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Navigating Conflict: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Online Higher Education Subject Matter Experts

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Navigating Conflict: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Online Higher
Education Subject Matter Experts

by

Tammi Clearfield

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2019

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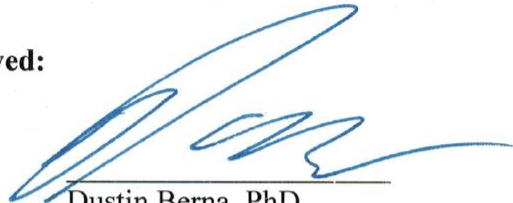
**Nova Southeastern University
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences**

This dissertation was submitted by Tammi Clearfield under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

11/19/19

Date of Defense



Dustin Berna, PhD
Chair



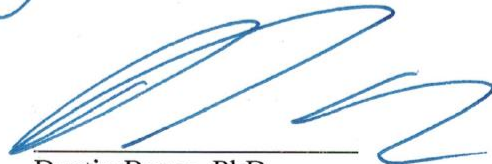
Neil Katz, PhD
Committee Member



Judith McKay, PhD
Committee Member

11/19/19

Date of Final Approval



Dustin Berna, PhD
Chair

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in honor and memory of my mother, Dr. Lois Clearfield. Earning her PhD while terminally ill with cancer, staying stoic, strong, and determined to live long enough to see me through the end of my first year of law school, I assured her I would reach academic finish lines in my higher education pursuits. Her strength, wisdom, commitment, focus, and perseverance made me the person I am today. This is for you mom.

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Abstract

This qualitative study, using phenomenology, examined the lived experiences of subject matter experts navigating conflict in the higher education online course development process. Examination of conflict from the perspective of the subject matter expert in this context was important because of impacts on subject matter experts, design and development team members, course quality, instructors, students, and institutions. Research questions that guided the study were: What were the potential sources of conflict encountered by the subject matter expert throughout the course development process? What did the conflict mean to the subject matter expert in the course development process? How did the subject matter expert manage conflict in the course development process? What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the course development product generated by the subject matter expert? What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the relationships with others involved in the course development process? What adjustments, if any, did the subject matter expert make as a result of the conflict? How did those adjustments impact the final course product and relationship dynamics? Theories integrated to illuminate participant experiences included collaborative theory, design theory, dual concerns theory, learning theory, and systems design theory. Data analysis was conducted using the transcendental model. The findings provided insight into how subject matter experts identified, avoided, mitigated, and managed conflict experienced in the online course development process that had the potential to impact direct and indirect stakeholders.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The utilization of online course delivery for higher education is extensive. Whether used to supplement traditional classroom learning, on a course-by-course basis, or program-wide, online delivery of learning is increasing in scope. To ensure consistency, competency alignment, and proficiency demonstration in online higher education curriculum, course content is often created by subject matter experts. The front-facing content created by subject matter experts is the foundation of student learning in online courses, and impacts many dimensions of higher education. The stakeholders are vast. Development of online courses is an opportunity for faculty to focus on the student, stretch boundaries, and enhance prior ways of approaching the material (Ko & Rossen, 2001). Research supports the contention there is a shift in the culture of education towards accessibility and accountability; counting quality and completion of educational goals over initial numbers of enrollment (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; DeWitz et al., 2009). Missing in the literature is emphasis on the subject matter experts responsible for developing online courses, and the repercussions conflict can have on the development of those courses.

Introduction

The focus of this study was exploration of potential sources of conflict and corresponding implications encountered by higher education online subject matter experts in the course development process. Examining these areas and related connections, from the vantage point of the subject matter expert, provided insight based on the lived experience of the subject matter expert. The research questions enabled subject matter experts to share different aspects of their lived experiences throughout the

course development process, perceptions pertaining to conflict, causes of conflict, and the impact of conflict on the overall course development process and the subject matter expert experience. The nature and scope of the questions, which prompted narrative responses, allowed participants to recount their experiences and share their opinions and perspectives.

Online learning is on the rise. Academic rigor, federal and state funding eligibility, academic integrity, administrative processes, and proficiency demonstration centered on employable skills are factors to account for in online higher education. An integral component of online education, with direct and indirect connections to these factors, is curriculum. Curriculum is primarily generated through the course development process. Subject matter experts play a role central to this process. Research is extensive in correlated areas, but not fully developed with respect to the online subject matter expert's role in the course development process. The gap in current research prompted this study.

Using semi-structured research questions, this study was conducted with three primary goals. The first goal was to gain a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content. Analysis of participants' lived experiences was performed specific to impacts on subject matter experts, course development processes, course content deliverables, and direct and indirect stakeholders. Identifying techniques used by subject matter experts when confronted with perceived challenges was the second goal. Assessing how those techniques impacted the direction of the course development process, from the perspective of the subject matter expert was the third goal. Gaining insight into those areas from the perspective of the lived experience of the subject matter expert enables

conflict management attempts to be more informed and focused, serves as the foundation for further research to explore the application of conflict management techniques in the online course development process, and evaluate impacts of conflict management technique utilization.

Throughout this study, focus was on developing an in-depth, nuanced understanding of how participants perceived and understood what they went through and what their experiences were. The shared experiences served as the foundation for examination of the conflicts that surfaced, exploration of the implications of the conflicts, and potential approaches to better manage the conflicts. These approaches have the potential, in turn, to impact the experience of the subject matter expert, others involved in the process, courses, and other direct and indirect stakeholders. This study encompassed the lived experience of the subject matter expert in online higher education course development that varied in format, bridging several research studies. Doing so provided a more global assessment of the experience in conjunction with different processes, enabled identification of trends and causal connections to better understand processes, and point out additional areas in need of exploration as a corresponding result of the study.

There are readily apparent implications to the course development process when faculty, staff, and program expectations do not match. Areas of focus to develop a better understanding of these causes and impacts include, but are not limited to, technology skills, pedagogical strategies, control of the learning process, time, communication, interpersonal issues, ownership of instructional decisions, level of preparation and documentation, access to online courses, and departmental support. To minimize

frustration and facilitate success for those involved in online course development, a better understanding of the subject matter expert experience in the course development process was needed. This study, conducted using transcendental phenomenology, provided insight into these areas.

Background

With online learning on the rise, data supports the importance of developing a better understanding as to why persistence in online courses is often much lower than in traditional “ground” courses utilizing face-to-face learning (Carr, 2000; Chen & Jang, 2010; Rochester & Pradel, 2008). High attrition rates prompted focus on different facets of online learning. Areas of focus included student learning styles, instructor facilitation, instructor satisfaction, course design, course development process, use of teams in the course development process, legal mandates, and different dimensions of higher education institutional prioritization and impacts. The online course developer is responsible for the creation of student-facing course content, with the potential to impact many areas associated with online learning. Despite the scope of direct and indirect potential impacts attributable to the online subject matter expert, research has not been heavily focused on understanding the role of the subject matter expert in the online course development process.

Research demonstrated the importance of emphasis on key aspects of the student experience and the course development process. Diversity of learners was encountered often in the research, as a point of focus in online course learning structure. The extent of student diversity and related implications was the focus of some research in this area. Other research studies focused on methods for accounting for diversity. Although some

facets of student variation and course design approaches aligned, there were several instances of direction and priority differences. The research did not bridge student diversity and course structure with focus on the online subject matter expert tasked with creation of online course content.

Research also explored the environment created for the student. It was recognized by Kochery (1997) that, although perceived as lacking by online students, the sense of a learning community can be attained by creating an environment focused on peer interaction, social support, and interpersonal communication. The connection to the online subject matter expert in the course development process, and potential conflict-based impediments to addressing these areas, were not points of focus. Factors related to learner satisfaction in online learning, according to Moore (2002), included group work, performance-based orientation, clear instructor presence, clear directions, opportunity for reflection, equal participation opportunities, and a concentration on ideas as opposed to facts. Accounting for such identified areas and the potential challenges associated with doing so, from the vantage point of the online subject matter expert, was not explored in the scope of the research.

Online learning should be engaging. An effective curriculum, according to Porter (2004), must be well structured, filled with usable and appropriate course content, and be innovative and interesting to the diverse student body who take each course and work through a progression of classes. According to Bonk and Reynolds (1997), challenging learning activities must be utilized to enable students to connect new information to old, acquire knowledge that is meaningful, and use their metacognitive abilities. The online subject matter expert, in part, is tasked with creating these learning activities. Without

better understanding the lived experience of the subject matter expert in the online course development process, tools and impediments to creating effective curricula cannot be fully understood.

A separate body of research focused on theory and process. Design theories, with emphasis on characteristics associated with how to best develop and construct a course, have been proffered by several researchers, including Reigeluth (1999). These theories stipulate true instructional design theories are design-oriented and focus on the overall construction of design or desired student learning outcomes. The process component yielded extensive research on teamwork and collaboration in the course development process. Acknowledgement of the importance of teamwork and collaboration in the course development process was a recurring research theme. In fact, M'hammed and He (2008) maintained a streamlined workflow, including collaboration with specialists, was a necessity in designing and producing quality online courses.

A recent study by Hart (2018) focused on the vantage point of the instructional designer and their experiences working with faculty subject matter experts to develop courses for online higher education institutions. Collaborative theory, team design theory, and conflict management theory were incorporated in the context of the findings (Hart, 2018). In the study, Hart (2018) explored the use of strategies by instructional designers to strengthen their working relationships with subject matter experts in online course development projects, and how the experiences affected online course quality. Fringe connections were made between conflict and impacts specific to the subject matter expert. Connections were not fully analyzed from the perspective of the subject matter expert in the online course development process and application of the theories,

implementation of strategies, implications, and findings. The acknowledgement of the existence of conflict from the perspective of the instructional designer supported the importance of focusing on the vantage point of the subject matter expert for a more comprehensive understanding of causes and impacts.

The utilization of online subject matter experts in the conversion of traditional courses to online course formats presented another research direction, and an additional dimension of potential conflict for the online subject matter expert. D'Agustino (2012) identified obstacles to developing an effective asynchronous learning course design model, and used those obstacles to serve as the basis for best practice recommendations accompanied by a new model. The implementation of the model was not fully explored from the perspective of the online subject matter expert in the design process specific to possible challenges associated with teaching and learning, learners, and learning objectives, with an emphasis on student interaction rather than information transmission, with consideration of the audience, content, and outcomes (D'Agustino, 2012). The extent of prioritization of those challenges created the potential for conflict, for the online subject matter expert, on multiple levels.

Incorporation of technology into the online learning process was also a research focus. In exploring the integration of technology into online course development, Palloff and Palloff (2001) asserted it was pedagogy, not technology integration, that was of primary importance to online course development. There was an acknowledgement in their research the planning process was complex, with many driving forces to take into consideration. The complexities associated with balancing varying interests and priorities

further reinforced the importance of examining the lived experience of the subject matter expert in the online course development process.

Throughout the process, and after completion of the course build, feedback and communication were central areas of importance on many levels. Communication was a key area of emphasis, in varying capacities, throughout the research. Smallwood (2007) focused on personality style differences, separate from the different roles, responsibilities, and frames, and proffered recognition of personality style differences was a key starting point necessary to make those differences work. In the context of communication between subject matter expert and instructional designer, Stevens (2012) emphasized the necessity of relationship dynamics in identifying steps to improve productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency in the online course development process. Stevens (2013) asserted instructional designers and subject matter experts were necessary in the course development process. A strong, positive working relationship between subject matter experts and instructional designers was identified by Stevens (2013) as one of the keys to the development of a high-quality online course.

Several initiatives have been undertaken focused on the ability to integrate objective assessment into different aspects of the online learning process and experience. The utilization of standards for online courses has been an area of emphasis. QM Rubric and the Sloan Scorecard were key areas of research. Through additional research and analysis, Stevens (2012) asserted the need for feedback mechanisms and proper procedures to facilitate decision making and resource allocation to avoid adversely impacting the distance education goals of the institution. The emphasis of the research

was faculty and content specific, as opposed to focusing on the online subject matter expert experience in the creation of the online course.

Quality of education, workflow management, resource allocation, competing forces, design versus pedagogy, utilization of instructional designers, perceptions of those involved in the process, and content requirements were prior research areas of focus. Each of these areas impacted, and is impacted by the subject matter expert building course content for online course delivery. Prior to this study, research had not focused on the connection between subject matter experts and the aforementioned issues, the potential for conflict, and the related direct and indirect implications associated with the conflict from the lived experience perspective of the online subject matter expert.

The online course development process is often formalized, with structured interaction and interim deliverables. The process is complex, and typically involves many individuals in varying roles. For online course development, understanding how process determinations are made and the corresponding impacts, and connecting those findings to the experience of the subject matter expert, are key areas of importance that were not points of focus in prior research. Focusing on the subject matter expert in the online course development process is central to exploring potential impacts, direct and indirect, in the areas of instructor satisfaction, competency proficiency, student experience data, student retention, and employable skills. The research centered specifically on the role of the online subject matter expert, and the impact on the lived experience and conflict encountered during the process connected to discrete variables, was lacking.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Research reflected growth in the online higher education sector, accompanied by a multitude of connections and impacts associated with curriculum developed by the online subject matter expert. The subject matter expert developing content for online course delivery has the ability to leave an indelible mark on a myriad of higher education facets. Potential implications of their contributions, both positive and negative, can be extensive. Barriers exist in the online course development process that threaten consistency, competency alignment and proficiency demonstration, course content, and ultimately, the student experience. Strategies to overcome these impediments are lacking.

Without focusing on understanding the individual tasked with the responsibility of developing online course content that will be student-facing, a key component is not accounted for in efforts to better understand challenges subject matter experts face, and the implications of the challenges in varying capacities, connected to direct and indirect stakeholders. Developing an understanding of the lived experience of the online subject matter expert in the course development process specific to conflict provided insight into the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of the subject matter expert, and resulting impacts on the subject matter expert, the process, and course content deliverables. Institutions of higher education that recognize the potential for conflict and how to effectively manage it are better equipped to meet the demands of quality online education standards.

There is a void in the research into the lived experience of the subject matter expert. Despite a vast array of research focused on higher education, emphasis on the experience of the online subject matter expert was not an extensive point of focus. The emphasis of this study filled a gap in the research. This study was needed to better

understand the nature of conflict, the potential implications, and possible approaches to management of conflict, to positively impact the experience, as well as the developed course.

As with a core that branches out in different directions, a key starting point is developing a better understanding of the core. The online subject matter expert is that core. From there, opportunities were presented for further research in areas of significant importance for online higher education, to examine the potential connections and impacts of each of the resulting branches. Prior research included fringe connections in varying contexts, to subject matter experts in higher education, without making their perceptions and experiences during the course development process central to the studies. This research gap justified the need to explore process, perceptions, and impacts of the lived experiences of subject matter experts that acknowledged the potential magnitude of those impacts.

Research Questions

The research questions which guided the study, based on the three primary goals, were as follows: What were the potential sources of conflict encountered by the subject matter expert throughout the course development process? What did the conflict mean to the subject matter expert in the course development process? How did the subject matter expert manage conflict in the course development process? What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the course development product generated by the subject matter expert? What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the relationships with others involved in the course development process? What adjustments, if any, did the subject

matter expert make as a result of the conflict? How did those adjustments impact the final course product and relationship dynamics?

Nature of the Study and Conceptual Framework

Qualitative research is often exploratory in nature and involves focus on interactions and the meanings applied to those interactions by those living the experience. This study's focus aligned with utilization of qualitative research based on the setting, the methodology (transcendental phenomenology), the context focus, the emergent and evolving nature of the field, and fundamentally interpretive exploration and analysis. Central to phenomenological study was the description of the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences associated with a phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 2013). Each research question delineated for use in this research study was based on different dimensions of the experiences, which were lived, felt, processed, and communicated by the subject matter experts, in the context of work developing a course for an online higher education modality.

The examination of conflict in the higher education course development process for an online modality was conducive to qualitative research. Transcendental phenomenology, as the qualitative research methodology, was utilized to address research questions focused on conflict experienced by online subject matter experts in the higher education course development process because of the nature of the research, and the research direction. Specifically, phenomenology is centered on the lived experience. Using transcendental phenomenology as the research methodology to examine conflict from the perspective of the subject matter expert, who is hands-on in the process of online course delivery, enabled that subject matter expert's voice to be heard. Through

semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions, the essence or structure of the experiences was the point of focus. There is alignment between these areas of exploration and phenomenology.

The focus of the research translated to an “object” of human experience. The object was the conflict in the context of the online course development process, and the experience was the lived experience of the subject matter expert within that realm. The research questions utilized centered on that lived experience. Each research question was based on different dimensions of the experience, which were lived, felt, processed, and communicated by the subject matter expert from their frame of reference, in the context of work developing a course for an online modality. Chan, Fung, and Chien (1993) suggested that, because researchers are human, and can therefore inevitably influence the research process, “the concept of bracketing should be in the researcher’s mind throughout the research process, and these strategies are not merely restricted to the data collection and analysis phases” (p. 3). Given the researcher’s experience in online higher education connected to teaching, learning, and curriculum processes, bracketing was performed prior to the selection of participants and periodically throughout the research process.

In this study, data was collected from a sample of 28 subject matter experts, known and unknown to the researcher, who developed online higher education courses following processes that varied based on institutional parameters. Transcendental phenomenology was the methodology of choice to conduct data analysis focused on describing the essence of individual lived experiences; reducing those experiences to a core, universal essence representing the commonalities among research participants. The

stages of data analysis included bracketing (epoché), phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of textual and structural descriptions into an expression of collective essence.

Using the method of phenomenology required bracketing (epoché), accomplished by discussing personal experiences of the author, as the researcher, in conjunction with the phenomenon. Given the author's professional experience in online course development, accounting for that experience through bracketing was critical to the integrity of the research. Once bracketing was complete, the researcher began the process of phenomenological reduction, beginning with horizontalization. The step of horizontalization enabled the researcher to be open and receptive in the data analysis process, to each statement from the participants regarding their lived experience. In highlighting significant participant statements, each was granted equal value, which encouraged a rhythmical flow between participant and researcher.

Horizons helped the researcher identify unique experiences that stood out from the others. During this process, delimited meanings or horizons were clustered into core themes (Moustakas, 1994). Reducing those experiences to invariant constituents, the researcher was then able to perform thematic clustering using Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and NVivo 12 Plus software to code and categorize the participants' experiences. The integration of clusters into individual textural descriptions, representing what occurred, provided descriptions of the context or setting that influenced how participants experienced the phenomenon. Those individual textural descriptions were integrated into a composite textural description through a process of reviewing and combining them to depict the experiences of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation was the next step, which began with creating individual structural descriptions of how experiences occurred. The individual structural descriptions provided a rich account of the underlying dynamics of the experiences, and the themes and qualities that accounted for how feelings and thoughts were connected with the phenomenon. This step involved extracting verbatim examples (Moustakas, 1994). These individual structural descriptions were then synthesized into a composite structural description, representing a universal description and the essence of the lived experiences of the study participants. The composite structural description enabled the researcher to understand how the participants in the study experienced the phenomenon as a group (Moustakas, 1994).

In the final step, the researcher integrated the composite textural and composite structural description into an expression of the meanings and essences of the experience or phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Using transcendental phenomenology as the methodology for this research yielded information that, based on interpretation and analysis, provided a better sense of the lived experiences of subject matter experts and how they navigated conflict situations during online higher education course development. This methodology facilitated focus on the nuances of these experiences, which provided a deeper understanding of subject matter experts' perceptions and experiences of conflict throughout the online higher education course development process.

Definitions

Brick and mortar. A business or other entity that serves customers in a physical location, such as a building or other structure.

Course content. The information and material incorporated in a course (Sims, Dobbs, & Hand, 2002).

Course development. Inclusive of course design, the manner in which a course evolves over time from initial creation through revision.

Domino effect. A cumulative effect caused by one action, event, or interaction affecting other actions, events, or interactions.

Epoché. Setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence (Moustakas, 1994).

Ground, or On-ground. Refers to classes and courses where both students and teachers interact in the same enclosed physical location, such as a classroom. May also be used to delineate those who teach or administer in the same physical locations with students as opposed to interacting with students using exclusively the Internet.

Instructional design. The collection of techniques and tools utilized in a course to manifest the course content, the assessments, and gauge attrition level (Smith & Ragan, 1999).

Instructional design theory. A theory that offers focused guidance on how to better help people learn and develop (Reigeluth, 1999).

Instructor, facilitator, professor, teacher. Acknowledging that each has a unique meaning, these terms are used interchangeably in the literature, and therefore, are utilized throughout to mean the higher education appointed authority within a course room, virtual or on-ground, for a class or course (Palloff & Pratt, 2003).

Learning management system (LMS). A platform used to organize an online

learning environment. A learning management system provides means to track users, assess performance, deploy content, and access general administrative functions through reports. Examples include Blackboard, Desire2Learn, Canvas, Angel, Moodle, and Sakai.

Lived experience. A detailed personal experience account, told by an individual who lived through the experience.

Master online course. Refers to the master course used for all facilitation of that specific course by the institution.

Online course design. Refers to all components of a course incorporated into the master online course.

Online course materials. Academic or reference materials such as resources, tools, presentations, audio/video recordings, multimedia, quizzes, documents, etc. designed, developed, utilized and/or implemented in the online course.

Phenomenological research. A qualitative research method utilizing a small group to provide insight, opinions, and observations about a specific topic or phenomenon (Creswell, 2003).

Roll-out. Refers to the process of publishing a class or course on the Internet and making it available to students and instructors for use.

Startup. Refers to a business or other entity that is new.

Subject matter expert (SME). The credentialed professional with exceptional knowledge and experience in an area, who provides content and resources in that area relating to all aspects of the topics for which instruction is to be designed (Smith & Ragan, 2005).

Subject matter expert (SME) responsibilities. Subject matter expert responsibilities can include content creation and development, assessments, media creation, collaboration with course development team members, learning management content loading, verification of content accuracy and/or evaluations associated with the course (Smith & Ragan, 2005).

Traditional courses. Refers to courses or classes taught in a defined physical location where the instructors and students meet and interact within physical proximity of each other. *See also Ground or On-ground.*

Limitations

One potential threat to validity was the notion that subjects tend to offer socially desirable responses in interview situations (Schmitt, 1967). That is especially true for those in the education profession. The inclination, in some instances, is to present oneself in the best light possible or to speak in generalities (Goodson, 1994). In an effort to mitigate the potential for these tendencies, questions were formulated to be experiential and insight based. This approach set the stage to illicit responses that included details of experience, reconstruction of events, and specific examples rather than abstraction and generalities.

The potential limitations included the involvement of the researcher in the course development process at multiple institutions in varying capacities. To account for this limitation, bracketing was performed. An additional limitation was the diminished ability to make generalizations from the findings because of variations in the course development process in institutions, scope, structure, and direction. Because of the vast array of potential impacts to the subject matter expert, the process, and the content,

extensive variation in direction based on perceptions of conflict was also a limitation, in that the ability to make generalizations may be limited.

Significance

This study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content, through an exploration of their lived experiences specific to impacts on subject matter experts, course development processes, course content deliverables, and direct and indirect stakeholders. This research also revealed areas of opportunity to enhance the course development experience, improve course content, and positively impact direct and indirect stakeholders. Examination of the lived experiences from the subject matter expert vantage point and related thoughts, feelings, emotions, and impacts connected to experiencing conflict in the online higher education course development process filled a gap in the literature and also supports the need to further explore effective strategies for conflict management in the course development process. Delineating specific areas of focus and understanding how each examined area impacted the subject matter expert provides a foundation for exploring additional connections.

Given the far-reaching impact of course content in online higher education, insight into the experiences of individuals tasked with content creation is of great value. Such insight sets the stage for subsequent research opportunities to explore conflict management approaches that enhance the experience of the subject matter expert, refine the course development process, improve team dynamics, and positively impact course development content connected to identified areas, in a focused manner. This focused insight is integral to various aspects of higher education, including the potential for

increased student retention, higher student satisfaction, competency proficiency demonstration elevation, employable skills improvement, and enhanced instructor and subject matter expert satisfaction.

Summary

The exploration of conflict experienced by the subject matter expert in the online course development process provided important insight into potential impacts on course content. Focusing on the different dimensions and implications of conflict from the perspective of the subject matter expert provided insight based on the lived experience of the subject matter expert that enabled connections to be made to other key areas of impact at the subject matter expert, instructor, student, and institutional levels. This study was exploratory in nature, with a focus on meanings of the lived experience of the online higher education subject matter expert, aligning with qualitative research, using transcendental phenomenology as the methodology. The description of the common meaning for individuals, of their lived experiences associated with conflict encountered in the online course development process, was central to the study.

The research questions provided the basis for subject matter experts to share different facets of their lived experience throughout the process, perceptions associated with conflict, conflict causes, and conflict impacts on the overall course development process and the subject matter expert experience. The impact of conflict can carry over into other areas of significance, in direct and indirect ways, including but not limited to institutional enrollment, student academic experience, student retention, employee satisfaction, instructor facilitation, and demonstration of employable skills.

A review of the literature in Chapter 2, associated with subject matter expert experience, course development, course design, curriculum approaches, implications, and connections supported the existence of a gap in focus on the subject matter expert tasked with developing course content for online delivery in higher education in key areas of higher education. Correlations between literature supported key facets of the course development process and course design focus to maximize important areas such as effectively educating diverse learners, student satisfaction, instructor satisfaction, outcome focus, resource utilization, and proficiency demonstration.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Using transcendental phenomenology as the research methodology to examine conflict from the perspective of the subject matter expert who is hands-on in the process of online course delivery enabled the subject matter expert's voice to be heard. The transcendental model, for data analysis, allowed for focus on the essence of the experience and crystallization of the core issues of conflict. That insight served as the foundation for better understanding the potential impacts on direct and indirect stakeholders associated with the online learning process at the higher education level.

This research approach yielded information that, through interpretation and analysis, helped in better understanding the experiences of subject matter experts as pertains to the impact of conflict on various facets of the online course development process. Potential areas for improvement were identified in conjunction with underlying sources, driving the need for improvement derived from the lived experience of those involved in the process. These findings have larger implications on key areas such as subject matter expert turn over, demonstration of course objective proficiencies, student satisfaction, employable skills, subsequent course preparedness, and student retention.

Literature Search Strategy

Research was conducted utilizing multiple databases, filtering for peer reviewed sources and dissertations. Initial search terms and connectors were broad. From there, narrowing was utilized. Combinations were varied using "and" and "or" in the search process. Search terms included curriculum development combined with higher education, subject matter expert combined with higher education, phenomenology combined with online course development and higher education, phenomenology combined with subject

matter expert and higher education, course development process combined with online and subject matter expert, online course development process, use of subject matter experts in online course development, impact combined with course development and higher education, online and student retention, impact combined with course development and higher education, online and employable skills, role combined with online course development, or online higher education curriculum development.

The same searches were conducted replacing higher education with post-secondary and utilization of e-learning and, subsequently, distance learning. Student workload, workload mapping, instructional designer, learning management system and course interface were also utilized in conjunction with the initial search terms and combinations. As searches progressed from broad to narrow, the term conflict was integrated into the combined searches associated with curriculum developer, subject matter expert, curriculum development process, and higher education. The terms collaboration, challenge, and impediment were also utilized in the search process as replacement search terms for conflict.

As on-point research was located, sources cited in that research were explored for additional insight into the online course development process from the vantage point of the subject matter expert. Research was updated throughout the dissertation process. Additional areas examined included student retention and institution impact. Research was broadened based on review of previous research specific to online course development from different vantage points taking different directions. Connections were made between the research and this area of study to provide additional perspective and insight, and to affirm the existing research gaps and possible future directions.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Data reflected online learning is on the rise. According to a survey conducted by the Sloane Consortium, in Fall 2012, an all-time high of 32% of students had taken at least one course online in their college career (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The data also reflected an increase in online enrollment as a percent of total enrollment to 32% from 9.6% at postsecondary institutions in 10 years (Allen & Seaman, 2013). There were even larger increases in enrollment percentages in different sectors, including undergraduate business students enrolled in online courses and online programs (Weyant, 2013).

It is estimated based on reports, by the year 2025 there will be between 30 and 80 million online students in the world (Hosie, Schibeci, & Backhaus, 2005). Although growth in online learning enrollment is rapid, data suggests persistence in online courses is often much lower than in traditional, ground courses utilizing face-to-face learning (Carr, 2000; Chen & Jang, 2010; Rochester & Pradel, 2008). The rates of students who did not successfully complete their online courses ranged from as low as 10% to as high as 75% (Carr, 2000; Chen & Jang, 2010; Rochester & Pradel, 2008). These high attrition rates are a source of concern on many levels, including the course design level (Liu, Gomez, Khan, & Yen, 2007).

In some instances, the course materials worked, and in others they did not (Pinto & Anderson, 2013). In comparing online course development to face-to-face course preparation, the goals and objectives selections do not vary greatly, in that the content in both settings is based on learning outcomes and course goals (Rosenblum, 2000). The pacing of material coverage requires a balance between time available and the learning that must be accomplished in the form of objectives (Rosenblum, 2000). Developing an

online class necessitates a focus on interactivity to parallel the discussions taking place in a ground learning environment, as it is the interaction and connections that, according to Kang (2001), students remembered as the key to online learning. The transition in course materials and course design from “on-ground” courses to online courses should be a transformative process rather than a transition to another medium (Torrise & Davis, 2000). Using interviews and observations of online course development teams, Kang (2001) identified subject matter, design knowledge, resources, and technical skills as critical in the course design process through his investigation of collaborative course development.

With the increase in diversity of learners, accompanied by an increase in online learning, testing and verifying the transmission of knowledge are important areas of focus. Focusing on different modalities provides a basis for comparison and insight into the varying impacts associated with delivery format. An exploratory study using pre-tests and post-tests was conducted by Chernish, DeFranco, Lindner, and Dooley (2005), comparing multiple sections of a junior-level college course, taught by the same instructor, using three different delivery formats. The formats were traditional classroom, instructional television, and Internet. The areas of research interest were whether the three methods were equally effective, whether the different methods would affect the feelings of learners regarding communication, interaction and being part of the class, and whether the different methods would affect access to learning resources for the learners (Chernish et al., 2005).

The traditional classroom setting encompassed face-to-face meetings, supplemented by online threaded discussions, and the posting of presentations online.

The instructional television group attended studio sessions broadcast to remote sites, enabling students to record the class. There was also an online threaded discussion participation requirement. For the online students, after an in-person orientation, the learning took place online with lectures and threaded discussions. The online students reconvened for an in-class final examination.

Based on the data collected, although the preference of the learners differed, there was no difference in learning achievement in terms of results. However, other research supported online learning can be more effective than face-to-face classroom learning (Russell, 2001). Concentrating specifically on the takeaways for online delivery, the importance of focusing on utilization of learner-centered, learner-driven activities was paramount (Chernish et al., 2005). In instances where instructional designers were utilized in addition to subject matter experts, the instructional designers could assist with approaches to account for the variation in learning styles, utilizing different strategies to reach learners with varying learning needs. Instructional designers possess specific knowledge of learning theories and instructional design models. This knowledge can help improve quality of instruction in online higher education courses. According to Wagner and Hulen (2015), for those reasons, instructional designers can be valuable members of the online course development team in higher education. The potential exists to expand this research by utilizing different class types, learner pools, and varying assignments.

It was noted by Kochery (1997) that, by creating an environment focused on peer interaction, social support, and interpersonal communication, the sense of a learning community can be attained, which was often something lacking from the experience in distance education from the perspective of the student. According to Moore (2002),

factors related to learner satisfaction in online learning included group work, performance-based orientation, clear instructor presence, clear directions, opportunity for reflection, equal participation opportunities, and a concentration on ideas as opposed to facts. Online learning, according to Bonk and Reynolds (1997), must encompass challenging learning activities to enable students to connect new information to old, acquire knowledge that is meaningful, and use their metacognitive abilities. Steed (2001) focused on the design of effective online courses, connecting focus to distributive education theory. Based on the premise that learning is not just delivery of information, it was recognized that passive involvement was not sufficient.

Instructional design theory is a framework that suggests how to best develop and construct a course focused on student learning, as opposed to the simple placement of content in an online course shell (Reigeluth, 1999). Design theories were identified as instruments to be utilized by course designers in the context of providing guidance pertaining to specific approaches to reach course goals (Reigeluth, 1999). Four major characteristics of instructional design theories were offered by Reigeluth (1999). Focus was on the overall construction of design or desired student learning outcome, with true instructional design theories being design-oriented. This framework focus enabled instructors to make selections for course goals to be attained. From there, instructional design served as a resource in determining the specific methods of instruction for utilization within the framework. Subcomponents, in the form of more detailed parts for additional insight into application, are identifiers of instructional design theory. Utilization of these methods provided greater opportunity for student success, according to Reigeluth (1999). Understanding and applying an instructional design model were not

always in alignment. The strongest utilization occurred when potential end results were identified early in the process through the application of the instructional design theory. Focus was on the end result and the process.

M'hammed and He (2008) maintained a streamlined workflow with collaboration of specialists was required in order to design and produce a quality online course. The specialists should include subject matter, technical, and instructional experts. An effective and efficient management process was necessary to produce quality online courses. Possible implications associated with focusing on these areas, in terms of gaps, included unavailable resources, poor course design quality, budget issues, and course readiness delays (M'hammed & He, 2008). Key areas of focus included time management, resource allocations, formative evaluation, control of quality, and course revisions (M'hammed & He, 2008). M'hammed and He (2008) suggested blending project management practices with a thorough online course development framework, and operational course development approaches through the use of a systematic approach to planning, design, and online course production facilitated by Enterprise Project Management (EMP).

The framework proposed by M'hammed and He (2008) was based on seven sequential and iterative phases, broken down into sub-tasks. The phase progression was as follows: preplanning (project definition), planning, analysis, design and prototype, production, post-production, and delivery. Four different approaches to online course development, categorized based on relevance to complexity of the instructional design and multimedia production, and emphasizing maximizing student and faculty satisfaction, were identified (M'hammed & He, 2008). The varying approaches accounted

for instructional design, text and graphics, and audio, video, and animation mapped to different course components based on effort levels. Project plans were created for each of the four approaches. Although front-end heavy in workload, it was maintained by M'hammed and He (2008) that utilizing this process served as the basis for an adaptable learning organization capable of building flexible knowledge associated with effectiveness and efficiency in the streamlined production of high-quality courses.

Colbry, Hurwitz, and Adair (2014), developed collaborative theory, and defined collaboration as “any on-going interpersonal interaction not characterized by a significant power imbalance with the express purpose of achieving common goals” (p. 67). The premise was contributions of something of value to the project by those involved, accompanied by taking all contributions into consideration. Parallels can be drawn to the collective goal of quality production of an online course, and corresponding perceptions of equality in partnerships to work toward that common goal (Hart, 2018). A strong correlation was identified by Zundans-Fraser and Bain (2016) between the amount of collaboration during the course development process, and the coherency and quality of the final collaborative project. A true partnership between collaborators can result in increases in productivity, quality, and morale, and prevent power struggles among individuals working together on a project (Holsombach-Ebner, 2013).

In the design of online learning focused on the conversion of traditional courses to online course delivery rather than the creation of new online courses, D'Agustino (2012) identified obstacles to developing an effective asynchronous learning course design model and used those obstacles to serve as the basis for best practice recommendations accompanied by a new model. The model was based on eight steps distributed through

three phases. Phase one was the identification phase, which encompassed strategy identification by the instructor (subject matter expert) and course design team. Phase two was the design phase, during which instructors selected, organized, adapted, and reflected. Phase three was the final phase, which involved implementation in the form of teaching the course (D'Agustino, 2012).

Focusing specifically on the online course development facet of course conversions, D'Agustino (2012) maintained that, in general, it was considered easier to convert a traditional online course into an online course in comparison to creating a brand new course for online delivery, because many of the components of traditional courses were applicable and transferable to online course delivery. Focus on teaching and learning rather than technology, accompanied by focus on learners and learning objectives, should serve as the foundation of online course development (D'Agustino, 2012). Emphasis in the design process should be on student interaction rather than information transmission, with consideration of the audience, content, and outcomes (D'Agustino, 2012).

The acronym SOAR, which stands for Strategies, Objectives, Assessments, and Resources, was proposed as a model to support the course conversion process from ground to online (D'Agustino, 2012). The model, according to D'Agustino (2012), should be applied to the overall course and, specifically, to the individual modules, to ensure all learning opportunities are purposefully designed. The high-level approach was student, rather than content-centered. Best practices involved utilization of a design team comprised of the subject matter expert, an instructional designer, and a media specialist.

Roles were clearly defined, with team members supporting one another throughout the process.

Context analysis occurred with the development of an understanding of the context of the learning environment by the design team. Learning outcomes and course objectives were identified and connected to specific learning in a sequenced process involving scaffolding. Scaffolding is closely related to the zone of proximal development, which is the gap between what a student knows, and that student's potential for knowledge (D'Augustino, 2012). Content was chunked into modules. Rapid design and testing occurred with the sharing of learning modules with specific student populations for feedback, driving revisions.

The delineation of areas of focus, throughout the collective and specific application of SOAR, encompassed many concerns that should be points of focus throughout the process, and impacted team members (D'Augustino, 2012). These areas included, but were not limited to, alignment, frequency, intensity, authentication, communication resource identification, organization, assessments, learning opportunity identification, adapting materials for heterogeneous learners, chunking, and scaffolding. These areas of focus, throughout the collective and specific application of SOAR, provided a snapshot of the potential complexities associated with the online course design process, along with extensive potential for conflict from the perspective of the subject matter expert in individual and team dynamics contexts.

Team culture emerged as a theme, in varying capacities, when the online course development process encompassed collaboration in different forms. It was maintained by Trammell, Morgan, Davies, Petrunich-Rutherford, and Herold (2018), supported by prior

research, there are several benefits to a team-based approach to online course development. Key benefits included utilization of multiple experts as contributors, collaboration opportunities that would not otherwise be present among faculty in a field grounded in a specific course, and the opportunity to work through problems or “kinks” because of different vantage points and multiple perspectives. Ultimately, it was concluded utilization of teams in the development of an online course had promising potential connected to student success and faculty development (Trammell et al., 2018)

In a team setting, the potential for conflict is present. Conflicts between those involved in the online course development process can have significant impacts on individuals, processes, and end results. The potential implications often transcend the immediacy of those involved in the conflict, impacting stakeholders such as administrators, students, and institutions, on a larger scale. This potential, which can be far-reaching, necessitated accounting for and exploring potential avenues for conflict management. A foundation, associated with conflict management, was understanding what constituted conflict. According to Wall and Callister (1995), conflict can be defined as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party” (p. 517). De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, and Nauta (2001) stated “the effectiveness of individual employees, teams, and entire organizations depends on how they manage interpersonal conflict at work” (p. 645).

The potential for conflict resonated in the definition of the culture of an environment or group setting, from Smit and Schabraczy (1998) as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions and beliefs established by a team as it copes with various problems” (p. 14). According to Waddoups, Wentworth, and Earle (2004), design teams structured

around naturally occurring alliances provided the foundation for integration to develop quickly, which added to success. The failure to create a supporting culture at the institutional level can impact worker motivation, job performance, and professional competence impacted by environmental attributes (Pan et al., 2003). The potential existed to develop an implicit trust between instructional designers and subject matter experts as they worked together in an effort that was mutually supportive (Pan et al., 2003).

In a basic qualitative study with purposive sampling consisting of 12 fully-online higher education instructional designers focused on the experience of instructional designers with faculty subject matter experts in online higher education course development conducted by Hart (2018), parallels in this area were identified in the theme of Work Dynamic Challenges, and sub-themes of Personalities, and Self Awareness and Boundaries. For example, P6 characterized her working relationship with faculty subject matter experts as “a work in progress.” The way in which she approached each subject matter expert was different based on the “temperament and needs of that faculty member.” P3 stated it rather simply: “They either love me or hate me.” She continued on to say that some of the faculty subject matter experts saw instructional designers as “an infringement on their job.” P4 explained that he has “very little problems with faculty SMEs if they truly want to collaborate and cooperate” (Hart, 2018, pp. 64–67).

