institution. The only participant who shared insights and work directly related to evaluation of courses and faculty was Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer. Sid was responsible for administering end-of-course surveys and collecting data on them; his project related to evaluation was focused on selecting a standardized instrument for the evaluations. However, he gave no indication that his work was focused on creating evaluation or improvement plans, or on following up with faculty on the results of their end-of-course surveys (Sid). It was, as with other projects led by Sid, focused on technology and support of faculty, rather than collaboration and partnership with faculty.

Participants from each of the universities also interpreted the questions related to evaluation as a focus on course quality. At Southeast Public University, the Online Learning

Center offered a voluntary course audit program in which faculty could have their course reviewed by a dedicated instructional designer. They would then assign courses that met their criteria a designation as either quality or high quality. Mike, the online faculty member participant, indicated that this program was a relatively new offering, but that it was quickly growing in usage and popularity, as evidenced by conversations he had with the dedicated instructional designer who reviewed his course. At Great Plains Public University, the dedicated instructional designer participant shared that they recently began conducting consultations with faculty using the OSCQR quality rubric, combined with an LMS course checklist (Dora).

Carla, the online learning administrator participant, also shared that this rubric was required for faculty who received grants to create new online courses. Finally, Sid—the decentralized dedicated instructional designer from Midwest Public University—shared that he was pursuing a course quality initiative, but gave no further specific information about it. The centralized dedicated instructional designer, however, shared that they used a course quality tool developed by the Center for Teaching and Learning, and that this was the cornerstone of the faculty development course as well as many of their pedagogically focused consultations with faculty (Alex). The role of dedicated instructional designers in evaluation at each institution was largely characterized not by participation in evaluation plans or processes, but in course quality initiatives managed and developed by the teams of dedicated instructional designers at each institution.

Ultimately, all three institutions had very little engagement by dedicated instructional designers for online program design work, but all experienced some level of a one-on-one consultative role in the design of online courses. The centralized dedicated instructional designers from each institution had occasional opportunities to work on programs, although the

work was rare or not pedagogical in nature. The centralized dedicated instructional designers from both Southeast Public University and Midwest Public University had largely consultative, pedagogically focused roles, while the decentralized dedicated instructional designer from Midwest Public University and the centralized designers from Great Plains Public University worked largely as technology support, even when working in consultation with faculty. I noted that this reality contrasted with their preferred work as experts in online learning and instructional design. Finally, all three institutions had course quality projects, and worked toward the evaluation of courses almost exclusively through that lens.

Research subquestion Q1c. For research subquestion Q1c, I focused on participant responses that revealed how faculty and online learning administrators empowered or disempowered dedicated instructional designers, specifically when collaborating on online learning initiatives, such as the design of courses or delivery of professional development for faculty. At Southeast Public University, Julia—the dedicated instructional designer participant—suggested that she felt empowered by her leaders Brian and Demitri, the two online learning administrator participants. Brian had a previous background as an instructional designer at Southeast Public University; he shared that the dedicated instructional designers believed it was valuable to have someone leading their team who knew the value and realities of their work. Brian shared one key instance of empowerment by the administrators: the decision to remove technology support from the responsibilities of the dedicated instructional designers, and instead form a separate team for technology support. This decision empowered the dedicated instructional designers to focus on their primary work of course design and made it clear that they were experts in pedagogy and design, rather than supports to help faculty solve technical challenges.

Julia also cited her faculty status and promotion plan as empowering, indicating that there were several levels of advancement for dedicated instructional designers, each with increasing layers of expectation around conducting and presenting research, as well as service to the university. She suggested that this focus on producing new knowledge empowered her and her colleagues to stay current and share their discoveries. Demitri suggested that this structure was positive for the Digital Learning Division as a whole because it incentivized dedicated instructional designers to become experts in specific areas of research, which both improved the visibility and reputation of Southeast Public University. The administration for the Online Learning Center and the Digital Learning Division were receptive to feedback on new projects and initiatives, although Julia expressed the wish that she and her colleagues would be involved sooner in the decision-making process. I noted that this desire for early inclusion in the decision-making process was the only instance of disempowerment mentioned by Julia in relation to the online learning administrators, and that it was tempered by their willingness to listen and receptivity to suggestions from the dedicated instructional designers.