In the exploration of an approach to building an online course shell, acknowledging the growth of the online learning sector, Trammell, Morgan, Davies, Petrunich-Rutherford, and Herold (2018) examined challenges and opportunities, focused on team utilization, that considered various stakeholder impacts. Utilization of teams on the creation of a successful course shell was the point of focus, with emphasis on

communication and related impacts in the context of core areas such as collaboration, combined feedback, and contributions. Success, in the context of course shell design, was correlated with consistency and structure, with acknowledgement of the value added in the utilization of teams. There was a recognition that, with the utilization of teams, came challenges. A prevalent source of challenge was identified as communication (Trammell et al., 2018).

Challenges centered around communication, according to Xu and Morris (2007), and acknowledged by Trammell et al. (2018), were sourced from negative team member interpersonal dynamics, lack of calibration of workload among contributors, schedule challenges, resource limitations, and a lack of reward from the institution. White (2000) acknowledged the potential for elevated frustration associated with team member delay impacting others, and related barriers to reaching the finish line in a timely manner. These identified areas, with adverse impacts on multiple levels, were identified in the study by Hart (2018), in the Work Dynamic Challenges theme, under the sub-theme of Respect for Expertise and Professional Confidence. Specifically, P11 stated instructional designers should remember that, while they are experts in designing instruction, they are not the content experts. Instructional designers should “offer some suggestions for improvement but not demand” that subject matter experts follow those suggestions. P1 stated instructional designers should be willing to listen to faculty subject matter experts’ ideas regarding course development rather than simply trying to convince them to do things the way an instructional designer would. P5 added letting faculty subject matter experts “know that instructional designers only want to be of service to them and to help

them” may encourage them to be more willing to work with instructional designers, and listen to their suggestions (Hart, 2018, pp. 77–79).

Correlations under the sub-theme of Communication and Feedback, and Respect for Expertise and Professional Confidence were also present. The most predominant correlation was associated with subject matter expert and instructional designer interaction (Hart, 2018). Related correlations were also present with the sub-theme of Team Member Field Knowledge, in the context of parameters, overstepping, and associated implications (Hart, 2018). This could be attributable, in part, to the different backgrounds and areas of expertise, with results being inevitable conflict in some instances (Singleton et al., 2011).

The importance of clarity in communication spanning the gambit of multiple facets of the course and expectations among the team was deemed critical to decrease frustration by Hixon (2008). Open mindedness, associated with learning new, and potentially improved approaches to course work, had the potential to decrease frustration. In the research conducted by Trammell, Morgan, Davies, Petrunich-Rutherford, and Herold (2018), team members were assigned to work on content aligned with their areas of expertise, resulting in an elevated level of enthusiasm. A project manager was utilized, for behind-the-scenes work, focused on timeliness, facilitation of resolutions for encountered challenges, and negotiation of personality conflicts (Trammell et al., 2018).

There were many potential directions of exploration, reflecting the extensive need for research in specific sectors associated with online course development. In examining the integration of technology into online course development, Palloff and Palloff (2001) maintained it was pedagogy, not technology integration, that was of primary importance

to online course development. The importance of learner characteristics in the online course development process was also identified as a key area of priority (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). White (2000) asserted that a pilot should be utilized, for newly developed courses, as part of the course development process.

The planning process is complex, with many driving forces for consideration. The complexities and balancing of different interests and priorities supported the importance of examining the lived experience of the subject matter expert in the online course development process. For online course development, understanding how determinations were made, and connecting those findings to the experience of the subject matter expert, were key areas of importance. Focusing on the subject matter expert in the online course development process was central to exploring potential impacts, direct and indirect, in the areas of instructor satisfaction, competency proficiency, student experience data, student retention, and employable skills.

According to Rosenbloom (2000), there were two main approaches to course development; the traditional faculty-designed/faculty-developed solo course model, and the team approach involving instructional designers and faculty members. Research supported greater utilization of the team approach to online course development, with emphasis on procedure and feedback mechanisms (Moore & Kearsley, 2005). Moore and Kearsley (2005) compared the systemic model of distance education to the system of the human body, with each party playing an integral part in how the body worked as a whole. Peters (1994), drew parallels between the system for distance education and the industrialization process based on the requirement of careful advance planning on a division of labor basis, costly development, and objectivization through media. The

analogies of the model can be applied to the development and scalability of online courses as analyzed by Puzziferro and Shelton (2008).

The team approach afforded the opportunity to combine the experience of the discipline experts and the instructional designers (Luck, 2001). In a team setting, inevitably, there will be divergence in perspectives between subject matter experts and instructional designers on the best methods for presenting course material to learners, which can translate to challenges (Stein, 2014; Stevens, 2013). In some instances, faculty members had minimal experience in online course development and instructional designers may lack experience specific to the faculty member's area of expertise. This can translate to a clash of perspectives in the online course development process in different contexts. The quality of the online course can be adversely impacted, as can the professionals involved in the process.

The team approach can pose challenges to faculty and instructional technologists working with online courses. Because of the greater reliance on collaborative teams in online course development, the opportunity to examine team dynamics from the lived experience of the subject matter expert, potential conflict, and related implications were timely research areas of focus that filled existing research needs. Collective trust and confidence in the group members made the process of collaboration much easier (Gordon, 2003). Communication played a central role in conflict and the development of collaboration, while giving conflict its due. The ability of group members to communicate also had a directly proportionate effect on the chances of a group's ability to collaborate. It was through communication group members were able to share their

perceptions of one another's power and make choices that were positive and beneficial to the group based on the trust built as a result (Gordon, 2003).

The online course development process is often formalized, with requires interaction and interim deliverables. The process is complex, and often involves many individuals in varying roles. Quality online course production requires a highly organized and concerted effort in terms of the key players (Caplan, 2008). The collective goal is a high-caliber online course that enables students to demonstrate proficiency of course, program, and institutional learning outcomes, or objectives. Workload must be calibrated, in alignment with accreditation requirements. Utilization of the learning as a foundation for subsequent learning, based on course sequencing, is also an important variable. Translation of learning into the workplace through demonstration of learning proficiency is a key area of importance. These areas of importance translated to allocated roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process, to reach the collective goal.

The process does not end with the completion and roll-out of the online course content. Evaluation and change management processes are integral to course content development. Once content is student-facing, a mechanism should be utilized, based on quantifiable measurable variables, to assess whether the objectives and goals were met. Areas of improvement should be identified through these assessment processes, based on information sources from faculty in the form of faculty governance, students in the form of student evaluation feedback, and administrators based on varying knowledge and involvement specific to the course.

The research centered specifically on the role of the online subject matter expert, and impacts specific to the lived experience and conflict encountered during the process

associated with each discrete variable, was lacking prior to this research study. Insight into the lived experience of the online subject matter expert is potentially connected to increased student retention, improved student learning experiences, elevated competency proficiency, employable skills demonstration and enhanced instructor satisfaction. Each specific potential connection provided a narrow and important research opportunity to gain insight into possible correlations and impacts.

In the online course development process, many institutions utilized instructional designers. Instructional designers have designated deliverables, as do subject matter experts. Acknowledging the challenges and conflict in the process, including between the subject matter expert and instructional designer, storyboarding was examined as a tool for different purposes in the online course development process (Yusoffa & Salimb, 2012). The purposes included instructional models and learning theories, to serve as a point of reference for content flow and ensure all areas were covered in the course content (Yusoffa & Salimb, 2012).

Specific to the use of storyboarding, focus was predominantly on different approaches used in storyboard design without sufficient emphasis on the effects of design and process challenges for the subject matter expert (Yusoffa & Salimb, 2012). The use of storyboarding to improve the online course development process with emphasis on the interaction between the subject matter expert and instructional designer was the point of focus for the research conducted by Yusoffa and Salimb (2012).

Yusoffa and Salimb (2012) utilized a cognitive task analysis approach to elicit the cognitive task challenges encountered by subject matter experts, with focus on the level of expertise needed for storyboarding. Cognitive task analysis is “the extension of

traditional task analysis techniques to yield information about the knowledge, thought processes, and goal structures that underlie observable task performance” (Schraagen, Chipman, & Shute, 2000, p.4). In applying cognitive task analysis to conflict and challenges faced by the subject matter expert, focus was placed on the difficulties in cognitive structures and processes, including knowledge-based and representational skills, attention, problem solving, and decision making (Stanton et al., 2005). The cognitive task analysis project in this research, according to Yusoffa and Salimb (2012), provided an important discovery, represented effective communication of the discovery, and achieved a meaningful impact from the communication. Those three criteria were requirements for success in cognitive task analysis projects (Klein & Militello, 2001).

In the research conducted by Yusoffa and Salimb (2012), there was an acknowledgement that, in processing involvement of a subject matter expert and instructional designer, the interaction between the two was significant for the online curriculum content. Five challenges were identified as a result of the research, specific to subject matter expert and instructional designer interaction and the process of e-learning storyboarding. Those challenges included communicative components, multimedia components, e-learning storyboard components, training components, and problem solving and decision-making components (Yusoffa & Salimb, 2012). Findings supported utilizing innovation and technology to enhance that experience for the collective improvement of the final outcome.

The utilization of instructional designers in the online course development process has been identified as positive and important on many levels. Kanuka (2006) and Stevens (2013) acknowledged the connection value between faculty subject matter experts with

discipline specific expertise and instructional designers with expertise in methods of teaching adult learners should not be ignored. Specifically, the successful collaboration between the subject matter expert and the instructional designer resulted in the development of an online course that enabled students to comprehend the course material (Kanuka, 2006; Stevens, 2013). This integration was not without potential challenges, including conflict perceptions from the lived experiences of subject matter experts.

In a study conducted by Castro-Figueroa (2009), collaboration and compromise dominated in the meetings between subject matter experts and instructional designers. The study focused on determining the main sources of communication conflict experienced by the instructional designer and three subject matter experts, understanding how the conflict was handled by the team members, and identifying the particular conflict resolution styles utilized by the team members (Castro-Figueroa, 2009). Case study research was the methodology used in this study.

According to Castro-Figueroa (2009), the study yielded a description of what happened in the design phase of an instructional system design process, with focus on communication conflicts among the instructional designer and an interdisciplinary team of subject matter experts; which contributed to the expansion of the limited body of literature about this subject. Hart (2018) focused on related areas from the vantage point of the instructional designer. Additional research and exploration were needed in this area centered on the subject matter expert, to better understand the sources of conflict, approaches taken to manage the conflict, impacts of the experience, and the implications for the final deliverables.

Northouse and Northouse (1998) asserted that “the most constructive approach to conflict was collaboration, which required that individuals recognize, confront, and resolve conflict by attending fully to others’ concerns without sacrificing their own” (p. 256). In the development process, frames were often vastly different, as were areas of emphasis and priorities. Fundamental disagreements perpetuated by different driving forces could potentially give rise to conflict. Attempting to compromise, which encompassed individuals attending to the concerns of others as well as their own concerns, was a goal, but not always a reality. The examination of the experience of an online course developer in this research study provided greater insight into these areas.

Stevens (2012) conducted a qualitative case study examining the experiences of professors (subject matter experts) and instructional designers during the online course development process to determine if the experience of the professors and instructional designers had an effect on the online course development process. The analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation (ADDIE) instructional design model was used as a conceptual framework for the alignment of emergent themes (Stevens, 2012).

The development process examined by Stevens encompassed instructional designers working closely with subject matter experts. Stevens (2012) identified potential issues in that working dynamic, including the varying educational backgrounds of the instructional designers and the subject matter experts, best practice applications, communication barriers, functionality requirements, and course production deadlines. It was noted both the instructional designer and subject matter expert needed the ability to adopt new strategies and views for teaching and learning accompanied by a professional working relationship (Stevens, 2012). For the subject matter expert, an expectation

existed of input in development decisions with results that correlated with their ability and style (Stevens, 2012). Limitations were acknowledged which included bias, limited sample size, limited participant response, and embellishment or minimization of the communicated experience (Stevens, 2012). Of the 10 participants, none were male, and one was non-Caucasian, resulting in a level of homogeneity.

Stevens (2012), based on additional research and analysis, emphasized the need for feedback mechanisms and proper procedures to facilitate decision making and resource allocation to avoid adversely impacting the distance education goals of the institution. Overcoming cultural barriers by working together as a team was also identified as an area of importance (Stevens, 2012). Course quality was not a point of direct examination in this study.

The research questions utilized were “(a) What were the experiences reported by professors and instructional designers in working with one another during the online course development process and (b) what meaning did they ascribe to their experiences?” (Stevens, 2012, p. 4). It was assumed by Stevens (2012) each participant had a perspective of the experience that served as their reality, that then became a factor in the relationship dynamics. According to Stevens (2012), through the identification of common themes of those individual experiences and the impacts on the relationship and process, the understanding associated with those areas could serve as the basis for more effective designs and efficient use of resources in the online course development process. The meaning ascribed to the experience from the perspective of the subject matter experts served as the foundation for conclusions to potentially assist in the improvement of

resource allocation, or development procedures on the part of management (Stevens, 2012).

Based on the observations of the interpersonal associations of subject matter experts and instructional designers working through the course development process, Stevens (2012) concluded a better understanding of these relationship dynamics was necessary in order to identify steps to improve productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency in the online course development process. Hart's (2018) research focused on the instructional designer vantage point.

The data analysis conducted by Stevens (2012) revealed five emergent themes of commitment to quality online courses, communication, mutual respect in the areas of time and talent, commitment to building a robust working relationship, and satisfaction in online course development work. The most prevalent factor identified as impacting the development process positively was communication. The most prevalent impediment to the online course development process was a lack of time. Uncooperative attitudes were also identified as detrimental to the online course development process (Stevens, 2012). Stevens (2012) concluded a workplace culture that provided an opportunity to interact in a supported setting and fostered good experiences benefited the online course development process. Elevated awareness of the workplace culture and allocation of resources focused on maintaining these areas were recommended (Stevens, 2012). Stevens (2012) analogized this research to a single spoke on a wheel of knowledge, with the opportunity to examine many more spokes.

Another potential area of focus in the exploration of the online subject matter expert's experience with conflict centered on personality style differences, separate from

the different roles, responsibilities, and frames. Recognition was a key starting point. From there, according to Smallwood (2007), “the ability to recognize these early and to understand the fallacy in these problems is essential to being able to make the differences work for them” (p. 2). Understanding the potential impact of frames in terms of perception about conflict and approaches taken to manage the conflict throughout the process were important variables in attempting to develop an in-depth understanding of the experience in the course development process, when attempting to ascertain shared experiences.

Puzziferro & Shelton (2008) acknowledged the challenges faced by institutions associated with developing process models for efficient, high quality online courses because creating or developing online courses was a multi-faceted, highly complex process. They examined team-based systems approach centered on Active Mastery Learning, an online instructional design theory, at Colorado State University-Global Campus. Emphasis was placed on the effectiveness of a common framework for consistency, design, and pedagogy. The base assumption was collaborative course development, which encompassed team dynamics, instructional design, and course quality, provided an ideal environment for developing dynamic, rich, and interactive online courses (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). The need for a sustainable model for online course development was acknowledged in terms of a scalable production process to serve as the foundation for productivity, quality, and efficiency. The caveat was that online courses were learning experiences that necessitated the integration of learning benchmarks and online pedagogy best practices (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008).

Puzziferro & Shelton (2008) emphasized the system, process, and workflow of online course production were driven by business functions which included market demand, market expectation, research-based driving forces, and a course distribution plan; all of which built in flexibility to adjust based on internal and external variables such as market, technology, and other fluctuations (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). In the process, course developers must be recognized as customers as well, as the market was competitive, and it was integral for institutions to hire and retain the highest caliber workforce. Subject matter expert expectations about the process must be a point of focus, as expectations were high about the process, support, and workload (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). Pedagogy must drive the process.

To be competitive in the market of higher education, staying relevant and producing a high-quality product keeping pace with market demands were key areas of importance. Flexibility must be a point of focus, accounting for academic freedom and faculty governance, for adaption to technology changes, evolving faculty and student expectations, pedagogy changes based on updated research, and changes in curriculum (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). It was acknowledged that measuring quality can be nebulous. The Quality Matters Rubric was recognized by Puzziferro & Shelton (2008) as an excellent guide for design standards and evaluation.

A critical dimension of systems thinking was recognized by Stenersen (1998) as applicable to integration of distance education in higher education institutions, to ensure alignment between institutional goals and organizational elements. In the incorporation of distance education into higher education institutions, Stenersen (1998) asserted it was essential for institutions to develop system analysis and design, recognizing the need for

unique system designs tailored for different institutions. Emphasis was placed on Churchman's position that the classic philosophical discussion concerning educational systems was the debate between emphasis on the parts of the whole educational system, versus focusing on the educational system overall in order to better understand the parts (Stenersen, 1998). For the parts-focused supporters, each facet was dealt with in its own light with a series of steps necessary to improve aspects of the system (e.g., student-teacher relations) (Stenersen, 1998). Advocates of the whole focused on ascertaining whether the system was achieving stated goals and looked to revamp the process based on goals not being met systemwide (Stenersen, 1998). According to Stenersen (1998), developing a system design for distance education provided assurance the program or unit maintained the integrity of the institution.

Croxton & Chow (2015) used systems thinking and systemic change as the guiding framework to understand organizational goals (macro) and issues involving design and development (micro) in the creation and offering of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). There was an acknowledgement of the importance of well qualified team members (faculty and production specialists), along with a carefully implemented instructional design process that provided for a constant feedback cycle between the production team and users (Croxtton & Chow, 2015). Croxtton & Chow (2015) proposed the usage of systems thinking for online learning and formal higher education to "turn chaos into organization and develop a plan for success regardless of paradigm shifts and rapid changes in technology, learning environments, learner expectations, university goals, and organizational infrastructure" (p. 95). According to Croxtton and Chow (2015), the key facet of instructional design was making the learner central to what was intended

to be accomplished and designing the learning activity to add value and enable learning the student pays attention to, retains, and draws from in a performance environment setting involving learning application.

In terms of quality of education, the Seven Principles of Good Practice, from Chickering and Ehrman (1999) served as a solid starting point. The Principles included good practice, encouraged contact between students and faculty, developed reciprocity and cooperation among students, used active learning techniques, gave prompt feedback, emphasized time on task, communicated high expectations, and respected diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Ehrman, 1999). Authentic learning emphasized the importance of active engagement of students in exploration, discussion, and analysis of abstract concepts in relevant, real-world contexts through the use of course activities (Donovan et al., 1999).

From a planning vantage point, the creation of the team culture, defining of the learning framework and vision, resource identification, and workflow production crafting were integral (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). Vision of quality, and course design standards generated from the vision, must be generated before production framework and processes commenced. The Active Mastery Learning model utilized by Puzziferro and Shelton (2008) began with the assumption the course in development was a series of learning environments and activities as opposed to one-dimensional content.

A systems model was the point of focus for Puzziferro & Shelton (2008) in the development of a team approach to online course production. Acknowledging the potential for conflict, and in an effort to minimize the potential academic conflict in the model recommended by Puzziferro and Shelton (2008), a single faculty member worked

with the instructional development team, accompanied by a stronger leadership role allocated to the instructional technologist, in a fourteen-week phased approach. In the proposed model, faculty drove the subject matter with solid support from the instructional development team in the areas of technology and programming and worked closely with the instructional technologist on pedagogical decisions (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities in the context of the team were identified as integral to overall success. After completion of the 14th week, courses transitioned into a maintenance phase, examined what worked well, what did not, and provided suggestions for improvement (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008).

The question of standardized courses created for utilization by all faculty teaching that specific online course was briefly addressed by Puzziferro & Shelton (2008), with emphasis on the pros and cons. The proposed solution was a middle ground, integrating core faculty in course production and delivery of the course content, with the ability to drive updates and modifications to keep the course content relevant and current based on research and pedagogical-driven changes (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008).

The complexity of online course development necessitates expertise, time, and thoughtful planning. One area of importance is process. The implications of poorly defined processes can be extensive. The correlations of a well-defined process to positive impacts, in varying context and scope, were identified in the research conducted by Hart (2018). Research direction accounted for different facets of standard design practice impacts, including student, faculty, instructional designer, and subject matter expert, in varying capacities and depths. Mudd, Summey, and Upsen (2015) focused on the learner-centered approach, with emphasis on the importance of collaboration in the process.

Anderson (2002) noted the need for curricular alignment, based on the premise there should be a measurable relationship between instructional activities and materials with learning assessment. Focused on the student, Anderson (2002) described multiple factors associated with improvement of the student experience through alignment, including avoiding marginalization of learners, enabling an elevated understanding of distinctions in the impact of education on student achievement, teaching to outcome alignment and assessments, and creating accountability. The learner-centered research conducted by Mudd, Summey, and Upsen was based on a track-through of how to involve a librarian collaboratively throughout the process for overall success for all involved in the process, and ultimately the student, using the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) model (Mudd, Summey, & Upsen, 2015).

The acknowledgement of value added in the utilization of teams versus individual efforts in the workplace was a point of focus in the research conducted by Thompson and Ku (2010). This assertion was reaffirmed in the research conducted by Hung (2013), with the contention real world problems were too complex and exceeded the cognitive ability of one individual. That premise was the basis for the assertion ability to work as part of a team was integral to success in a chosen field (Hung, 2013; Thompson & Ku, 2010).

In a case study conducted by Hixon (2005), faculty experience of developing an online course as part of a collaborative team was examined, with focus on identifying specific factors that facilitated effectiveness of the process. The need for a study in this area was based, in part, on extensive reliance on online education by institutions as a key component to the long-term strategy of the institutions. That reliance cannot negate the

importance of development and delivery of high-quality online courses, which required a better understanding of the facets of the process to yield that end result. As recognized by Cohen (2001), the asynchronous quality of online instruction necessitated different instructional strategies and often promoted a new model for the instructor. It was for reasons such as those, Bathe (2001) suggested the process of developing online courses needed special attention.

The importance of administration and faculty working together was acknowledged by Tannehill, Serapiglia, and Guiler (2018), in the assertion that doing so resulted in the optimal situation for the creation of quality online courses and the most effective online instruction. This necessitated an acknowledgement by administration and faculty the student experience and subsequent learning should be the collective goal (Tannehill et al., 2018). As noted by Hixon (2005), the development of online courses could follow one of two approaches: a collaborative, team-based approach, or a traditional, faculty-driven approach. In a collaborative course development structure, individuals from a range of disciplines were brought together. The dynamics, challenges, and impacts were points of focus in Hixon's research, through the use of case study to examine one specific collaborative program called Jump Start. The Jump Start program was a structured program that followed a set protocol for communication patterns and documentation procedures while affording flexibility to accommodate the unique situations of individual faculty members (Hixon, 2005).

It was acknowledged by White (2000) it took careful communication, along with time, to bridge the different knowledge domains and discourses used by the instructors as content experts, the instructional designer, and technical staff. Additionally, language

could too easily become an impediment to clear communication (White, 2000).

According to Hixon, the two related factors of learning and teaching styles had the potential to influence the extent to which faculty members could benefit from the collaborative approach to online course development (Hixon, 2005).

It was emphasized by Ellis and Phelps (2000) online delivery challenged traditional notions of academics working in isolation and instead brought people together in a team setting, with their own unique skills contributing to the course design and development process in collaborative online course development. Two major paradigm shifts were identified by Hixon (2005) in the context of participation in a collaborative online course development process. One paradigm involved the newness of the process that brought individuals together who had not worked together in a similar fashion, and a delivery method with which they likely had minimal experience. In some instances, the subject matter expert had extensive on-ground experience, but those skills often did not translate directly into the online environment (Caplan, 2008).

As pointed out by Hixon (2005), because of the significance of the changes faculty were asked to make throughout the process, it was not be surprising for frustration, avoidance, apprehension, dissatisfaction, resentment, anxiety, or any other number of reactions to have occurred. Identification of complications and how they were worked through were key areas of focus. Caplan (2008) maintained “the importance of the degree to which faculty feel that they are receiving encouragement and solid support in all areas of online development should not be underestimated” (p. 179).

In a phenomenological study of four online course developers engaged in a faculty-driven course development process, the study findings suggested the participants

were self-taught instructional designers and developers who believed they would have been more effective instructional designers and developers if they had received instructional design and development training before commencement of the online course development process (Albi, 2007). In the study conducted by Albi (2007), participants were tasked with developing course content and completing instructional design aspects of the process with no training in instructional design or course development processes.

It was acknowledged by Hu (2009) competing perceptions of instructors and students associated with design versus pedagogy was a lot to balance. Those competing perceptions were another source of challenge and potential conflict for the online subject matter expert in the course development process. Hu (2009) conducted a study investigating the preferences of students and instructors for pedagogy and design features of post-secondary level online instruction. According to Hu (2009), the cycle of developing continuing education online courses typically involved the instructor organizing and conceptualizing content before commencement of the formal development process. This preliminary focus, according to Hu (2009), was a critical step that, combined with decisions on instructional design, pedagogy, and teaching, provided a framework for other areas of needed expertise. The team approach to online course development was a premise for this facet of Hu's research focus. Hu (2009) maintained specific instructional design, teaching, and pedagogy preferences of students and instructors served as an important research area of focus conducted using focus groups and an expert jury process.

Although preferences did vary, there was a high correlation between student and instructor preferences on course design and pedagogy features. There was some variation

in the degree of preferences, within those correlations. Validation of the implications of the features for which statistical differences were indicated was identified as a possible area of future study. Meta-analysis research associated with effectiveness of online course design focusing on design and pedagogy was also identified as a future research opportunity.

Albi (2007) pointed out there was little research associated with successes and challenges from the standpoint of the online course developer. Zheng and Smaldino (2006) suggested additional research should examine how distance educators viewed their role as instructional designers and how they applied instructional design elements in designing distance courses. They point out there was a strong need to examine how distance instructors understood and applied instructional design elements. The learning process, quality, and consistency were key areas of focus from the standpoint of the lived experiences of the participants in the study. The importance of harmonizing the relationship between subject matter experts and instructional designers was emphasized by Stein (2014), who acknowledged a collaborative experience was an integral aspect of high-quality course production.

The need for additional research focused on the experience of instructional designers working with subject matter experts was recognized by You (2010), specific to online higher education course development, and perceptions about impacts of the interaction on course quality. The potential impact of additional research from that vantage point was acknowledged by Sharif and Cho (2015), as a mechanism for instructional designers to explain skills and knowledge contributed by their involvement in the online higher education course development process. Additionally, Sharif and Cho

(2015) emphasized the importance of the research in contributing to elimination of confusion associated with instructional design that had potential to escalate to conflicts between subject matter experts and instructional designers.

A facet of those identified research area needs was filled with recent research focused on the instructional designer and related connections and impacts in different aspects of online higher education course development conducted by Hart (2018). This research filled a void and provided valuable insight about instructional designer perspectives, including focus on instructional designer and subject matter expert interaction. The 12 participants in the study consisted of instructional designers with at least two years' experience working in fully online higher education who worked with a subject matter expert on online higher education course development a minimum of five times (Hart, 2018). Although focus was on the instructional designer, there were correlations between the findings and the lived experiences of subject matter experts in the present study, interacting with instructional designers. Analyzing the two vantage points presents opportunity for additional focused research and more extensive insight into the interactions, perceptions, and implications.

In the study conducted by Hart (2018) using qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews and document collection, research question one asked participants to describe their experiences working with faculty subject matter experts in the design of online courses. Research question two asked participants to discuss what they believe about those experiences. Participants were asked whether they believed instructional designers made a difference in the quality of online education courses, and to share examples specific to the impacts (Hart, 2018). Hart (2018) found consensus that

instructional designers made a difference, based on the specialized knowledge of instructional theories and how people learn, and by the contributions to the online course design process. Different facets of involvement and perspectives were studied, including positions about process, conflict, negative experiences, and success strategies.

In Hart's (2018) study, when asked whether participants would change the course development process if presented the opportunity to do so, five stated no changes would be made, one participant stated more flexibility in changing course outcomes was desired, one participant expressed a preference for more integration about instructional design principles into the course development process, one participant would like to have seen mandated collaboration between subject matter experts and instructional designers, and one participant communicated a desire for greater involvement by instructional designers in the creation of course outlines and course objectives.

Regular communication and management of conflict were two key strategies, based on research, identified as leading to improvement of the working relationship between subject matter experts and instructional designers. This relationship improvement had a positive impact on course quality (Pan & Thompson, 2009; Singleton, Toombs, Taneja, Larkin, & Pryor, 2011; Stevens, 2013). These two areas were points of focus in Hart's (2018) examination of instructional designer interactions with subject matter experts.

According to Xu & Morris (2007), instructional designers should possess the ability to communicate well with faculty members, technical design expertise, and instructional design expertise, to properly advise faculty on best methods for instructional learning in their field. The participants in Hart's (2018) study were asked to describe any

negative experiences with subject matter experts and how those experiences affected the quality of the resulting courses. There was agreement among participants, trepidation experienced by some subject matter experts about collaborating with instructional designers to develop courses caused them the most problems during course development projects (Hart, 2018). Impacts included frustration between the two parties and a breakdown of the working relationship (Hart, 2018).

In Hart's (2018) study, 3 of 12 participants agreed communicating with faculty at the inception of the development project and formulating a solid plan with specific goals for project completion can help in improving the relationship between the instructional designer and the subject matter expert. That improvement, in turn, ultimately improved the course being worked on by the instructional designer and the subject matter expert. In that consensus, 1 of 3 participants acknowledged the value of having a plan in place, at the outset, connected to minimizing problems and conflicts that could develop as the project progressed (Hart, 2018).

Conflict, when functional, can yield positive results (Andrade, Plowman, & Duchon, 2008). For example, a conflict between parties could force those involved to reevaluate ideas and develop methods to compromise (Andrade et al., 2008). The potential existed for the team to discover new and novel ways to approach areas, such as the measurement of a specific course objective in the build or revision. Perceptions about conflict were a point of focus in Hart's study. The difference between functional and dysfunctional conflict is an important area of understanding for those in conflict, along with the extent to which conflict management and conflict resolution tools and theories are needed (Singleton et al., 2011).

The potential for conflict to surface, based in part on communication, can result in a stalled course development project, break down a course development project, and adversely impact online course quality (Stevens, 2013; Hart, 2018). Many give communication a cursory treatment and superficial place in conflict resolution, but Tidwell (2004) argued communication held a much higher degree of importance as a result of its involvement in both the conflict, as well as the resolution of conflict.

Participants in Hart's study identified potential causes of conflict experienced in their projects to include personality clashes between instructional designers and subject matter experts, subject matter expert concern about the loss of academic freedom because of mandated course design procedures and processes, lack of subject matter understanding or student needs on the part of the instructional designer, delays associated with untimely deliverables on the part of the subject matter expert, and a lack of understanding by the subject matter expert of the reasons for specific design requirements (Hart, 2018). Personality differences were also examined as a potential source of conflict. According to Wall and Callister (1995) different personality types can be a major catalyst for conflict. In the realm of instructional designer and subject matter expert personality conflict, process versus deadline driven distinctions in approaches set the stage for personality clashes resulting in conflict (Hart, 2018).

Blake and Mouton's dual concerns theory proposed individuals have two primary motivations regarding interpersonal conflict; the desire to obtain one's own goals (concern for production), versus the desire to retain interpersonal relationships (concern for people) (Holt & DeVore, 2005). Five discrete styles for resolving conflict came about from mapping the two concerns on the "Managerial Grid." The styles were identified as:

smoothing (high concern for people/low concern for production); withdrawing (low concern for people and production); compromising (medium concern for people and production); problem-solving (high concern for people and production); and forcing (high concern for production/low concern for people) (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

The acknowledgement of the positive impacts of conflict management associated with the instructional designer and the subject matter expert were reinforced in Hart's findings. The findings were analyzed within the parameters of core conflict concepts presented by Singleton (2011). Conflict management is what people who experience conflict intend to do, along with what they actually do (Van de Vliert, 1997). Tidwell (2004) suggested conflict resolution was best thought of in cyclical terms. Each component is complex, and responses often prompted further inquiry. As a starting point, opportunity, capacity, and volition must be present. Opportunity requires there be time to resolve the conflict. Capacity requires those in the conflict have the ability to resolve it. Volition (will) is the desire to engage in resolution. Without the three, several things can happen: (1) conflict resolution can still be attempted but will not be successful (2) those trying to resolve conflict will simply quit or (3) some remedial action will be taken to alter the situation (Tidwell, 2004).

Understanding the definition of conflict and the theory to be applied provided the roadmap for future activities. However, considering the cyclical nature of conflict as described by Tidwell (2004), this process can lead us to more questions than answers once a definition and theory have been identified. Additionally, in trying to understand the drives, impulses, constraints, and influences, as sources of the human behavior at play, how those behaviors were addressed can have a profound effect on the formation of

specific theories of human behavior. When managing conflict, the focus shifts from whether the conflict is positive or negative to how, and how effectively, the conflict is managed. When managed effectively, according to Gordon (2003), conflict becomes a vital asset in that it is a prime source of energy and creativity in a system.

Conflict is guided and influenced by a variety of factors. Conflicts are multifaceted, with internal and external variables at play that impact the goal of resolving conflict. The list of variables is extensive, which is consistent with the position of Tidwell about the true challenge of working towards the goal of resolution. Some factors included communication, culture, structural factors, and balances or imbalances of power. When it comes to capacity and the creation of capacity, the ability to create capacity is variable. The starting point would logically seem to be education. The question from there becomes how to educate, and the nature, scope, and extent of the education needed. The one answer that we do know is that the education must focus on a range of factors and cannot be limited to a narrow focus of capacity. Additionally, parties involved must be willing to resolve the conflict. That will cannot be imposed by coercion, force, or power, or there will not be a true resolution to the conflict (Tidwell, 2004). Creating a voluntary and genuine will is truly a challenge. Failure to account for all these factors, based on the presumption of the ability to identify and educate about them, will leave parties under-resourced to deal with the conflict. “Resolution” means different things to different people. There is a range in the process. There are also many questions that surface.

Communication is affected by the perception of the recipient to the message sent; therefore, perception also played an important part in the conflict resolution process. Perception is “the way in which an individual interprets the world” (Tidwell, 2004, p.

91). We use perception to “decode” messages we receive, but the decoding is not universal. Rather, it is internally based; therefore, people decode the same message differently. Perception can be collective in nature due to outside influences in a group setting. Perception can bring us together, or it can divide us. According to Tidwell (2004), the type of information presented and the manner it is presented influence the way people make judgments about a given event. That said, one’s perception is not always rational or objective.

Language and communication hold equally important places in the process of conflict resolution, because they serve as the vehicle by which we are linked to our ideas and how we exert power in relationships. People often fight over words alone, hence the expression, “those are fighting words.” Not only can communication be the source of conflict, it can also be the means by which we resolve the conflict, making the role of words in conflict resolution very central. As Tidwell stated, “there can be no societal conflict without communication, just as there can be no societal resolution of the conflict without communication” (Tidwell, 2004, p. 105).

Connections to course development centered on conflict were examined by Stevens (2013), who asserted once both parties in conflict felt understood and respected by one another, a much stronger relationship existed when working together on the course development project. This yielded a higher quality, more engaging, and informative higher education online course. In Hart’s (2018) research, when exploring conflict management in the context of the 12 instructional designers, most participants agreed there was no specific process for conflict management in their higher education institutions. As a result, the participants developed their own methods for handling

conflicts, which included approaches such as discussing the situation with instructional designer colleagues, attempting to negotiate and compromise with subject matter experts, utilizing regular communication from project start to finish to build relations with the subject matter experts, and turning to a supervisor or other leadership for assistance (Hart, 2018).

Success strategies were shared by participants in Hart's (2018) study, focused on improvement of the relationship between instructional designers and subject matter experts, with recognition that improvement would ultimately improve the quality of the course in development. Several participants indicated building a culture of teamwork with different methods, and most acknowledged the importance of the instructional designer meeting the subject matter expert at the midpoint, versus placing blame on the subject matter expert for working relationship issues (Hart, 2018). Ensuring role parameters were adhered to, listening, solid planning, process clarity, rapport building, support, team culture building, willingness to compromise, availability to answer questions, ability calibration, and student-focused needs were identified by participants as potential areas of importance related to success (Hart, 2018).

Xu and Morris (2007) conducted research using case study centered on a team approach to course development to contribute to the literature by analyzing the roles assumed by faculty during planning and development, and examining curricular decisions for online courses made by the development team. Areas of emphasis included clarity in responsibilities, shared values, an understanding of expectations, and mutual respect for each other's knowledge (Xu & Morris, 2007). Skill sets often varied between subject

matter experts and instructional designers. The collaborative process presented challenges.

The case study conducted by Zu and Morris (2007) involved team roles and decisions related to curriculum made by the course development team comprised of a web instructional designer, a project coordinator, and four faculty members serving in the capacity of subject matter experts from different institutions focused on process. Specific decisions related to central versus peripheral curricular decisions were also investigated. Team curricular decisions were analyzed using Stark and Lattuca's (1997) model of an academic plan. The model, based on vast research about faculty perceptions of how curriculum development took place at the course and program levels in several fields, implied a deliberate planning process emphasizing important educational considerations (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Viewing curriculum development as a planning process prompted planners to focus on major elements.

The primary research questions of the Zu and Morris (2007) study were: How did the team members perceive and implement their roles in the collaborative planning process, and what were the central and secondary curricular decisions in the process? In the study, focusing on the role of the faculty, faculty members were primarily engaged in curricular roles, including but not limited to providing content, course objective drafting, textbook selection, content review, assessment of resources and materials, development of assessment tools, and adoption of products for the course (Zu & Morris, 2007).

The way in which decisions were made was a point of analysis in the research. Collaboration occurred in stages, with the highest level of collaboration occurring at the outset. Some faculty felt the need for more collaboration and did not receive the level of

input and contribution from others desired in the process. It was revealed priorities of the team members were not always in alignment. For example, decisions pertaining to purpose and objectives, content, structure and sequence, and instructional resources were made collaboratively by faculty members (Zu & Morris, 2007). Focusing on instructional process for online students was a key priority for the project coordinator, but these areas were not a collective concern of the team. There was very little collaboration in these areas, and even less collaboration related to online learner characteristics (Zu & Morris, 2007). An additional source of conflict was attributed to the utilization of course development online, which precipitated misunderstandings because of the lack of benefit of personal contacts and non-verbal cues associated with that personal communication (Zu & Morris, 2007).

Perceptions of the collaborative process utilized aligned with prior research, as noted by Zu & Morris (2007), with issues including potential conflicts between project coordinator and faculty, and increased workload. Creation of the course collectively formalized the process and resulted in greater attention and accountability to other team members because of the peer review. The project coordinator was perceived by faculty as holding them together with managerial and social functions, but communicated mixed feelings about course design input, and curricular function (Zu & Morris, 2007). Although the overlap of some roles unified the group, the overlap was also the source of conflict between faculty and the project coordinator (Zu & Morris, 2007). This was more pronounced when curricular decisions were involved, with the source related to differences of opinion on what was important. The dispute seemed to be between substance and form, and the frustration of faculty members about consistency in look and

feel, demanded by the project coordinator, perceived by faculty as impacting creativity (Zu & Morris, 2007). Zu and Morris (2007) identified some limitations to this case study, including the questions utilized not being more in-depth, explored potential differences in group dynamics and curricular decisions in different disciplines, and analyzed the impact of collaborative work in the online learning environment from a student standpoint. These identified areas provide additional research opportunities.

Swan (2000) conducted research on the State University of New York (SUNY) Learning Network, using student surveys, focusing on student satisfaction and perceptions of learning in an asynchronous setting with emphasis on course design factors. The findings indicated interaction with instructors, clarity of design, and active discussion among course participants had a significant influence on perceived learning and student satisfaction (Swan, 2000). Specific to the relationship between course design and student perception, 22 course variables and design features were examined in this research (Swan, 2000). For validity, two researchers examined 73 courses, separately, using an approach similar to a Likert scale. The ratings were compared with disagreement resolved by consensus. Correlations were utilized to examine the relationship between student perceptions and course design variables (Swan, 2000). Findings specific to course design supported consistency among modules. The higher the course module consistency, the higher the student satisfaction, perceptions of learning, and interaction students perceived having with instructors (Swan, 2000). From a grade distribution standpoint, the larger the percentage of course grade based on discussions, the higher the student satisfaction, the more students thought they learned from the course, and the more interaction students thought they had with peers and instructors (Swan, 2000).

Conversely, students perceived less learning in instances of higher course grade allocation toward group or cooperative work (Swan, 2000). Clear and consistent course structure was a finding that resonated. Connections from the research findings were made to different types of interactivity and a community of inquiry online learning model (Swan, 2000). Additional research opportunities exist to isolate these potential impacting connections for more in-depth analysis.