At Great Plains Public University, Dora also felt as though her direct supervisor empowered her, and that this empowerment was a positive result of the restructuring that occurred 2 years prior to the interview. She expressed that any time she felt a need to push forward on a key decision, Carla, her boss and the online learning administrator interviewed, would encourage her to push forward and ask for forgiveness afterward, if needed (Dora). This sense of empowerment that Dora felt from Carla did not significantly influence her role as a dedicated instructional designer, however, because Dora shared that Carla was rarely up to speed on the day-to-day work of the dedicated instructional designers. I attributed this lack of involvement to a challenge of scale because Carla had a dual reporting structure with

responsibilities in both academic and administrative work, and her team and office were understaffed. Dora made it clear to me that Carla, her supervisor, was an excellent leader and did everything she could to empower and encourage leadership in her team. However, Dora herself—as well as her colleagues—were resistant to assuming further leadership roles, as expressed by Carla. This hesitance to explore leadership opportunities, even when empowered to do so, differed significantly from both the decentralized and centralized dedicated instructional designers from Midwest Public University.

Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer from Midwest Public University, suggested that the flat leadership structure of the Center for Teaching and Learning disempowered him and his colleagues; instead of being able to specialize and pursue specific lines of inquiry and expertise, they were all required to be generalists because there was no day-to-day leadership. Alex found this structure disempowering because as it introduced occasional conflict between colleagues at the Center for Teaching and Learning and made it more difficult to enact broader change through expert leadership. Alex did, however, experience empowerment from Nina, the online learning administrator participant. He expressed that Nina gave him and other dedicated instructional designers opportunities to lead initiatives, such as the overload he had that focused on growing online programs.

Nina corroborated this approach to empowerment, suggesting that her campus as a whole acted through collaboration and partnership, and that this empowerment extended to the Center for Teaching and Learning. Sid, however, felt that his direct supervisor in the School of Education, though a good boss, disempowered him by excluding him from leadership and collaboration opportunities. He also shared that the negative relationships between the dean and the faculty at the School of Education created an environment in which he felt it was necessary

to hide things he was working on from one group or the other. The dean, he shared, was not respected, and navigating this political challenge proved to further limit his potential for collaboration and partnership, both with administrators and with faculty.

At Southeast Public University, Mike—the faculty member participant—shared that although he considered the dedicated instructional designers to be peers, partners, and leaders, the prevalent perspective among other faculty may not be consistent with his own. He suggested that other faculty may see the dedicated instructional designers as more of a support; Brian, the executive director of the Online Learning Center, shared that role misperception was a common problem still, even with dedicated instructional designers holding faculty status. Julia, the dedicated instructional designer, shared that her experience had been largely positive when working with faculty; through her own research, teaching, and instructional design work, she felt that faculty largely considered her to be a colleague. The only instances of disempowerment that arose from Julia's responses were related to faculty not taking advantage of the resources of the Online Learning Center, specifically the dedicated instructional designers, and faculty who were resistant to online learning or looked at it as an obligation rather than a mission.

Faculty at Great Plains Public University generally did not empower the dedicated instructional designers. Anna, the online faculty member participant, suggested that the small size of the instructional design team made it challenging for the designers to act as leaders, and that they were currently working on taking a more active role in promoting their work and value to faculty. Rather than active disempowerment, Anna described these behaviors as challenges left over from before the restructure, in which faculty were expected to seek out assistance from the Office of Digital Learning if they wanted it, and little to no effort was made to reciprocate from the office itself. However, Carla shared clear instances of disempowerment that the

dedicated instructional designers on her team experienced. In one example, she shared that a faculty member assumed the dedicated instructional designer with whom she was working needed a note to extend her meeting time, as if the designer could not manage her time and schedule on her own (Carla). Although Anna viewed the dedicated instructional designers as partners and suggested that collaboration had been happening more frequently since the restructure of the Office of Digital Learning, Carla's example showed a severe disconnect between the dedicated instructional designers and faculty. In Carla's example, the dedicated instructional leaders were frequently treated with classist behaviors, and this behavior resulted in severe disempowerment for the dedicated instructional designers. Carla shared that most of the time, when one of the designers on her team had a bad day, it was because a faculty member had mistreated them.

Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer from Midwest Public University, experienced similar disempowerment from faculty, specifically one person with whom he had worked previously as a graduate assistant. Sid suggested that this faculty member, as well as others, struggled to understand and respect his expertise in pedagogy and online learning and attributed his focus on technology—and the difficulties with overcoming perception of his work as technology-centric—to this lack of mutual respect. Sid felt largely disempowered by this misperception of his role and expertise. He also experienced disempowerment from the centralized dedicated instructional designers because they would treat him similarly to his faculty—specifically, that they did not know or respect his expertise in pedagogy and online learning. Alex and Nina did not discuss instances of disempowerment from faculty, other than the challenges of working with faculty who were less than proficient with technology. However, Nina did share a story related to her husband, who taught an online course at Midwest Public

University and worked with a dedicated instructional designer from the Center for Teaching and Learning. She suggested that he would have quit teaching the course had it not been for the designer; she suggested that the value and expertise of the dedicated instructional designers was indispensable to faculty, and that she only wished they could have more designers and faculty could have more time with dedicated instructional designers. As a result, she suggested that issues of scale—particularly, the cost of hiring enough dedicated instructional designers to fulfill the needs of such a large campus—was disempowering to their work with faculty because it stretched each dedicated instructional designer too thin.

The dedicated instructional designers at Southeast Public University felt largely empowered by both faculty and online learning administrators; they attributed this empowerment to leadership by a former instructional designer, their faculty status, and the decision to separate technology support from the role of dedicated instructional designers. The dedicated instructional designers at Great Plains Public University felt empowered by their online learning administrator, but disempowered by faculty who did not consider them to be colleagues and partners. This disempowerment happened frequently, even though Anna, the online faculty member participant, suggested that perception was changing as the dedicated instructional designers took a more active role in pursuing work with faculty. Finally, Sid, the decentralized dedicated instructional designer interviewed from Midwest Public University, was largely disempowered by both faculty and administrators at the School of Education. The negative organizational culture coupled with severe misperception of Sid's role and expertise resulted in instances of disempowerment from both faculty and his direct supervisor. Alex, the centralized dedicated instructional designer, felt disempowered by the flat organizational structure of the Center for Teaching and Learning, but empowered by Nina, with whom he worked on growing

online programs. Nina suggested that there were instances of empowerment by faculty as well and focused on the significant value dedicated instructional designers bring to faculty work when they collaborate on course design.

Primary research question. The primary research question was focused on discovering which organizational structure most positively influenced the ability for dedicated instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives. Research subquestions a, b, and c each uncovered information related to this larger question. Through the within-case analyses and the comparative analysis, I discovered that the organizational structure of Southeast Public University was the most positive for positioning dedicated instructional designers as leaders over online learning initiatives. However, each of the three institutions that participated in this study shared elements of their organizational structures that positively influenced leadership potential for dedicated instructional designers; as a result, the research chose to share elements of each structure that most positively influenced leadership potential to develop a clear structure profile that synthesized the most positive elements of the organizational structures of Southeast Public University, Great Plains Public University, and Midwest Public University.

Across all three institutions, the centralization of dedicated instructional designers in a single online learning-focused team proved to be a positive structure element that promoted leadership by dedicated instructional designers. Although only one participant interviewed was in a decentralized structure, participants from all three institutions indicated that the centralization enabled clearer role definitions, while the decentralized dedicated instructional design participant experienced severe role misperception. Further, the instructional design teams that were organized under an academic reporting structure had a closer alignment with faculty and academic work, which resulted in more opportunities for leadership over online learning

initiatives, specifically over the design of online courses and in course quality improvement initiatives. Although the dedicated instructional designers who reported through an administrative line also worked toward course quality initiatives, they faced challenges in adoption and exposure to this work because of their alignment with information technology and frequent misperceptions of their expertise that resulted from the association with a technology organization.