Learning must involve the learner and encompass engagement. According to Conrad and Donaldson (2011), engaged learning stimulates learners to actively participate in the learning and, based on the active participation in an online learning community, gain the most knowledge. Learner interaction, based on research, is key to an effective online course. Being an engaged learner is something developed, and must be understood, by the learner. That is the foundation for the formation of a community with others in an online learning setting (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011).

The instructor plays an integral role in this process. In an online setting, course content is also an important area of focus in the content of transitioning a learner from the developmental phases of engaged learning in the process of striving to reach engagement, to independent knowledge building. Initial determinations included selecting tools to be used in the course. From there, student skill levels must be taken into consideration. The learning process for a student is enhanced through the course design, with emphasis on creating content to engage and challenge students while expanding personal connections to existing knowledge (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011).

In alignment with constructivism, interaction is considered central to learning. Collaboration is a central theme to reach a deeper level of thought, with collaborative

acquisition of knowledge deemed a key to the success of creating an online learning environment (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). According to Conrad and Donaldson (2011), combining constructivist and problem-based learning philosophies in a collaborative context resulted in an engaged learning environment. The learning was focused on the learner, who was central to the generation of new knowledge, with actions of each learner contributing to both individual and collective community knowledge (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). According to Conrad and Donaldson (2011), effective assessment of engaged learning must be built into the course structure, with the imposition of higher levels of performance in engaged learning environments. In an engaged learning environment, assessment should be centered on whether course objectives have been met, and whether there has been engagement throughout the learning process (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011).

Pheils (2010) conducted a qualitative study using phenomenology grounded in the constructivist approach to learning, examining elements of online student performance and ability to succeed by offering an enhanced and synthesized model based on the student, holistically, for online course development. Pheils (2010) sought to fill a void by proposing a synthesized model for online course development using a holistic approach to account for and accommodate specific and unique student areas of need through application of course development theories. Understanding student needs and accounting for those needs in planning were the starting points for good course development, according to Pheils (2010). The research questions addressed focused on whether there was a significant relationship among existing course development models for utilization as the basis for a student-centered online course development model, identification of

areas of online community college student situations unaddressed in current course development models, and identification of specific elements that could be integrated into the synthesized model for transformation into a student-centered online learning model (Pheils, 2010).

According to Pheils (2010), a fundamental flaw existed in many current instructional design system models, in that the models were not firmly grounded in an understanding of the needs of the students specific to problems and limitations hindering current learners. Too much emphasis, according to Pheils (2010), was placed on content and how to provide the content in pieces, stages, or divisions, rather than accounting for regression to solidify subject understanding and competency. Intentional focus, according to Pheils (2010), citing the constructivist approach to learning, should be on the learner's needs. Different categories of learners, and corresponding needs, were identified. These categories included non-traditional learners, adult learners, first-generation college learners, and post-secondary education option learners. Gender, age, disability, political, social, cultural, and religious factors were also explored in the context of potential areas of focus, adjustment, and impact on learner success.

According to research conducted by Croxton (2014), internal, external, and contextual factors can influence a learner's decision to drop out of an online course. Characteristics shared by successful online learners, based on research, included strong organizational skills, learning deduction, and self-discipline (Palloff & Pratt, 2003). Connections between effort, quality of that effort, student learning, and success were also well documented in research (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). Motivation was identified as integral to student success in the online learning environment (DeWitz et al., 2009). Additional

factors connected to student success included grade point average (GPA), socialization skills, extracurricular responsibilities, comfort level in new settings, and culture (DeWitz et al., 2009). Accounting for learning style variation was also identified as connected to online student success (Ko & Rossen, 2001). According to Pheils (2010), students who did not possess the attributes identified in research as connected to success in online learning also had potential to advance. This opportunity can be connected to the online course learning environment, which included, but was not limited to, the course content. Pheils (2010) also explored the larger levels of student success and retention, including support systems that transcended course content, and the instructor facilitating the course.

Using the Delphi method, and focusing on using questionnaires directed to a heterogeneous panel of experts, Pheils (2010) focused on individual learner gaps in areas including gender, age, disability, strengths, learning styles, sociocultural indicators, economic indicators, family obligations, and economic impact. The research centered on determining if addressing each of these areas had a positive effect on the online learner in the areas of perceived and realized success (Pheils, 2010). Limitations were identified by Pheils (2010) in the areas of subjectivity in defining student success and differences in meaning, construction, and student perceptions. It was highly recommended by Pheils (2010) future research be conducted focusing on student-centered courses and course development focusing on student consideration and the impact to online course development. The model accounted for topics in the areas of gender, age, disability, strengths, learning styles, sociocultural indicators, economic indicators, family obligations, and economic impact, but did not propose specifics for integration of those areas in the online course development process, and did not include specific data on causal

connections and impacts. The areas identified were extensive, and research was not specific and focused on each area in the context of building out parameters and specific methodology for translation of connections into online course development.

Croxton (2014) examined the role of interactivity in student satisfaction and persistence in online learning by reviewing empirical evidence through social cognitive theory, interaction equivalency theorem, and social integration theory. Online course interactivity can occur as formal interaction built into the overall course design, or informal interaction that existed outside of the online course (Rhode, 2007). Formal interactivity encompassed asynchronous or synchronous opportunities for communication between students, student and instructor, and student and content (Croxtion, 2014). In instances where online students had insufficient formal or informal interaction experiences, the potential existed for learning and satisfaction to be compromised (Croxtion, 2014).

According to Croxtion (2014), research suggested online courses with high levels of interactivity in comparison with less interactive learning environments led to higher levels of student motivation, improved learning outcomes, and satisfaction. Research also suggested the relationship between interactivity and student satisfaction in online courses may be dependent, in part, upon whether the interaction is done as individuals or within groups (Thurmond et al., 2002). Specifically, research indicated students who were more likely to participate in teams and groups tended to be less satisfied (Thurmond et al., 2002). Connections were also identified as significant with a positive correlation between instructor feedback, assessment variety, knowing the instructor, and online student satisfaction (Thurmond et al., 2002). Findings support student-to-student interaction

played an important role in online learner satisfaction; however, preferences were not universal and varied depending upon the level and type of learner (Croxton, 2014). Preferences regarding asynchronous versus synchronous discussions also varied. In addition to online instructors, course designers must take those preferences into consideration specific to the student demographic, and include types of interactive activities that most closely match the needs and preferences of the distinct student groups (Croxton, 2014).

Croxton (2014) focused on the importance of course designers, administrators, and instructors providing online learning opportunities for students that were satisfying, promoted deep and meaningful learning, and created environments in which students choose to persist. Croxton (2014) proposed an online course interactivity framework that included key elements of social cognitive theory, interaction equivalency theorem, and social integration theory, she maintained can help increase the likelihood of creating a learning environment that resulted in student persistence.

The ultimate goal is to deliver a course that enables students to demonstrate proficiency of the course and institutional learning outcomes. Ideally, the outcomes will be centered on the learning and the ability to transition that learning from the classroom to the workplace. Often, subject matter experts generate courses that will be taken by all online students enrolling in that course. The levels of connections that can be made by the student, in the course, are integral points of focus in the development process. It was maintained by DeLotell, Millam, and Reinhardt (2010), deep learning occurred when students were able to connect with course topics, find value in them, and saw how to apply them to real-world situations.

Fink's theory of significant learning (2003) was based on six critical categories of deep learning. Fink (2003) suggested the interactivity of the six categories was an integral element of significant learning because it promoted an academic experience that engaged students on multiple levels, which led to the creation of knowledge that had real world application, was meaningful, and was lasting. This was also connected to taking different learning styles into account, to the extent possible, in the online course development process. It was maintained by Fisk (2007), the more exposure students had to the different learning categories and the more opportunities to participate in a variety of learner-centered activities, the more the students would gain, and the more value they would associate with the educational experience. While attempting to develop content to meet those areas of focus, the potential for conflict was vast. The impact can be a diversion away from the objectives, disconnect, or a loss of focus. Understanding those potential impediments was integral to heightening awareness so any potential adverse effects were addressed, to the extent possible.

In a qualitative study conducted by Li and Liu (2005), the Online Top-Down Modeling Model (OTMM), combining utilization of internal and external instructional resources, was explored with a focus on learning impact. The OTMM was related to instructional design, instructional strategy, and Internet integration, connected with developing a better understanding of learning information for use and information retention based on the presentation structure (Li & Liu, 2005). Li and Liu (2005) maintained materials designed to facilitate online learning through the transfer of the top-down modeling strategy to technology-assisted instruction offered opportunities to focus student attention on the intended learning content and the expected outcome. Li and Liu

(2005) found instructors should consider the objective/ends/task before the materials/means/tool.

Picciano (2009) proposed a Blending with Purpose model in which instructors first carefully considered their objectives, and transitioned to determine how to apply technologies that would work best for them. Although Picciano (2009) focused on hybrid course delivery, which included a face-to-face component, the areas of focus addressed are applicable to online course development specific to areas of consideration for online curriculum. Picciano (2009) proposed utilization of a multimodal conceptual model, Blending with Purpose: The Multimodal Model (the Model), for designing and developing in order to address needs of a variety of students. The Model recognized multiple approaches should be utilized to meet the diverse spectrum of students based on variations in generations, personality types, and learning styles.

The diversification in methods, according to Picciano (2009), allowed students to experience learning that best aligned with comfort levels, while challenging students to experience and learn in other ways. In acknowledging challenges, Picciano (2009) pointed out the belief that available technologies were not being utilized enough in higher education to engage students in meaningful explorations of content and curricular materials, with a recognition these technologies can be used to foster engagement. According to Picciano (2009), the Model posited pedagogical objectives and activities should drive the approaches utilized by faculty in instruction and blending six basic pedagogical objectives and activities within multiple modalities had the potential to appeal to the vast range of students. The six objectives were content, reflection, social/emotional, dialectic/questioning, collaboration/student generated content, and

synthesis/evaluation. Emphasis was placed on instructor consideration of objectives, and understanding how to apply the technologies and approaches to demonstrate proficiencies.

Although the studies conducted by Li and Liu (2005) and Picciano (2009) focused on instructor utilization of resources, the findings are on point with the subject matter expert approach to designing online course content. The areas identified by Li and Liu (2005) and Picciano (2009) are important points of focus in building online courses from a subject matter expert perspective. Depending on resources and online course structure with current technology, the face-to-face student learning experience can be accounted for, at least in part, in the online course development process. Taking learning variation into account is an integral aspect of online course development. Ensuring effective integration and timing of resources impacted the instructor and student experience in online learning and must be points of focus for the subject matter expert developing online course content. The complexity and potential limitations, both internal and external, can be a source of conflict for the subject matter expert developing an online course.

Various initiatives have been undertaken to integrate objective assessment into different facets of the online learning process and experience from varying vantage points. One initiative was the community of inquiry framework, explained by Garrison (2011), that involved social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Social presence encompassed communication among mutually supporting members of a group. Cognitive presence involved learning through reflection and discourse. Teaching presence encompassed intentional instructor guidance (Garrison, 2011). Weyant (2013)

supported the use of the community of inquiry model as a pedagogical model for online instructors, and utilized the model in an undergraduate human resources management course. The foundation for utilization of interaction, instructor guidance and reflection, and discourse in the learning process, in the online modality, was directly connected to the subject matter expert role. This potential connection, explored in these identified areas, presents a research opportunity to gain additional insight and opportunities for improvement of different facets of the online experience.

Standards for online courses have been a point of focus. According to Tannehill, Serapiglia, and Guiler (2018), if course development is predominately left to the faculty to control, there could be a number of instances in which courses are not designed to standards such as those of Quality Matters. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2006) produced standards for quality online courses. These standards required the inclusion of clearly defined curriculum content, and effective and easy-to-use opportunities for students to engage with and learn the material and design that attracted student interest (SREB, 2006). The courses must utilize technology to enable instructor customization of the student learning experience for each student with use of various tools and formats (SREB, 2006).

Utilizing extensive research, the Sloan Consortium developed a Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education Programs. The Scorecard was designed for assessment of online instruction. However, many of the categories in the Scorecard provided valuable insight into individual courses. The Scorecard consists of 70 equally weighted items in the areas of technology support, institutional support, course development and instructional design, course structure, teaching and learning, social and

student engagement, student support, faculty support, and evaluation and assessment (Lorenzetti, 2013). An opportunity exists to explore the possibility of formulating a Scorecard specific to online courses, leaving the potential for additional research in an area that necessitates attention based on the increasing utilization of online learning for all or part of higher education learning.

Research, well aligned with standardized processes, improved the quality of course production processes, and ultimately the courses themselves. To interject objectivity into the online course review process and emphasize effectiveness, Quality Matters (QM) provided the QM Workbook for Higher Education. This workbook focuses on evaluation of the course design of online and hybrid courses through the utilization of the QM Rubric, developed based on research-based best practices. The workbook contains general review standards, specific review standards, a scoring system, explanations, and examples (Woods, 2014). QM provides a peer review process utilizing three trained QM reviewers who conduct reviews and provide specific constructive feedback centered on course strengths, and areas in need of improvement (Woods, 2014). QM also provides multiple opportunities for professional development in virtual and on-site formats to prepare faculty to design and improve courses and to take on QM roles (Woods, 2014).

In comparing the QM Rubric to the community of inquiry framework, the QM Rubric is more specific and comprehensive (Hall, 2010). In comparing the QM Rubric to the Sloan Scorecard, the QM Rubric is more specifically applicable to individual courses (Hall, 2010). The current QM Rubric contains General Standards of review, made up of course overview and introduction, learning objectives (competencies), assessment and

measurement, learner interaction and engagement, course technology, learner support, and accessibility (Woods, 2014). The QM Rubric also contains 41 Specific Review Standards. Of the 41, 21 of the Specific Review Standards are essential, in that if one is missing, certification cannot be attained until the missing Specific Review Standard has been fulfilled (Woods, 2014). At a high level, the review process centers on alignment of learning objectives (competencies), assessment and measurement, instructional materials, learner interaction and engagement, and course technology, all of which work together to facilitate attainment of learning outcomes (MarylandOnline, 2013).

The potential value associated with these objective assessment tools is being explored in early stages specific to the online course development process and the roles of those involved in the process. It was noted by Mercer (2014), who conducted a mixed methods study of the impacts of a QM workshop on faculty who design, develop, and deliver online courses, very little research exists on QM professional development and effective methods for instructional designers supporting faculty in the course design process to meet QM standards. In this research, peer review took place for courses that were redesigned, and faculty member interviews were conducted prior to, and after the course redesign (Mercer, 2014).

Two phases were utilized in the study. Phase one encompassed exploration of cognitive outcomes, including knowledge of best practices in online course development associated with the *Applying the Quality Matters Rubric* course, with faculty at one university tasked with designing, developing, and delivering online courses (Mercer, 2014). In phase one, affective outcomes were measured using self-report and addressed willingness of faculty to use the QM Rubric to redesign an online class and perceptions

of course quality (Mercer, 2014). In phase two, the extent to which faculty improved the quality of their online courses subsequent to participation and the lived experience of online course redesign to align with QM standards were explored (Mercer, 2014).

The findings, according to Mercer (2014), reflected a statistically significant improved knowledge of best practices in online course development through the utilization of the *Applying the Quality Matters Rubric* course. However, there was not an increase in willingness to use the QM rubric to redesign an existing online course, or an improvement in the perception of online course quality (Mercer, 2014). Out of the five case studies, three completed the process of course revision and markedly improved the quality of their online course (Mercer, 2014). Of these improvements, the most significant took place in the areas of Course Overview and Introduction, Learning Objectives, and Learner Support (Mercer, 2014). The lowest improvements were in the areas of Assessment and Measurement, and Accessibility (Mercer, 2014).

These findings, according to Mercer, suggested the need for further faculty learning opportunities in the area of application of the concept of alignment within an authentic setting (Mercer, 2014). It was noted that, after overcoming an initial feeling of being overwhelmed by the work involved in the initial course review, there was a perception by faculty of a positive professional growth experience (Mercer, 2014). From that, the recommendation was a model for additional professional development, and guidelines for effective collaboration (Mercer, 2014). Additional detail about the research could not be examined, as the full text of the dissertation was not available because of a student embargo.

There are many dimensions of correlations associated with online course development, those involved in the process, impacts, and implications. According to Pawl (2018), expertise, time and thoughtful planning were necessities based on the complexities of online course development. Core principles must be understood by the subject matter expert in the areas of teaching and learning, best practices, and student-to-instructor interactions in the online modality (Pawl, 2018). Team utilization necessitated collegial interactions, a level of fluidity in process, identification of markers of success, and a determination of improvement opportunities to continue learning and growth (Pawl, 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

Research reflected the existence of a multitude of connections and impacts associated with the content produced by the online subject matter expert in higher education. Potential areas of impact included the subject matter expert, students, course instructors, subsequent course instructors, institutions, future employers, and other stakeholders. The subject matter expert is the nucleus in this process. Looking at process, dynamics, perceptions, expectations, and impact was complex. Carving out specific facets for focus, and understanding how each examined facet impacted the subject matter expert, provided a foundation for exploring connections based on other research findings. Although pieces of this examination have been conducted separately in other capacities, findings supported the need to focus on process, perceptions, and impacts, in recognition of the potential magnitude of the impacts. Findings also supported the importance of understanding these facets from the vantage point of the online higher education subject matter expert.

The researcher's insight provided a foundation for examination of possible adjustments to enhance the experience of those involved in the process, and the overall quality of the produced course content. A study in this area was needed to better understand the nature of conflict experienced, potential implications, and possible approaches to manage conflict, from the lived experience of the online higher education subject matter expert. The findings, as represented by the four emergent themes, provide insight into possible impacts of conflict throughout the course development process, and direct and indirect implications. Based on this study, the potential exists for additional research directions to better understand conflict, related impacts, and potential conflict management opportunities associated with various aspects of higher education, including the potential for increased student retention, higher student satisfaction, competency proficiency demonstration elevation, employable skills improvement, and enhanced instructor and subject matter expert satisfaction.

Many potential connections and impacts have not been examined. It is imperative research has the potential to be useful in the field. Gaining a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content was a goal of this study. Identifying techniques used by subject matter experts when confronted with perceived challenges was another goal of this study. Assessing how those techniques impacted the direction of the course development process, from the perspective of the subject matter expert was the third goal. Analysis of participants' lived experiences was performed specific to impacts on subject matter experts, course development processes, course content deliverables, and direct and indirect stakeholders.

Conflict does not take place in a vacuum; it is important to look at the internal and external variables associated with the conflict in order to work towards resolution. In doing so, and in painting the most comprehensive picture possible of conflict resolution, it is apparent how challenging conflict resolution is, and how many different dimensions and levels are involved. Ignoring those dimensions means conflicts are not truly understood, and therefore cannot be effectively managed or resolved. The insight from this study, reflected in the four themes, provides a foundation to commence efforts focused around conflict management and conduct further research to explore the application of conflict management techniques in the online course development process.

Utilizing phenomenology to examine conflict from the vantage point of the subject matter expert developing course content for online higher education institutions, as explained in Chapter 3, provided integral insight into the lived experiences of the individuals responsible for content creation. Transcendental phenomenology enabled focus on the essence of the experience and crystallization of the core issues of conflict. That detailed understanding provided the foundation to identify potential impacts and corresponding opportunities for adjustments. The findings set the stage for additional in-depth analysis in subsequent research. In this area, the need for a deeper understanding takes many forms. Contributions should take the form of steppingstones, with focused research on each step. Efforts to examine this area in a large-scale context will not yield the level of detail needed to enhance the overall experience and outcome for key stakeholders.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Review of the literature framed the research problem and set the stage for the study direction. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perception of conflict by subject matter experts through their lived experiences in the online higher education course development process. Once conflict was identified and understood from the context of the lived experience of the subject matter expert, potential implications were identified as attributable to the conflict encountered in the process from the perspective of the subject matter expert. Doing so set the stage for subsequent research to address the sources of the conflict in an effort to manage the conflict which, in turn, has the potential to positively impact the subject matter expert experience, facilitator experience, student experience, emphasis on employable skills, student success, student retention, and institutional operations. The research supported the need to further explore this area for purposes of developing a greater understanding of the causes, meanings, and implications of conflict in this context.

Examining conflict from the perspective of the subject matter expert developing course content for online higher education institutions aligns with the usage of phenomenology as the qualitative research methodology. Transcendental phenomenology enabled focus on the essence of the experience, and crystallization of the core issues of conflict. The research questions which guided the study, based on the three primary goals, enabled the subject matter experts to share different aspects of their lived experiences throughout the process, perceptions pertaining to conflict, causes of conflict, and the impacts of the conflict on the overall course development process, relationships,

and subject matter expert experiences. The nature and scope of the narrative questions allowed the participants to recount their experiences in a manner that respected their opinions and perspectives associated with the conflicts encountered in the online course development process.

Research Design and Rationale

Using phenomenology as the research methodology to examine conflict from the perspective of the online course developer subject matter expert enabled each subject matter expert's voice to be heard about conflict in the process, source of the conflict, and for the impact of the conflict from those living the experience to be identified and understood. The problem statement was centered on the perceptions of conflict attributable to online course development from the perspective of the subject matter expert. The statement of the problem centered on understanding the perceptions of conflict experienced by the subject matter expert in the online higher education course development process through their lived experience. Based on the research void in this area, and the potential impacts on stakeholders in higher education surrounding conflict, research questions were formulated to understand the core of the course development team, being the subject matter expert.

The research questions, based on the goals which guided the study, were as follows:

1. What were the potential sources of conflict encountered by the subject matter expert throughout the course development process?
2. What did the conflict mean to the subject matter expert in the course development process?

3. How did the subject matter expert manage conflict in the course development process?
4. What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the course development product generated by the subject matter expert?
5. What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the relationships with others involved in the course development process?
6. What adjustments, if any, did the subject matter expert make as a result of the conflict?
7. How did those adjustments impact the final course product and the relationship dynamics?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research constitutes a broad approach to the study of social phenomena, which demonstrates the fit between qualitative research and the examination of the conflict from the perspective of the online subject matter expert experiencing conflict in the process. Qualitative research is often exploratory in nature and involves a focus on social interactions and meanings applied to those interactions by those living the experience. The examination of conflict experienced by online subject matter experts in the course development process is conducive to qualitative research. Rossman and Rallis (2003) set forth five general hallmarks of qualitative research and four typical stances of researchers who practice it. The general hallmarks delineate that qualitative research is enacted in naturalistic settings, draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the study participants, focuses on context, is emergent and evolving, and is fundamentally interpretive (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Shifting to the qualitative researcher, these

researchers view social worlds as complex and holistic, partake in systematic reflection on the conduct of the research, remain sensitive to their own social identities and how these shape the study, and rely on complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deduction and induction (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

This research topic aligned with utilization of qualitative research based on the setting, the use of phenomenology as the methodology, the context focus, the emergent and evolving nature of the field, and the fact that exploration and analysis are fundamentally interpretive. The higher education institution with online course offerings using subject matter experts for course development was the setting. The setting was a fit based on the areas of focus that encompassed exploring experiences of subject matter experts in the online course development process as it related to conflict. Voices of the participants were heard with the usage of directly quoted content from the responses to ensure there was no alteration of the context or content communicated by the participants.

In order to support the proposed areas of focus for exploration, it was integral to construct a logical argument, compile evidence in support of each point, and demonstrate the entire venture to be conceptually integrated. According to Maxwell (2005), “a proposal is an argument for your study. It needs to explain the logic behind the proposed research, rather than simply describe or summarize the study and to do so in a way that non-specialists will understand” (p. 119).

While quantitative studies can be useful in assessing the percentages of subject matter experts who meet requirements, quantitative methods are not able to help us understand the experiences of the subject matter experts and how they navigated all of the factors that have to be accounted for throughout the course development process.

Throughout the research, the focus was on developing an in-depth, nuanced understanding of how the participants perceived and understood what they went through and what their experiences were. The shared experiences served as the foundation for examination of the conflicts that surfaced, the implications and approaches that could have been taken to better manage the conflict which, in turn, impacted the experience of the subject matter expert and the developed course.

Phenomenology, according to Flood (2010), is “a philosophic attitude and research approach, its principal position is that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity, and that the person is integral to the environment” (p. 7). Central to phenomenological study is the description of the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences associated with a phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 2013). The focus is on describing what the participants share in common as pertains to the lived experience of that phenomenon or concept.

Phenomenology was the most viable research methodology option for examination of conflict in the higher education course development process for an online modality, based on the nature of the research and the research direction. Specifically, phenomenology is centered on the lived experience. The focus of the proposed research translates to an “object” of human experience. The object was the conflict within the context of the course development process and the experience was that of the subject matter expert within that realm. Although previous studies in this area used different methodologies, the focus was on qualitative research to develop a greater understanding of the complexities in different areas of the course development process. For example, Castro-Figueroa (2009) utilized case study research, but focused questions around the

experience with an emphasis on a direct concern with experience as it was ‘lived’, or ‘felt’, or ‘undergone’. Hart (2018), in a study focused on providing instructional designers an opportunity to describe their experiences working with faculty subject matter experts to develop courses for online higher education institutions, conducted a basic qualitative study with purposive sampling using semi-structured interviews and artifacts provided by instructional designers, and analyzed the data based on the themes of collaboration, teamwork, and conflict management.

The fundamental purpose of phenomenology is to translate the lived experience of the individual as pertains to the phenomenon or concept, into a description of the universal essence, which Van Manen (1990) referred to as a “grasp of the very nature of the thing” (p. 177). Phenomenological research has been described as inductive and descriptive (Flood, 2010). In phenomenology, the researcher strives to understand the cognitive subjective perspective of the person who has the experience, and the effect that perspective has on the lived experience (Omery, 1983). The effect of the lived experience on the perspective of the participant is also an important area of focus.

Appropriateness of Phenomenology

Depending on the form of phenomenology, the potential exists for the researcher to bracket him or herself out of the study by discussing personal experiences of the researcher in conjunction with the phenomenon. That encompasses bracketing the questions asked. Although this does not completely remove the researcher from the study, it does serve as the basis for identification of personal experiences with the phenomenon and the setting of those experiences aside, partially, to enable the researcher to focus on

the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing was used by this researcher throughout the research process.

Focusing on the cited research, phenomenology was used by Albi (2007) to gain an understanding of the online course development experience of four developers who had no prior experience, and were tasked with serving in the capacity of online course developers and instructional designers with no advance training before commencement of the process. This methodology allowed for the development of an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, throughout the process, of those participants as pertains to the online course development process.

Phenomenology was also used by Lammers (2011) to examine the phenomenon of how college of medicine faculty developed and managed online courses while balancing their own professional obligations, to provide insight about appropriate faculty development programs for college leadership. Time management was a source of conflict experienced by subject matter experts, revealed in the context of the research questions in this study associated with different aspects of the lived experience. Although case study was used by Hixon (2008), the underlying driving force of understanding the experience paralleled with the phenomenological approach proposed for this research study. The identified areas of focus overlapped with the research questions proposed surrounding potential areas for conflict, through the experience of the subject matter expert.

Each research question delineated for use in this research study was based on different dimensions of the experience, which were lived, felt, processed, and communicated by the subject matter expert, in the context of work developing a course for an online modality. The different questions had a common thread of experience, and

the related meaning of the experience centered on the individual providing the response based on their frames of reference. Phenomenology also allowed for bracketing, in the form of discussing personal experiences of the author as the researcher, in conjunction with the phenomenon. Given the author's professional experience, accounting for that experience in bracketing was integral to the integrity of the research.

The exploration of conflict that surfaced in the course development process in an online modality was based on the lived experience of the subject matter expert in the context of being tasked with course development and focused on the lived experience of that individual, in an in-depth capacity, throughout the process as it related to conflict. Central to the research was the experience of the subject matter expert when confronted with conflict in the online course development process. Perceptions, impacts, and interpretations were based on the lived experience of the course developer, in conjunction with the course development completed for an online modality. As such, there was alignment between phenomenology as a methodology, and the research topic.

Epoché

The qualitative researcher's starting point was the identification of a phenomenon that translated to an "object" of human experience (Van Manen, 1990). Once the phenomenon was defined, the process of bracketing was necessary to ensure integrity of the study, due to the researcher's experience in online higher education. Based on extensive personal experience with online learning, management of curriculum development, and work as a subject matter expert in the online course development process, this researcher has been exposed to many different facets of the proposed areas of focus. This researcher has taught online at the higher education level, taken higher

education courses online, supervised the online course development process, participated in the online course development process, created master templates and mapping schemes for online course development, and audited online course development content for purposes of course roll-out, and for accreditation at multiple higher education institutions. This researcher has also monitored the online learning environment, trends, and the focus on employable skills by law makers based, in part, on student loan default rates.

Keeping the need for bracketing in mind throughout the research process, bracketing was performed prior to the selection of participants and periodically throughout the research process. Once initial bracketing was completed, data collection was commenced from those who experienced the phenomenon in order to “develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). In the context of research collection, the focus was centered on the lived experiences of individuals and how those individuals had both subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of an area that could serve as a common experience of others (Creswell, 2013). The composite description was comprised of “what” the individuals experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). The culminating facet was a descriptive passage that discussed the essence of the lived experience of the participants, which incorporated the “what” and “how” of that experience (Creswell, 2013).

Sample and Instrumentation

Purposive sampling was used to concentrate on particular characteristics of a population of interest that enabled the researcher to best answer the research questions. Emphasis was placed on locating individuals who had experiences related to the

phenomenon that was the subject of the research (Kruger, 1988). The potential sources of data for the proposed research study consisted of online course developers from different higher education institutions that offered fully online course delivery. The potential participants were subject matter experts, known and unknown to the researcher, who developed courses in online higher education across different disciplines. For external validity, variation in participation selection was utilized. This variation took the form of subject matter experts with graduate degrees who worked at various higher education institutions utilizing different processes for online course development in different fields with different levels of experience. The interaction took place remotely, using recorded GoToMeeting.com webinars and Audacity audio recordings as backup, with the permission of the participants.

Through interviews, the essence or structure of experiences was the point of focus that surrounded the lived experiences of those participating in the online course development process as subject matter experts, who experienced conflict in the course development process. There was alignment between those key tenants and phenomenology. Using phenomenology for research yielded information that, upon interpretation and analysis, provided insight into a better understanding of the online course development process from the perspective of the subject matter expert and related implications associated with conflict for various stakeholders. Focus was placed on nuances and the development of a deeper understanding of what the subject matter experts went through and what their experiences were because of the perceived conflict in the online course development process. Additionally, insight was gained about the conflict, the response, and the related implications. This comprehensive examination

enhanced the implications of the research findings. This also better informed the researcher for research preparation to ensure the comprehensive experiences were accounted for in the scope of coverage.

The steps taken during the data collection and analysis phases of the research study began with framing the research problem based on a review of the literature, bracketing with the researcher engaging in the epoché process, solicitation of participants, scheduling an interview for each participant in the study after consent was secured, data collection, transcription of interviews, data analysis, and summary of findings. The research problem was formulated based on review of the literature, which reached a saturation point. From there, consistent with the transcendental model, the researcher engaged in the epoché process in order to create a non-threatening environment and established a comfortable environment for the participants. From a researcher preparation standpoint, awareness of potential biases was a key starting point. Bracketing was integral in this study.

According to Stiles (1993), “deep personal involvement and passionate commitment to a topic can bring enmeshment, with its risks of distortion, but they can also motivate more thorough investigation and a deeper understanding” (p. 614). According to Miller and Crabtree (1992) the researcher “must ‘bracket’ her/his own preconceptions and enter into the individual’s lifeworld and use the self as an experiencing interpreter” (p. 24). Revealing, rather than avoiding, the researcher’s orientation and personal involvement in the research and through evaluating interpretations according to their impact on readers, the researcher, and the participants,

shifts the goal of quality control from the objective truth of statements to understanding people (Stiles, 1993).

Potential participants were contacted via e-mail. Emails were sent to online faculty at various institutions, using faculty distribution lists, that included details about the research and asked for participation for those who meet the lived experience criteria. There were 28 participants in the study. Boyd (2001) regarded 2 to 10 participants or research subjects as sufficient to reach saturation and Creswell (1998) recommended long interviews with up to 10 people for a phenomenological study.

The interviewee selected a time that was convenient for them to be interviewed from a list of options. The interviewee had control over how long the interview session lasted and was afforded the opportunity to end the interview at any time. The interviews lasted no longer than two hours. The initial email included a summary of the study and the research goals, and delineated a detailed description of the interview process, consent process, risks to participants, and the potential participant's option to decline to participate or to drop out at a later date.

Once potential participants were identified by responding to the inquiry email and expressed an interest in participating, the researcher sent a follow up email that told the individual the kinds of questions they would be asked and informed the individual they would be asked to talk about their lived experience, as a subject matter expert, encountering conflict in the online course development process at higher education institutions. The email indicated that each participant would only be asked to recount whatever they felt was relevant, and whatever they wished to share. It also noted participants could leave the study at any time.

Potential participants were encouraged to contact the researcher with additional questions or concerns prior to making the decision whether to participate. The email asked those who would like to participate to respond by email to ask any questions and schedule an interview. If the person did not respond, the researcher assumed they did not wish to participate. When a potential participant responded to the email, the researcher answered any questions and then scheduled the interview. Prior to starting the interview, the researcher provided the consent form, explained the contents, and allowed the participant to take as much time as desired to review the form and ask any questions. The researcher answered all questions to their satisfaction and informed the participant they could withdraw from the study at any time, with absolutely no negative consequences, and that they had control over what information to share, and what information to keep private.

The inclusion criteria were the ability to speak and write English, willingness to participate, previous conferral of a graduate degree, and prior or current work experience in the capacity of a subject matter expert in the online modality. The exclusion criteria were the inability to speak and write in English, unwillingness to participate or no conferred graduate degree, and no current or prior work experience in the capacity of a subject matter expert in the online modality. The interaction took place remotely, using recorded GoToMeeting.com webinars and Audacity audio recordings as backup, with the permission of the participants, after the completion of the informed consent process.

The researcher asked the participant to sign the consent form, scan it, and return it digitally, by e-mail. The researcher signed the scanned version and returned it by email so the interview could take place by remotely. The execution of the forms took place prior to

the interview. Additionally, before the webinar date and time, the researcher provided instructions on how to access GoToMeeting.com.

All participants signed the consent form. Any potential participant who decided at a later date that they wished to participate in the research during a time when it was still viable to add a participant (i.e., data collection is still going on), had the opportunity to contact the researcher via email and request to be included. That did not occur during the study. Participation began upon receipt of the signed consent. Data was not collected from any participants based on activities completed prior to the date on the consent form. No participants opted to leave the study. If a participant had opted to leave the study, any data collected prior to that time would have been kept for 36 months following the completion of the study, and then destroyed.

Data Collection

The principal data collection methods were interview and journaling. The researcher collected data that consisted of semi-structured interview questions with initial and follow up questions asked by the interviewer of the interviewees, online subject matter experts, who experienced conflict in the course development process. Reflective journaling was completed by the researcher. Use of a reflective journal enabled the researcher to record her reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases about the research process, which added rigor to qualitative inquiry (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Participants were interviewed separately. The researcher explained to the participants it was critical they give as complete a description as possible of the experience associated with conflict in the online course development process as the subject matter expert. It was essential for the researcher to keep track of the dimensions

of time present in the interview situation. The participant was, in the present, describing a memory of an experience during which they remembered something. The concern was with the lived experience of conflict associated with online course development work experienced by the participant. The focus, for the researcher, was to make sure the participant in the present interview situation described a situation in which they remembered a conflict event. The researcher told the participant they could end their participation whenever they felt the need to do so. Only one interview protocol was developed for this study. The interview was designed with an open-ended question as the starting point, probes, and follow up questions.

The interview questions were centered on the lived experience of conflict in the course development process, and probes included follow up on the interview questions such as questions about the nature, extent, and impacts of the conflict. The questions drew on a common theme and urged the participants to identify the importance of interpreting the experience in a unique way. The nature and scope of the questions, which prompted narrative responses, allowed the participants to recount their experiences in a manner that respected their opinions and perspectives. The different questions had a common thread of experience and the related meaning of the experience, centered on the individual providing the response, based on their frames of reference. The initial broad question was: "When doing SME work for Online Higher Education, did you experience any form of conflict?". The initial question led to probes, and follow-up questions, that rendered the interview semi-structured.

After the initial question, the interviewer made concerted efforts to be present to what was going on in the subject-subject relation and switched to a presence towards the

research phenomenon (e.g., the subject-phenomenon relation). Once the subject responded to the initial question and started to describe the event they remembered associated with conflict, the researcher was able to see how the participant made connections in their meaning of conflict, and the connection to the experience and online course development process. Other open-ended questions were asked to focus attention on gathering data that led to a textural description and a structural description of the participants' experiences.

Follow up questions included:

1. Describe something you remember about experiencing conflict when working on online course development as a subject matter expert. Be sure to describe the event as well as the memory you hold. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. What about the incident made you classify it as a conflict?
3. What was it like to experience that conflict when working as a subject matter expert developing the online course?
4. Describe your feelings about being confronted with conflict while working in that capacity.
5. What did you do when you felt there was conflict?
6. How do you feel that conflict impacted your deliverables?
7. How do you feel that conflict impacted your overall experience serving in the capacity of a subject matter expert?
8. From there, as needed, the following prompts were incorporated:
 - i. Can you tell me more about the event you are describing?
 - ii. Exactly what happened?

iii. What conflict connections did you feel were present?

Interviews continued until the topic was saturated in that the participants introduced no new perspective on the phenomenon. The researcher utilized interface technology with audio to conduct the interviews. Webinars were recorded via GoToMeeting.com's internal recording feature, accessed using a secure login with a user name and password, downloaded onto the portable USB drive, and stored in a locked cabinet in the home of the researcher. Audacity was used as backup for the audio recordings. Audacity audio recordings were simultaneously downloaded onto the portable USB drive and stored in a locked cabinet in the home of the researcher.

Once an interview recording conducted via GoToMeeting.com was downloaded onto the portable USB drive, the researcher deleted the interview from the respective website. Audacity recordings, simultaneously downloaded onto the portable USB drive and stored in a locked cabinet in the home of the researcher, were only accessed to verify interview content, in four instances, during transcription, when wording was unclear in the GoToMeeting.com recording. The data was de-identified at the time of transcription. To ensure the confidentiality of the interviews and the participants, the researcher did not use actual names that could be linked to the participant's identity in the transcripts. The interviewer transcribed interviews in a private setting with the use of headphones to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

The interviewer secured the portable USB drive with the recordings in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher had access and transcribed the interviews on a password-protected computer. Three years following completion of the study, the recordings and transcriptions will be deleted, and the USB drive will be destroyed by being crushed. The

researcher likewise substituted code numbers for names of participants. The data was processed properly, which enabled the researcher to forge a common understanding at the end of the process (Creswell, 2007).