Across all three universities, I noted that positional parity with faculty was of critical importance for dedicated instructional designers to have leadership potential. Although each university approached this parity differently—one through direct faculty status, one through requiring terminal degrees, and one in which designers suffered for not having parity with faculty—all three recognized the importance of dedicated instructional designers being partners and colleagues of equal standing, either through positive examples of parity or negative examples of the lack of partnership and respect that entailed not having parity with faculty. Further, I noted the importance of empowering and knowledgeable leadership from online learning administrators; both Southeast Public University and Great Plains Public University had online learning administrators who advocated, supported, and empowered their dedicated instructional designers. Midwest Public University; however, had empowering leadership at a high level, but lacked it in day-to-day operations, which resulted in disempowerment, role misperception, and conflict for both the centralized and decentralized dedicated instructional designers. Finally, I noted that one of the most important structural elements to positively influence leadership over online learning initiatives by dedicated instructional designers was that the scale of the online learning team matched the scale of the university. This scale was a

challenge at both Great Plains Public University and Midwest Public University, but not at Southeast Public University.

Summary

I conducted a comparative analysis of Southeast Public University, Great Plains Public University, and Midwest Public University. The comparative analysis was framed by the three research subquestions and the primary research question. I discovered that dedicated instructional designers who operated in organizational structures that had centralized instructional design teams with academic reporting lines had the most potential for leadership over online learning initiatives, such as online course quality and design initiatives. I further discovered that positional parity with faculty, either through faculty status or educational achievement, was an important structural element for leadership potential, as was proportionally scaling the size of the instructional design team to the size of the university. I noted that these structural elements positively contributed to role definition, empowerment, leadership, collaboration, and dedicated instructional designers being viewed as partners in academic-focused work by both faculty and online learning administrators.

Chapter 8: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to uncover which organizational structures most positively influenced the ability for instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives in higher education. I conducted a multiple-case study focused on three institutions of higher education, each with a different organizational structure that aligned to one of three profiles designated by me, based on the literature review and purposive sampling criteria. I interviewed participants from each university using semistructured interview protocols, one for each role type interviewed: dedicated instructional designer, online faculty member, and online learning administrator. Case analyses of each of the three universities that participated in this study were presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6; a comparative analysis was presented in Chapter 7. This final chapter includes a discussion of the results of the study, conclusions based on the findings and their associated implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Discussion

Online learning initiatives often act as the impetus for significant organizational change for many universities (Fredericksen, 2017). As online learning has increased in saturation and popularity, faculty have expressed concern about course quality and the need for more qualified educators (Ciabocchi et al., 2016). Shaw (2012) suggested that instructional designers were uniquely positioned to be leaders over online learning initiatives in higher education. Dedicated instructional designers were often hired to alleviate these concerns about course quality and professional development for faculty; however, they were also not widely recognized as leaders, formally or informally, due to challenges in staffing, role perception, and scalability of resources for instructional design teams (Fredericksen, 2017). Further, collaboration with faculty was listed as the primary challenge for dedicated instructional designers who work in higher

education (Intentional Futures, 2016). Dedicated instructional designers in higher education operated within a broad range of organizational structures that had the potential to have a positive or negative impact on their effectiveness (Tran & Tian, 2013). I explored three common organizational structures to determine which had the most positive influence on leadership opportunities for dedicated instructional designers. The three universities studied were each given a pseudonym: Southeast Public University, Great Plains Public University, and Midwest Public University.

The results of the comparative analysis were shared in Chapter 7; they revealed that there were key structural elements from each university that had a positive influence on the ability of dedicated instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives. I discovered that the organizational structures at each institution affected the centralized and decentralized dedicated instructional designers in role development, professional advocacy, reputation, and opportunities for leadership. Dedicated instructional designers who were centralized had more opportunities for leadership, while the decentralized dedicated instructional designer interviewed experienced few opportunities for leadership and experienced severe role misperception, disempowerment, and very little collaboration with faculty. I also discovered that dedicated instructional designers in an academic reporting structure were more closely aligned with faculty on the design of online courses; dedicated instructional designers in an administrative reporting structure, however, were often over-aligned with the technology portions of their roles and expertise, to the detriment of their pedagogical expertise.