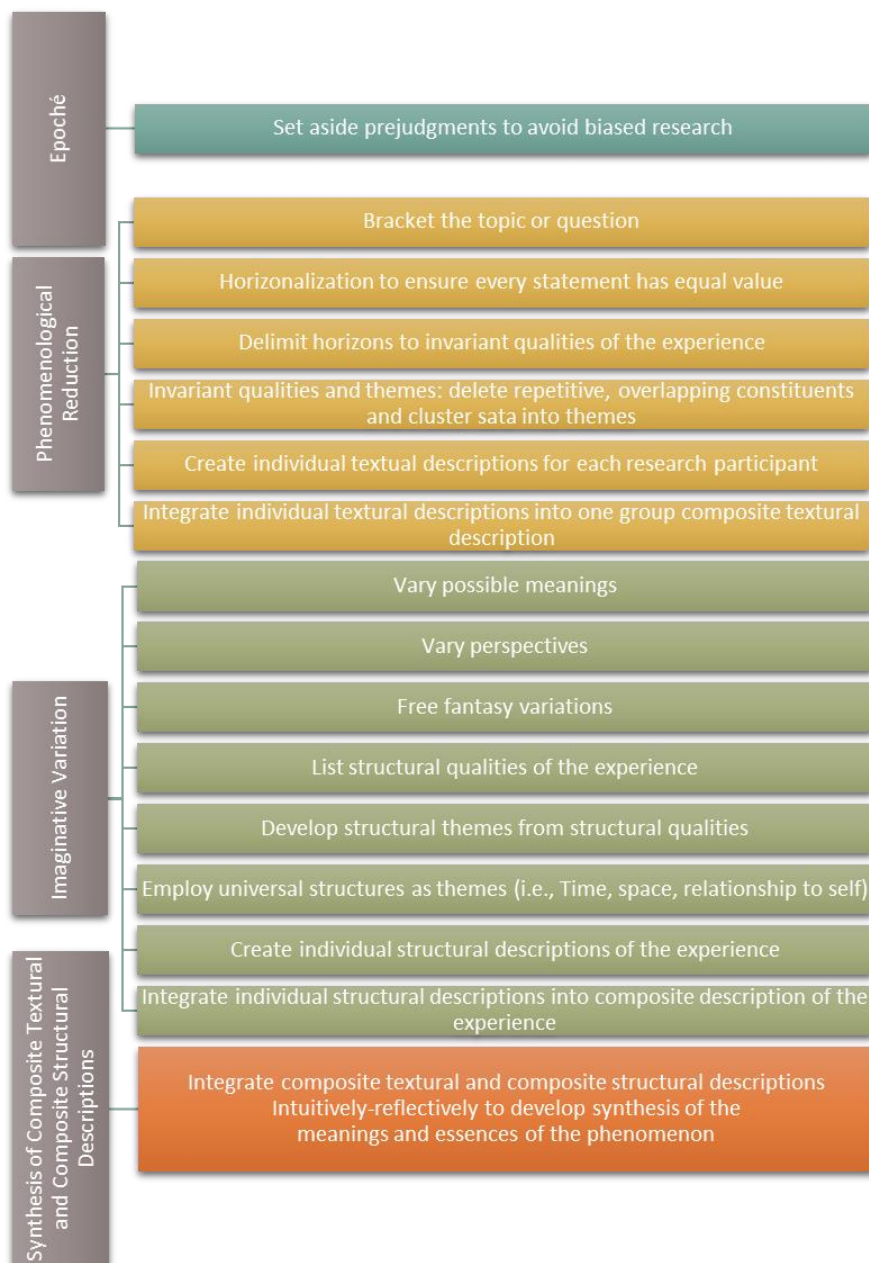


Figure 1. Data Analysis Using the Phenomenological Model, Moustakas, 1994, p. 180–182.

Data Analysis

Within phenomenology, the transcendental model was utilized to conduct the data analysis (Figure 1). That allowed for focus on the essence of the experiences and the crystallization of the experiences of conflict by subject matter experts. In transcendental phenomenology, according to Creswell (2007), data is analyzed by the researcher by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combining the statements into themes. The themes in this study served as the basis for development of individual textual descriptions of the “what” of the participants’ experience. This was then integrated to a composite textual description that described the experience at a group or universal level. The individual structural descriptions created pertained to “how” the participants experienced conflict in terms of situations, context, or conditions (Creswell, 2007). The integration of individual structural descriptions into a composite structural statement provided the final component for integrating the textual and structural composite descriptions into a synthesis of the overall essence of the experience which, in this study, was “navigating conflict” (Creswell, 2007). This research model was integral to effective data analysis in this study.

Epoché or Bracketing: The process of phenomenological reduction encompassed the researcher engaging in purposeful and deliberate opening to the phenomenon, with its own meaning (Hycner, 1999). At that juncture, no position was taken either for or against the phenomenon (Lauer, 1958). To begin the process of phenomenological reduction, bracketing was performed. The researcher’s meanings and interpretations, or theoretical concepts, were not permitted to enter into the unique realm

of the study participant (Creswell, 1998). Units of meaning were then delineated, which was an important stage of explicating the data.

Phenomenological Reduction: The data analysis process included coding and categorization. The starting point was a review of the whole transcript, with an open mind, considering all research questions and areas of focus, for the commencement of the analysis and coding of the data. Thematic analysis of the data collected included editing and formatting the transcripts in NVivo 12 Plus software to facilitate the coding process. Other NVivo features employed for analysis and coding of the data included mind-mapping, word-count queries, question-level queries for participant profiles, interview formatting, node creation, case classification, thematic coding, and various charts and reports.

In the step of horizontalization, the researcher reviewed each statement as having had equal value, to horizontalize the data. The researcher delimited the horizons, and, in doing so, made note of horizons that stood out to the researcher as invariant qualities of the experience, in the next step. From there, the researcher refined and combined the data, with depth and overlap in mind, and, in doing so, clustered the invariant constituents into themes (nodes in NVivo) in an attempt to understand the participants' experiences. Documentation of coding, that included how initial codes served as the foundation for more elaborate codes and linkages and ultimately to data analysis, was performed with the assistance of the NVivo software. A research decision was made to code larger blocks of data to include necessary context.

The researcher performed descriptive coding on the transcripts based on the initial themes. Documentation also took place as to how initial codes led to more elaborate

codes, linkages, and to the formal data analysis. This process continued until theoretical saturation was reached; there were no new issues or themes arising specific to a category of data, and when the categories were validated. The compilation of units of relevant meaning extracted from each participant interview was meticulously examined, and units that were clearly redundant were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). Because data can lead to numerous different interpretations of the participants' experience, it was necessary to develop clusters of meaning, into themes, from the significant statements (Creswell, 2007).

Themes were refined and combined into meaningful groups that represented the final themes and sub-themes. The four emergent themes and 21 sub-themes were reviewed for credibility and uniqueness. The researcher then analyzed the themes to ensure all data was accounted for. At that point, the researcher created individual textual descriptions and integrated those individual textual statements into a composite textual description that represented the conflict experienced by the participants, as a group.

Imaginative Variation: A goal of imaginative variation, the next step in the process, was to vary the possible meanings to arrive at structural qualities of the experiences. Those structural qualities were then clustered into themes that enabled the researcher to create individual structural descriptions of how participants experienced conflict. The integration of the individual structural descriptions into a composite structural description allowed for a deeper understanding of how conflict was experienced by the group of participants. According to Creswell (2007), the statements and themes developed from these clusters of meaning formed the basis for the development of descriptions of the participants' experiences (textual descriptions

generated during phenomenological reduction) and descriptions of the setting(s) or context(s) that influenced the experience (structural descriptions).

The researcher concluded this study by writing a composite summary of the subject matter experts' experiences of conflict in the online course development process, reflected in the context from which the themes emerged (Hycner, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Following Sadala and Adorno's (2001) view, the researcher, at that point, transformed the everyday expressions of the participants into expressions appropriate to scientific discourse that supported the research. The researcher assessed whether credibility, dependability, and transferability were adequately discussed, whether findings presented were adequate to reflect the lived experiences of subject matter experts in the course development process in the context of conflict, whether the original purpose of the study was adequately addressed, whether the importance and implications of the findings were appropriately identified, and whether there were adequate recommendations made to address how the research findings could be developed (Ryan et al., 2007).

Synthesis of Composite Textural and Composite Structural Descriptions:

Integration of the composite textual and structural statements into a synthesized expression of the meanings and essences of the subject matter experts' shared experience or phenomenon provided the foundation for reporting the study findings in the final phase, with the generation of a narrative description of the essence of the experience of a particular phenomenon. The essence of the phenomenon in this study, "navigating conflict", is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Quality Control

Research preparation involved developing an understanding of the characteristics of the study. Specifically, consideration was given to the way in which the data was collected, the use of instruments to collect the data, and the formulation of questions. Additionally, an understanding of the inductive and deductive logic that was used throughout the study is important. According to Creswell (2007), “the inductive-deductive logic process means that the qualitative researcher uses complex reasoning skills throughout the process of research” (p. 45). It is also important to ensure the study focused on the participants’ perspectives, their meanings, and their multiple subjective views (Creswell, 2007).

Participation benefit was a key area of emphasis in structuring the study. Participation potentially assisted participants in positively framing their lived experience of conflict in the course development process in a manner that raised awareness and promoted adjustment to benefit the subject matter expert, and potentially impacted the final deliverable in a positive manner. Participation may have raised awareness that prompted discussion about possible adjustments to improve the online course development process, and the experience of those involved in the online course development process. Participants may have gained new insights into conflict management behaviors and strategies that resulted from their lived experience, bringing about a more positive experience as a subject matter expert in the online course development process.

Quality control was a key area of importance that started with inception and carried throughout all aspects of the research. Minimizing ethical concerns and

maintaining rigor throughout the study were integral to the research process. As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011), reading the research of others regarding ethical problems and using case material can refine the researcher's ability to reason through moral arguments. Bias on the part of the researcher can have adverse impacts on the research.

Careful decision making, throughout the entire process, was essential. The framing of questions was also central to proper data collection and was based on the literature review. From there, careful participant selection was imperative. According to Creswell (2007), "the participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question" (p. 62). Continuing with the process, proper data processing was vital to enable the researcher to forge a common understanding (Creswell, 2007). The research involved an emergent and evolving design rather than a tightly prefigured design, was reflective and interpretive, and presented a holistic, complex picture (Creswell, 2007). Accounting for these areas ensured there were no ethical impediments, increased confidence in the findings, and allowed for rigor to be maintained throughout the process.

One potential threat to validity was the notion that subjects, especially those in the education profession, tend to offer socially desirable responses in interview situations (Schmitt, 1967). It is not uncommon for individual inclination to prompt presenting themselves in the best light possible or to speak in generalities (Goodson, 1994). To mitigate those tendencies, questions were formulated to be experiential and insight-based to illicit responses that included details of experience, reconstruction of events, and specific examples rather than abstraction and generalities.

A potential limitation included the involvement of the researcher in online teaching, online learning, and the online course development process, in multiple capacities, at multiple institutions. In conjunction with this limitation, bracketing was a point of focus. An additional limitation was the ability to make generalizations from the findings because of variations in course development processes in institutions in scope, structure, and direction.

The research proposal offered participants the opportunity for significant new insight into their lived experiences of conflict in the online course development process and the implications of those conflicts, in exchange for a nominal investment of participation time and secure self-disclosure. The potential impact scope areas, based on the study findings, included subject matter experts, course development processes, course content deliverables, and direct and indirect stakeholders. The risks associated with confidentiality, loss of time, and privacy were minimal. Protocol was followed and security was maintained, to ensure confidentiality and privacy were intact. At no time were participants in danger of losing their dignity or any aspect of personal information that they did not choose to reveal. For those reasons, in the researcher's estimation, the potential gain far outweighed any potential risks.

Because of the researcher's professional experience in different capacities, in online higher education, integral insight existed that enabled targeted questions to be formulated to yield responses focused on the impact of the online course developer experience on multiple higher education areas. The researcher's purpose, in examining conflict experienced from the lens of the online subject matter expert in the higher education course development process, was to provide insight into a perspective integral

to subject matter expert success, student success, faculty success, and higher education institution success. The professional experience of the researcher facilitated attaining that insight through the study.

It is a necessity for the qualitative research to demonstrate trustworthiness in providing rigor and strength to the study validity and reliability throughout all stages of the research process (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007; Vivar, McQueen, Whyte, & Armayor, 2007). Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were undertaken throughout the study process, which are components of trustworthiness. Bracketing was conducted throughout the study. Bracketing eradicated any bias inherent in researcher beliefs and attitudes (Creswell, 2009).

Additional strategies were implemented to elevate the rigor, including "member checking" accomplished through securing agreement from the participants on the emerged results (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman 2011; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Throughout the duration of the interviews, participants were provided ample time to fully develop responses, and to elaborate, frame questions, and provide explanations in their own words. To achieve greater credibility and to build trust, participants were afforded the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews, with the ability to add to and delete from the transcripts, to ensure accuracy and comprehensive communication of responses (Van Manen, 1990). Member check offer opportunities added to the validity of the observer's interpretation of qualitative observations.

For dependability, and audit trail was maintained in the form of record keeping including a transparent description of all research steps from inception through the reporting of findings. The audit trail encompassed raw data, data reduction and analysis,

data reconstruction and synthesis, and process notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As part of the audit trail, a reflective journal was maintained, with consistent entries throughout the research process. The entries reflected methodological decisions, reasoning, logistics, and reflection based on values and interests.

Summary

Qualitative research, based on the exploratory nature and focus on interactions and meanings, was appropriate for the examination of conflict in the online higher education course development process from the perspective of the subject matter expert. Utilizing phenomenology as the methodology aligned with focus on developing an understanding of the lived experience of the subject matter expert experiencing conflict in the online course development process. The researcher conducted the research process methodically, adhering to the processes identified as aligned with transcendental phenomenology, and ensured alignment with ethical mandates and trustworthiness criteria. This set the stage for detailed examination of the data collection, data analysis, and results that follow.

Chapter 4 presents a summary of the data collected, organized by the four themes. The data described represents the participants' thoughts, feelings, emotions, perceptions, and the meanings attached, regarding situations where they perceived conflict in the higher education online course development process. Specifically, the data described includes the sources of conflict encountered, what the conflict meant to the subject matter experts in the course development process, how they managed conflict, implications of conflict on the course development end product, implications of conflict on relationships with others involved in the course development process, adjustments subject matter

experts made as a result of the conflict, and how those adjustments impacted the final course product and relationship dynamics.

Chapter 4: Results

This study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content, by exploring their lived experiences specific to conflict, and the effects of that conflict on the course development process, course content deliverables, and direct and indirect stakeholders. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of subject matter experts working in the online higher education sector who perceived conflict in the online course development process. This chapter contains the findings of this transcendental phenomenological study that answer the following research questions, addressing how to identify, avoid, reconcile, mitigate, manage, and resolve conflict experienced by the online higher education subject matter expert:

1. What were the potential sources of conflict encountered by the subject matter expert throughout the course development process?
2. What did the conflict mean to the subject matter expert in the course development process?
3. How did the subject matter expert manage conflict in the course development process?
4. What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the course development product generated by the subject matter expert?
5. What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the relationships with others involved in the course development process?
6. What adjustments, if any, did the subject matter expert make as a result of the conflict?

7. How did those adjustments impact the final course product and relationship dynamics?

Additionally, this chapter presents participant demographics, using tables to complement the summary, and participant profiles to provide an additional layer of context to the participants' shared experiences, organized by resultant themes, representing the findings of this study.

Participant Profiles

To preserve confidentiality of the study participants, all study participants were assigned participant numbers for data coding and identification in this report for purposes of reporting the findings in this study. According to Creswell (2013), "researchers need to protect the anonymity of the participants by assigning numbers or aliases to them to use in the process of analyzing and reporting data" (pp. 230–231). Participant numbers were based on the order in which the researcher conducted participant interviews, but the numbers have no correlation or relatability to the participants that would make them otherwise identifiable. The researcher conducted 28 semi-structured interviews in this transcendental phenomenological study. All participants possessed extensive professional experience and advanced degrees in their fields, which qualified them to work as subject matter experts developing online course content for institutions of higher education. As a group, the participants collectively possessed over 401 years in the field of education. Sixteen of the 28 participants hold a PhD. Given that the participants' level of subject matter expertise and lived experience was often directly tied to the conflict they experienced, this researcher determined that a brief profile of each individual participant would facilitate a deeper understanding of the overarching essence of navigating

conflict common to all participants in the online higher education course development process.

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a male possessing an undergraduate degree in computer science, a Bachelor of Science from a military academy, a Master of Science degree in information, and a PhD in software engineering. He began teaching in the classroom in the early 2000s and online in mid-2006. Participant 1 has experience working with several colleges as a subject matter expert for course development for general information technology courses, with particular development expertise in the areas of networking, and cyber security. When asked whether he has experienced conflict at any point in his work as a subject matter expert with educational institutions, he replied:

A common thread across all of those is, is really related to the compensation offered for the amount of effort and the expectations of that developmental work. So, when I say that it's routinely not a large amount of compensation, typical pay rates are, I feel, lower than what would be expected for the level of knowledge that you're providing.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is a female who holds a PhD in clinical psychology and two postdoctoral degrees in forensic medicine and neuropsychology. In addition, Participant 2 earned three master's degrees in healthcare administration and criminal justice. She has accumulated extensive real-world experience in all related educational areas and has been teaching since the early 1990s. Participant 2 began developing curriculum in approximately 1992 and has worked as a subject matter expert for 11 schools; nine that

offer online components in the areas of nursing, criminal justice, and research methods-related subjects. Participant 2 has also functioned as a department chair at one university. When asked to describe her most significant conflict experienced in the online course development process, Participant 2 stated:

I was the subject matter expert. I put together all the modules, all the components, all the bells and whistles, and then the team, which are two other people picked it up from there and what they called ‘operationalize’ my work. The problem was they went in and edited it without a background in the subject matter and it was wrong. So, when it came back to me for final review, it's like, “This is not the course I wrote.”

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a female who has earned an associate degree in physical, biological, and mathematical sciences, a bachelor's degree in music with an emphasis on classical vocal performance, and a Master of Education degree in learning design and technology. She has been working in higher education for 10 years in public and private universities and colleges. Her experience spans positions such as tutor, instructor, and instructional designer. Participant 3 has extensive experience as a subject matter expert, developing undergraduate and graduate level online classes and has also developed smaller assets for courses being developed by other subject matter experts. When asked whether she, in her work as a subject matter expert, had ever experienced what she perceived to be through her lens, conflict, Participant 3 stated:

I was developing a website of teaching strategies that were going to be used by paraprofessional and professional educators for music theory instruction.... I was

working with a team of people. Some of them were the full-time faculty who were music theory instructors who were going to be asked to use these strategies in their classroom and others who were involved in the process that I had conflict with were instructional designers who were speaking into the process....So, where the conflict arose with the IDs is that they really didn't, and this is not their fault because what we were doing was pretty non-traditional in terms of teaching pedagogy, they really didn't understand the content of the course.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is a female who has a background in public health and health care administration. She holds a master's in public health and a PhD in health services and has been working in higher education since 2006. Her career began as a research assistant during her master's program. Participant 4 has taught on-ground as an adjunct instructor at a community college and moved to online education in 2011. She has taught online since 2011 for multiple for profit and non-profit higher education institutions and also has experience as the lead in a master's in public health program and as faculty chair for a public health program. Participant 4 has experience designing over a dozen courses as a subject matter expert, at two different institutions, and is the academic owner over a set of shared nursing and health science courses where she was heavily involved in the course design experience. When asked to share a memory regarding a feeling or experiencing conflict as part of her work as a subject matter expert, Participant 4 stated:

I've only had a specific instance where I've had conflict and it was working with an instructional designer who had a very tight control over the process and she very much wanted to move from her role as instructional designer and try to

control the content that I was going to do as the subject matter expert and then she delegated tasks to me that weren't necessarily within the realm of the subject matter expert; more the administrative tasks that the instructional designer should be doing.

Participant 5

Participant 5 is a respiratory therapist with 27 years of experience who is currently the director of respiratory therapy at a hospital in Southern California. She holds a bachelor's degree in management and a Master of Arts in Business Administration - Organizational Development. In her first online teaching experience, she also functioned as in subject matter expert helping to develop curriculum. When asked to describe her perception of conflict in developing online curriculum, she stated:

So, the my first my first exposure to curriculum was editing someone else's curriculum. So, they already had you know, all of the CLOs they have the homework assignments and everything was already done and I was just going to go in and edit that so, I was unclear and didn't get the connection really between some of the things that could change and some things that couldn't change so that was a little bit of a conflict for me. At first I got to know all of that as I went along but it would have been more a nice to know kind of a thing right at the beginning and I or if I would have had something some other type of resources that I could look into on my own to find out that would have been also, nice to know. So, that's how one kind of minor conflict but the other thing is, I think probably the major most major conflict for me was writing the curriculum hoping that it works out. Well based on my feedback from what I've seen from the students and then

but then not seeing it to fruition....I really would have liked to have written the creative curriculum for a class and then taught it to see if it even makes sense to this from the student's point of view and because I did that in one of the classes. I was able to write the curriculum and then I taught that class after and was I did make a lot of updates on it since then. I was still not completely happy with it because I feel like what has worked best for me is to have like team building for curriculum because I have worked with another professor in in developing curriculum.

Participant 6

Participant 6 is a male who holds bachelor's degrees in civil engineering and history, a master's degree in library science, and a PhD in engineering. In 2006, Participant 6 began developing classes and has developed for four or five different universities at the undergraduate and graduate level. His background consists of 20 years consulting in real estate and construction as well as experience working for a law firm that included conflict resolution and conflict management. Participant 6 has developed classes in project management, negotiation and communication, construction management, history, mathematics, and structural engineering. When asked to describe the circumstances surrounding what precipitated conflict experienced in the course development process, Participant 6 stated:

I developed the classes in project management. They had guidelines that said, "Here are our typical methods for assessing student achievement," i.e., exams, that could be essay exams, multiple choice exams, fill in the blank or so, that was one component you can use, exams....Those [were] are all offered as suggested

means of assessment. I did not choose to use group assignments based on personal preference and past experience....I didn't feel based on the objectives we were trying to achieve, that adding group projects to the sequence of classes was going to be beneficial and so, when they offered those as guidelines when I developed the class in the review process, they stated that, in at least three of the four classes I had to have a group assignment. So, it went from being a recommendation and an option, to you will put a group assignment in these classes and I still teach the classes today and the group assignments don't work.

Participant 7

Participant 7 is a female who has a doctorate in management with a focus on organizational leadership, a master's in education, a master's in public health, and bachelor's degrees in chemistry, and theology and scripture. Her education has been both on-ground and online and she has administrative experience as a dean and program chair as well as 20 years' practical work experience in healthcare and administration.

Participant 7 develops courses in the areas of business and healthcare at the associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels for approximately nine universities and one company as a consultant. In reflecting back on the experience with the nine different universities and the work for a third-party company in her role as a subject matter expert, Participant 7 described the most significant conflict encountered in the online course development process as follows:

I would say it is not respecting my industry experience and my understanding of an online student. Like how to build content that gives them what they need from exposure from the industry itself like practical application along with really just

understanding how this needs to be provided to the student. Like what platform is going to engage them.

Participant 8

Participant 8 is a female who holds a bachelor's in healthcare and billing and a master's in education. Participant 8 has developed course content for five online institutions. In her personal experience performing online subject matter expert work for colleges or universities, when asked if she had experienced any feelings of conflict from her lens in that role, Participant 8 stated:

Yes, for sure. There's one specifically that stands out, actually. It was a school [that] wanted to develop a medical coding class for their other online degrees. ...The problem was they didn't have anybody at the facility that was experienced in coding at all. So, they so, said they obviously needed somebody to do it. Um, the conflict that we had was they almost didn't trust me. It's not that they didn't trust me, they understand coding and they didn't fully trust me. So, every time I sent something in, they would almost question everything, even though I'm supposed to be the subject matter expert, you know, they would send it back and say why isn't this put in this way, why isn't this put in this way even though I have a, you know, I have my coding certification and instructor, and I also had the book I was going with so, it's almost like they didn't believe me and that was a major conflict because um, we kind of ran behind a little bit because of questioning.

Participant 9

Participant 9 is a male who graduated with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, a master's degree in civil engineering with an emphasis on construction engineering and management, and holds a number of certifications, such as licensed professional engineer. He has worked as a professional engineer, primarily in public utilities agencies. In addition to ground and online teaching experience, Participant 9 began developing classes that he was teaching for two colleges or universities. In his subject matter expert experience, he shared an instance in which he felt conflict in his capacity as the online subject matter expert working on curriculum, stating:

The coursework is more flexible in the instructor's ability to modify it from course to course. So, when an instructor gets a course to teach for a particular, you know [with on institution] there were several occasions in which other instructors who were receiving the information of course materials that I was developing just had a you know, professional difference of opinion and especially being relatively new to the university. I think these other instructors, I don't know how long I'd been there, but I was assuming they've been there for quite some time. So, they were more seasoned in that University, you know, but I you know, it's, you know two different people can have two different opinions as to that; what is the right way to handle something, and so, that there was you know some conflict I think in a few of those instances.

Participant 10

Participant 10 holds a bachelor's degree in liberal studies, a master's degree in organizational development and transformation, and a PhD in integral studies with a

concentration on learning and change, and human systems (transformative learning). Both the master's and PhD degrees were earned online, which signified Participant 10's introduction to the online world in 1997. Participant 10 has both on-ground and online teaching experience, as well as time spent as a faculty mentor and administrator in the higher education field. The first subject matter expert assignment of work came about as a pilot for an online program at the institution that Participant 10 and a colleague had worked for. As a subject matter expert, Participant 10 gained experience in the military and higher education arenas. In her experience as an online subject matter expert, Participant 10 experienced conflict arising when receiving feedback on a project involving the innovative creation of animated content. Participant 10 recalled:

It took hours and hours and hours, and my boss didn't like it. And so, I tried kind of another way of going through it and he's like, yeah, I just don't think this going to work. So, I was heartbroken. I was, I was heartbroken and very disappointed and yeah, it really kind of caused me to question my ability and as well as my capacity to imagine what was possible because I was I was pretty excited about it at that point and that again that was like I want to say about 2000...because they, it was the world of graphic design had not caught up with the world of online learning at all. And I felt like that was a strength that I was able to bring to the table, but it was kind of dismissed off hand as being fluff or eye candy that didn't have any value. But my boss being as he was, able to kind of stroke my ego, Okay and say, you know, it's still just a lot of experimentation and I've got you know, like a boatload of classes. I have to get out. So, we just have to kind of cookie cutter them and get it up and running. So, he kind of massaged my wounds and

picked me back up and pointed me off in a different direction and I didn't try to finish developing that class. He gave it to somebody else and I just went back to teaching.

Participant 11

Participant 11 is a male who has been working in information technology (IT) for approximately 20 years, 17 of which have been in higher education, predominantly in online education as a subject matter expert, adjunct, or part-time faculty member for a number of online institutions. His educational background consists of a bachelor's and a master's in computer science. He has also worked as a subject matter expert for third-party companies, such as book publishers. In his experience working for 14 organizations in some capacity as a subject matter expert developing online curriculum for higher education, Participant 11 has encountered conflict, and recalled:

Especially early on, when there were not a lot of like solid processes for online course development, there has been that challenge or even like organizations that are new to online environments. They tend to want to have a little bit more control over the process, so, that can create some conflict between the subject matter expert and the organization in part.

Participant 12

Participant 12 is a female who has been working as a subject matter expert and teaching online since 2005. She holds a bachelor's degree in health information and medical coding and a Master's in Business Administration with a healthcare focus. Initially, she developed many of her own courses as part of teaching (without an instructional designer) and has seen the online course development process evolve over

the years from inserting her own content to now having a very structured process for course development in the areas of medical office administration, health information management, medical coding and some health services, and human services. Over the years, she has worked as a subject matter expert for close to 10 institutions in the online modality. Participant 12's most impactful and frustrating conflict occurred early in her career. She shared:

I think also, just being new to working with an instructional designer. Was when I was developing content for [an online college] and working with an instructional designer thinking that you know working really hard on what I was instructed to do which those instructions may not have necessarily been clear and delivering back a work product that I thought was good and then finding out that it was, you know, it was not at all what they wanted and then having to rewrite it all.

Participant 13

Participant 13 is a female, and a nurse by training. Most of her career experience has been in nursing and at the hospital level. She holds a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a PhD in public health with a specialization in epidemiology. She has worked in higher education since earning her master's, teaching clinicals for various colleges and began teaching at the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and skilled nursing levels after earning her PhD. Her teaching experience also includes courses in health care administration and public health for Master of Public Health, Master of Science in Nursing, and doctoral level programs. Participant 13 first worked as a subject matter expert after earning her master's degree. When asked whether she has experienced conflict as a subject matter expert in the online course development process, she replied:

When I started working [the next institution], that was my first real in-depth subject matter expert experience with you know different people at different levels, you know the design of the course designer, you know, the instructional designer...the subject matter expert for the competence and you know, and then me the subject matter expert of the course itself...so, when I first became a subject matter expert at the at [this institution] and you know, you have to learn their system, so, I felt like a fledgling I felt comfortable with the subject matter that I was that I was the subject matter expert over but I didn't feel the confidence in the how they did it at [that institution]... and it became very clear that that you know that competency person...It became very clear to me very quickly that whatever she said went. So, ... everyone had to acquiesce to what she said. So, that was the big and I'm not saying that she wasn't she wasn't knowledgeable and certainly wasn't an expert in her field, but she had an you know, an EdD by her name and a lot of in most of her EdD experience was in competency-based, instructional design and so, you know, I'm a nurse and I'm a public health expert, you know, so, in the beginning it was a brand-new experience for me, you know, so, everybody acquiesced to her.

Participant 14

Participant 14 is a female who holds a bachelor's degree in sociology, a master's degree in health administration (health/health care administration/management) and is pursuing a doctorate degree in organizational leadership with an emphasis on learning with emergent technologies. She began teaching business courses online in 2005.

Approximately four years later, Participant 14 began working as a subject matter expert

in the areas of business and health administration. Her interest in the work prompted her to earn a graduate certificate in instructional design. She continues to work as a subject matter expert for a variety of institutions, now also in the area of instructional design, and has worked as a subject matter expert for six different institutions. Participant 14, in her work as a subject matter expert developing online courses, has perceived what she believed to be conflict from her lens. She explained:

I think the most impactful is a conflict over roles and responsibilities and the organizations that I have worked which tend to have different roles and responsibilities assigned to different participants in the course development process. And, as a subject matter expert, that can be frustrating, confusing, and I mean for everybody, not just the subject matter expert, but I think that's the most impactful. So, it's something that, for me, I try to pay attention to any time I engage in a new project.

Participant 15

Participant 15 is a female with an extensive background in public education. Her career in education began 28 years ago as a classroom teacher and progressed to administration. She currently serves as the director of education for a school district and also teaches at the university level. Participant 15 earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in liberal studies, a master's in education, and a doctorate in organizational leadership, as well as reading specialist and administrative services credentials. She has experience teaching as adjunct faculty at the university level on-ground, online, and in a blended setting for three different universities. When asked if she has perceived, in her work as a

subject matter expert, any conflict in her role as the online subject matter expert, she shared:

The most impactful [conflict occurred while] working with students that are working on their administrative credentials and this past year. This state has implemented a new testing system for people that are earning their administrative credentials... so, the universities have just had this put on them where they have to develop coursework and move cohorts of students through these three cycles to complete this test. And so, I came on board with this and the person that was the course developer for the graduate administrative courses. She was sort of just receiving information on what the requirements needed to be... Like we're going to have to create it as we go along and so, you know teaching online is not my full-time job. It's something that I do on the side and so, it became very time and labor intensive trying to just research and put components together for the online course as we were as you know, I had students that were actually enrolled and I was working with them and trying to lead them through the process. And so, instead of coming into something that was sort of, you know ready to use where I was just adding my own, you know unique components to it. I was you know in the trenches with her trying to build it we were literally staying about a week ahead of students in the course.

Participant 16

Participant 16 is a female who holds a bachelor's degree in nursing, a master's degree in nursing as a family nurse practitioner with a minor in nursing education and a PhD in nursing with a major in the professorial role. She began educating at the

community college level in 1997 in nursing, and online in 1998, eventually moving into graduate nursing education working for state universities, and proprietary for-profit and public not-for-profit organizations, creating and revising courses. Participant 16 recalled in her interview that her most impactful conflict as a subject matter expert in the online course development process occurred while working for a proprietary school as a remote part-time or adjunct employee who was assigned to lead the process of completing a revision for a degree program. She said:

The problem came with the instructional architect who was very knowledgeable about online design and mapping courses to professional documents [but there] was a major shift for the university in terms of going from face-to-face to an almost self really a self-paced process, facilitated by a course mentor and it was very difficult in working with this instructional designer/architect [because] she wanted everything to be, you know course outcomes are going to be really hard put quantitative not qualitative developed in a way that could be measured in the traditional sense with an assessment and that just wasn't possible. And so, it took approximately four or five months to try to educate her and everybody else involved as to what the purpose of the degree was and what the final outcome would be. ... God I couldn't stand working with her and she probably couldn't stand working with me and other members of the team was just getting so frustrated because we would hit that same wall where well where's the outcomes for this. She would not do it the way it needed to be done because she couldn't understand she didn't understand that it all went back to the course. And so, I

ended up flying to corporate and spent a week there and through once meeting this person we were able to find some better communication pattern.

Participant 17

Participant 17 is a female who began teaching ground classes in 2006 at the local community college level. She then gained experience teaching online at several schools that are no longer operating. Participant 17 holds a bachelor's in business accounting and master's degrees in accounting and in business administration (MBA), and completed course work toward a PhD in public administration. When asked about the online curriculum development work she has done and whether she ever experienced what she would consider conflict from her vantage point, she replied:

The one that stands out to me the most as the development of the Excel course where I was trying to put together, you know, written summaries and things like that where there's pretty much only one way to say things. So, it looked like it was perceived as like copying straight from the textbook so, and my point was I understand that it looks like it's copied straight from the textbook. However, there's only one way to say this because we're talking about Excel or we're talking about accounting or we're talking about math or whatever. . . I guess well, I don't know how to say I guess it was like being accused of something.

Participant 18

Participant 18 is a female who holds a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics, a master's degree in educational technology with a minor in mathematics, and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. She has been an educator for the last 20 years including K8 technology, high school mathematics, and adult education where she began teaching

Microsoft Office certifications and philosophy courses. Additionally, she held the positions of registrar, assistant dean, and career services director. Participant 18 has worked as a subject matter expert for six different institutions, all of which were private and for-profit. The most impactful conflict felt by Participant 18 in her role as an online subject matter expert developing curriculum for an online modality occurred, as she explained:

When I worked with another ... developing courses, I was actually working directly with the department chair for the program, so, there were things that were expected that were clearly articulated, I think, and my initial experiences. I think we all probably were may be new to the experience and we were figuring out the process as we went and what the needs were, and I think that that articulation is what was probably most problematic; not being clear as to what's expected. I think I'm one that wants the directions or instructions are clearly laid out. I typically want to be because I'm very pragmatic. I want to follow that order without deviation, and I think with initial steps that was not afforded to me or afforded to the team at that point. And so, it took on quite a few different directions before we got it together, but of course it ended amicably, and we were able to successfully enroll the course.

Participant 19

Participant 19 is a male who holds a bachelor's in criminal justice, a master's in human services administration, and a doctorate in leadership studies with a focus on cultural criminology. He began his career as a police officer and held various roles, including undercover investigations, for 23 years. He then embarked on his second

career, working as adjunct faculty with an on-ground, community-based college that was part of a larger, for-profit education network. After earning his PhD, he spent some time consulting, and eventually gravitated to online and continuing education through a university contact who asked him to develop their online Criminal Justice program with a team of professionals. He currently serves as a Dean for an online program. In his role as a subject matter expert doing online course development for an online university,

Participant 18 recalled during his interview encountering conflict in the process, stating:

I think it was revolved around a variety of different areas, such as misunderstanding of expectations is one, you know, misunderstanding perhaps of the philosophical, say, intention or intent of delivery per se, but nothing that was I'd say unresolvable. It just required a lot of conversations.

Participant 20

Participant 20 is a female who holds a bachelor's in English and a master's degree in English. She has worked in online education for higher education since 2011 and has held various positions in the educational sector including online coordinator/student services advisor for ground campus students who were taking online classes and eventually becoming a full-time instructor where she also performed subject matter expert and curriculum review work. When asked to share a conflict experience specific to her online subject matter expert work, Participant 20 replied:

I had gotten feedback from the curriculum manager about some concerns that another English instructor had about the course [I developed], and that of course is fine. There's nothing wrong with that; that's to be expected. There's always room to edit and review. It was when I dug into the content to the feedback that

really disturbed me, and the feedback was basically, “why was such and such a thing?” I think was pathos, ethos, and logos. “Why was that positioned in the course at the time that it was positioned? Why wasn't it discussed later?”, and it was two such pieces of feedback, maybe a couple of months apart, from the same instructor. And again, those are fine questions except for the questions showed that this particular instructor, 1) was unaware of the CLO requirements of the course, and 2) hadn't read the textbook in the most basic of ways, and I found that to be the most disturbing ... because that's, you're having a teacher teach a class and present the material that you've put together to students where either through incompetence or laziness that this person isn't doing a good job with that material.

Participant 21

Participant 21 has an associate's in respiratory therapy, a bachelor's in respiratory therapy, a master's in education, a master's in instructional design and technology, an MBA in healthcare administration, and a doctorate in health sciences with a focus and organizational behavior in leadership. She has been working clinically for 13–14 years, teaching since 2010 as both a classroom and online instructor, and working as a subject matter expert designing courses for several colleges for undergraduate bachelor's programs. When asked whether, in her experience doing online subject matter expert work for the undergraduate bachelor's level institutions, she had the experience of conflict from her lens in that subject matter expert role, Participant 21 replied:

So I think with the one that had the most impactful conflict was working with somebody else who was the subject was also a subject matter expert but was the program director. She had a vision of the way the online class or the courses were

running which wasn't a realistic vision to keep the program sustainable with students. So reviewing what she wanted she wanted me as the SME to create a more of an instructor centered course versus actually making it a very good student-centered course.

Participant 22

Participant 22 is a female who holds a bachelor's degree in health care administration with a minor in human resources, an MBA with a specialization in healthcare administration, and several certifications from the American Academy of professional coders (AAPC). She is a certified professional coder, certified professional medical auditor, certified professional compliance officer, and a certified professional coding instructor. Participant 22 possesses work experience in the field of management and worked for several doctor's offices and surgeons doing coding, billing, and office management. Her experience with online higher education as an instructor and as a subject matter expert spans eight years and several different online colleges, teaching business classes in healthcare management, anatomy, physiology, statistics, accounting, and medical coding courses, and four years working at one specific college as a subject matter expert helping review discussions and assignments in the areas of medical billing and coding, respiratory care, marketing, financial planning, and statistics. In the course of performing online subject matter expert work, Participant 22 recounted an occasion when she experienced what she perceived as conflict from her lens as the subject matter expert, stating:

I had to develop a new course that was going out and the instructors of that course, you know had a lot of input in it, which was absolutely fine and shared

ideas. But they also, wanted to add a part where they had group projects due for online courses and dividing the group the way they wanted to divide to divide the group's or the assignment for the group's really wasn't feasible for an online course program type. I mean, you know for a course for online students and there was a lot of going back and forth and trying to rationalize with the instructors. Well, this is a great idea and a ground setting, but these students are spread out all over the country. So, it wouldn't particularly work in this situation, but let's try to come up with something different if you want a group type project to go on.

Participant 23

Participant 23 is a male who holds an associate degree in computer information systems technology as well as human resources, a bachelor's in computer information systems, a master's in information systems, a master's in management, and was primarily an online student for the majority of his undergraduate education upon separating from the military. He is currently pursuing an EdD in adult education. He has been involved in information technology since joining the Air Force in 2003, working in a variety of capacities within that general field, including help desk, applications development, server administration, and security administration. He then began work in the private sector for a nursing services company, primarily as a network and server administrator. Participant 23 began working as an instructor in 2013 at a small career college and has taught at the community college and university level primarily as an online adjunct in asynchronous and synchronous courses, as well as a third-party private provider of information technology training. At that time, he also began working as a subject matter expert for an information technology support technician program and five other institutions. Participant

23 described his most impactful conflict experienced in the online course development process as follows:

The biggest impact from the conflict were disagreements, I guess and different objectives with myself and the instructional design team to kind of summarize what it was about I wasn't really being tasked with my subject matter expertise. I was being more tasked with the educational side of things objectives and certification entities and all those sorts of things and very little of it was what my actual experience was what the course or the courses is needed to cover so, lot of conflict because I felt that I was kind of getting away from why I was being consulted in the first place and really focusing on the educational side as opposed to what needed to be included in the course as far as content.

Participant 24

Participant 24 is a female physical therapist with 30 years of practical experience. She earned a Bachelor of Science in physical therapy and a Doctor of Science in physical therapy. She has 13 years of experience teaching undergraduate healthcare management and graduate biomechanics classes and developing courses as a subject matter expert for five institutions in the areas of anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, disease pathology, and medical billing and coding. In her experience as a subject matter expert developing online courses, Participant 24 shared her most impactful conflict, stating:

I received an email specific to me with the changes that would be happening in my [master's level course in biomechanics] course beginning in September. So, I read through the changes, and they changed the course name, and the course description, and about half of the overall learning objectives for the course. And

so, the learning objectives that were different were so incredibly different they no longer matched the course so, and this information didn't come from my direct supervisor, came from very high up. And I was told to put the new information that they provided me into my course. So, I wrote back to them and explained that half of the information and the course description and the course objective was not covered in the course, and that for my course to match what they gave me, I would have to rewrite at least half of it and probably pick out a new textbook. I was told not to worry about it and just put the new description in the new goals into my course. That was going to be a huge problem for the students, and I tried to present this to these program managers and they very much told me, "Don't worry about it. We spent a lot of time on what we did, and you need to just copy basically copy and paste this information and put it into your online course." So, because of the timing it being I believe it was May or June, I did not have time to rewrite this course and I didn't feel comfortable teaching a course that didn't match the course description. So, I decided to quit, and I did it quickly because I wanted them to be able to replace me.