I also discovered that positional parity between faculty and dedicated instructional designers was important to the development of leadership opportunities for dedicated instructional designers. The scale of the instructional design teams needed to coordinate with the

scale of the university to ensure that dedicated instructional designers had the time and space to pursue leadership opportunities on institution-level projects. Only a few examples of instructional designers working on the design of online programs were shared, even though this topic was an area that several participants indicated was of interest to dedicated instructional designers and within their range of expertise. While each university had elements of their organizational structures that benefitted dedicated instructional designers and their potential for leadership over online learning initiatives, the key elements that emerged across all institutions were centralized instructional design resources, academic reporting structures, positional parity with faculty, and the size of the team that matched the scale of the university to allow for leadership-focused work.

Conclusions

Conclusions are based on the results of the study, from both the within-case analyses and the comparative analysis; each conclusion includes recommendations for practice.

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature on the convergence of leadership, instructional design, and organizational structures in higher education. Although existing research existed on each of these areas independently, I discovered new information through this study that benefits dedicated instructional designers, university faculty, and online learning administrators alike. As such, conclusions are drawn from the study itself, which is situated within the literature as a new contribution to the fields of instructional design and organizational leadership in higher education. As a result of these discoveries, I recommend that online learning administrators and university leaders re-evaluate their organizational structures to develop or reinforce leadership potential and opportunities for dedicated instructional designers.

Based on the study, I concluded that the organizational structure that has the most positive influence on the ability of dedicated instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives was a centralized instructional design team with academic reporting lines. Additionally, two more positive structural elements were identified through the comparative analysis: positional parity with faculty for dedicated instructional designers and the scale of the instructional design team matching the scale of the university. I recommend that universities that are looking to create a new online learning team or restructure an existing team implement the most beneficial organizational structure identified in this study: specifically, a centralized instructional design team with academic reporting lines. Centralization of dedicated instructional designers provides them with a base of advocacy with their colleagues, helps to clarify their roles as pedagogical and design-centric, improves the potential for positive perception change with faculty, and supports instructional designers assuming leadership roles in online learning initiatives. I further suggest that institutions whose dedicated instructional designers struggle with advocacy, role development, negative perception from faculty, and a lack of leadership opportunities consult this recommended organizational structure to make intentional changes to their structures to assist in alleviating these concerns.

I noted that program design work was uncommon for dedicated instructional designers at all three institutions, but that the designers were also equipped and open to leading or participating in such work. As such, I recommend that online learning administrators consult dedicated instructional designers on decisions around program design and include them as key team members when designing or redesigning academic programs. The dedicated instructional designers in the study faced role misperception challenges, largely around technology support. I suggest that leading or participating in pedagogical work at the program level could positively

influence role perception for dedicated instructional designers by positioning them alongside faculty in curriculum and program design. While authority would remain with faculty for all curricular decisions, increasing the amount of program-focused design work may also increase opportunities for partnership and collaboration between faculty and dedicated instructional designers.

The decentralized dedicated instructional designer participant in this study experienced significant disempowerment, role misperception, a lack of collaboration, and a lack of both advocacy and leadership opportunities. I concluded that decentralized dedicated instructional designers need strong relationships within their respective schools or colleges, as well as with the centralized instructional design unit if one exists, to have opportunities for leadership. Although a centralized instructional design unit may be ideal for positioning dedicated instructional designers as leaders, decentralized designers can certainly still act as leaders in their schools and colleges. However, I recommend providing clear, consistent, and intentional support to these decentralized designers to ensure that they are positioned as well as possible for success.

Participants at two institutions indicated that faculty considered them to be peers. At Southeast Public University, this peer status was formalized: dedicated instructional designers held faculty positions. At Midwest Public University, the peer relationship was informal, but reinforced by the requirement that dedicated instructional designers hold terminal degrees and teaching experience. No such parity existed at Great Plains Public University. I concluded that positional parity with faculty was an important element of organizational structure that had the potential to improve leadership opportunities for dedicated instructional designers. I recommend that universities pursue positional parity between dedicated instructional designers and faculty. There are many ways to achieve positional parity; although two examples were provided in this

study, other options may also exist that would better serve the organizational cultures and structures of different universities.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the results, conclusions, and recommendations from this study, I suggest the following recommendations for further study.

This multiple-case study focused on organizational structure, instructional design, online learning initiatives, and leadership in 4-year institutions with at least one online graduate degree and both a physical campus and a significant online presence. One opportunity for further research is to replicate the study at other institutions of higher education, such as community colleges or for-profit institutions. Replication of the study with other institutions would provide deeper insights into the roles and leadership of dedicated instructional designers, as well as into the organizational structures that either empower or inhibit their potential for leadership in online learning.

Dedicated instructional designer participants in this study expressed interest in leading or participating in online program design. I also suggest that increased work in program design by dedicated instructional designers has the potential to improve role misperception by faculty. As such, a study that focused on the type, frequency, and quality of participation in program design by dedicated instructional designers would be beneficial.

This study focused primarily on the organizational structure of instructional design teams specific to online learning. However, dedicated instructional designers may also be focused on face-to-face instruction at some institutions. A study that explored the structure and work of multimodality instructional design teams may prove beneficial, given the resource constraints and focus on improving course quality identified by participants in this study.

Dedicated instructional designers shared that they consider their primary work to be collaboration and partnership with faculty in course design, pedagogical consultations with faculty, and course quality initiatives. Further study on the nature, frequency, and type of collaboration between dedicated instructional designers and faculty would be valuable. Such studies may help to further address the issues of role misperception identified in this study.

Summary

I investigated the organizational structures of instructional design teams in higher education to discover which organizational structures most positively influenced the ability for dedicated instructional designers to lead online learning initiatives. I interviewed participants from three key role types at three different universities with different organizational structures and conducted within-case analyses and a comparative analysis. The study has provided evidence that a centralized structure for instructional design teams—coupled with academic reporting lines, positional parity with faculty, and an instructional design team of appropriate size to the scale of the university—provides the most potential for dedicated instructional designers to act as leaders in online learning initiatives. I also found that decentralized dedicated instructional designers face significant challenges of role misperception, as do dedicated instructional designers with administrative reporting lines. Although centralized designers with academic reporting structures also experienced role misperception, they experienced more opportunities to lead online learning initiatives, in part due to the influence of academic leaders and administrators who recognized their pedagogical expertise and empowered them to act as leaders.

Dedicated instructional designers have become vital members of the higher education community. Their expertise in pedagogy and design are positively influencing the quality of

online courses, ensuring that students of diverse locations, backgrounds, and abilities can have positive, transformational learning experiences at a distance. As online learning continues to grow and evolve, dedicated instructional designers will only become more valuable and important to universities. As such, it is of paramount importance to intentionally and favorably structure online learning organizations within universities to empower dedicated instructional designers and promote collaboration with faculty. Through shared leadership with faculty, deep expertise in pedagogy and design, and a commitment to excellence in online learning, dedicated instructional designers have the potential to become the leaders universities need to advance online learning for the benefit—and growth—of students and universities alike.

As a dedicated instructional designer myself, I have experienced many of the challenges conveyed by participants in this study. I have worked in settings from all three organizational structures evaluated in this study—first on a centralized instructional design team, then as a decentralized designer in a single academic unit, and finally as a team leader over instructional designers in a centralized unit. I have worked with faculty members who expected me to answer their technology support questions on weekends; I have also worked with faculty members who embodied all of the best leadership qualities and decisions shared in this study. The simple truth is this: as a dedicated instructional designer, I was often misunderstood and, as a result, undervalued. As an instructional designer myself, I am committed to the well-being and professional advancement of my colleagues. Instructional designers have such great potential for positively affecting change at universities, and it is time for the conversation to change. It is my sincere hope that this research will help other professionals and universities honor the value and potential that dedicated instructional designers bring to the table as partners in the educational

mission that dedicated instructional designers, faculty members, and administrators all share:
improving the lives of our students through learning.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



May 23, 2018

Jason Drysdale

Department of Education Leadership

Abilene Christian University

Dear Jason,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Organizational Structures of Instructional Design Teams in Higher Education"

was approved by expedited review (Category 7) on 5/23/2018 (IRB # 18-033). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Megan Roth".