Participant 25

Participant 25 is a female who holds a Bachelor of Science in biology and education, a masters in curriculum and instruction, and a PhD in education and technology. She has worked in education for 31 years, beginning in the public-school K-12 system and transitioning to online and on-ground courses teaching the sciences, psychology, sociology, career planning, and education courses at colleges and universities 12 years ago. Participant 25 has served as a subject matter expert with six

different private and public undergraduate institutions. In recalling her most impactful conflict as a subject matter expert developing online course content, Participant 25 recounted:

I worked for an institution probably about 10 years ago...where they were transitioning to different Learning Management platforms. And instead of doing the transitioning at the end of a quarter or end of a semester, this particular place had six-week classes, 12-week classes, and 8-week classes; all in the same institution. And so, they decided to transition from one Learning Management platform to another in the middle of a term. So, you have students that are currently taking a class and all of a sudden in the middle of the class they have to transition to another platform, which makes it very hard on students but as a subject matter expert is getting the content from one platform to another almost overnight so that it wouldn't would not interrupt the flow of the course right in the middle of the course. Not a really good plan to do instead of waiting until the end of the term to make that transition.

Participant 26

Participant 26 is a female with a Bachelor of Science in accounting and a master's degree in business administration. She has been teaching business and accounting online and working as a subject matter expert since 2005, and has developed approximately one hundred courses among six public and private undergraduate institutions. Participant 26 experienced her most impactful conflict as a subject matter expert during the online course development process when she was contracted to teach a course at an institution where instructors were responsible for developing their own content and loading the

content into the institution's learning management system (LMS), without pay. She further explained:

So, we owned the class about three weeks before it started. I developed the entire 11-week course. Loaded the 11-week course, it had all of the expected assignments your discussion forums. It had two per week. We had a quiz a presentation study notes homework. and then on the first week of the course when it started. I had just a few of the students tell me "I don't have the textbook yet." Okay, it was just a few of maybe 25 students in week 2; I started hearing a little bit more about I still don't have a textbook and the Director of Education contacted me and let me know we may have a problem because they could not find the textbook that they had asked me to develop the class with. And, in week three, we had a concrete decision of this textbook is no longer in print and in week three of the 11-week course, I was asked to select a new textbook for this business course and develop the course starting at week three. So, this put me in a position of "I need to hurry up and get this entire course from week 3 to 11 developed with all new content" while the course was live.

Participant 27

Participant 27 is a male who has an undergraduate degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in management. He also earned his Project Management Professional (PMP®) credential from the Project Management Institute. For 12 years, Participant 27 has worked as an online instructor and is currently a full-time online administrative instructor teaching approximately five courses a semester remotely. He also teaches as an adjunct at four other universities in the business, business management, and project

management areas and owns his own business. Participant 27 has worked in curriculum development since mid-2010, developing courses as a subject matter expert for six public and private institutions. The most impactful conflict Participant 27 experienced as a subject matter expert in the online course development process occurred when he was hired to teach at an institution that was new to online. He explained:

They hired me for business management, human resources type courses and so, they would give me three courses a semester that I would have to develop and then...where I started running into issues and conflicts with this particular university was that the timeframe they would give me to develop the courses in my opinion was not nearly adequate to develop an effective successful online course. I would have three courses that I'd have to develop from scratch that I would probably have a month-and-a-half timeframe to do this and that got to be very stressful from the standpoint that I wasn't given much support from [my] direct supervisor that was doing this. I had requested to be able to choose the publisher and the book that I wanted to use simply because I wanted to have as much robust instructor materials as I could and was not given much leeway on that. So, in essence I had to use my own knowledge without any type of resources at all to build this type of course, and you know, and I know you know as a curriculum developer it's difficult to build a course when you really have no resources and so, there was there was conflict that arose from time to time with my supervisor about that simply because I would ask for you know, support or some resources, and the timing of the responses back from her were, you know,

not adequate to set me up for success. That was the main takeaway was you know; I didn't feel I was being set up for success at this particular school.

Participant 28

Participant 28 is a female who holds an Associate in Applied Science in nursing, an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Science in computers coordinated with political science, a Juris Doctor in law, and is ABD in a PhD program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution with a concentration in Organizations and Schools. Participant 28 practiced law for 10 years and then transitioned to adjunct teaching and course development in 2005. She has developed online courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels in areas of criminal justice, legal studies, business, and research for approximately 10 institutions. Participant 28 has also held positions in the education sector as lead faculty, course owner, program chair for an undergraduate paralegal program, curriculum design and development specialist (quality assurance), and currently works full-time as an eLearning Instructional Media Tech designing and building interactive media for higher education. When asked to describe her most impactful conflict as a subject matter expert developing online courses, Participant 28 replied:

I would have to say that probably the most impactful situation and the most noticeable change for me through the years, having done this for probably 15 years, the process has changed and the introduction of instructional designers and that position has sort of come into its own and taken on a very different role. Whereas, it sort of evolved and has taken on a life of its own. When I first started there was very little of the presence of an instructional designer per se but through the years I've noticed that the present position of an instructional designer has

gotten to the point where when an “instructional designer,” and many of them right out of school, are involved. The feedback that I would get from them during the curriculum design or development process often necessitates additional work to contextualize the content that I was working on because the ID although they were well versed in academia, assessment, and the education approach and packaging facet, lacked the understanding of the underlying subject matter expertise in my particular field. So, they were very much generalists who were trying to apply instructional design skills across the board to many different fields that necessitated me to have to justify an approach or design decisions that I was making regarding covering context content in a particular manner for example, or a particular deliverable and it almost seemed like an attack on my subject matter expertise, which was very frustrating and ultimately you have resulted in some kind of conflict.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Highest Degree	Years in Higher Education	Areas of Expertise
Participant 1	Male	Doctorate	17	IT
Participant 2	Female	Doctorate	28	Healthcare, Criminal Justice
Participant 3	Female	Master	10	Music, Math
Participant 4	Female	Doctorate	13	Nursing, Health Science
Participant 5	Female	Master	2	Business, Respiratory Therapy
Participant 6	Male	Doctorate	13	Project Management, Negotiation, Communication, And Construction Management, History, Mathematics, Structural Engineering
Participant 7	Female	Doctorate	11	Business, Healthcare
Participant 8	Female	Master	4	Healthcare, Billing
Participant 9	Male	Master	12	Civil Engineering, Construction Engineering, Management
Participant 10	Female	Doctorate	22	Math
Participant 11	Male	Master	17	IT
Participant 12	Female	Master	14	Medical Office Administration, Health Information Management, Medical Coding, Health Services Human Services
Participant 13	Female	Doctorate	10	Nursing, Public Health
Participant 14	Female	Master	14	Business, Health Administration
Participant 15	Female	Doctorate	28	Reading Specialist, Administrative Services
Participant 16	Female	Doctorate	22	Nursing
Participant 17	Female	Master	13	Accounting, Business
Participant 18	Female	Doctorate	20	Microsoft Office Certifications, Philosophy

Participant 19	Male	Doctorate	6	Criminal Justice
Participant 20	Female	Master	8	English
Participant 21	Female	Doctorate	9	Respiratory Therapy
Participant 22	Female	Master	8	Healthcare Management, Anatomy, Physiology, Statistics, Accounting, Medical Coding
Participant 23	Male	Master	6	Network Administrator/Server Administrator
Participant 24	Female	Doctorate	13	Anatomy, Physiology, Medical Terminology, Disease Pathology, And Medical Billing and Coding
Participant 25	Female	Doctorate	31	Sciences, Psychology, Sociology, Career Planning, Education
Participant 26	Female	Doctorate	14	Business, Accounting
Participant 27	Male	Master	12	Business, Business Management, Project Management
Participant 28	Female	Doctorate	14	Criminal Justice, Legal Studies, Business, Research

The collective perceptions of the participants regarding their experiences developing online curriculum in situations in which they perceived conflict from their lens as a subject matter expert formed the basis for this study's findings that subject matter experts must navigate conflict in the online course development process. Participants perceived that initial expectations were often misaligned with the actual ask, requiring additional work beyond the initial scope of expectations. Personal integrity and commitment to the student experience were the predominant motivating forces enabling the subject matter experts to persevere in the face of conflict. Many times, the subject matter experts expressed being required to perform work beyond their initial expectations. The study participants shared a number of work dynamic challenges that

often went unresolved. Concerns regarding insufficient quality control after the conclusion of their development work were also expressed. Compensation not commensurate with the subject matter expert's level of education, professional expertise, and time spent adjusting the product to meet changing demands was voiced as a source of frustration. Participants also expressed a need for clarity of roles and procedure, and a higher level of respect for their professional expertise to minimize instances of conflict in the online course development process.

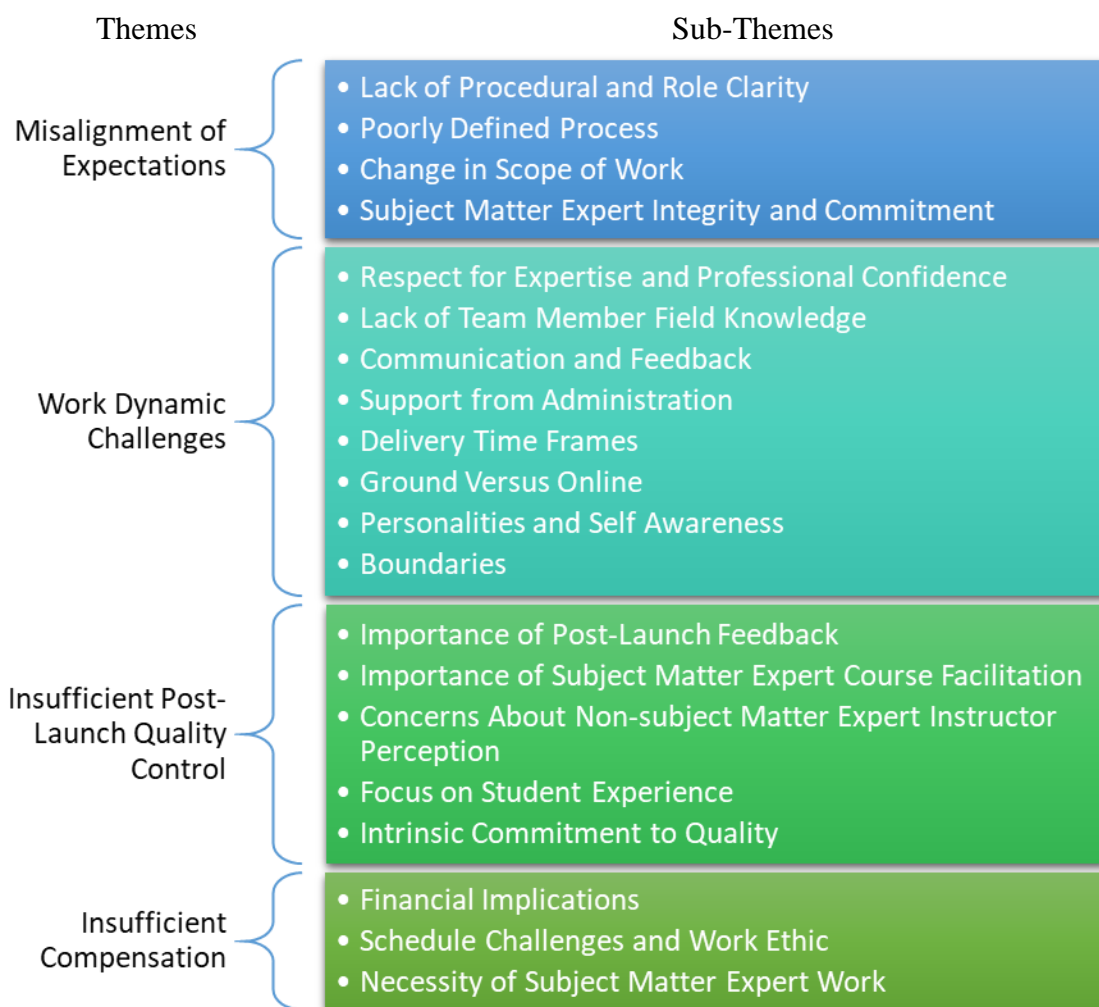


Figure 2. Emergent Themes

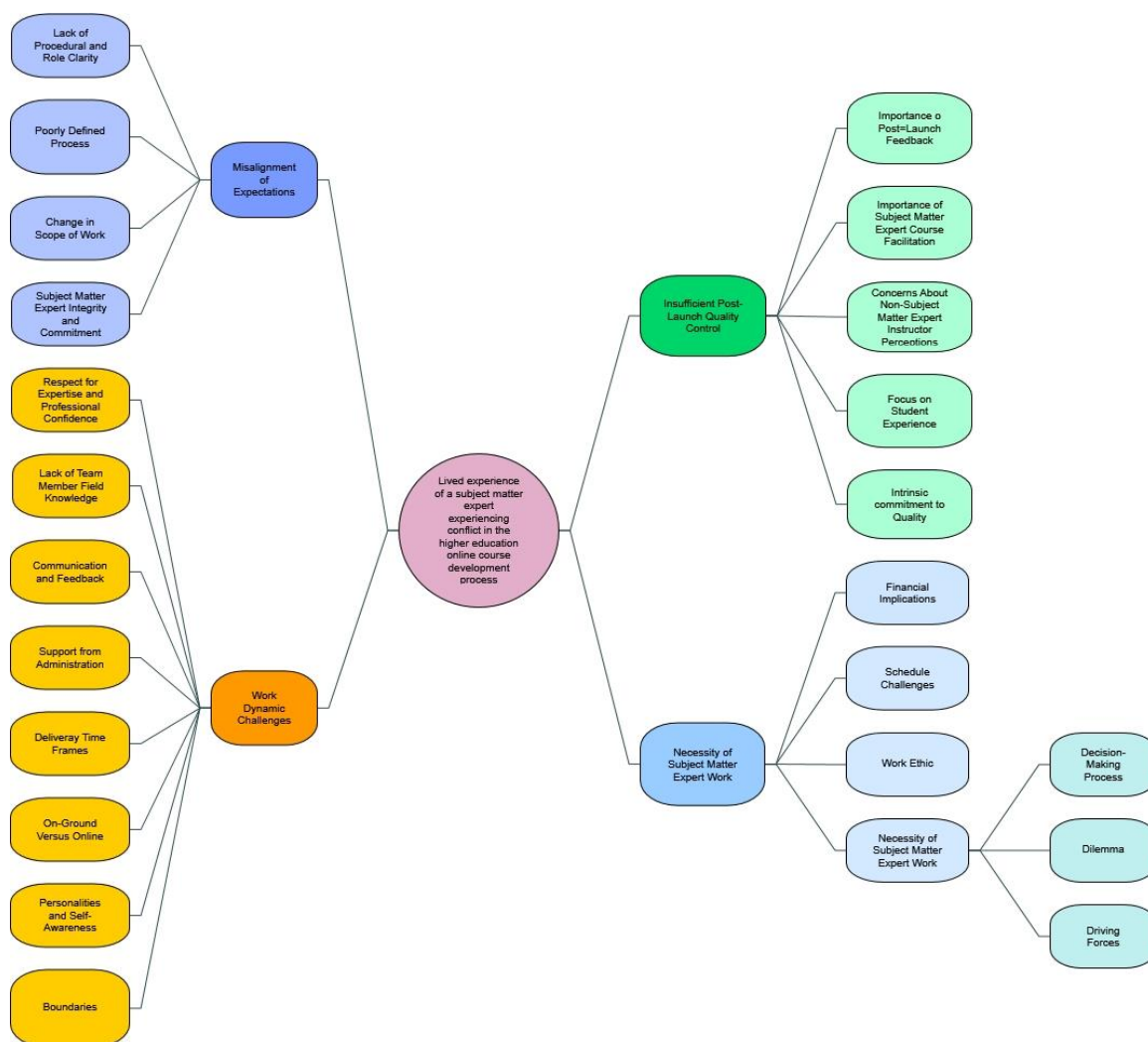


Figure 3. Thematic Coding Mind Map

The review of the data, NVivo analysis and thematic coding of the information collected from the participants yielded four resultant themes, culminating in the essence of “navigating conflict”: misalignment of expectations, work dynamic challenges, insufficient post-launch quality control, and insufficient compensation (Figure 2).

Analysis of these themes gave rise to 21 sub-themes, leading to a thematic structure, developed from participant perceptions and expressions. This thematic structure (Figure

3) highlighted connections among the resultant themes and sub-themes that will also be discussed.

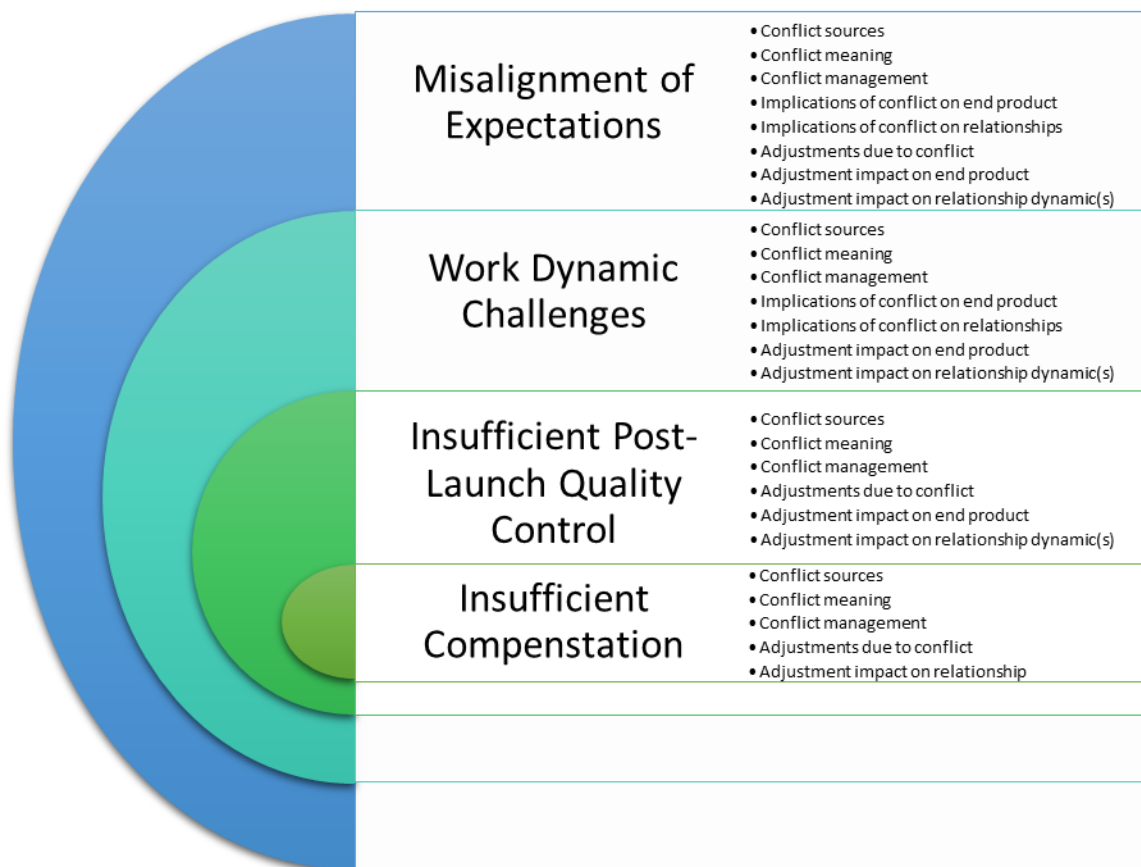


Figure 4. Thematic Connections to Research Questions

This study was conducted with three primary goals. The first goal was to gain a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content. Identifying techniques used by subject matter experts when confronted with perceived challenges was the second goal. Assessing how those techniques impacted the direction of the course development process, from the perspective of the subject matter expert was the third goal. All participants described experiences that clearly demonstrated a perception of conflict from

their lens arising in their roles as subject matter experts in the online course development process. Participants also all shared techniques utilized when faced with conflicts, and reflected on various dimensions of connected impacts. As a result of the analysis of the experiences shared by the study participants, the themes and sub-themes relevant to the lived experiences of this sample of subject matter experts emerged in answers to the research questions (Figure 4) and are discussed below.

Theme 1 – Misalignment of Expectations

The first theme that emerged from the participant interviews in this study was that of misalignments of expectations between the initial and final expectations of work assigned to the subject matter experts. Twenty-five of the 28 participants expressed that in their experience, these misalignments were the cause of conflict in the online course development process. This theme was indicative of the shared feeling that almost every study participant expressed frustration due to some level of misalignment of expectations, the consequences of which caused them to perceive conflict. Some of the consequences that flowed from the misalignment of expectations included the requirement of additional, unexpected, often uncompensated work; a change in the scope of work from initial expectations; confusion regarding roles and responsibilities of design team members; and the need to rely on their personal and professional integrity to push through conflict. This theme led to the identification of the following sub-themes: lack of clarity, change in scope, poorly defined process, and integrity and commitment. Some high frequency words noted in this theme were: process, time, students, expectations, objectives, design, changed, and outcomes.

Lack of Procedural and Role Clarity

A key sub-theme that surfaced during the interview process was the lack of clarity in the assigned work, which was clearly articulated by 25 of the 28 participants. The interviews led to participants describing what they, as subject matter experts, perceived to be a lack of clarity in the online course development process at some level. This lack of clarity was sensed in relation to the course development procedure, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the design team members. This lack of clarity was a source of conflict for many subject matter experts who expressed the need to be better informed by the institution at the outset of a project to avoid a decline in course content quality, confusion over deliverables, and communication breakdowns. Some of the descriptive words and phrases subject matter experts used in detailing their experiences and their meaning included unclear, confusing, big picture, roles, instructions, expectations, communication, moving parts, and responsibility.

Some subject matter experts came to an institution for the first time through development work. Others took on development work at institutions where they taught as adjuncts or were referred by someone who worked at the institution. Regardless of how they arrived at an institution, many participants shared instances where they were given very little detail at the start of a project. Many participants communicated their frustration of feeling conflict about a lack of clarity in the online development process overall, citing unclear instructions from the outset. Participant 18 felt conflict associated with the process because of a lack of clarity of expectations. She reflected:

I think the very first time probably came when I submitted what I thought was excellent work and it was returned full of pointing out the holes in what I

submitted which I think could have probably been overcome had expectations been much clearer. So, for instance, in the first phase we later found out that let's say for instance. I can't remember all the way back to 2009 but not the details at least but probably something to the effect of well, you submitted this information, and these are the assignments that you want the students to do. But what are the pages that should be included with these and not knowing that that was a part of what was expected but those things were kind of spoon fed along the way I think what I've seen now in years lately that it's clearly articulated what's expected even down to a map that you will follow it's a pass in and support what the expectations of the project are.

When asked at the outset of one development project, upon initial engagement, what was communicated to her about expectations before she signed on, Participant 21 replied, "It was more of a, 'This is the program. This is the course. These are the course objectives. Are you willing to develop the course?'" The researcher then asked Participant 21 whether she felt, from the subject matter expert vantage point, there was a lack of clarity in the areas of process, team member involvement, timelines, or deliverable formats and exactly what was lacking. Participant 21 further explained her perception of the conflict experienced:

I think with that on the outside with that one it was there was some course objectives provided but not an actual course description. So, you were just going off the objectives versus what like the overall course education was supposed to be provided and then from there. There was a timeline given in the sense of okay have everything done by this point and there wasn't, there wasn't necessarily

milestones with that one per se. It was just like make sure everything is cohesive which was a reasonable timeline, but I think it's more just with that like even you know who to email wasn't very clear on like who would upload the course Who's the who is the point person to get that to them? There was no curriculum manager. It was just kind of emailed back to that one person and just hoping that it got to where it was supposed to go.

Participant 26 echoed similar sentiments about experiencing what she would consider conflict in the online course development process, stating:

I would say just on a very high level. It would be at the onset of a development when expectations are not clearly defined because I'm a very black and white person and then you get to the end of a development and you find out you were not doing something correctly; let's say for instance, a test needed to be 25 questions but you were developing 20 for each unit. So, I've had some conflict as far as expectations of a course development not being clear from the outset or expectations changing during a development. I've been a part of both and that's frustrating.

Many participants who relayed experiences of conflict that transpired at the beginning of their online course development careers shared they especially needed clarity of expectations at the outset, either because they were new to the process, or because they developed at multiple institutions. Participant 15 said:

I was fairly new to teaching online courses when I was asked to redesign this particular course... based on my education and level of experience and I said absolutely I'd be interested... but I didn't have a clear understanding of what the

expectation was as far as all of the different components that need to be designed. I enjoy the work and so I you know kind of dug in and every time I thought that something was completed, like a particular section was completed, I would submit it and then it would be maybe two or three weeks later that I would find out that, oh, this actually needs to be done instead or this needs to be done in addition or it just felt as though the process was so, I don't know what I want to say strung out across a real lengthy period of time and like I said part of it was because I don't think I had a clear understanding of all of the components that went into designing the course and in terms of that lack of clarity at the outset.

Participants were very candid as to whether their perception of a lack of clarity was due to inexperience, or other issues. In particular, when asked if she felt that, at the outset, there was not enough communication or process clarity regarding what the expectations would be, Participant 17 reflected:

No, I wouldn't say there wasn't enough communication ... but when it came down to specifically what you're looking for, I was I was at a loss. I was trying just to kind of do the best I could and maybe it was on my end. It was a little bit intimidating and I felt like I like I would, I felt like if I had asked more questions, which I probably should have, if I had asked more questions that that would have made me come across as being kind of dumb, you know, like the here's this person that is a subject matter expert that should know this already and you know, why is she asking me questions and then that's what I wanted to avoid. So, I guess part of that was me being reserved and not asking enough questions. ...I believe that a lot of it was it was my fault for not asking enough questions. Like I was

reserved like I was hesitant to ask questions because I didn't want to be perceived as not knowing what I was doing. You know what I mean? I don't think my I guess subject matter expertise was ever in question. I think it was, 'Does she really know what she's doing to put this class together?' I think that was the type of what I was thinking.

Although clarity of process was an ongoing necessity, Participant 8 realistically assessed that lack of clarity was a bigger stressor at the outset of a development project, explaining that: "Once you go through like the first, the first set of deliverables, you get to understand what you have to do and it becomes more of a schedule thing."

Participant 18 was asked to do additional work, which could have been avoided if clarity and expectations had been communicated at the outset. When asked if time was a resulting concern when she was faced with a lack of clarity in the development process, she voiced her frustration and replied:

I don't know that time was really an issue. I really think that it was just all heavily set when it was just not being clearly defined. So, while time could have been, I don't see it as a waste of my time. I see it really as much more of an aggravation of again at not having those points clearly laid out.

In terms of transparency and clarity of roles and responsibilities, Participant 4 explained that, in one of her earlier builds, despite such a structured approach, there was a lack of clarity in that the information regarding roles and responsibilities was not well communicated to those involved in the course development process, to provide an understanding of, and the boundaries of, each person's responsibilities, and how their

boundaries connected with the boundaries and responsibilities of others. Participant 4 said of her experience:

It's not well communicated and I think that sometimes like I said, I've done quite a few course designs and you will be put with an instructional designer who very much understands his or her role and a subject matter expert that understands like, it's just a reciprocity of understanding and it's a great experience but in this situation that I just illustrated that instructional designer was new to her role. She came from a faculty position. So, I, you know, she was doctorally prepared herself. So, I think that she came in with a little bit more of an assumed authority and that it was never communicated to her by her side of the development team what her role should be.

The lack of clarity of roles expressed by Participant 4 in this instance can be juxtaposed with her later experiences, where she held a different vantage point from a full-time position at the institution, and further reflected on her experience and the evolution of the institution's online course development process, explaining:

I think it was a learning curve. I think that we learned from that in regards to better training new subject matter experts. And so, now that I have any new full-time faculty member that comes on board, they take faculty development to learn how to teach and they take faculty to learn how to mentor doctoral students. We have training for them to learn how to be subject matter experts and on the design process, and I make it a requirement that within their first two quarters that they take that training.

The definition of roles was a critical component of the online course development process when it came to clarity, especially when working with a large team. On the importance of roles, Participant 28 shared:

I think roles are important and I just think you know, maybe sometimes that maybe the roles need to be clarified a little bit more and the expectations a bit more. If you're going to have a large team everybody needs to stay in their box and, of course, stay in their lane. Sometimes people get a little overzealous and try to do it all thinking that that's you know, just what they're supposed to do, but it's not.

Participant 2 shared her perspective of how the online course development process lacked clarity, stating:

The lines are very blurry. You have no idea who the heck is in charge of what. One particular online school I work for, I've worked for them for over 15 years. I only teach graduate and postgraduate work and through the years of working for them there, it may have been a year or two, I had no idea who my boss was. I didn't even know who was in charge of the school because we had such turnover and such turmoil going on in administration. So, complaining about a specific class or trying to get something fixed was next to impossible because you didn't know who to get hold of.

Participant 12 also shared an experience wherein the process lacked clarity in terms of the bigger picture of the final product, stating:

Also, like envisioning the big picture of what the final product will be and sometimes you only get pieces, so, that can be difficult when you don't know

what the goal is for the final product. You're only writing a piece, but you have to think of you know, "what is the goal of this piece that I'm writing for the final product?"

When asked what her understanding of her role would be and what her requirements were as a subject matter expert in the online course development process at one institution, Participant 24 explained she was given nothing more than a course description and course learning outcomes to use as the foundation for the build. By contrast, at other institutions, there were milestone deliverables or checkpoints where she received feedback along the way. Participant 24 replied:

For the first institution that we talked about, I don't think anybody looked at anything. They just gave me a shell and let me do whatever I wanted, but everywhere else that I've worked I had guidelines and received feedback, and everything was submitted segmentally.

Participant 26 further explained that in the subject matter expert work she did, she also had experiences where there were no interim milestones or check points and she was asked to deliver everything at the finish line. While she was not opposed to the prospect of submitting all deliverables at the end, she raised the issue of compensation that could arise from a lack of clarity in the process, stating:

As long as it did not involve me completely doing a task wrong. Like I said with the presentations, I needed to go back and change, maybe five that I submitted in the end. Another conflict with that is pay, where you may develop an entire course and it may take you 60 days and there's no pay until you turn everything in

and it gets reviewed and that takes another 10 to 15 and then you submit an invoice and you may you may wait 30 days.

When asked whether the course development process was unclear to her as the online subject matter expert, Participant 16 expressed that, in at least one instance:

The process of what happened at the end was not clear. Then they contract the instructors and said, “You're going to do these things, and this is time frame. Here are the due dates and then we're going to do a quality control and we'll contact you with any questions or clarifications, you know, you have two weeks to fix it if you want to get paid.”

For its many similarities in the delivery of the ultimate student-facing content, the online course development process can vary greatly from institution to institution. Even seasoned subject matter experts who developed for multiple higher education institutions expressed a need for clarity of process to avoid pitfalls and potential conflict. To that point, Participant 8 shared a philosophical take on a conflict situation she experienced in the course development process, stating:

I think with the content, the process was something that a lot of people need help with because every university is different, and you don't know exactly what they need. So, if you have questions about what they need it is good to have somebody to ask, or show you, or something.

Highlighting the fact that there is great disparity among institutions in the procedural aspects of online course development, in analyzing the data regarding the issue of clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities, many participants expressed a need for more clarity of procedural roles. Participant 8 echoed that need, stating:

I think with the content, the process was something that a lot of people need help with because every university is different, and you don't know exactly what they need. So, if you have questions about what they need it's good to have somebody to ask, or show you, or something. But the content they were, for somebody, or somebody who has, you know, no knowledge of it there was they were a little too hands-on. I had experience with one last year, where she wasn't hands-on at all. She just told me what to do and I'd send them in by the due date. She'd send me an e-mail and say thank you. You know, that's almost the other extreme where I don't have people to talk. So, it's good to have a middle ground, where there's somebody to talk to you but they let you do what you need to do also.

This shared stressor of time constraints as a result of a lack of clarity was apparent from the interviews, because most subject matter experts shared they developed course content in addition to full-time or several part-time jobs. That lack of continuity and lack of knowing whether something was finished, or what the next tasks were, presented difficulties for participants in accurately forecasting their workloads as they accepted other assignments and obligations and ensured they produced their best work possible within the parameters of their other work and life obligations.

Participant 20 connected his conflict to a lack of communication coupled with a lack of clarity in the process in relation to the time element in his role as a subject matter expert, stating:

I think that generally speaking that sort of that kind of conflict, a lack of communication on the part of the reviewer or a lack of clarity in the process or those kinds of things, I think, well that and the time that it takes to put forth an

adequate product is one of the reasons why it can be difficult to find subject matter experts who are capable of, and willing to, put out a really good product.

Participant 15 also expressed the need for clarity of process when developing an online course from a time allocation standpoint to avoid conflict and its resulting stress, explaining:

It's just something that I love to do, but it's really important for me to have a clear understanding of what the expectations are so that I can budget my time and allocate my time. And so, when things are coming up that I didn't know about it does create extra stress for me, because then I'm trying to readjust and fit things in and I take my work seriously. I don't like to do anything that feels sort of half-way; I want it to be my best work. And so, you know when I can't sort of schedule things out and budget my time in advance. It just creates that that stress that extra stressor for me.

Participant 25 offered the following perception of conflict from her lens connected to process in the area of a lack of clarity of expectations that she experienced as a subject matter expert, explaining:

I think the lack of clarity would be sometimes institutions have in mind initially what they want you to do and then like in the case of the lab manual then they start getting other ideas. "Well that worked out. Well, let's do this now and let's see..." so they start making assumptions that you're just going to be available at their disposal to pretty much handle anything and the expanded role of the original subject matter expert kind of gets blown out of proportions.

As a result of this experience, Participant 25 shared it made her feel, "... like you're being taken advantage of because they know that you're easygoing and you'll pretty much do anything if it's going to help the students and they kind of take advantage of that sometimes."

In another example, Participant 7 was passionate about her subject matter expert experience when faced with a lack of clarity of process and roles that led to an uncomfortable aftermath of conflict. The conflict surfaced in an instance when she agreed to do some development work as a favor, to take over a development project for another subject matter expert. She was given guidelines for the process to develop an online course, but said the institution neglected to tell her that once she had done completed the work, she would need to present that information to the full-time ground faculty to get their permission to move forward. This was a key component of the process of which she was unaware, and which led to an uncomfortable conflict. She shared that, "they kind of ripped me apart." After explaining to the group that she was not aware of this additional requirement to move forward with the content, she had a heated exchange with the person who had given her the initial instructions. In a subsequent meeting with the person who assigned her the project, she voiced her frustration, asserting:

Okay, this is a contract and I can quit at any time, okay; so, step back. Second of all if I am unclear on a process that is not my fault or my responsibility that is yours. You should have explained to me. This was the expectation. You said here's a course. Here's the objectives. Don't use a book, design it however you want. So, I did. That was the only direction I was given. If that's not what was expected, I should have been told that. Now, I have absolutely no problems going

in and reworking this course and meeting these objectives and sending it back up to the committee for you to look at but don't beat me up over something I was unaware of; so, again, poor process. Explaining the process would have circumvented all of that.

Some subject matter experts craved the rigidity of process and articulated a need for clarity of roles and responsibilities, while other subject matter experts did not experience as much resulting conflict in this area. For example, Participant 24 shared an example regarding giving an institution everything required and feeling like nobody looked at anything. From the perspective of a subject matter expert building a class and whether there was a perception of what might, by some, be considered disengagement, she shared that this did not create any level of conflict for her as the subject matter expert author, authoring the course content. She stated: “No, I actually felt like it gave me a lot of autonomy and I enjoyed it.”

While all participants described conflict they experienced stemming from a variety of aspects of the online course development process, not all study participants felt that every institution's design process lacked clarity *per se*. After explaining one conflict she experienced with an instructional designer on a particular development project, when asked what the institution's structure was for course development in terms of roles and responsibilities and how those roles and responsibilities were explained at the outset, Participant 4 explained that:

You have your academic side and then have a course design team and that course design team basically is a business partner with the academic team. And so, you have a manager that's over a particular school or portfolio. Then, you have your

project manager, who basically makes sure the team's meeting deliverables deadlines; that all constituents are happy in the process. Then, you have an instructional designer who's supposed to partner with the subject matter expert. So, the subject matter expert really brings the content to the design experience, you know, the industry related experience. They design the assessment. They bring the Resources Division and then the instructional designer more so makes sure that you know, the criteria is being met.... And then, you have the instructional architect who basically looks at things from a broader perspective the instructional architect makes sure that all that the course that's being designed falls in alignment with all the other course offerings and the program that it makes external accreditation alignment that it meets internal initiative alignments and that you know, the competencies and the assessment flow. So, that's been a major organizational structure for how [that institution] does design.

It should be noted that Participant 4 held a full-time position at that institution and, as such, was familiar with the institution's online course development process from a subject matter expert and administrative vantage point. Several other study participants also held positions that put them on the organizational or institutional side of the development process. In a later role, Participant 21, who worked in the capacity of reviewer, shared perspective about lack of clarity, and explained:

As I later did review work, I saw areas, I saw corners that were cut, could recognize that they were being cut because when I develop classes, I knew I could have cut a corner by doing this or that and I chose not to because I wanted to put forth the best product but you know. I would see things like test bank questions or

content that was copied directly from the textbook and put in as a presentation script and those kinds of things where it was clear that the subject matter expert for whatever reason and whatever their motives was trying to get it done as quickly as possible as opposed to producing the best result possible, and I think that some of these conflicts with regard to communication or process or just general issues of how much time it takes to do something right. I think it causes that or at least it doesn't help in that with some subject matter experts.

Lack of clarity in the process did not always mean a lack of structure. For example, at an institution where the process had many moving parts intended for clarity, Participant 28 perceived a lack of role clarity, because of the complexity of the process structure. Participant 28 stated:

No, so, I felt a lot of times like there was a lack of role clarity, if you will, at the outset. It seemed like maybe everyone's scrambling for a position. And that's going to depend on how many people are involved in the process and the actions that test the boundaries and some instances there were too many team members, for an example at [one university] where the number of team members was extensive. It was very difficult to remember who was tasked with what, who was communicating with whom, when everything was due, what the chain of command was. It be got it got to be very circular in many instances and felt like the process was so over-engineered and there were so many people involved in so many meetings that it just resulted in confusion. And, there was again more time spent on the process than the product, which for a subject matter expert who's there to do a specific job and deliver specific products can be very frustrating.

Couple that with very structured forms and the end result was very much trying to fit a round circle into a square hole.

Poorly Defined Process

Most of the study participants expressed encountering at least one instance of the online course development process that was poorly defined. Processes lacking structure and definitive steps were perceived to lack a consistency that many subject matter experts felt should be an integral part of the online course development process. On the other end of the spectrum, some subject matter experts found institutional processes to be far too rigid, limiting creativity, innovation, and academic freedom to create the content they believed, based on their professional subject matter expertise, was required for requisite student learning and acquisition of employable skills. Based on the experiences shared, there was a broad diversity of processes from institution to institution and sometimes even within an institution. Participant 1 commented:

I think with structure it's up to the individual entity the organization doing it because you know some have different, you know, five-week term, eight-week term, you know, 12-week term whatever may be and they have each have their own ways of designating what their courses should look like to have that consistency. So, you know, I mentioned the different wickets, you know, like if you have an institution that says we need a discussion in every module or unit or week, whatever you want to call it. And we also, need a test and okay, got it, understood, then that has that aspect to it. I think those organizations that have projectized their course development efforts and have a good scoping document which details the expectations going into it have better success and have a better

relationship with their developers and subject matter experts then others who have not and a kind of doing it piecemeal.

Participant 28 stated:

A lot of these universities are very form driven and they're all different and they all just seem to want to check those boxes and this distraction with the process.

There are so many dimensions of feedback coming at you from so many different angles and vantage points. For example, [at one institution] there was media, there were instructional designers, department chairs, librarian project managers; it just, it felt like you never knew where everything was coming from or where it was coming from next. A lot of the ask ended up being inconsistent or some of them very late in the game and that lack of alignment and timing in terms of the roles and parameters and asks that were being made put a lot of pressure on me and made me feel a lot of conflict and I also felt very much like an island at times, sort of “one versus the machine”. I felt like I was pulled in multiple directions and several of those directions intersected in a way that it didn't align, which for me as a subject matter expert can be concerning at the end. I felt the quality of my build was compromised because the rigidity of the process was such that it was just very frustrating at the end of the day.

Participant 11 shared an experience regarding the online course development process that translated to a perception of an internal institutional, process-based conflict for him, explaining:

Okay, so, one of the projects that I've worked on in the past has been developing courses at this institution. Every time that like a new course is being developed,

they change the way that they do the process. So, because of the change that they try to implement in the process, every single time that you go through development it makes it really difficult as a subject matter expert to kind of follow along and not focus purely on the process and it's getting a little bit too much time on process versus the actual content of the course. So, because of that process you are constantly going back multiple levels at a time. What's updated or changed then with just the ID is not what the program manager or what the dean of students expects and so, because of that, there's that that slowdown in terms of the content being developed. ...There's the lack of consistency when it comes to the content being that we're focused so much on like pleasing or having the content available based on what the dean of students or the program manager wants. So, that's something that I've never been a fan of, and I think it's important to have a streamlined process and consistency across the board and not have so many like checks and balances along the way that slow down the content building process.

Based on her subject matter expert experience, Participant 21 commented about whether she thought having a rigid deliverable format with interim deliverables was something that would work well in every situation. She replied:

Not in every situation. I think that there's times that you can follow it and then there's times that it depends on the course. It depends how you're mapping out that course and what needs to be done. And you know, they might be saying, "Oh, we want this deliverable", but you're like, "You know what, I can knock out all the discussion boards real quick in getting that thought process going." So, I think it just depends on that subject matter expert's brain processing for that particular

course because I don't look at every course cookie cutter. So, I kind of, okay, what's, how's this course going to flow and what assignments might be built on each other or what are independent?

Participant 24 expressed:

I feel like the subject matter expert should have been more involved in the process there and I don't know what to call the process because I wasn't involved but even if they are, we're not part of the decision to reorganize the program. I think the next steps in the process should involve the subject matter experts and say, "Okay, we're contemplating combining your class with this other class. And we're tossing around these ideas with this work." Or just being involved in that level and providing my input. If you're going to be a subject matter expert, let them be a subject matter expert.

Participant 22 shared:

When you develop, because I have worked for a university that actually, it was just like a community college that was just starting online. So, meeting the expectations of what they're looking for...their, you know, development and everything being, you know, they're the first at the beginning of the course development and trying to understand, you know, what they want and what they're looking for. I wouldn't say that's really, you know, there's not much conflict there but more of like uncertainty type thing...I would say more process than communication. Like I said with like those other instructors, if the person doesn't have experience taking classes online or working, you know with an

online classroom their expectations of what the student learning should be and what should be developed is sometimes unreasonable.

Participant 21 explained:

Sometimes it's more difficult to get resources than you think. Like I think when you're looking at it as a subject matter expert, another aspect that you're looking at when you're deciding what book is there is what resources are there, even though you might not use them the way a ground professor would it's still good to have them. So, I know that you know, I'm looking at books that have them and but if the best book doesn't have any resources, which has happened to me before, you just end up making your own.

Participant 14 experienced conflict from a process standpoint at multiple institutions. She explained:

One other thing that has come up in probably all six organizations is that there is, so, one of the things that's become increasingly important is file-sharing and version control. And many organizations are struggling with that, and that creates conflict related to the subject matter expert role because there are different expectations about where final drafts go, or how drafts are shared, and things like that can produce a lot of conflict.

Participant 23 remarked:

My framework, my frame, would be more from the overall program was network administration which of course includes security but it's primarily network administration and I was stressing the network "side of the house". He was stressing the security side of the house because yeah, I'm sure based upon the

feedback that they receive maybe that was something that they were really trying to push for and I think I basically said well then, it's not network administration you're talking about cyber security. So, you have to change the entire goals of the program. So, my frame was, "I get that this is what you want. But that's not what you're telling us to do. You have to change one or the other. You have to change what you want, or you're changing what you want us to do." So, my conflict wasn't definitely with the individual or you know, the entire process or what was expected of me vastly different to what I experienced with [another college]. It was more so of, "You're saying one thing but we're trying to do something else and we've got to make sure the left hand is talking to the right hand."

In her experience with one institution, Participant 4 explained how the development process was dramatically different from her other experience. When asked to compare her first development experience to another institution and whether she had again experienced conflict, she shared that she did not experience conflict, explaining:

No, but how they do it is very different. And so, when you're a subject matter expert there, I mean they have huge teams that design, so, you literally are only bringing the "con", like the industry content to the experience. So, you're explaining industry-standard, you're creating assignments that are based on real-world. You're basically just giving them your ideas and then they do the rest.

Change in Scope of Work

While most of the conflict situations experienced by the participants in this study were, at the very least, a source of frustration, one of the sub-themes that emerged from their discussion of a misalignment between their initial and final expectations was that of

a change in the scope of work assigned. At least 17 of the study participants described instances where they had been assigned work only to find at some later point in the project, or even after the project had ended, the deliverables, format, deadlines, or another key aspect of the development contract had unilaterally changed. This change in the scope of work and misalignment of the initial and ultimate expectations was a clear source of conflict for many of the participants.

Instances where the study participants described perceiving conflict as a result of that change in the scope of work assigned included changes in written content deliverables, changes affecting the entire course related to course, program, or institution level objectives, changes in content related to a change in course duration, changes in deliverable format, and an expectation for what would be considered an uncompensated, open-ended, perpetual contract. Of the experiences shared that gave rise to this sub-theme, many participants described these changes as occurring in midstream, with two participants specifically referring to the change in scope they experienced as causing a “domino effect” and several more alluding to the same effect. More than one participant left a project when its scope changed to include additional work.

According to many of the study participants, institutions often changed the scope of work once a course development project was underway. Participant 8 explained her feelings regarding conflict that arose during subject matter expert work where she encountered a change in scope midstream. She recounted:

We have a course that was put together. It was a medical billing course and it was very outdated and um, I was teaching it and they wanted me to go through and um, you know, I set everything up correct and it wasn't until like the middle of the

class that the chair sent me an e-mail and said, you know, we just realized that half these students haven't taken coding before, so, they have no idea what they're doing. So, we have to go back and totally redo the class and as a subject matter ex..., as a subject matter expert, it just kind of bothered me that that should have been caught before, and so we tried to make the class something more user-friendly, for those who hadn't taken those classes before. So, that, that was kind of frustrating.

Participant 7 recalled more than one instance when a change of scope occurred during her contracts as a subject matter expert. She described another experience as almost a matter of course, stating:

And it's really minor but this is kind of one of those things that kind of happen. Sometimes when you're part of a project in the very beginning and there's continual changes. "So, this is the format we want. This is the direction we want to head. Here's our guidelines in terms of how we want you to build the content" whether it's you know, discussion, questions, assignments, whatever, again, this was another [platform] experience, but with a larger university. And so, what happened in that, which was, it's kind of low-lying fruit like you said, like kind of the third conflict, but it's more along the lines of them changing midstream what they want all the time so, "Oh we don't like the way this looks, or we want this instead or we want these things in this order." So, you go through and you built five courses and then they change their mind on how they want things done. And so, not only do you have to now change up what you're doing for the current course you're working on, but you got to go back and rework the ones you've

already done. So, you know, that was a little frustrating but then again, that's normal right? Nobody really knows what they want and what they're getting into until they're into it. Well, you would think but if they accepted five courses from you and didn't tell you to change it, and then decided they were changing it and asked you to go back.

Participant 7 replied:

If you have a poor process, you're gonna get your guarantee that you're going to have conflict in the in the in the entire process as a whole if it's not well designed, if it's not thought out very well, if there's not considerations of all stakeholders involved when the process is designed. There's going to be conflict built in too; it's just the nature of the how that stuff works. For situations where I've had very clear guidelines, very clear instructions and then kind of been let loose to go do whatever those have been easier of course to do because you know what your guideposts are. It's kind of like, you know plan it's like bowling, you know that you need to be between the, you know between the bumpers and so, you know where that goes in other instances.

A change of scope can also come when, as Participant 25 experienced, assignments needed to be rewritten because a class was changing from a 10-week class to a 6-week class after the class was already underway, with enrolled students. She explained:

Well, if you have let's say an assignment that is of a certain length that's already written. So, as a content expert in writing this assignment for a 10-week course and now all of a sudden that assignment has to be merged into a six-week course,

modification has to be made very quickly because it would be impossible. You can't plan on assignment that's going to span 10 weeks and now all the sudden they only have six weeks to do it, so, that the assignment itself would have to be modified. So, going back in and changing the deliverable.

Participant 28 also experienced a change of scope in the middle of the development process. In fact, several different changes in the scope of work assigned throughout one project were recounted. She elaborated:

I've also had instances where institutions have changed the process in the middle of development. One particular institution changed several things throughout the process to the point where it did almost end my contract. They changed the requirements, they changed the way they accepted content, they changed providers, and in terms of who they were going to use and how they were going to deliver their classes. They went from [one LMS] to [another] in the middle. They changed resources so that I had a situation where I had pulled tons of the graphics, and I finished my contract, and delivered all my material, and then they said I wasn't finished because the resource they used for the images was no longer going to be used and I needed a repull all of those images and so my contract wasn't finished. I thought that was unbelievable. I did the best I could to work with them, but I was aghast at that situation.

Some participants said there was no such a thing as a small change because changes to one part of a course could affect many other parts and could not be made in a vacuum. Most changes, no matter how seemingly insignificant to the participants, if related to content, could have what two participants called the “domino effect”;

especially changes made to course objectives. Participant 23's most impactful conflict experienced as a subject matter expert revolved around a major change in the scope of work assigned, which ultimately led him to leave his teaching and subject matter expert position. Participant 23 explained:

They were sending emails to the instructors with general updates on the program and it was going through some changes. So, they were rewriting the program and packaging it in a slightly different way and from a very high level. So, I read through the changes and they changed the course name and the course description and about half of the overall learning objectives for the course. And so, the learning objectives that were different we're so incredibly different they no longer matched the course. I tried very hard to reach out to them and explain from my perspective how important it was that my course actually match what they gave me, and then I also tried to present the students' perspective if a student selects a course and has a perception of what's going to be covered and the course doesn't cover that information. It was aggravating because I would have been understanding of the need to change the direction of the class. And it's not just about being a subject matter expert and being that expert on the content. It's also somebody that understands how important it is that curriculum alignment is accurate and that you're creating content, not just understanding the content of what you're creating but understanding why you're creating it and how it's supposed to all fit together in the puzzle. And to have somebody tell you, "sorry", and have to tell you that what you're saying isn't important and doesn't matter. It's insulting.

Participant 25 shared her perception of a conflict situation that created a “domino effect” for even more unexpected work:

That conflict in my opinion can't be just isolated to one thing because everything is interconnected when you're looking at online. So, if you make one major change, it's a domino effect to other things. So, it's going to be a domino effect on the content that's being delivered, how it's being delivered, what format it's being delivered in; it's not just isolated to one thing. It's kind of like working in an office building; if one person has a problem then it can affect everyone else around them. So, it's conflict. One small conflict is not in my opinion isolated to one specific thing. So, a content expert or subject matter expert, you know, somebody's going to look at the subject matter. That subject matter has to be modified to fit into all the parameters of the new platform which you're faced with.

Participant 27 also described a change in scope that resulted in a “domino effect.” It occurred while getting feedback from an instructional designer in the online course development process, that he described feeling like the proposed edits changed the nature of his content and intended direction. He said:

I do remember there was you know, at least one week where the instructional designer would come back and have different thoughts on it. Wasn't so much what I did it was more the content, like the objectives; that they wanted to change a little bit like, you know, now that we're thinking about it because I sent them the objectives before I started all of the stuff for the week. So, they had time to review that to make sure that the weekly objectives aligned with the overall course

objectives and so forth. So, I built everything and then as I sent my feedback they said, “You know now that we think about it, we think that we may want to change this outcome to say this, and let's take out this outcome, and let's add this.” And I'm thinking, you know, I just built an entire week based on the outcomes that you guys approved. And now, you want to change it. That created a lot of conflict for me simply because you know by changing the weekly objectives back it has a domino effect to change, you know, everything else I've done because I also, align my activities I'm doing each week; align them to the weekly objectives. But yet I also, align them to the overall course objectives to make sure that everything aligns and that everything we're doing is relevant, you know, and it's mapped specifically and it's, I do that very painstakingly when I map things, and so, to come back to me and say, “let's you know change them, lets you take out this objective and put this one in” that you know, taking changing A will affect B, C, D.

Many study participants also experienced a change in their expected scope of work as it related to the course content they were asked to deliver. When Participant 23 was questioned about whether his experience of being asked to do mapping beyond the course learning outcomes, to program and institutional learning outcomes, was the pivot point for the conflict he experienced, he replied:

Yeah, because based upon you know, my understanding of the description, how it was communicated in the job description. Let me clarify, not the catalog description, the job description and the interviews that I had had it was, “Hey, this is this is the course we're asking you to develop. This is all you need to focus on”

and then it slowly, as most projects do, more kept getting added to the mix. But definitely, that pivot point would be well, how does this fit into the bigger picture of the program? How does this fit into the bigger picture of what the college is striving to achieve, and it was basically, “Hey, you didn't hire me to do that type scenario.”

His initial response was to reach out and explain that he did not think that was his responsibility or what he was hired to do. He said that, when they tried to assign him additional responsibilities beyond what he thought he was contracted to do for a certain amount of compensation:

That did add to the to the conflict because both parties, myself and the college went into it with an understanding of what was expected and how I would be compensated, and once those things changed without changing the compensation associated with it that that definitely got to more conflict....Eventually I did you eventually I did dig my heels in and say I've delivered the course as you described it to me as was required by the agreement and everything else that falls outside of that scope. I'm not going to do.

In the case of Participant 25's conflict, she chose to push through the conflict and perform the additional work, despite the resulting stress. She further explained:

Oh, it's stressful. It was challenging but you know teaching in general is stressful and challenging you say, so, you get faced with challenges every day. So, you just work it out. I made the modifications to the content to fit into a six-week course, a 10-week course, and they also had a 12-week course. I did it for all three of them. And yeah, I guess sometimes I think there's maybe an occasion or two where they

hire you to do a certain thing and then all of a sudden that one thing they want you to do turns into 10 other things.

Another study participant also experienced a change in scope of the assigned work; in her case relating to how the course would be delivered. Participant 3 described the following situation that occurred when developing and building a music theory class:

What wound up happening with the continued conflicts with the ITT department is that we actually had to completely change the way that we published that course, that we handled that course, that we stored that course. It got to the point where ITT threw up their hands and they said, “You know, we can't help you and we're not putting this on the University website.” So, what had to happen is that the course had to get developed outside of the university website and it had to be listed as a professional development opportunity for educators and as mandatory training for paraprofessional educators. The original intention of the build is that it was going to go into a course shell that was inside the university's network architecture...it was exciting. It was this idea that we could take these really easy strategies and benefit students in so many ways and instead I actually had to publish it myself on an outside website.

In the experiences shared by the study participants, several subject matter experts were confronted with an unexpected change in the scope of their subject matter expert duties after their work had concluded. Participant 1 described the following situation from his perspective:

Now when I developed that cyber course is an example. I was teaching it that very first round along with two other instructors who had a separate section so they

could kind of see a spread of the different student population and instructors. And so, with that even in the first week, I was getting questions from the two other instructors who the chair had said, “Oh [Participant 1's] the one who developed it, let's ask him your questions” and it was related to that as well. “How do I grade this? What am I looking for in the answers that I know what would be the right answer?” So, I kind of work to develop almost a solution set for what the student would be providing so that they could then compare that and grade against it and that to me was somewhat of a conflict because that was outside of the scope of the development work and it became now of, “Okay, I'm doing this to help these other instructors out merely because their knowledge base is kind of insufficient for them do it on their own.” So, that that was a separate conflict outside of the development, but it was a it was a secondary effect of it.

Participant 25, who, when asked if she experienced a change in scope during any of her work in the role of a subject matter expert, recounted a scenario regarding a change in scope she perceived to lead to what could be seen as a perpetual contract in the institution's eyes. She replied:

Well, like I wrote them a lab manual for a particular college, and they did pay for this content writing. It was a different contract that we had to write this manual for them. And, I did, and that took considerable time, lots of revisions, and you know that was part of the job that I was supposed to do. Well, the year after that then I guess they assumed that it would be perpetual care on the on the manual. So, the assumption, well on their part, was well, “You did a good job on the first manual, so, every year, let's come up with an edition, a new one or revisions, and

revisions, and revisions...” Well, 10 years later, “You still want me to revise the original manual that you only paid for that one semester to write?”

Participant 28 commented:

It’s actually still in the process of being worked out. Because I was, I received a W-2 for half the money and never received the money. So, it's turning out to be a little more complicated and a little bit more than just the subject matter conflict experience. But basically, the bottom line was that my disappointment was in the process that if this particular department director had such narrow need for that program and such narrow want for that program that either someone else such as their self should have developed it or those instructions and parameters should have been given up front, not halfway through the process where all the work had to be redone. You know and then the subject matter expert was left to where the problem as their own deficiency when it wasn't their deficiency. It was a deficient process.

Participant 26 perceived conflict from her lens as a subject matter expert writing an online course, in several cases, stemming from a change in the scope regarding initial expectations. The change in scope in her case was related to the format of the deliverables she produced and submitted. She recalled two specific examples, stating:

Let's say we needed to place the presentation in a PowerPoint and you provided a lot of bullets for each slide and then you got to the end of all of your development work and they were in the process of being reviewed and then you were told that you needed to go back and only include about six or seven bullets per slide and that can be where an expectation was. Not really clear but also, changed, you

know, if you if you don't tell someone in the onset of what you need, that's to me, that's a changed expectation or let's say you were told that you only needed five graphics for your entire presentation. And then, you were told, "Oh, we're going to need at least 10." So, those are changed expectations that I have experienced at the end of a development after I had already created let's say five presentations for my course development.

When asked how that conflict made her feel, she replied:

It's a frustrating event when you think you're done, but you're not. So, you go back, and you do it again based on changed expectations. That's always frustrating when you when you think you're doing something correctly and, in the end, you need to go back and change your work.

Based on participant responses, any level of change in the scope of online course development had some level of impact on the subject matter expert, and in some instances, the student experience if not resolved. Larger implications were identified in participant responses, as well, such as changes potentially affecting institutional accreditation. Several subject matter experts spoke of conflicts arising in their subject matter expert work experience, because of a need for alignment with accreditation requirements.

Participant 4 was faced with the challenge of a change in the scope of development work during one of her subject matter expert projects and expressed serious concerns regarding the need for her content to align with what she knew would be examined by the institution's accrediting body. She described the following experience

regarding a change in work, during her role as a subject matter expert redesigning a class specifically for compliance reasons:

We had an external accreditation that we were trying to achieve and that was why this class was being redesigned and we had to align all the course content. So, any assignment that was being designed, we had to align to this accrediting body's competencies. So, I had designed an assignment. I had been very purposeful in aligning the competencies to the assignment and I even told [the ID], "I'm a little bit different than any other subject matter expert that you have worked with because I'm actually the lead over this program and I'm the lead person over this accreditation. So, I know how this is supposed to go. We have to do it this way." She changed the work told me that this was not the way it was going to be. She redesigned the assignment and we got to our midpoint review where we had the dean, the associate dean, the chair, you know our portfolio team, the instructional architect, and we got called out because the assignment was not aligned the way that it was supposed to be to the competencies and that was a very, it was very hard for me because I very much wanted to disclose at that meeting I had it that way and she made me change it. But I was like that's not professional, so, I just said, "That's not a problem. I can fix that quickly." And, I went back and reverted the assignment to how I had it and I went to the instructional architect and told her what had actually happened. And so, then the instructional architect came in and says well you can't question her (as in me) with the competency alignments to the assignment.

Participant 4 explained:

It's actually our design team who was in charge of designing the content there's two different there's actually three different trainings. So, there's a quick self-paced training where they can go in; they can kind of learn what our design process is to the organizational chart then there's a training to learn the software system called Atlas. So, that's the actual software system the where we store everything. It's the software system that the editors pull the content from. It's the software system where it pools from to like build out the Blackboard shell. So, there's training on that and then there's an actual two week-long intensive training and so they meet one-on-one with the instructional designer that teaches new subject matter experts. They do mock-ups of course design process. They learn about competency alignment. They learn about rubric design. They learn about our new initiatives around writing standards, critical thought, and inquiry. They learn about all the resources, how to use the library, etc.... To be quite honest I think that it is if you have a good faculty chair that is involved in the process, no, and I think that the...and don't take this as being conceited, but I think that I'm a good faculty chair when it comes to working with the course design process because of my experiences as a subject matter expert. And so, if you have a faculty chair that is in there, you know coming to meetings, routinely asking questions, giving their thoughts and visions based upon what they know has to be done to meet standards I think that then, no, that the process can be really good.

Participant 7 refused to perform additional work when the expectations changed from what she was told initially. In her experience, she felt she had the leverage to do so. In participant responses, not all subject matter experts felt they had that ability to refuse,

based, in part, on fear the consequences refusal could have on future work opportunities.

Participant 7 described the following situation:

It is content I didn't agree with. Matter of fact, the last they wanted some additional changes and I told them that I was not going to engage on those changes, and they could work directly with the team lead who also had industry experience to finish that up. Technically, that should have burned a project. Honestly, that should have burned a bridge to where they should have been like I was too difficult to deal with and they shouldn't have wanted to actually spend any more time with me, but they were, they really wanted me to work on the other content.

Subject Matter Expert Integrity and Commitment

In study participants' responses, there was consensus of personal ownership in the work done as subject matter experts associated with their self-standards; before, during, and after content was delivered. Many of the study participants expressed they experienced some level of conflict in the online course development process as a result of circumstances that led them to perform more work than they had initially anticipated. Whether that anticipation was based on mutual expectations or calculated based on their personal experience as a gauge, it was their integrity and commitment to doing their best work that were driving forces.

Participants had their own approaches to the course process in addition to the deliverable requirements. In discussing an example of conflict, Participant 19 was asked whether he ever felt any level of conflict when thinking ahead, past the development process, to what would be handed to the instructor. In response, Participant 19 said:

Well, yeah, well my transition from you know, subject matter expert/consultant to the full-time role as dean. I ended up getting full ownership of it being you know kind of this hybridized program and in truth it was you know, I worked as diligently and as closely as I could with faculty to help them understand that you know that a) just do the best you possibly can with this course at this time. And as we go your suggestions naturally are going to be you know, validated and implemented relative to trying to you know, iron out some of those the coherence or idiosyncrasies that are occurring. So, I was lucky enough to be able to forge a relationship with the newly hired: those subject matter experts that were brought in shortly thereafter. I meant to say early on in the development process. But it's also, basically became a hands-on kind of, you know, 24/7 kind of vigilance of support of monitoring, of assessing, providing the right amount of data to demonstrate that we have a coherence problem, and that we're doing all that we possibly can and you know, it's the kind of thing was I understood why they wanted to do it and businesses just being what they are. So, to try to answer that question is basically I had to stay close to the knitting, work closely with faculty, monitor the success granularly for each but each particular course right down to you know of the smallest of variables relative to learning data, and just basically do what we can to make to argue for better and more, you know for improvements or redevelopments etcetera. If you hadn't.

Participant 15 also explained her mindset when approaching a development project, stating:

My regular day job is very encompassing, especially at certain times throughout the school year. And so, I take on work related to universities because it's just something that I love to do, but it's really important for me to have a clear understanding of what the expectations are so, that I can budget my time and allocate my time. And so, when things are coming up that I didn't know about it does create extra stress for me because then I'm trying to readjust and fit things in and I take my work seriously, I don't like to do anything that feels sort of half way. I want it to be my best work. And so, you know when I can't sort of schedule things out and budget my time in advance. It just creates that that stress that extra stressor for me.

Participant 19 highlighted his perception of the importance of communication in the development process and described the additional efforts he felt were necessary to learn more about the learning management system an institution was using when he sensed there would be learning management system related development and delivery issues due to a lack of resources. He explained:

I think there was just an absence of appropriate communication which created problems. So, if you could house that under the term “conflict”, I think that's probably the only way I can really describe it. It was just some disconnected and disjointed communication in spite of people's best efforts. They just didn't have the communication infrastructure in place prior to looking to, you know, embark on a major enterprise such as you know, development delivery of any online program or whatnot. I was relatively new to the burgeoning world of LMS or learning management systems and what may or may not work best. So, you know,

I am I took it upon myself to learn about, you know, the development or the recent of the then in progress development or what had already been developed in terms of these learning management systems out there, but I realized that what they were doing was using, you know, let's just say probably a low, low cost, low ball, low quality LMS. I could start seeing where it would be developmental issues and delivery issues because of the lack of resources that this particular LMS provided based upon the fact that they didn't want to spend any more money than they had to, so, once I learned more and more as I sort of like I said I immersed myself in this because I was charged with development and delivery. I realized that we're going to have some handicap some challenges with this particular LMS.

When describing his perception as a subject matter expert at an institution where he taught, not having the leverage to advocate for what he believed was important based on his subject matter expertise, Participant 19 described the conflict as follows:

Well, I think you know the biggest issue, you know in in higher education most of the folks not most but a lot of the folks I know I work with, you are a part-time adjunct instructor. So, you your ability to argue for what you believe in is limited by you know, how much you think it's worth? Do you really still want to work at that institution. So, I walked away from a job I made \$36,000 a year doing, you know, I didn't do a lot but I said, you know, "I can't. I'm not compromising my values for that."

Participant 3 shared the lengths she went to, to advocate for what she thought was needed as a subject matter expert, and the importance of not having to raise certain issues as a subject matter expert. She stated:

In a lot of different situations there were times where I had to say things that in my position I shouldn't have had to say. All I should have had to do was create the content in this case and communicate with the IDs and communicate with the music theory instructors. I should never have in any position I have there except maybe the one where I was managing staff, you know, student retention arguments are not something that I should have to make to get an email back from people.

Participant 15 also shared perspective regarding her commitment to her students and the student experience in relaying an example regarding the need to add content to a running course. She explained:

The state was providing information as they were creating this whole assessment and then we were having to turn around and put it right into the course. So, we were literally building as information was becoming available... And, when I'm instructing, I take my work and my commitment very seriously and I find that most of the students that are in an online format, whether it be at the graduate level or the undergraduate level wherever they are in the process, I think they often choose online because they're also, working and so I felt like I knew that their time was also, very precious to them and important to them and I wanted to make sure that whatever I was providing or expecting of them was respectful of their time and the things that they were trying to balance as students and I was one

of those students as well when I went through the doctoral program. I went through a blended program and was working full-time and balancing and so that's something that feels very real to me and I feel very responsible to make sure that I'm you know, providing something to my students that they can actually you know do and try to limit their stress as much as possible when you know that balance already creates stress, but I don't want more stress created because there are so many unknowns built into the course.

Regarding the future employability of those students as a result of a diminished educational experience, Participant 7 expressed the importance of commitment to quality as a subject matter expert. She shared insight, stating:

Well, I mean, there's two ways you can look at it. I got paid. I did the work. I got paid. I'm moving on. So, it's not my problem. But the flip side of that is I feel like it is my problem because if any of these people ever come to this country and they come in and they work in my industry, they're not going to be as prepared as they need to be and I had a part in that. So, I take some ownership in that and but not everybody feels that.

The issue of integrity was also raised by Participant 6 from the vantage point of a subject matter expert told to put certain content in his course build despite feeling it was not appropriate. He recounted an exchange that occurred between him and an instructor who later taught the course, stating:

Part of the deal was I was going to be the instructor. So, you know, I mean, it wasn't like I was concerned about somebody else happening to manage that. Now I will tell you I have developed classes where you know, the I've been told you

will put this content and then I've talked to the instructor after they're teaching the class and they said, "Well, I really don't like this section." I said, "I think it's part of what the university expects" without, you know, telling them directly. Yeah, I know that, and I put it in there and I was told to so there is a little bit of an integrity issue there, but again, I think it's not uncommon in higher education and part of the deal.

Some subject matter experts also described circumstances where they performed extra work they felt was necessary, although not required. Participant 22 shared an experience in which she took the initiative to ensure the best student experience. She recalled:

I took the initiative to do that on my own because when I was, you know starting out, I'm like this is you know, some of this information is antiquated here. So, then that's what I went on and I look first look to see if there was an updated edition of that book and there wasn't. So, that's when I looked for you know something else and you know, and that's what I explained to them. I'm like, "You know, we can use it but they're not going to get the best information out of it because some of this stuff is so old." And they, you know, that was agreed upon and you know, they changed the book.

Many participants completed their development work despite feeling they were faced with some level of conflict. Participant 28 also expressed her commitment to stick with a project, despite her dissatisfaction with changes that were made to her content. She said:

I'm not one to walk away from a project, that's not the type of person that I am. I would definitely try to follow through. Although I certainly wouldn't be as proud or as comfortable with what I was turning in as the final product than I would have been had I been allowed to act as the subject matter expert I expected to be able to act as, you know, when I was hired. And, I've had situations where you know if they're, I've written things and then they just get changed and I mean, I still have to go forward with the process. I need the job. You know I'm there. It's a job but I you know that I definitely did not feel as effective or as important as I did when I was hired.

Many study participants performed extra work without additional compensation. When the researcher asked Participant 25 whether she felt she had ample time as the subject matter expert making changes in classes that were currently running, she replied:

No, but you do it you get it done. So, I did it got it done. And I think probably the worst part about it is I did it. I got it done on top of my normal teaching assignments and I got no extra pay for it.

When asked how that made her feel, Participant 25 said: "Of course overworked and maybe a little bit under appreciated. But again, that's teaching, oftentimes teachers go past what their normal duties are, and you just do it."

When discussing his decision to decline additional work beyond the scope of the initial assignment, Participant 27 explained:

If I was ever questioned by somebody, you know who was actually looking over my courses that I've developed, you know, and they say, "Okay, you know, I noticed in week two of this course, you know that your objectives don't align with

your material that week. How did this happen?" I have to answer for that. So, I want to make sure that everything I do I can answer to and I have an explanation and a rationale for why it is the way it is. And so, that's why when they wanted to make these changes, I said, I said, "No."

Participant 7 also relayed an experience she had as a subject matter expert where she chose to walk away from subject matter expert work as a matter of personal integrity. She explained:

I told the individual who hired me who was the overarching project manager for the entire project who did all of her negotiations I said, "Listen." I said, "They want subject matter experts to write the work, but they want to direct what's happening and they're not respecting the industry experience. It's coming to the table. And as long as they continue to do that, they're going to prove they're going to provide substandard content for these students. They're not going to get what they need to be successful in the industry and I don't want to attach my name to anything else like that moving forward" and she's like, "I respect your opinion and I respect what you're doing and you know, if you change your mind at any time, let me know."

She further elaborated about the potentially diminished student experience in that context:

So, [students] don't know that what they're getting is less than what they deserve from an actual application standpoint. So, they wouldn't see anything different because they don't know that this is there. They don't know that there could have

been so much more. Do you know what I'm saying, that I know that from my perspective as a subject matter expert they're being shortchanged?

Not all subject matter experts completed the projects during which they perceived conflict. Some made the decision to leave as a matter of personal and/or professional integrity. Participant 3 felt so strongly about what occurred during the development process at one institution, she made the difficult decision to leave the university, citing the conflict she experienced as a result of one of her projects as a main consideration. She shared:

You know, it's actually one of the biggest reasons that I left that university. I can take that, and other experiences, led me to believe that that university was about the money and not about the students, and I felt that that the University had strayed from its mission and its mission statement, and was by not doing simple things to improve student learning. I was watching these students be devastated and I couldn't handle being in a place anymore that wasn't willing to actively make changes to benefit the students as much as they were actively willing to raise the student's tuition. So, yeah, I left; I couldn't handle it.

Theme 2 – Work Dynamic Challenges

Work dynamic was another sub-theme that grew out of the coding process. Conflict resulting from a poor or affected work dynamic can set the tone for an entire project, leading to more conflict over the course of a multi-week or multi-month development. This consisted of the largest number of sub-themes: professional respect and confidence, lack of team member field expertise, communication and feedback, support from administration, delivery time frames, on-ground versus online, personalities

and self-awareness, and boundaries. Some key words noted in this theme were: time, content, people, process, working, students, design, understand, expert/expertise, and team.

For example, when Participant 4 first perceived conflict in the experience she shared regarding her interaction with the instructional designer on the project, she almost immediately classified the experience as conflict. She explained:

The first experience or time I designed with this particular ID instructional designer, she was very forceful with the process; did not ask me how I like to work. What were my preferences, you know, do you want to meet once a week or do you want to meet multiple times a week? It was, this is how you're going to do it and there was no, you know again, the design team basically is our business partner. They work to deliver a product for the academics. And so, they're supposed to be a little more accommodating to the academic people and what the academic people should be to the design team, and there was no question of what my schedule looked like what days worked best or times for me; it was, "Thursday morning is when I'm available, so, we're going to be having calls on Thursday morning."

Participant 28 added:

You know, teamwork is an art. It's definitely something that people need practice to do so, I just try to go with the flow. I generally try to be accommodating. That may not always be the best approach, but I think we just have to be careful of the process taking over the product to the point where the product and the students in this case suffer as a result.

Respect for Expertise and Professional Confidence

The nature of being a subject matter expert is built on the notion subject matter experts are hired explicitly to lend their subject matter expertise to a project for the purpose of building content specific to a professional field. Subject matter experts are hired for this expertise. Many subject matter experts who participated in the study experienced a lack of professional respect for that expertise from their design team members or a lack of professional confidence. Conflict, shared by participants, was based on the misalignment between the purpose of utilizing a subject matter expert, and feelings and experiences associated with perceptions of lack of respect.

Almost 80% (22) of the subject matter experts in this study shared some perception of conflict stemming from a lack of respect for their professional expertise experienced in interactions with design team members. When faced with conflict regarding a subject matter expert's professional expertise, some subject matter experts ended up questioning the value of a subject matter expert and why they were ever hired.

Participant 11 said:

I think in part it's like their lack of trust in the subject matter expert of what they are they're able to do and so, they placed so many obstacles along the way that it just doesn't make sense to have a subject matter expert actually build the course at all.

Participant 24 said that, in emails to her, the administrative person on the development team made it sound like she was the expert and the subject matter expert was not. When asked if she felt the administrator's approach to the content in her class "devalued" her professional expertise, Participant 24 replied:

Yes. Her response was very condescending. Well, I think the word you use “devalued” is good a good word. I also, felt like I was being told what to do by somebody who didn't understand curriculum and as a subject matter expert that's really difficult to work with.

Participant 28 also described multiple experiences of professional expertise conflict with instructional designers, commenting:

That's why I'm hired as a subject matter expert and I take my role as an expert seriously and I'm committed not only to the students but to the instructors who will teach the courses that I develop because I don't always teach the courses and of course, I'm committed to the institution for the betterment of them overall as well. But when I have to sort of do this dance with the IDs and explain everything step-by-step that translates into basically trying to teach the ID my field, which I had to do many times because it is a little bit different from the legal analysis and processes, you know, not like I said one that fits the mold like English or math might so, it can become extremely time-consuming and frustrating and distracting in the process and it always felt like the focus became more inappropriately emphasized on checking boxes for the instructional designer and justifying my subject matter expertise, you know, even though I was hired as the expert.

Participant 16 expressed feelings of anger, frustration, and fear when she perceived her professional expertise being questioned. She asserted:

I was angry and frustrated, like, “Who was this lady? I've been doing this for years,” you know, my courses were all fine. You know my I did my course map. I followed all of the “rules”. You know, “Who are you telling me in nursing where

I'm the expert that I don't know? You know, I don't know what I'm doing", and it doesn't work and whatever. I was angry and I was frustrated, and I would say I was rude; good thing that I was, we didn't do video back in those days. It was just on the phone because I'd be rolling my eyes and texting my colleague that I mentioned who was the lead and then the interim director, you know, what the hell and all of that it took a long time for me not to be afraid for lack of better words to be assigned to another course and work with her because I didn't know what to expect except for a battle. That was the whole first experience which to which was about two years in length; hated working with her.

The researcher then asked Participant 16, in the context of what she shared and her feelings about that conflict, whether she, at any point, felt there was an attack on her level of her field expertise. Participant 16 reacted:

Oh, absolutely. That's what it was. That was the feeling right there. I'm the expert. I've been doing this. I know what is expected. You know, I've been doing online courses since 1998; some better, some worse. I understand the essentials. I am an on-site evaluator for accreditation, and it was like that was my big issue. It's like I'm the expert here. So, stop telling me that I need to do things that I don't need to do.

Participant 16 confirmed that she had similar experiences at other institutions, continuing:

Yes, there's always conflict it seems, and it might be profession-specific, and it might be just because everybody does things differently. Nursing is very complicated to do, and it doesn't follow the rules. It's really hard. So, there's

always that tension of you know, this instructional designer says to you, “I’m the instructional designer. I know how to do this. I’m going to be I’m the one responsible for writing the assessments and you know, the rubrics and all that.” and I’m like, “Well that might be so, but I’m the content expert. You have no idea what I’m talking about.” It just seems to be a constant tension between what needs to be done and how much room there is.

Participant 7 said:

I told the individual who hired me, who was the overarching project manager for the entire project who did all of her negotiations, I said “Listen”, I said, “They want subject matter experts to write the work but they want to direct what's happening and they're not respecting the industry experience. It's coming to the table and as long as they continue to do that, they're going to prove they're going to provide substandard content for these students. They're not going to get what they need to be successful in the industry and I don't want to attach my name to anything else like that moving forward” and she's like, “I respect your opinion and I respect what you're doing and you know, if you change your mind at any time, let me know.” It was really challenging against a similar theme as before but not having people who don't have the industry experience respecting that industry experience. You hired them for a reason because they had that but then you're not going to, you're not going to direct them, accept information, or even listen to them in the process? To have all of that industry experience and all the education supported, all the things that are supposed to make you the expert and then have people still look at you like you're not when you know you are. At some point

time in your career, you just say, “You know what, this is it; I'm out. I don't have to put up with this. There are other schools who want to leverage my talent and do it well and do it in the right way and so, I'll just take my talents elsewhere” and a lot of people in higher education are running into that, where they will mistreat a subject matter expert, have these types of conflicts that happen, you hire them for their expertise, and then you yell at them for their expertise, and then you don't appreciate their expertise. And then you say well never mind, we didn't need it.

Participant 14 described her feeling of conflict surrounding her professional experience, stating:

I would say the biggest conflict would be relative. There were two; one was related to course content in and of itself, the other related to how content should be assessed and I, as a subject matter expert, had very specific ideas about that and things that I wanted, but other stakeholders in the process saw it differently and that sometimes is because they have responsibilities to make assessments fit into certain criteria or certain formats and then relative to the content. The other stakeholder in that particular case felt that they had more knowledge about the topic despite the fact I was serving as the subject matter expert.

Perceptions of a lack of respect for professional expertise, based on information shared by study participants, represented conflict surrounding confidence concerns.

Participants who perceived institutional confidence in them reported a more positive impact than those who felt the institution lacked confidence in their professional expertise. This shift was often tied to the length of time a subject matter expert had

worked with an institution. Participant 6 lent some insight into his perspective of the level of confidence an institution should have in a seasoned subject matter expert, explaining:

I went into that assignment with the University and from my own perspective trying to establish a different set of ground rules, based on the fact that at that point, I had probably been there eight or nine years and they had a lot more confidence in me. I was allowed to basically define how I was going to set up the class and I'm not sure that they, I mean they had somebody peer review it, but effectively I am the expert in that in that subject at that university and it's like pretty much free reign so, that that was a lot nicer.

When subject matter experts did not sense development team members demonstrated confidence in them, some subject matter experts expressed feelings of frustration. In describing his feelings in one such instance with a new institution, Participant 6 continued:

It made me just feel really frustrated because I mean, I have the book, I have like 15 years of knowledge of coding. So, if they would have trusted me a little bit and known that I, you know, knew what I was doing, or knew what I was talking about, that would have made me feel better. Or, if they would have known that from the beginning because I've had, I've had, um, I've had universities who don't tell me anything. You know, they're, they just came to me and say, "Here it is, here's the due date", and then they're totally fine. You know, everything's correct. They're not really hands-on, and they were a little more hands-on than I would have liked.