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Dedicated Instructional Designer Interview Protocol

Thanks for your willingness to participate in this interview. By consenting to this interview, you agree to answering the questions honestly, but may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. All responses and recordings will be de-identified and kept confidential to protect your identity.

1. Please share with me your position title and an overview of your typical responsibilities in that role, including any major tasks, projects, or initiatives that would help clarify your role.
2. Why did you choose to pursue a professional interest or career in online learning for higher education?
3. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within contribute to your success within the organization? In what ways?
 - a. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within inhibit your success within the organization? In what ways?
4. What are some of the most important initiatives that your university is pursuing, from your own perspective as a professional?
5. How clearly defined are the roles for online learning administrators and dedicated instructional designers at your institution?
6. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution positive? If so, why?
 - a. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution negative? If so, why?

7. When was the last time your institution restructured its online learning and instructional design teams and resources? What were the reasons?
8. Would you like to see anything change in regards to online learning at your institution? If so, what changes would you like to see?
9. Why did your organization choose to structure your instructional design and online learning resources the way that they did?
10. From your perspective, who should have primary decision making authority over online learning initiatives?
11. What kind of leadership role do your administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers play at this institution?
12. How does your organization make decisions regarding curriculum?
13. What system or model do you use to evaluate student growth on learning outcomes and the quality of your courses and curricula?
14. How do dedicated instructional designers at your institution work with faculty on courses and curriculum?
15. What is your experience working as a dedicated instructional designer?
16. What are the most challenging parts of working with your administration?
17. What are the most challenging parts of working with your faculty?
18. Do your administrators work to ensure the dedicated instructional designers have an equal seat at the table for major decisions around online learning initiatives? If so, what in particular do they do?

19. Does collaboration happen between administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers when creating a new online program? If so, how would you characterize it?
20. What do faculty and administrators at your institution do that empowers or disempowers you?

Appendix C: Online Faculty Member Interview Protocol

Thanks for your willingness to participate in this interview. By consenting to this interview, you agree to answering the questions honestly, but may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. All responses and recordings will be de-identified and kept confidential to protect your identity.

1. Please share with me your position title and an overview of your typical responsibilities in that role, including any major tasks, projects, or initiatives that would help clarify your role.
2. Why did you choose to pursue a professional interest or career in online learning for higher education?
3. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within contribute to your success within the organization? In what ways?
 - a. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within inhibit your success within the organization? In what ways?
4. What are some of the most important initiatives that your university is pursuing, from your own perspective as a professional?
5. How clearly defined are the roles for online learning administrators and dedicated instructional designers at your institution?
6. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution positive? If so, why?
 - a. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution negative? If so, why?

7. When was the last time your institution restructured its online learning and instructional design teams and resources? What were the reasons?
8. Would you like to see anything change in regards to online learning at your institution? If so, what changes would you like to see?
9. From your perspective, who should have primary decision making authority over online learning initiatives?
10. What kind of leadership role do your administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers play at this institution?
11. How does your organization make decisions regarding curriculum?
12. What system or model do you use to evaluate student growth on learning outcomes and the quality of your courses and curricula?
13. How do dedicated instructional designers at your institution work with faculty on courses and curriculum?
14. What do you consider to be the most important role for dedicated instructional designers at your institution?
15. What is your experience working directly with a dedicated instructional designer?
16. What are the most challenging parts of working with your administration?
17. What are the most challenging parts of working alongside a dedicated instructional designer?
18. Do your administrators work to ensure the dedicated instructional designers have an equal seat at the table for major decisions around online learning initiatives? If so, what in particular do they do?

19. Does collaboration happen between administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers when creating a new online program? If so, how would you characterize it?
20. What do faculty and administrators at your institution do that empowers or disempowers you?

Appendix D: Online Learning Administrator Interview Protocol

Thanks for your willingness to participate in this interview. By consenting to this interview, you agree to answering the questions honestly, but may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. All responses and recordings will be de-identified and kept confidential to protect your identity.

1. Please share with me your position title and an overview of your typical responsibilities in that role, including any major tasks, projects, or initiatives that would help clarify your role.
2. Why did you choose to pursue a professional interest or career in online learning for higher education?
3. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within contribute to your success within the organization? In what ways?
 - a. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within inhibit your success within the organization? In what ways?
4. What are some of the most important initiatives that your university is pursuing, from your own perspective as a professional?
5. How clearly defined are the roles for online learning administrators and dedicated instructional designers at your institution?
6. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution positive? If so, why?
 - a. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution negative? If so, why?

7. When was the last time your institution restructured its online learning and instructional design teams and resources? What were the reasons?
8. Would you like to see anything change in regards to online learning at your institution? If so, what changes would you like to see?
9. Why did your organization choose to structure your instructional design and online learning resources the way that they did?
10. From your perspective, who should have primary decision making authority over online learning initiatives?
11. What kind of leadership role do your administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers play at this institution?
12. What system or model do you use to evaluate student growth on learning outcomes and the quality of your courses and curricula?
13. How do dedicated instructional designers at your institution work with faculty on courses and curriculum?
14. What do you consider to be the most important role for dedicated instructional designers at your institution?
15. What are the most challenging parts of working with your faculty?
16. What are the most challenging parts of working alongside a dedicated instructional designer?
17. What do your administrators do to ensure the dedicated instructional designers have an equal seat at the table for major decisions around online learning initiatives?

18. Does collaboration happen between administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers when creating a new online program? If so, how would you characterize it?

Appendix E: Qualitative Interview Transcript Coding Manual

	Code (type of coding)	1st pass (emergent)	2nd pass (a priori)	3rd pass (emergent)	Code meaning
1	ID leader (values)	X			Attitude, value, or belief that instructional designers play and should play a clear leadership role in the organization
2	Structure positive (values)	X			Attitude, value, or belief that the organizational structure in place positively informs one's success, work, well-being, or perception
3	Structure negative (values)	X			Attitude, value, or belief that the organizational structure in place negatively informs one's success, work, well-being, or perception
4	Relationships Positive (values)	X			Attitude, value, or belief that the relationships in the organization are positive and influence the organization in positive ways
5	Relationships negative (values)	X			Attitude, value, or belief that the relationships in the organization are negative and influence the organization in negative ways
6	Collaboration (process)		X		An action which indicates that collaboration is happening in the organizational culture or situation being discussed
7	Not collaboration (process)		X		An action which indicates that collaboration is not happening in the organizational culture or situation being discussed
8	ID partners (process)		X		An action which indicates that instructional designers are acting as experts, consultants, and partners who are equal in value and influence with faculty
9	ID not partners (process)		X		An action which indicates that instructional designers are not acting as experts, consultants, and partners who are equal in value and influence with faculty

	Code (type of coding)	1st pass (emergent)	2nd pass (a priori)	3rd pass (emergent)	Code meaning
10	Empowering (process)		X		An action which empowers the interviewee or a situation which shows empowerment happening in the organization
11	Disempowering (process)		X		An action which disempowers the interviewee or a situation which shows disempowerment happening in the organization
12	Growth (causation)			X	Indicates a decision, situation, or outcome influenced or caused by growth (intended or achieved) of the university
13	Scale (causation)			X	Indicates a decision, situation, or outcome influenced or caused by the size of the university or its resources
14	ID support (values)			X	Attitude, value, or belief that instructional designers are treated as support staff with low expertise, rather than collaborators toward a shared vision/mission.