A lack of institutional confidence was intertwined with a lack of personal confidence for some, when pushing back in the face of that conflict. Participant 13 described instances when she had to have the confidence to push back in a conflict situation. She explained that her perceived conflict was connected to a feeling of lack of trust, and that mutual trust needed to be built by both parties. As a result, she was subsequently able to work through the conflict. She explained:

In the beginning when it's my first subject matter expert course, yes, I, you know, she had to learn to trust me and that I knew what I was doing and I could, you know, and I had to learn to trust her I had to learn I mean there were yes. Yes. It was a, it was you know, you have to build. Yes. It absolutely was trust on both parts.

Lack of Team Member Field Knowledge

Accompanying the issue of lack of respect for subject matter experts' professional expertise was a sub-theme that revealed a lack of team member field knowledge. Many times, based on participant responses, these issues went hand-in-hand, but there were also instances where this lack of field knowledge was experienced at multiple levels of the development team, from instructional designers, to administrators. Participant 27 experienced what many other subject matter experts communicated during their interview; that most, if not all, design team members tended to lack specific knowledge of the field for the content they were assigned to work with subject matter experts to develop. He explained:

No, they were, it was a group of instructional designers and what they did was they didn't obviously create any content for the school. They would like the two

designers that I worked with were over if I remember correctly over the English program, the science program, and the business program, and then they had another ID with an assistant who is over, you know, IT and is over other types of areas. So, while they were the ones that actually built the course shells and put the content in for these three subject areas, they were not specifically English, science, and business subject matter experts, no.

Participant 1 found himself needing to navigate the lack of field knowledge on the part of his development team members in one course development. He shared a situation where he perceived resistance when he felt he needed to add additional material to the course content beyond what the textbook provided. Participant 1 explained:

Some of my examples of say creating that would tie into operationally and things that are in the news right now that happened in cyber security, but it may not represent exactly what's in the textbook and so, having that where it's been a challenge to where a developer or someone says, "No, you can't use that; that doesn't make sense. It doesn't map specifically to our book." I feel that's a bit of a conflict because I know what I'm looking for in employees that are coming out. I know what I've experienced in the real world and the textbook is essentially incomplete in some of those aspects. It talks in generic terms; more abstract in many cases. And so, that's been a challenge to kind of deconflict between what would benefit the student most compared to what the textbook is advocating for as the learning material...So, when I put expectations into the course design and saying, "Here's what we would expect to see," I got some pushback from the course designer who also, had the department chair kind of at their beck and call,

and I was told in some ways to sort of back off on that, but then at the end of the day I met with the department chair. I did a phone call with them and was able to talk to him and say, "Look this is real world, what you're going to expect, and you need to add content that explains that, that's outside of the textbook as to why you're doing this and making this happen then that's what we need to do because otherwise the students are going to walk out of here not knowing the fundamentals. They can talk to you about description in a dictionary definition, but they're not going to know the applicability of this in an operational environment and it's going to be a disservice." So, at the end of that, I was able to convince them, but I had to go over the head of the designer who was looking at specific areas of the course and not having the in-depth knowledge of that content. They just know to kind of put the lipstick on the pig to pretty it up.

Participant 10 recounted a course development situation that resulted in conflict.

As a current administrator, she reflected her perspective of subject matter experts and field knowledge from a dual lens. She was working for a small company that worked with [a government agency] and shared perspective regarding subject matter experts who appear to be too close to their subject matter at times. She stated:

I was basically redoing what had been done and I was aware that there was conflict, but the conflict was between that original author and...we'll call him the boss, and the boss and, I was only tangentially involved with that because I saw some of the emails going back and forth where I mean, he was clearly mad that you know, it's like he knew the subject matter and I didn't know the subject matter and you know, why would he have somebody who, you know wasn't even a

military person working on this? As somebody who has managed a lot of subject matter experts one of the issues that you have with subject matter experts generally speaking is that they know the content too well. Well, and there is a certain psychological or intellectual capacity that some people have where they can step out of a context and view what's being said for what's being said... and those people make lousy subject matter experts because they can't unlearn what they've learned and look at it from the point of view of a student who doesn't already know this stuff. And so, that was the problem with this guy. He, it's like he couldn't look at what he had created from the point of view of "if you don't know anything except for what you're seeing, this doesn't make any sense at all", and he just couldn't he couldn't see it.

Participant 18 stated:

Again, it becomes a source of contention because I anticipate that some questions will follow, and they follow and they're not consistent with what an ID should ask me. They're much more consistent with, "Okay, help me understand why this is going to be important for students to know integers prior to understanding factoring." And so, to have to do background discussions on those things that truly is a conflict and then it kind of puts me at odds with my instructional designers. And so, again, it becomes one of those things where I have to ask myself, "Is it more important to work through this? Or is it more important to just say this is just not a task I'll take on because that whole dynamic is just too involved for me?" It's very stressful. I think if I could actually, and I know this is utopian, but if I could have it in a perfect setting I would love to either have work

through a department chair go to someone that was very well-versed in the subject matter and someone that could kind of buffer that relationship, and, or have an ID that was also a subject matter expert. I think that would really, really be helpful. I do value collaboration and especially if everyone coming to the table has a baseline understanding on the full scope of the project.

For Participant 22, there came points in time in dialogues with a startup, where individuals and administrators on the development team didn't have the same frame of reference or any subject matter expertise in the field. This created conflict for her as a subject matter expert trying to communicate with stakeholders about the builds without them having the subject matter expertise, and that conflict caused her to feel stressed. She explained how she felt that impacted her in a work setting, sharing:

Being a subject matter expert, if you have a question or a concern about what you're building or what you're creating, you really don't have anybody to bounce off of. You basically have to come to the conclusion yourself because they just don't understand the concept of what you're trying to teach, or what you're trying to build or do.

Participant 23 also perceived conflict in the development process throughout his work as a subject matter expert on a build working with point people who lacked subject matter experience. He stated:

They were looking at it from a different perspective than I was, and it was a lot of what I felt to be their responsibilities were getting pushed onto my plate, as far as the defining of objectives and correlating that to student learning outcomes, and how that ties into the overall picture of the goal of the program, and what

transferable skills students should walk out of the course with, and it was my understanding that is kind of stuff that should have been done already. My job is, “Hey, here's a course that's on Microsoft Windows Server Administration,” for example. What do students need to know? How do we go about teaching them? What are some things that we can use to develop various pieces of content? That was my understanding, but it quickly started turning into, “Hey, you got to write all these objectives and kind of do all of this.” We’ve got our certification bodies who need these sorts of things and tied into the amount of credit hours, and the time expected, and it just kind of turned into a little bit more than was originally advertised.

Participant 3 shared:

So, where the conflict arose with the IDs is that they really didn't, and this is not their fault because what we were doing was pretty non-traditional in terms of teaching pedagogy, they really didn't understand the content of the course. And so, there would be comments that they would make about the course saying, “Well, you know, you can't really do that in a classroom. You know, that isn't really going to work with the students. You know, that doesn't really fit into this traditional course shell that we have for you.” And that was hard because my comment was, “I know this doesn't fit into your traditional course shell but I'm not going to change the way that I deliver this content to fit your course shell. It is not my issue that your course shell does not fit this style of teaching,” and I had made that clear up front.

Participant 4 also shared a dual-lens perspective on conflict arising from a lack of field knowledge of team members, stating:

I think the common theme at least from the experiences that I've had, and it wasn't so much my experience designing courses but more so what I have seen being as a supervisor over subject matter experts who design courses, is that the subject matter experts feel like the instructional design team. So, the team that you know, helps us design the courses has more say and influence over the process than what they have as the academics and the IDs, they're not subject matter experts in a particular field, they are not. Most of them come from education background. So, either they have EdD degrees or they were high school teachers or they, you know, more administrators and higher education. Not a single one of them actually had that I've worked with at least have come from the disciplines in which they're designing the courses for.

Participant 6 echoed:

The person that I was working with was not a content expert but a kind of administrative person responsible for helping with a kind of a global redesign of and trying to standardize with the same issue where we had online courses and ground courses and we are trying to get a greater correlation between the two and at the same time trying to standardize across all of the online platforms. So, it was a non-subject matter expert but an administrative expert trying to ensure that we had consistency.

Participant 7 said:

The last three courses were the reverse. The university representative didn't want to look at anything until the entire course was built so, seven sections and at that point in time then it was like literally everything was a push back. "Well, I don't agree with this. This is not what we're doing," this and the other and, the person at the university was not a business expert; the person at the university had a background in arts and sciences. So, we had somebody who was driving approval who was not even in the even industry or vernacular that we were trying to write content in. So, from an administrative standpoint and this is me stepping out of subject matter expert and into administrator; that was a stupid move. If the university is going to have somebody who's driving a project, they need to be subject matter experts in the project they're driving. Having somebody who has a completely third, different perspective in a different discipline does not make any sense. But that's the person who was determining words. Like, what does "culture" mean? What does "organizational culture" mean? What does "financial decision making" mean? Simple things like that, which seemed like that should be a no-brainer. It's got a clear definition, but it doesn't necessarily have a clear definition depending upon the context within which it's used...I think it's a cop out way to be able to handle it. Sure. I think it's a way to be able because they had such tight deadlines on their end...we've all worked in organizations that have done this. I think the fact that they were assigning somebody who's outside the subject matter area to be the decision maker was out of necessity for their internal deadlines not necessarily looking out for what's the best possible program we could provide.

Participant 8 ended up losing a development contract due to the lack of field experience of team members at an institution seeking to develop medical billing and coding content. She explained:

I mean at the end of it they were not, they were not, they weren't frustrated with me or anything. They told me that they decided that, it was really expensive to hire an outside source to write something for them and that coding was extremely, they, I don't think they realized how complex it was and how much work went into it. So, they end up canceling the contract about halfway through, and I had almost, I mean I was like way ahead of schedule to, so, they had a lot of the information, but in the end, they told me that they were not going to follow through with the contract because they told me they didn't realize how extensive coding was and how much work went into it.

Communication and Feedback

Barriers in communication often led to conflict for participants, and sometimes the resolution led to a parting of ways rather than continuation of the relationship of the parties. Institutions that emphasized providing valuable communication and feedback to students were perceived, by some study participants, to function in the opposite manner when it came to the online course development process. Many participants recalled receiving little to no feedback during the build process, which created conflict and additional, uncompensated work in many instances. On the issue of communication related to conflict in the online course development process, Participant 2 replied:

Number one is better communication between all people involved in the development process from the big picture supervisor top person all the way down

to the developer. And then the person that's actually operationalizing the course. Everyone's got to be able to communicate with each other on what is and is not working on a specific course or content or whatever it is they're doing. Not communicating causes a lot of aggravation when you're actually getting to try to get this thing to go up live. So, the communication process needs to go along, and I think there should be some type of milestones that are implemented and approved by the team as you go... So, communication is key. People that are not good at writing online emails and online correspondence should not be part of this process. They have to understand that responding to somebody in two or three words can be interpreted in many ways and mostly negative ways. That I have found in two different experiences... The one person that did the tech development at the first school I was talking to you about when he would get back to me. He would say, "Look at discussion two; sentence two sucks." That's it. So, communication really, really is important both verbal and written, especially in this development process. We're trying to get a finished product that meets standards and helps the student obtain their degree to move forward in their career. Whatever school it is. We all have the same thing we're trying to do with this material. So, we all need to work together to get to that goal. Sometimes I don't think people understand what the end goal is. This is about the final product for the student and utilizing this information to help them get their degree and a job; every school, every level of education. We're all doing the same thing. So, that's a really big primary one is the communication stuff. No, communication has always been the biggest problem when you're developing courses. There isn't

major conflict that I can come up with for most of the subject matter expert development I've done through the years.

Participant 1 shared:

They were under the kind of the assumption that what they had done with prior courses had to follow that strict model. So, by talking with the chair and kind of presenting my side of it then when he sided with me, we just had a re-scoping of what that would look like and what was in the realm of possible for that course designer to work on doing and that kind of facilitated that moving forward and then because I actually could put in the kind of mappings and the content threads that I wanted to, then it I had more vested interest in actually doing it because it was more of an interesting topic and you want to be able to kind of wind that through rather than saying just do A, B, and C, and don't worry about D and F. Okay. Well, then I'm simplifying it too much. But okay, so, I don't have the same buy in that I do if I'm given the ability to kind of, you know, not quite follow it all the way through but it does give you a little more creative flexibility to make that happen...I think for me it impacted me more of you know, I didn't necessarily care too much either way, but by doing that it let me know that the department chair was open to having input and was willing to correct the course knowing that it would benefit the students in the university at the end of the day. So, that gives you a little more confidence in their ability to actually run the organization rather than just kind of saying, "No, this is how we're doing it" and just slapping it out there, you know more or less care for what the student's going to experience. I think most of the things have been fairly well kind of documented of what the

expectations were to start. So, knowing that kind of going in it, kind of shapes what the level of effort will look like, and so I haven't really had much conflict outside of kind of that example. I think with structure it's up to the individual entity, the organization doing it, because you know some have different, you know, five-week term, eight-week term, you know, 12-week term, whatever may be; and they have each have their own ways of designating what their courses should look like to have that consistency. So, you know, I mentioned the different wickets, you know...like if you have an institution that says, "We need a discussion in every module or unit or week", whatever you want to call it. "And we also need a test," and...okay, got it, understood, then that has that aspect to it. I think those organizations that have projectized their course development efforts and have a good scoping document which details the expectations going into it have better success and have a better relationship with their developers and subject matter experts than others who have not and are kind of doing it piecemeal. That's where I think those hurdles kind of come into play and cause that conflict so, you know, I would tell you that. I don't have a, you know, a conflict with the content itself or how it's played out. That's...I don't look at it that way, but mapping into some of those things can be difficult at times, you know in instances where it may be better to have a written paper that describes you know, what you would do with malware in a system as opposed to giving them five or ten questions that are matching related on a, you know, a fancy dialogue that maybe, you know, a thing of "Will do we do a discussion on that and see; can we

can we modify it or move it somewhere else in the content?" or however that may work, but I don't see that as a major challenge.

Participant 11 stated:

If there was a direct line of communication to the program manager and the dean of students in that scenario on a consistent basis rather than having like the middle person with the ID being the main point of contact, it would have helped clarify a lot of the points being that there were agreements already between the subject matter expert myself as well as the ID on certain elements, but then when the ID would meet separately with the program manager and the dean of students to make some changes, things were agreed upon there that I did not agree with. So, direct line of communication would've been something that attributed to a lot of the conflict.

Participant 12 described an instance when she turned in an interim deliverable to the instructional designer and it was returned to her for additional edits. When asked what in that experience created conflict for her from her perspective as the subject matter expert, Participant 12 replied:

I think first of all was probably the way it was delivered. You know just kind of more with the in my perception more with the you know, "This is all wrong. You need to fix this." So, was specific communication...Um, like my work wasn't good and also, frustrated that I had to do more work. So, that was the communication tone.

The researcher then asked Participant 12 if there was any conflict connected to the content feedback as well, or whether it was only the way the message was communicated.

Participant 12 continued:

It was mostly just the way it was communicated. I think if it would have been communicated and more of a, you know, "Let's get on the phone and talk about this and let me help you do this correctly," it would have been a lot different the way I would have accepted it.

Although Participant 12 shared she didn't feel the message was communicated in a collaborative way, but rather felt it more as an attack, she was eventually able to resolve the conflict once better communication lines were established. She explained:

Yeah, after it happened multiple times and I got frustrated we finally did get on the phone and start talking about things and that really helped. I don't think this person was very good as far as you know what was communicated via email as well. And so, I think once we sat down, we actually ended up having a good relationship by the end of it. We just had to figure out the best way to communicate.

In one of her conflict situations, where exam questions were sent back to her for additional editing because she was one of the original co-subject matter experts, Participant 13 connected the conflict she felt to when she was willing to push back on some of the feedback she received, explaining:

I'm you know, I'm not a novice. I'm an expert in the field of collaboration and management and administration and all that. So, I knew you know, when I felt conflict, and conflict to me just made me feel uncomfortable, you know. You

would first take it personally, you feel as if you're being not attacked, but that you know, you're being questioned, and you are being questioned. So, I just learned to you know, I would say to the person, "Please clarify what you're saying to me because I'm not understanding." So, I said this, you know, I would say, "This is what I think you're saying to me" and I would say something back to her. You know, the way I heard what she said and then she....And so, I found that I had to work with the subject matter expert and then I had to work with the competency-based person to help her to understand what the subject matter expert was trying to accomplish in the first place. And finally, I just, it became very clear that instead of me being a referee that the two of them needed to meet and really kind of hash it out and develop the trust in their relationships with each other. And so that was the conflict that I had, you know was trying to, was eventually coming down to the notion that you know, I can't be a referee in this, you know, if the competency-based person has issues with it, then you know, the competency-based subject matter expert and the subject matter expert, you know needed to talk with each other so they could understand what, you know, what each one was saying. So, then I was involved in that level of discourse as well as the chair and so that was conflict. But at a different level.

When asked if she took on any more course development at that institution after two instances of conflict, Participant 14 said that she did and again experienced similar conflict, but was able to manage and resolve it, explaining:

I was able to manage those conflicts more quickly because I was aware of how to address the concerns that person had so that I could carry forward. I understood them better and how to resolve that conflict better with that particular individual.

Participant 15 also experienced conflict in the development process with respect to her feeling that she did not receive enough allocated resources to support her, for what was being asked of her. She shared:

Yeah, I don't think so. Honestly, she you know, she's not real responsive in getting back to me. And so, there would be questions that I would ask her. And then she sometimes she would get back to me within 24 hours. And sometimes it was literally, you know at the last minute before we had to actually put something into the course and I kind of; it was frustrating because I had come on board with the understanding that, you know, we're going to be a team and we'll be in this together and we'll create this together. And then I sort of had that feeling as it progressed that I was sort of out there on my own trying to figure this out with this group of students that were depending on me to provide the information and support to them ...that they needed.

Participant 15 also shared there were conflict feelings centered on communication resources that weren't provided to her, and time limitations she had personally with her other obligations, sensing there wasn't transparency at the outset about the extensive scope of the project. The situation rose to the level of what Participant 15 categorized as a conflict within her, as the subject matter expert creating the content. When asked what, for her, in that situation rose to the level of a conflict within her as the subject matter expert doing the writing or creating that idea, Participant 15 replied:

Yeah, I think that we all want feedback on our work whether we're course developers or teachers or students or you know, in any other field...I think that when you commit to doing something and then put a lot of time into it, I mean there were several hours and days that went into creating this and then you send it on, you know, you would expect that person that you're sending it to respond and not receiving that response or any feedback whatsoever is frustrating.

Participant 16 perceived conflict resulting from communication that was resolved once that barrier was broken, stating:

That was the most impactful one. I learned the most from that experience. I want to share just a little bit of the middle in the ending of the story because it's really important to me. I learned so, much from it. So, once I went in person, we, now there's a face-to-face relationship. We hug. We talked, we even joked about the fact that we didn't get along at all and for that week, we actually worked through a lot of the problems and came to some agreement. I have to tell you I revised that whole curriculum. We had the same discussion for every course about, you know, mapping these essential documents to the course outcomes and stuff, but it got easier every time you know, it just took her a really long time to understand nursing education, and then it took me a really long time to understand the university expectation and we worked through it. She was able to change her whole perspective on how she writes course outcomes in this kind of course and there were no discussions of mapping and so, she had learned a lot in the years as and my communication skills if I watch how she communicates and now I can mirror it back to her. We're much improved and that process went really smooth.

The issue of communication as a source of conflict also arose when Participant 19 was asked whether, during one of his development contracts, he felt like he had enough time for the work assigned, to which he replied:

You know what, you never really know, you know. I want to say like I said if they ask me to do it in a week or eight hours, I would have done everything. I possibly could, sweating notwithstanding, you know, heart failure occurring along the way, but no, not for me. I put you, I enjoy the challenge, you know, and we're doing that now with the redevelopment of the criminal justice program. Now, you know, we have deadlines, we have demands, a lot of moving parts and but we, to avoid conflict, we meet frequently, you know, if there's a like I said there's resolution to be had it is constant communication and dialogue, you know, making extraordinary efforts to mitigate, minimize any element of siloing or hoarding of information, you know, it's a very, very egalitarian approach that they take, we take over there and works out really, really well. I'm not saying it's perfect, but it does work out better than, better than not having those things in place...I think there was just an absence of appropriate communication which created problems. So, if you could house that under the term conflict, I think that's probably the only way I can really describe it; was just some disconnected and disjointed communication in spite of people's best efforts. They just didn't have the communication infrastructure in place prior to looking to you know embark on a major enterprise such as you know development delivery of any online program or whatnot.

Participant 20 shared:

My reviewer wasn't the best about getting back to me or answering questions.

And so, I found myself fairly new in this position and fairly new as subject matter expert being asked to develop things on a fairly tight timetable and having serious process questions. "Wait a minute. Am I supposed to use this file or this file my supposed to do this for like this because I'm getting two different sets of information" and I would get answers not very quickly, and the answers I would get would usually be incomplete. So, I found that to be it was very frustrating for me at the time. But it will I could also, see it in a larger scale being difficult for somebody who, say a subject matter expert, who isn't as invested or committed to seeing a project through to the end and for doing the best that they could do with that project being very quick to just kind of give up or to do a half-hearted effort at that job. And I could see the that breakdown in communication or that problem with the onboarding process resulting in poor inadequate work on the part of other subject matter experts.

Participant 21 replied:

I feel like sometimes you're; you know, you are in limbo. You're working very siloed and then like understanding what the capabilities are so, as an online subject matter expert you, it's like, okay, we need this, this, this, and this but there isn't the communication of like, "So what does the LMS have? What's the capabilities of the LMS?" You know, like maybe no one's ever used a blog assignment before within that organization. And then, you know, you're kind of like, "Do we, can we do this? Can we do that?" Where if that communication was clear, "Hey, this is the, these are your options, these are all the tools in your

toolbox when you're designing.” I feel like sometimes that creates like conflict in the sense of you don't know what you don't know about the system.

Participant 3 stated:

I think that we could have come up if the conversations and the feedback I was getting were not so rigid we could have come up with better solutions. It could have benefited more students. And I'm sad that that didn't happen...I would have landed in the same place, but I wouldn't have felt as bad about it. I would have felt better about it. I think if I had been able to communicate through...Sometimes I feel like I don't know how to communicate through conflict in a way that gets results and part of me acknowledges, a big part of me acknowledges, that that was the system that I was in; that's how communication was done and that my communications were really not welcomed. They really did not want to hear from me. They really did not want to hear that there was a problem but I think that that sometimes can lead to me having a perception that nobody wants to hear about the problems that I perceive and so, I realized, for me, it's important for me to be in an environment where I know that people are listening and that I feel like I'm being heard and respected.

Participant 7 explained:

Yeah, so, really it came down to just the timelines in terms of when they want two deliverables was fine. They were easy to meet and getting the content built was fine. It was the communication structure and the communication back from the university through the pivot, which was the project lead after all of the work was done, after all of the content was done. The first interaction, the first two courses

were fine because the university lead and the team lead wanted to look at stuff every single unit. So, there was communication early on after the first unit, so you got a feel for what they were looking for.

Participant 9 said:

Yeah, you know, I think, I think what contributed to at least my feeling of conflict was the, on top of just you know me being new to the university, everything is being, you know, pretty much managed remotely, right? Everything is via email. I haven't ever spoken to any of the other instructors directly and I think if you're face-to-face in the conference room and you're talking about these things, it's a lot easier to kind of get to the bottom of it and you can kind of see what the tone is when you're getting kind of written feedback a lot of times that stuff's misinterpreted, and I tried to take that into consideration too, but you know a lot of times those, lot of times there's unintended tone in writing an email. I think that probably contributed to the sense of conflict that might not have been there if it was, you know, being handled in a face-to-face setting.

In Participant 4's experience, that was the case. Regarding the lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of course development team members that resulted from poor communication she experienced, she said:

As I've moved in my roles at [my institution] going from part-time faculty, full-time, a lead, and now a chair, I've seen where projects have not been successful and I've actually seen instructional designers quit, and subject matter experts remove themselves from projects because of that poor communication of whose roles are what.

Even when communication was intended to be professional, it was not always received in that manner by participants, resulting in conflict. In the conflict experience shared by Participant 4, for example, she detailed that, although communication exchanges were “pretty professional in regard to both the emails and the phone call communications,” she still felt faced with conflict. Describing how the conflict experience with the instructional designer made her feel, she stated:

She was bossy though. Very bossy. It was not like it was a collaborative relationship. It was more I was working for her and she was the one supervising this experience. I have to say it made me feel very frustrated and that the experience working on this course, and it made me really want to quit. I wanted to step away from the project.

Participant 13 explained:

Okay, so, I would, so when I first became a subject matter expert at [one institution], you have to learn their system, so, I felt like a fledging. I felt comfortable with the subject matter that I was the subject matter expert over, but I didn't feel the confidence in the how they did it [there]. And so, it became very clear as I met with people and as I worked on different aspects of the assignment that you know on the “one a weekly” basis, you know, I had things that I had to work on and get done, it became very clear that you know that competency person...I talked about the competency subject matter expert making certain that everything we did was accurately reflecting a competency-based approach. It became very clear to me very quickly that whatever she said went. So, if she sanctioned something that you did, great, but if she said this area needed more

work, even if you might have thought it didn't need more work and it was reflecting what it needed to reflect everybody and every everyone had to acquiesce to what she said. So, that was the big and I'm not saying that she wasn't knowledgeable and certainly wasn't an expert in her field, but she had a, you know, an EdD by her name and most of her EdD experience was in competency-based um instructional design and so, you know, I'm a nurse and I'm a public health expert, you know, so, in the beginning it was a brand-new experience for me, you know, so, everybody acquiesced to her. I mean if she said something, you know, she said it was good, great. If she said it needed work, great. I had to go back to the drawing board and do it.

Feedback from the design team pertaining to requested adjustments was not always perceived as accurate or material, by participants, which translated to perceptions of conflict. For example, when the researcher asked Participant 16 if she ever felt feedback received resulted in proposed changes to her content that were inaccurate, she replied, “No, because that I wouldn't let that happen.”

To that point, the researcher asked Participant 16 if, in the course of any exchange of drafts or feedback, any of the comments or proposed revisions changed the meaning of her content to where she felt like it didn't align with her subject matter expertise or what she was trying to impart through her content. In response, Participant 16 said:

Oh, I would say along the way at least in the beginning, yeah, probably. You know, it's a long time ago, so, that level of detail I don't remember by the end by the end. We had negotiated a compromise. We had to because you know, I would, I wouldn't approve it if it wasn't. Now, she was, remember, she was above the

instructional designer. She was the architect So, she would get the finished draft provide feedback to us and it wasn't until several courses down the line that one of the instructional designers said to me, "Well, you know, you don't have to take her ideas. You can reject them instead of getting into these heated battles", but we always as far as I can remember we always figured it out. I may have given it up at some point. You know, I don't remember.

Participant 14 described an experience where she only received feedback if there was a question or concern once she turned in deliverables in a self-imposed checkpoint process. She personally expressed feelings of isolation and disappointment at the lack of feedback.

Participant 15 expressed a desire to have some feedback beyond the initial feedback received.

It's a little frustrating when you're emailing someone several times saying, "Is there anything else that's needed?" You know, "Did you have a chance to review?" and then there's no there's no response. And you know, that's frustrating because you don't really know, you know kind of where the situation sits.

Participant 17 experienced the other end of the communication issue; the lack thereof. Not only were no substantive changes made, but there was virtually no communication. She shared:

No, I felt like she did nothing. Actually. She would always say, "Everything is good." You know, so, I'm like, okay everything looks good. I never had really any people on the phone calls the conference calls that we had with these people from India. They you know, she never hardly even spoke.

Participant 18 had a more positive experience with instructional designers and communication, stating:

One of the schools which we are now required to use and work with IDs, I've been grateful to have the opportunity to work with them in a manner in which I can actually voice my concern and escalate them if necessary and not that I would get my way or that things will go my way but at least I know that it's heard and if that idea is not able to effectively communicate their reasons why then someone else along that tandem can.

Participant 2 replied:

He didn't hold any punches on his writing, um, totally inappropriate and very poor communication. So, all right, this discussion and this fit and but what is it? "That sucks." What is it you want from this? Is it a technical issue? Is it an embedded URL issue? Is it a grammatical issue? What is the problem? You didn't hear that, it was just, it sucked. I can't, there was another one he did too. It was something about, "Your work needs to be deleted" and it was like that was the whole thing. I thought, "What are you talking about?"

In one instance developing course content, Participant 21 sent her entire course content to the institution at once. She did not recall receiving any feedback regarding the work, including any changes. She shared:

I don't remember if I got any feedback. I mean, I know I confirmed that the deliverables were received but I didn't remember getting any particular, you know, feedback on the actual course itself.

With regard to how that lack of feedback made her feel, she continued:

Well, I think you put effort into something you'd hope that somebody would read it and be like, "Oh, hey really good job, or good." You want, everybody wants like a little pat on the back that they've done, they put effort into something, and it's been read. And even if you need feedback, that just helps for the growth of the course because I personally, as a subject matter expert, I do actually like to share it with another subject matter expert to be able to be like, okay, it makes sense to me.

Although Participant 24 received feedback on one of her course developments, she remarked, "I did. I remember it to be very curt and polite and good luck in your future kind of response." She elaborated:

I don't think anybody looked at anything. They just gave me a shell and let me do whatever I wanted but everywhere else that I've worked I had guidelines and received feedback, and everything was submitted segmentally.

Participant 25 shared an approach to receiving feedback and revisions, stating: "Yeah, I think everything always has room for improvement, changes, and stuff." She said that she doesn't often get the opportunity to review her content before it goes live; only "occasionally." When asked how it made her feel not to be given an opportunity to review the content, or be part of the next process steps of going to the design team, being produced, and launched, she replied:

Oh, it's frustrating, especially if it happens once and then I say, "Can you please let me take a peek at it before we put this thing live?" and then I don't get that opportunity. Then it goes live and those problems, and I have to turn around and say, "Well I asked; you should let me take a look at it before we put it out there."

So, that's frustrating but you know with working on teams, sometimes you don't have that kind of control. You just gotta roll with it.

Participant 26 recalled experiencing conflict recently working with instructional designers on a development project as well. She explained:

I worked with on an accounting course and this, the ID did not have any background in accounting which caused some misunderstandings in the language and it frustrated me as a subject matter expert because I would have to take time out of my day to define certain terms so that we could get on the same page so he could review my work. So, the ID may not necessarily always understand your work and be valuable. Their feedback and suggestions cause conflict when they don't understand the subject matter and they are trying to make suggestions, so, I did recently have that conflict with an ID.

Participant 26 also had at least five development projects where all of the deliverables were due together at the end of the timeline. Regarding that experience, she remarked:

As long as it did not involve me completely doing a task wrong. Like I said with the presentations. If I needed to go back and change, maybe five that I submitted in the end...I remember one in particular. I submitted an entire course and I received no feedback and then hardly any feedback in the end. My assumption was that my reviewer did not have adequate time to review all of that content. So, I think it may have been minimally reviewed.

Participant 27 expressed feeling a lack of support in the area on a development project where he did not receive feedback. He explained:

I would say I asked for feedback. ... I would send [content] to her for some feedback just to make sure I was on the right track with what they were looking for and really never received any type of substantive feedback one way or the other being positive or constructive. You know, she just said, you know, "Looks great" but that you know, that tells me okay, I'm on the right track, but yet it tells me nothing ...I wasn't receiving any type of substantive feedback on how the courses I was building were and that also frustrated me because I'm the type of person that I like feedback, you know, whether it's positive or constructive and if there's something that I'm not going down the right path on then I would expect someone to let me know that in a constructive way, and then I'll make the necessary changes and I'll know going forward that this is how you want it; not that way. I just, I wasn't getting any type of feedback on that. So, I just continue doing what I was doing and how I knew. How to do it and you know, I never had any issues or complaints from them on their side, so, I just figured that you know, what I did was, that was fine, but I just don't feel that again. I was able to create the type of course that I like and I'm used to creating simply because, like I said, the support wasn't there as far as you know, either from the supervisor standpoint as well as the subject matter type of resources, they just they weren't there.

As a follow up to what he shared, in the context of what he believed made a good subject matter expert, Participant 27 commented:

I think you know willingness and open being open to change, you know being open to feedback because not everything that you know, we do as subject matter experts is going to be you know, spot-on perfect the first time, you know as much

as we try to have it be there, you know there are going to be times where we're going to be provided with constructive criticism where things need to be updated or changed and I think to be successful at doing this you have to be open to that feedback not take it personally, but take it as constructive and as you know be willing to learn that's another thing is ...being open to feedback and open to learning. Also, time management, that's the next best. The biggest thing I think is being able to manage your time.

When delivering content in the absence of feedback, Participant 28 also shared feelings of conflict related to how a lack of feedback impacted the subject matter expert directly, along with the entirety of the online course development process, stating:

In terms of getting feedback because one hinged on another, hinged on another, and you never sure what was coming next and who you were waiting for where, then this process would get hitched up in the content deliverables with one person you're waiting back from them and then you get new information from your ID. So, the timelines in terms of the due dates and the deadlines for the deliverable process in the content development.

During one course build, Participant 23, in his role as a subject matter expert, expressed a preference for specific content. The development team he was working with didn't accept his preference, causing him to adjust his content based on their feedback. He reflected:

No, I didn't I didn't flat out say, "I'm not doing this" for everything they asked for if I had to pick an example I had suggested, "Hey, why don't we make their final assignment taking the certification exam and if they pass it, they pass the course?"

If they don't well, you know, then they don't pass the course, we can have another way to kind of evaluate whether or not they earn a successful grade.” They said, “No we don't want to do it that way....well let's just come up with a traditional final exam” and you know that that's one example, I guess, where I got a little bit of pushback and I said, “Yeah, okay that makes sense. I understand that.” So, no, I wouldn't say across the board I was just “Mr. No”. There were some things I would take in but other things I definitely wasn't willing to do.

Support from Administration

The shared experiences of several study participants reflected the importance of support from administration when encountering conflict in the online course development process. While subject matter experts were not always supported by administrators, there were times when those in administrative roles got involved in the process, at the request of the subject matter expert. In Participant 4's main conflict situation, after encountering repeated challenges, she requested assistance from the instructional designer's supervisor, who had the opportunity to observe the work dynamic between Participant 4 and the instructional designer and offered support to Participant 4's position. In one work session, which included the subject matter expert, the instructional designer, and the instructional architect, Participant 4 recalled:

It was one of those situations where I basically had to juggle my work and my life right in and then she's telling me how it's going to be and I went to her supervisor and I said, “This is not going to work at all.” And then interim of all of this my boss got terminated. So, my chair that I reported to was abruptly terminated didn't have her as a sounding board. So, I went to this instructional designer supervisor

and said, “This cannot work. This will not work. We have to have a mediator in this process.” So, that's when the instructional architect came to every single one of our design meetings and she knew the background and...remember one particular working session interrupted because the ID was telling me how I needed to design the rubric and how I needed to design the assignment and the informational architect said, “If I can interject and share my opinion” and then she made a joke about it. “You all can talk about me after this call behind my back.” She's like, “But I I'm not feeling that this process is going well.” And then she says to the instructional designer, “I feel like you are basically telling [the Subject Matter Expert] how she needs to design the content of the course instead of allowing her to design the content and then you align based upon the content that's designed the grading rubrics in the grading standards.” And after that I think that the instructional designer became a little easier to work with but it's just, I think it's her personality style. She's very forceful. Very abrupt, very authoritative. If the Faculty chair is experienced definitely but like in my instance my faculty chair was brand new. I mean, she literally hadn't been there a year before she was terminated. And so, and she was an external hire so, she had never been through a design process as a faculty member, as a subject matter expert working at [this institution]. And so, while she could listen and maybe take it to someone above her, she didn't come with the insights and experiences and tools to really help me navigate through that situation and to empower me.

In reflecting on the necessity to continue working with the instructional designer with whom she had already experienced work challenges, Participant 4 further explained:

One particular working session interrupted because the ID was telling me how I needed to design the rubric and how I needed to design the assignment and the instructional architect said, “If I can interject and share my opinion,” and then she made a joke about it. “You all can talk about me after this call behind my back... but I’m not feeling that this process is going well.” And then, she says to the instructional designer, “I feel like you are basically telling [Participant 4] how she needs to design the content of the course instead of allowing her to design the content and then you align based upon the content that’s designed to the grading rubrics in the grading standards.” And after that, I think that the instructional designer became a little easier to work with but it’s just I think it’s her personality style. She’s very forceful; very abrupt, very authoritative.

Oh, yes. So, my situation was a little special that go-around. So, I was actually seven months pregnant and I was a high-risk pregnancy, and everyone knew it at work. And so, when I said, “Look, you know, you have letters from my doctors. I you know have, I have to maintain the stress level and all of this I will do it. I will design these practical courses, but she, I cannot work with her. I have to keep the stress down.” Then how I found out that she was going to be working with me is they had taken the request for the courses to be designed to the process and we were waiting for, we call it the intake process, to be completed and I get an email from her saying, “Oh, I just found out I’m going to be the instructional designer for the practicum courses you’re designing. I’m so excited to be working with you again.” So, I emailed my boss and I was like, “No, no, no, no, no. No, I’m like this is not going to work. This goes against all the medical advice that I’ve been given

by my doctors. This goes against the agreement that we came upon for me to design these courses. This is not going to work.” So, she went to this instructional designer supervisor and, you know, said, “Look we can't do this” and so he calls me and says that, you know, “We just don't have anyone else. We're at full capacity. We don't have anyone else who has the means and time to design this course, but please tell me what I can do to make it easier for you we care about you care about your health. We don't want your pregnancy to be even further complicated” but I kind of feel like his communications to me was just to pacify me. He really didn't have a plan in place to keep her under control.

In her role as an administrator, Participant 4 shared insight from a faculty chair vantage point. She noted that her own conflict experience in the course development process enabled her to assist her faculty in working through course development process issues, since she was in a more supervisory capacity. When asked to connect her role as a supervisor to subject matter expert work and her interaction with subject matter experts, and whether she had any opportunity to see conflict from another subject matter expert's vantage point in her capacity as a supervisor, Participant 4 described a conflict situation which involved a new core faculty member who struggled with the process. She explained:

It just was not intuitive to her how we design and then she had an instructional designer who was very good, but it was very structured with how she did the work and my full-time faculty member just didn't I think work that way. She's a lot more, I don't know, slow maybe and how she catches on to things. She kind of works at her pace, spent a lot of time thinking and thinking, and rethinking, and

then she didn't understand the role of the instructional architect. She felt like the instructional architect was dictating the process and it's like, "Well, no, she's not taking away your creative authority and, in any regard, she's just making sure what we're doing is going to meet alignment standards." And so, I had to have a talk and be like, "You know, I've had tough design experiences as well. And you know, I think that the best thing that you can do is approach your instructional designer, explain how you like to work, and see where you could maybe have some modification instead of perhaps using the working the hourly working calls to do actual design work. Maybe you could set up two calls a week where you...one call where you talk through ideas at the beginning of the week and then another call at the end of the week where you actually do some live time work with her." And so, I think that my experiences where I had a difficult instructional designer helped me then to be like, "Well, gee, I wish I would have said this or done this looking back," and it helped guide the faculty members that I was working with.

Participant 1 remarked:

So, when I put expectations into the course design and saying, "Here's what we would expect to see" I got some pushback from the course designer who also had the department chair kind of at their beck and call and I was told in some ways to sort of back off on that, but then at the end of the day I met with the department chair. I did a phone call with them and was able to talk to him and say, "Look this is real world, what you're going to expect, and you need to add content that explains that, that's outside of the textbook as to why you're doing this and

making this happen then that's what we need to do because otherwise the students are going to walk out of here not knowing the fundamentals.” I think for me it impacted me more of you know, I didn't necessarily care too much either way, but by doing that it let me know that the department chair was open to having input and was willing to correct the course knowing that it would benefit the students in the University at the end of the day. So, that gives you a little more confidence in their ability to actually run the organization rather than just kind of saying “No, this is how we're doing it” and just slapping it out there, you know more or less care for what the student's going to experience.

In Participant 18's experience, there was a chain of individuals subject matter experts could go to if there were challenges with certain individuals in the online course development process. She explained:

That is of utmost importance to me... It is of utmost importance to me to me because I'm able to if I feel like we, the ID and I, have reached an impasse I'll need to because the project ultimately needs to go on. I need someone that I can actually go to and discuss these things with that is also, connected to the project in some form or fashion. Not just a therapist or my husband but someone else.

Participant 18 expanded that she was able to collaborate with the ID, saying:

She is well-versed in quite a few areas. And so, what she doesn't have [in subject matter expertise] she makes up for in managing people and so it actually comes off much more palatable than with someone that is not necessarily a people person. Someone who is just kind of task-oriented and could kind of care less

about people's feelings and thoughts in the process. So, I think that's why I tend to kind of turn to her most of the time with issues that might arise.

Participant 2 remarked:

So, that's...it really wasn't with my work, but it ended up being a conflict and communication issue until in fact the Provost to that school got involved and said, "You will not do this. You teach online. This is what we give you. Everybody's got to have the same thing in the classroom. This is what we do" and laid it out so it put an end to that weirdness going. There are going to be administrators that let it ride because they do need retention. They do need a graduation rate. They need the numbers.

Participant 20 replied:

I think it does take an administrator or administrators who have a good process, a good understanding of dealing with people to drive results without compromising quality and who care themselves about the end result in what students experience and if that sort of thing is not in place you end up with classes that I've seen at other institutions, not the one I'm currently working at, but previous institutions where they had courses that were developed by subject matter experts that had literally a hundred CLOs, of course and that's created an environment that doesn't have the proper structure and supervision and guidance and training that I've seen myself. So, I think that the role of administration and supervision direct supervision could be overlooked but shouldn't be.

Participant 21 shared her perspective regarding conflict experienced from her vantage point as an online subject matter expert with respect to a lack of administrative support. She contrasted an initial versus a subsequent development situation, explaining:

I would categorize this as a conflict but not let's say like the first time you're doing the subject matter expert work. It's kind of like, "Hey, develop this." And there were some guidelines but because it was like a first time though there were people kind of helping you. It wasn't, I don't know it's the first time you're doing it. I kind of felt like just, "Here. Here you go. Get it done." So, I think that lack of support sometimes generates a conflict or not knowing like who you need to reach out to.

Participant 22 spoke about successfully reaching out to someone in administration later in the development process, stating:

Actually, I did but not until closer to the end of the project. When finally, I said, you know, "I don't, I can't read what's in people's minds and do what they want to do." You know, it was something like, "If you want it done this way, then maybe you should have written the course", you know, or, "If you wanted that in there, maybe you should have, you know, added it to an outcome," you know, it was sort of one of those things that you feel like that your hands are tied. So, then you just think you're doing the right thing, but then it just, you know, the irritation and aggravation just gets to you and then I did reach out, actually to the dean of the class, and said, "Listen, I understand what's going on here. I understand what they're trying to do, what you want to see, but it is impossible to include all that information or all of those types of questions and you know for credit, you know

for the student to get credit when it's a three credit course.” I said, “You can't,” you know, they wanted to overload the course.

She continued that the feedback was well received by the dean, saying:

It was one of those things where, “I wish you would have told me sooner” type thing. But you know, I don't know if you've probably heard this before you just you know, you want to work with people, you don't really want to step on their toes and I think that you know, like I said, I was working with it. It came out more like not me working with them, but I was working for them. After I talked to the dean and explained everything, it was more like he's like, “You're just gonna have to go with it and I'll talk to the other two.”

Participant 3 shared:

I had direct conflicts with the vice provost of the University. I had direct conflict with my director. I had direct conflict with the ITT department which is where the instructional designers were. I had conflict within the School of Music. Although that wasn't, they weren't the problem and that was a different conflict. That's a conflict we haven't talked about yet that I think is equally important... Yeah, I think that you know, if I was back at that university and this same problem occurred, it would not have mattered how I communicated. I ultimately was not... my communications didn't have a lot of value for people and they were looked at as something where you know, I was the, I was causing a problem. At one point. I actually got written up for the fact that I was continuing to communicate about a problem, which just kind of gives you an idea of the climate of the University. I wasn't communicating negatively. I wasn't using bad words. I

wasn't threatening. I was just continuing to communicate that there were issues that needed to be resolved, and I got a pretty firm slap back from that university letting me know that they didn't want to hear it.

Participant 7 recalled:

We're in that dual hat of being the administrator or receiving that feedback from your subject matter experts. Well considering the fact that I experienced the same thing, there was a lot of credence with their perspective because I had experienced it myself. And of course, you know, the only thing I can do is go to the Provost and say, "This is what we're dealing with from an academic perspective." I've had subject matter experts who will not continue to work on the project because of this interaction and I knew at some point resign. It's going to come down to where I'm going to have to do whatever's left because I'll be the last one standing because obviously I can't quit I'm the dean and you know, the Provost is like, "Well, I'll see what I can do," but nothing was ever done because the person who is in charge of CDT was very well-connected politically within the organization. And ultimately, I left the organization as a whole and went to work where I am now. And the project wasn't finished.

Delivery Time Frames

Online course development is for the most part extremely deadline driven. Based on participant responses, this was predominantly because there were many deliverables, many layers to the process, many people working on the project, and often firm roll out deadlines that would cause a trickle-down effect if missed. Participant 4 experienced unexpected timeline and due date changes during her course development, because of the

instructional designer's decision to move to a faculty position, which substantially shortened the course development timeline. In recalling her reaction to this unexpected change, Participant 4 said:

And so, again, it was just like, "Let's just get this done" and during all of this one day she calls me and or emails me and asked if she could have a call with me that afternoon. So, I said, "Okay." So, she calls me and tells me that she will be leaving the design team that she had accepted a faculty position at the same institution and that she'll be moving from the design team to a faculty position. And so, because of her moving, she needs to, she was told, she has to get all her work finished to be used to her new role so, our, she had to get all of this to the editor and so our due-to-edit date moved up by three weeks. So, I was basically working overtime. I was working during our break. So, full-time faculty get a 10-day break between quarters because we don't get, you know, vacation time or PTO or any of that and so, I was working during my 10-day break with a high-risk pregnancy to make sure that we got everything done for this course because she was moving to a new role.

Participant 4 remarked:

It failed. We never launched it. We were not going to meet due to edit. We were nowhere near finished on that course design and so we had to just call it a loss, call the project off because we did not have the capacity to push it into the next quarter due to other courses within our school that had to be designed. And so, the course got called off the work that was done. We saved it in hopes that maybe we can salvage what was started and it is slated for a redesign actually in July.

Participant 28 stated:

So, several, you know several times I would miss deadlines because I had no choice. It wasn't necessarily my fault. It just created such a conflict that I was answering to what seems like several people who had competing interests and competing due dates and you know that that just landed me in a very conflicted position and I didn't want to tell one team member that I was waiting on another team member, you know, that would impact my ability to finish one deadline so that I could move to the next but sometimes I had no choice because everything was pretty forward-facing and I wasn't able to be timely in my deliverable, you know. As a working professional I've had to set the time available to do my subject matter expertise work around other development and other obligations. And when other demands were made and, then I miss other deliverables it would set me behind, and it would put me in a state of conflict for sure. I had to juggle and adjust other obligations, which also, wasn't respectful of my time. It cut into my other personal and professional time. And I feel if you're going to hire somebody and you're going to work with professionals and ask for their industry knowledge that, you know, it has to be accounted for in the subject matter expert process, you know adding to requirements and the process throws off the timeline and that's not respectful and it's not fair for me, for example, to bear the burden of looking untimely when it isn't due to something that I did or didn't do.

Participant 27 described a development experience where the timelines and deadlines were spelled out from beginning to end. He explained:

My supervisor wasn't involved in the development process in any way it was the instructional designer. Then there was like I said an assistant instructional designer that I worked with but they had it spread out where it was literally a formal process to do the course and you know, they we would do one week at a time and then I'd send the course map to them. They'd review it, give me feedback and then I'd make corrections and then send it back to them. If there were no corrections to be made, they said, "That's great." We just continued, but literally was that they had it all spelled out you know, a hundred fifty days from launch date. "This is," you know, "Has to be in place a hundred eighty days."

In the context of additional responsibilities that impacted his ability to focus on the subject matter, Participant 11 commented:

Absolutely. I think I spent in that that instance maybe like 70% on clerical things and then 30% on content and I don't think that I did as good of a job on those particular courses just because of the restrictions of the way that they wanted the content...It was time [restrictions] in that case. That was many, many years ago, but they wanted I think it was like a hundred questions in two days. And the other was not enough time to really get quality content out there and it was just the way that they require the questions made it even worse.

Participant 13 recounted an instance of conflict that involved the removal of a team member due to stringent delivery deadlines. She explained:

It was the chair who removed her because they were because, you know, when you're a subject matter expert and you're revising a course, you're only given x amount of time within which to revise this course and so it should be a quick

turnaround process and I'm not talking a week. I'm talking, you know, no, you know no more than 10 weeks, you know, which is one quarter at [this particular institution]. And so, she was pushed up against you know, that time frame. I mean the deadline date was coming and she had not made any progress. You know, she was just stuck in the weeds and she was not hearing what anybody was saying to her. And so, finally the chair had to step in because the course needed to be revised and you know, I mean, they had like three weeks left before it needed to be turned around and so the chair had to step in and remove her and say, "Look, you know, we really have to get this done and you know, I'm going to I'm putting somebody in in the course who has revised this course before or has revised other courses and their turn around." You know, they need their turnaround time is very quick and so because she was not able to do it. I mean she was just; you know, she was really stuck in the weeds.

Participant 14 shared:

So, I was writing a particular course and I was probably a quarter of the way through and then I was notified that the text had changed but I had already invested quite a bit of time in that and so I had to start over with a brand new text. I had to review that and get that get all of the deliverables still completed on time despite the fact that so much of the work had been done. I wasn't compensated for the additional time. I don't know how I wasn't in the communication. I don't know if I just got left off of an email. I don't know if I wasn't given the correct information when the project started. I don't know but it was very frustrating because a huge part of subject matter expert work is project management and time

management. And when those things happen it pretty much destroys your entire plan and can set you way back. And personally, I am not someone that produces sound work when I'm pressured, when I'm under the gun. I tend to make mistakes and I don't want to make mistakes. And so, that creates a lot of conflict for me when those things happen, especially if the deadline isn't pushed back.

During one development project, Participant 16 experienced having to resend content as a result of time mismanagement on the part of a team member. She was then not given the opportunity to provide additional subject matter expert input into what was forward-facing for students and instructors for that particular course, which resulted in conflict. She explained:

I was to a point, but you know, we would go back and forth and then we had not come to agreement on certain pieces and I was told, "Sorry time's up. This is what it is," and I was livid, and I shared it with everybody I can, and nothing has happened.

Participant 17 remarked that, on one development project, it was "too much of a headache" because she felt it was over-engineered, there were too many deliverables, and the time frame was too tight. She explained:

I would say the time the turnaround time was very, very tight. It was, and of course, you know, you never know. It's kind of like when you're a student in the online class and you know, I always tell them, "You need to do your work at the beginning of the week. That way if something comes up at the end of the week, you're in good shape." You know here I was trying to juggle teaching, working full-time, and working on the courses, and I ran out of time. I just didn't have

time. I was working all day. I'd come home. I'd be on the computer until midnight, one o'clock in the morning, turn around get right back up. Do the same thing again and it just wasn't enough hours in the day for me to complete it. So, personally if I had not had a full-time job or if I was just strictly, you know, working as an online instructor all day or all night, I probably would have had, it would have been fine. But in my situation, I didn't have enough time to do it.

In online course development a goal, identified by participants, was utilization of working professionals in the field as subject matter experts, bringing their industry experience into the course content to help students gain employable skills while ensuring proficiency demonstration of aligned course and program outcomes. A key area of importance associated with accomplishing the goal, based on participant responses, was time. During Participant 17's interview, the researcher followed up with a question asking whether she felt, based on her lens in the role of the subject matter expert, the course development process at the two schools she worked for accounted for the needs of a working professional to bring their expertise to the subject matter expert process from a time standpoint. Participant 17 shared:

The first school I had no problem at all. That was actually a long process. It was it was probably longer than it needed to be. It was very drawn out and this most current one, you know, it was intense. It was it was a time crunch. It was. I think if, I had longer, more time to work on things, I think I could have accomplished what needed to be done. I think it would have been a higher quality of work, I think. Yeah, so, if you're talking about full-time professionals that are working on this as it needs to be, the deadlines need to be a little bit further apart.

Participant 21 described a situation when she had to make a choice between textbooks, choosing a book that either would be best, but had no resources and would make her job harder versus a book that had resources, but that wasn't the best fit based on her professional opinion. Regarding whether she felt like that created a sense of conflict for the subject matter expert at the point of making the textbook decision, she commented:

I think so, you know, because what your timeline is, it is a course that you need to turn around ASAP to get to the IT group or the ID group or the developer group to get going because you have students in the pike that need to take this class in five to 10 weeks. Or, is it a class that is going to be rolled out in 15 to 20 weeks where if you take 10 weeks to develop it or take the time, will they still have time to load it?

Taking the question a step further, the researcher asked Participant 21 about her perception of conflict from the vantage point time, as to whether she picked a book that was the best, but with no resources. Participant 21 explained that, in that situation, "It's going to take me an additional X number of hours versus if I take the book that's not the best with resources, my life as the subject matter expert just became easier." Participant 21 viewed that as a conflict for a subject matter expert and recalled:

Yes, because I think you know again it goes down the timeline. It's, and it depends on the person right, for me, I'm a person that I would prefer to get the best book that's going to give the student the better experience even though it makes my life more difficult in that moment in time of developing that course versus, you know, give them something that's not as effective; they don't realize

it's not as effective. But when you're looking at the, at the choices and in your mind and your personal set, you're like, okay, this really gives the best learning experience, but it's going to take me longer. This doesn't, this gives them a good learning experience. Students are not going to know the difference. I think it just depends on the person, on what type of person you are, as in the choice, and then sometimes it could be down to the time crunch. You don't have that time to say, "Hey, this one doesn't have any instructor resources and I'm going to take the time to develop it." So, you know, I think it could be conflict in the sense of, "I need to get this done and this is what I have to do."

Participant 22 stated:

In the beginning, yes. A little, but towards the end there was like no time because once again that you know things kept adding up, you know more needed to be done. The timeline was approaching when they wanted to, you know, open it up and start the courses. And sometimes you just have to, you know, go with the flow.

Participant 26 addressed the impact of timelines in the context of what she considered qualities of a good subject matter expert. She recounted:

A good subject matter expert, first of all, it's got to be someone that can think through a process. You got to be able to think through the process from start to finish, the entire flow of the course. "What do I need to do? What are my objectives? How am I going to meet these objectives?" You've got to have some critical thinking. You have to be a good writer. I've worked with subject matter experts who had dyslexia and that was not an easy task. A good subject matter

expert follows the directions that are clear, or the expectations that are clear from the outset and actually follows them, uses the templates that are provided if they are provided. Timeliness, able to meet their deadlines. Hopefully they are given milestones for deliverables and they're able to meet those deadlines.

Participant 28 expressed perceiving conflict when circumstances out of her control led to missed deadlines in the online course development process. She explained:

So, several, you know several times I would miss deadlines because I had no choice. It wasn't necessarily my fault. It just created such a conflict that I was answering to what seems like several people who had competing interests and competing due dates and you know that, that just landed me in a very conflicted position and I didn't want to tell one team member that I was waiting on another team member, you know, that would impact my ability to finish one deadline so that I could move to the next but sometimes I had no choice because everything was pretty forward facing and I wasn't able to be timely in my deliverables. You know, as a working professional, I've had to set the time available to do my subject matter expertise work around other development and other obligations.

And when other demands were made and then I miss other deliverables it would set me behind, and it would put me in a state of conflict for sure. I had to juggle and adjust other obligations, which also, wasn't respectful of my time. It cut into my other personal and professional time. And I feel if you're going to hire somebody and you're going to work with professionals and ask for their industry knowledge that, you know, it has to be accounted for in the subject matter expert process, you know? Adding to requirements and the process throws off the

timeline and that's not respectful and it's not fair for me, for example, to bear the burden of looking untimely when it isn't due to something that I did or didn't do.

Participant 9, too, shared concerns of conflict surrounding timelines for online course development, but also expressed the ability to resolve that conflict with increased collaboration. He explained:

The only thing I would say is you know, it was a it was a very tight time frame and I would have liked more time, to really look at look at textbooks. I felt like we had to make a decision of which text to go with pretty quickly because we had tight timeframes to get the work done because we were implementing so rapidly so, you know, I think normally, you know, I would have, I'd be giving it a little bit more time and be able to go out and you know and read the text in advance and make sure everything rather than just kind of skim through it and, you know, in the end I think we picked good text but I would have liked to be able to vet through things a little bit more carefully. I think just, I think you know, I wasn't afraid to ask for help. And so, I think yeah, there were there were time frames that that I wasn't physically able to meet with the time that I had allotted. So, you know, that was a conflict that we just resolved by you know getting more people to work on the project with me.

The researcher asked Participant 14 to describe one of the larger scale conflicts she experienced that affected the timeline of deliverables and share how it impacted her. She elaborated:

So, I was writing a particular course and I was probably a quarter of the way through and then I was notified that the text had changed but I had already

invested quite a bit of time in that and so, I had to start over with a brand new text. I had to review that and get that get all of the deliverables still completed on time despite the fact that so much of the work had been done. I wasn't compensated for the additional time. I don't know how it wasn't communicated. I don't know if I just got left off of an email. I don't know if I wasn't given the correct information when the project started. I don't know but it was very frustrating because a huge part of subject matter expert work is project management and time management. And when those things happen it pretty much destroys your entire plan and can set you way back. And personally, I am not someone that produces sound work when I'm pressured. When I'm under the gun, I tend to make mistakes and I don't want to make mistakes. And so, that creates a lot of conflict for me when those things happen, especially if the deadline isn't pushed back.

On-Ground Versus Online

All participants in this study possessed online teaching and course development experience. Many subject matter experts also had ground teaching experience or course development experience that included some level of interaction with ground instructors. Participant responses reflected clear and differing views, from both the perspective of subject matter experts and the perspective of instructional designers, regarding how the course development process worked in ground versus online higher education settings. Melding online and on-ground practitioners in the course development process, based on participant responses, was often a source of conflict. Participant 20 explained a conflict

experience that occurred as a result of a disconnect between ground and online approaches to online course development:

At times I would be asked to work on initiatives at my institution that were, that would originate from the head academic office and often would be geared toward ground campus practices and then they would try to have us to make them work for online. And as you know, of course, online, it can be a completely different animal and what works for ground doesn't work for online and vice versa and I would often take a great deal of time to try to 1) understand what they're asking because these initiatives would often be asked by people who didn't understand the online process either in general or in specific and 2) it would take a long time to try to sift through that and understand what they're asking, and then it would take an innate longer amount of time sometimes, you know eight plus hours in total to respond and say, "We can't do this as you're asking because it's not going to work" and we can't just say it's not going to work, they have to show why and that's where the time would come in. So, we have to dig into grade books and dig into CLO data, dig into assignment completion rates before and after we made a particular change, and we'd have to prove why what they're asking isn't going to make sense or isn't going to work. Thankfully, I can't think of a time where we weren't listened to but it still took a great deal of time and effort to try to explain why a particular thing wouldn't work and a lot of that had to do with the people asking the questions, being ignorant of online in general and in particular.

Participant 4 recalled an instance involving a subject matter expert who had a background in ground course development and teaching, from her perspective as an administrator:

She just she shared apprehension. She's a very perfectionist-driven individual and she was afraid of failing in this assignment and not doing well, but I have to say I think part of it was more so the fact that it was not it was not the design process or the instructional architect or designer making it hard for her. I think that she was used to designing courses in a brick-and-mortar setting to teach, you know, person-to-person classes and she was not understanding that in the online setting, when we design classes, they're very standardized and they're very prescriptive and that you don't have as much autonomy when you're the actual faculty member teaching as you would in a brick-and-mortar.

Participant 12 shared an experience in which she was brought in to revise a class for online delivery that was built by a ground subject matter expert. When asked if she felt that the ground versus online experience had any impact on the final course product, she explained:

Yeah, because I mean we're still trying to fix that class, you know, she wrote a lot of the exams and more even recently. Now, the people that are teaching it who have online experience are still saying that the exam questions need to be rewritten or clarified. She writes in a very conversational tone because she's a ground instructor and she just doesn't understand how to write things in a way that works for online.

Participant 2 stated:

I developed a set of courses for an undergraduate criminal justice program and they had both on ground and online components. Huge university the conflict arose because they were trying to take the curriculum from the online courses and putting it as a box type of preset teaching into the course room. And that wasn't working, and I thought, "Why would you think that would work?" It's not set up to go in and do a lecture in front of students and do group work and homework and testing because it's an online course, and there was a lot of feedback and grumbling because some of the instructors that had access to the online stuff were trying to walk it into their course rooms.

Participant 22 described an experience about collaborating with instructors, some of whom were ground only. When asked whether she thought there was a difference in collaborating with online versus ground instructors, Participant 22 replied:

I think it's a big difference because I think there's a huge misconception of the work that students do in online classes. I think that a lot of people don't take that, and like the students taking online classes seriously, you know, as seriously as somebody that goes to campus, you know. I don't know if you know people feel like that, they just, you know, these students don't have that much work to do when majority of the time they have much more work to do than those on, you know, ground. So, I would say with that misconception, you know, there's, it could be harder for an instructor too that's never taught an online classroom, never attended an online class, to understand, you know, all the areas that need to be covered in such, you know, the short amount of time that we have per class and all the information that you know, the students have to gain during that time.

The researcher asked Participant 26 whether she had any conflict in her role as a subject matter expert working with an instructor who only had a ground vantage point.

She replied:

Yes, I have. We have had some accounting assignments which needed to be the same between online and on ground and we have had some mode conflict where the approved assignment needed to be able to be delivered to online students and on-ground, but it needed to be the same assignment. So, I had to work between both. So, we had to work on ways to make sure that we could satisfy both modes of learning with those specific assignments. It wasn't a big deal, but we had to be aware of the delivery of the particular assignment.

Participant 26 further explained that this situation translated to what she perceived to be conflict, continuing:

The conflict existed when on-ground presented an assignment that did not work for our online students. Because our online students need to use like Excel spreadsheets, but on-ground had submitted an assignment where they needed a physical workbook to write their answers in and that did not work for us. So, I presented the solution that would work for both...the conflict was that they wanted to use that, but it would not work for us so I think it was that they did not understand our mode of delivery for online students and I think they just didn't you know, they didn't really think about it. Our students can't necessarily scan workbook pages, so.

Participant 7 recalled:

Related to process, there was one situation where I built a course for a university that I had done some, I had taught for probably two classes and then out of the blue, they needed a favor which always happens to me. "Hey, we need a favor" and the next thing I know I'm taking over a course design from somebody who didn't meet any of the deliverables and they're like, "Basically we're scratching everything that person did." They wouldn't even share with me what the person had done. And they said, "We want you to do this" and then they kind of gave me their guidelines and said, "Here's our process," except what they neglected to tell me was after the completion of the design, once I had done everything I was supposed to do, then I had to present that information to the full-time ground faculty. This was for an online program. I had to present the information to the full-time ground faculty and get their permission to move forward. I was not aware that that was part of the process. And in that interview, that presentation, I went through the process and went through the syllabus and stuff. They started ripping, of course. I don't know if they just didn't realize you know, my limited engagement with university or what but they went through and like the there's always kind of inherent conflict between full-time faculty that work on the ground campus and online instructors is just like the front versus the back in the doctor's office. It's the same and they kind of ripped me apart and they're like, "Well, you didn't do this, and you didn't do that, and this is not designed this way, and there's not enough Bloom's." You know, somebody's always got to throw Bloom's into the mix. "Well, there's not enough Bloom's taxonomy in this area and this, that, and the other" and I was like, "I apologize, I was unaware that this was part of the

expectation and that this was, you know, I needed to run these things by this group before we move forward. That was not the direction I was given” and the person who gave me all the direction was in the room and they got mad and they flipped out on me over Skype in this meeting saying that I was throwing them under the bus and this and the other and I’m like. “Wait a minute. Hold up. First of all, I’m an adjunct. Let’s get that clear. Okay, this is a contract and I can quit at any time. Okay, so, step back. Second of all, if I am unclear on a process that is not my fault or my responsibility, that is yours. You should have explained to me. This was the expectation. You said, ‘Here’s a course. Here’s the objectives. Don’t use a book. Design it however you want.’ So, I did. That was the only direction I was given. If that’s not what was expected, I should have been told that. Now, I have absolutely no problems going in and reworking this course and meeting these objectives and sending it back up to the committee for you to look at, but don’t beat me up over something I was unaware of.” So, again poor process not explaining the process would have circumvented all of that.

Personalities and Self-Awareness

A key factor leading to or escalating conflict perceived by subject matter experts in online course development, based on participant responses, was the personalities of the parties involved in the process. Several participants recalled exchanges that lacked volition, or will, to manage or resolve conflict when encountered in the online course development process, with implications. The teams involved in the personality dynamic conflict experiences were frequently cross-functional teams; often made up of members with a variety of backgrounds and professional experience. Several participants shared

information they learned about themselves when they encountered conflict connected to personality dynamics.

Participant 18 described an online development encounter where she delivered content she believed fit best for a particular deliverable. The content was kicked back to her, by a non-subject matter expert design team member, because it didn't seem to fit into what that team member perceived to be a place in the procedure, or wasn't aligned with a particular deliverable. She shared an example of an experience that translated to conflict for her as the subject matter expert navigating personalities, and made some observations of herself in the process. Participant 18 shared:

I would say yes, and no. It does not have to be a conflict I think and it could be...I think my challenge comes in with personalities as I can be kind of important too, because if I have a pushy person that is insistent that knows it must be done this way. "We can definitely not do it as a test question. It must be a homework assignment. So, we just need it this way." That to me is one of the quick ways to just kind of cause me to shut down if you will and I'm almost either always on or always off. So, it's no gray for me. So, either I'm going to develop this class, or you develop this class. So, and that might be my own little elementary idiosyncrasies, they're kind of showing and rearing their heads, but even in the instance that you gave it depends on the person now. Anything that [one particular person] asks of me, I am totally game with it. And so, it really depends on the source of the contingent as well. So, if it's someone that I have to take Aleve, I probably would finish the course and let them go ahead, and acquiesce, and let them have their way if you will, but it's just someone that you know, I'm really

well, I'll do anything to support them. I'm going to make matters work and so there's conflict either way, but it's the manner in which I choose to address it that I think speaks more to my side of how I handle the conflict.

Participant 14 explained that through the online course development process, she noted she had changed. When asked whether she felt that she had to change in that situation, she replied:

I don't feel like I should have had to, but I feel like as a subject matter expert you have to be able to manage yourself and your relationships in order to be effective and if that's what you have to do then it's okay to do it.

Participant 15 pinpointed specific connections to conflict connected to personality, and the team members involved regarding whether the conflict was internal or external. She recounted:

Well, so, the actual course developer, actually, she's the program developer for this. She was my doctoral chair a few years ago. And so, you know, we had a pretty good working relationship. She tends to be, let's see, I think I'm much more of a type-A type of personality than she is. My life is very busy and I like to have schedules and routines and know sort of what the expectations are and what's coming so that I can prioritize my time and make sure that things get done whereas she's more of a kind of a last-minute person. And so, the differences and our working personalities also create some stress for me. And then also, there were some things that were just out of our control because the state was providing information as they were creating this whole assessment and then we were having

to turn around and put it right into the course. So, we were literally building as information was becoming available.

Participant 23 stated:

Several IT professionals were hired to serve in the role of subject matter experts. We worked with instructional designers at the college as well as faculty members and the program chairs. It was kind of a, I guess the best way to describe it will be a subject matter expert workshop, to give you a rundown. We all met at one of the campuses. I believe it was four days and we went through, you know, the college history and how this program has changed over the years and what they're looking for, some of the feedback they received from students; why they're making the changes. So, we had a well-rounded understanding of what the goal was and what we were responsible for after that workshop. They divided us up into I would say individual pairs, you know, a subject matter expert and a faculty member to develop individual courses and during the workshop you get a bunch of A-type personalities in there. There would be disagreements as far as you know, what the, what the job outlook is what employers are looking for, how that ties into the courses that we select. Then, if you got down a little bit deeper, what should some of the content be in that course so, you know, just the normal, I would say conflict of getting a large group of people together.

Participant 25 said:

You know people get....And I think it was just a conflict in her mind, but you know how people are...It's frustrating because you're supposed to be working as a team when it comes to writing content and she didn't want to have any input in it

at all. But after it was all said and done got an attitude because it worked out well, which I don't understand why. So, if you know I as a subject matter expert I did what I was supposed to do. I wrote the content according to what the college wanted and if she got had hard feelings over it, I have no idea why. That's you know, but that creates tension in a team setting and it shouldn't be. You know she had every opportunity to contribute but declined to do so, so, you know, she didn't want to be a part of the team. You have to then deal with the outcome. You know that other people do that. I did, you know.

Participant 3 replied:

I think that anytime that you're looking at conflict, conflict is never a one-way street, right? It's, there's almost always things within yourself that you have to look at and decide whether or not you want to use them to make yourself a better person and the things that I learned in these states of conflict are that, not surprisingly, I'm pretty stubborn and when I believe in something I really do stick my heels in and so, since these conflicts I've put work into modulating that because something that I also know about myself is that just because I believe in something and I give it a hundred percent doesn't mean it actually needs that level of stubbornness. So, I try now, because that was all just so darn painful, I try to be less emotionally engaged and things that benefit students I try to, I'm really careful about, you know, the hills that I want to die on in the battle. I'm careful about really thinking through the things that I want to dig my heels in on and I think too that I also, I've been trying to use this ever since it happened. To work on my own sense of being less than, being inferior to people. There is no reason

that I should feel inferior to people. There's no reason that I shouldn't get equal respect from people for my ideas. Even if they don't like them, you know, it's okay to not like somebody's idea. It's not okay to phrase it in a way that makes them inferior, but part of that is on me too because I need to do the work to not be made to feel inferior because it's, when I let it cross that line that it then becomes hard for me to communicate and so, I'm looking forward to continuing to be a person who does a better job of working through conflict and communicating through conflict even when it's uncomfortable and even when it leads me to spaces that I don't want to be. And I really hate conflict; really, really hate conflict. But I'm trying to be better at communicating through it, understanding that nine times out of 10, there's no huge risk to communicating but there's a huge risk to not communicating and not being clear, and not communicating through a difficulty.

Participant 4 commented:

It slightly aggravated me, but I am more of an amiable personality. Look, I have, I had a job I had to get done at this course view to be designed. So, it was just roll with it, you know, just make it, make it work as the experience went on with her. So, that was just you know, the initial experience and I had designed courses before so, with several different instructional designers.

Participant 5 shared:

So, I actually have found that I prefer either working with somebody so, that they can, we can bounce ideas off each other or taking current curriculum and just simplifying it so, that it makes more sense and it's easier for the student to absorb

and translate into what we're looking for and to see if we're actually meeting our learning outcomes. Are we really seeing what we hoped to see? Are they going to be able to apply this in real life at their jobs or wherever in their careers?

Boundaries

In some of the experiences shared by participants, regardless of the source of the conflict, instances were recalled where subject matter experts felt other members of the design team had crossed boundaries in the online course development process.

Boundaries were crossed in personal and professional settings, and many centered around changes made to the content subject matter experts built that either changed the meaning or completely eliminated the content altogether; often without the subject matter expert's knowledge prior to making the changes. In her role as a subject matter expert, Participant 25 described a situation where revisions were sent back to her she felt changed the meaning of her course content. She explained:

Yeah, I'm because you have you might write the content and then you send it off to a design team who then sets things up. Like say a I write some content and they want the content, they want to create a video or something. I don't know make something up and you know, something visual for students because you get to do when you're doing online stuff. You have to tap into the video, the audio, the you have to hit all areas because you gotta watch out for individuals with disabilities, you know, the individuals Disability Act so, a transcript or something is made from something that you sent to them and the person on the other end who's putting that together, which would be like their technology department or something. They might not be subject matter experts. So, they might think that

they're writing something some way and the way they transcribe what you've given them takes on a whole different meaning and you have to go back and say, "Oh you can't say it that way because it doesn't mean the same thing if you say it that way. You have to put it back to the original way."

Participant 11 shared an experience that involved changes made to his content by non-subject matter experts that he deemed subject matter specific. Although he did not consider the changes to be inaccurate, he felt:

It just didn't fit the model for the course, the competencies, and the content for the week. It just added so much ancillary content that it made it more difficult for the students and it was something that I brought up. I didn't agree with their approach, but they wanted to get that in there.

Some boundaries described equated to barriers to the subject matter expert's productivity and role as a whole. For example, Participant 11 commented about instructional designers' treatment of subject matter experts, stating:

I think in part it's like their lack of trust in the subject matter expert of what they are they're able to do and so, they placed so many obstacles along the way that it just doesn't make sense to have a subject matter expert actually build the course at all.

Participant 2 stated:

So, I'm the subject matter expert, supposedly the head of the team. Then I have a marketing person that puts it all together and makes it pretty and then I have a person that verifies the course information. The two people took it upon

themselves to change the course content, which was not part of our contract nor of their description of their roles.

Participant 24 replied:

It's not just about being a subject matter expert and being that expert on the content. It's also somebody that understands how important it is that curriculum alignment is accurate and that you're creating content; not just understanding the content of what you're creating but understanding why you're creating it and how it's supposed to all fit together in the puzzle. And to have somebody tell you, "Sorry," and have to tell you that what you're saying isn't important and doesn't matter. It's insulting. I explained my position that the course that I created no longer matches the description and the objectives and that it needs to be rewritten and I wanted them to have the time to replace me with somebody who could rewrite it.

Participant 25 recalled:

Little bit frustrated, again, because you're looking over the shoulders again. You've done your job. You've done it, right. Somebody else mistakenly made a change because they made an assumption without asking, you know, hey, was it supposed to look like this and if they would just ask that first, then you wouldn't have that situation. Then you find out later sometimes even the cases where it's found out after the course has rolled out and students like, "Wait a minute, this doesn't make sense to me. I'm confused." Well, it shouldn't be like that; wasn't like that originally. Why did you change it?

Participant 27 shared:

You know, if we say this how will it impact this or you know asked my opinion on it as far as how it's going to affect everything I've done instead of just saying, "Well, we want to change this" when you're not the subject matter expert, you're the instructional design expert and it just it was it was crossing boundaries and it just bothered me. And I mentioned that that is, it's a crossing the boundaries I mean you're paid, and your job is to design the courses. You know, that's what your degree is. I'm sure you do very, very well at it. You know, I'm being paid to create the content so, that, you know, let me do what I'm doing; you do what you do... I'd be home at night seven or eight o'clock at night be as you know be sitting with me my wife on the couch watching TV... and you know, my boss would call me on my cell phone and talk to me about changes that she wanted made from something I submitted to her that day and I thought that I said, "Look, this is so way over the line, excuse me," crossing boundaries, you know.

Participant 3 said:

I think that the issues of bureaucracy and the issues of "this is the way we've always done things and we're not changing this" is huge in higher education. I think it is one of the things that kills higher education to be honest, that kills institutions. That, and when I say kills an institution, I don't mean necessarily causes the institution to close, but I certainly think it causes the institutions to lose money and lose students and lose their quality of education.

Participant 4 shared:

The first experience or time I designed with this particular ID, instructional designer, she was very forceful with the process, did not ask me how I like to

work, what were my preferences, you know, “Do you want to meet once a week or do you want to move, you want to meet multiple times a week?” It was, “This is how you're going to do it” and there was no, you know, again, the design team basically is our business partner. They work to deliver a product for the academics. And so, they're supposed to be a little more accommodating to the academic people than what the academic people should be to the design team and there was no question of what my schedule looked like, what days worked best, or times for me, it was, “Thursday morning is when I'm available. So, we're going to be having calls on Thursday morning.”

Participant 7 explained:

They said well, “We appreciate your feedback. But this is the direction and we will head and this is what you need to produce. And what if you lead and the team lead within the organization and I got together” and he's like, “Listen, I totally agree with you. I think they're totally”, because he actually had experience in my industry and their industry and he's like, “They're not understanding the direction we need to head and we're going to provide content that's not really going to meet what those people really need to be successful in the industry. But this is this is what they want.” So, we build what the client wants.

Participant 27 recalled:

I was developing my fourth course at that time and her as my supervisor was the one who was you know, reviewing what I was developing and she had seen the other courses that I developed and obviously she wasn't over me at that point, but you know; she had no problem with what I was doing and the way that I was

developing courses. What really, and her and I really started to butt heads when I was developing the course because you know again it was it was more of I would create if she created the course learning outcomes for the course and then I would do the weekly and you know as I did for other types of schools, but she was so micromanaging that I didn't have room to breathe as the course developer. I mean she quite literally micromanaged every single thing that I did but for everybody it wasn't just me. It was just the way she was and so, as the subject matter expert, I was developing and I never forget this.... It made me over time physically sick because working for her just it was it was horrible. And so, I developed maybe two more courses underneath her and then I left. It just got it got to be too as physically affecting me. We ended up with content in the class that she essentially wrote because she essentially redid everything that I was doing, and she took my ideas and then would change them. And so, we ended up basically it ended up being where she ended up writing the course. I mean, I still did it obviously and I created everything and would send them to her. But then she would rewrite it and send it back to me how she wanted it. So, the final product was not mine it was hers.

Participant 28 echoed:

I pride myself not only on being an expert in my field, but I take pride in my work. I work very hard to develop creative innovative approaches to subject matters that you know engage students and the way I develop my courses there is a purpose from beginning to end. So, whereas during the design and development process many people can be very unit minded and just, you know, write a unit and

be done with it, I start my development process with a bird's-eye view of how that all of the assignments are connected and how that content progresses and builds, and how that feeds into the learner experience so that they can use that as information and knowledge and skills to get a job. And so, when I feel like castrated for lack of a better word, you know, when somebody takes basically everything I've done, throws it away tells me I need to do something else and you know, I just kind of wonder why I was there in the first place.

Theme 3 – Insufficient Post-Launch Quality Control

Another important theme that emerged from this study involved the phase after full delivery of course content by the online subject matter expert, namely insufficient post-launch quality control involvement after the roll-out of the course(s) developed. Based on participant responses recounting post-launch quality conflicts experienced, a lack of post-launch involvement, by the online subject matter expert, resulted in the potential loss of important data associated with quality control, changes to content that were not subject matter expert approved, instructor facilitation challenges, student learning implications, and institution impacts. This theme led to the identification of four sub-themes: importance of post-launch feedback, importance of subject matter expert course facilitation, concerns about non-subject matter expert instructor perceptions, and intrinsic commitment to quality. Some key words noted in this theme were: errors, expert, learning, taught, correct, frustrating/frustrated. Several subject matter experts recounted experiencing situations where they eventually taught the course(s) they developed, only to find material changes had been made to the course after the finished content was submitted. On such example was shared by Participant 28:

I would get extremely frustrated teaching the class because I was able to reflect back on what I built, but what changed was what ended up being a source of frustration and an area of poor performance for learners and in reflecting back, it was very clear to me and extremely frustrating and irritating that the areas of struggle were off and not always but often areas I approached differently or wanted to approach differently, but I had to allow others on the team to edit rather than consistently fight the fight and you know in many instances those, there were edits being performed after I ever after I ever saw the map again, so, I didn't have control over that and then we get exhausting honestly to fight the good fight after a while you sort of throw your hands up which turns into, that translates into a perceived problem with me as a subject matter expertise being difficult or unwilling to accept input or constructive criticism but after being beaten down enough, you know with time constraints and the process in general you just sort of throw your hands up and say, you know, "Find whatever you think is best." It's not ideal, but she can only, you know, we do so much at that point I felt, which is frustrating.

Participant 2 shared the following experience about seeing only one of the three courses she developed after roll-out:

Yes. I actually taught one of those courses about six months down the road and I would say 75% of my content was in there. The rest was absolutely unknown hadn't seen it had no idea and there were two major errors, which actually became an accreditation issue because they were that wrong and I took it to the dean of students because at that point I'm out of this whole process now, I'm back to the

instructor level and it's like, "Look this is wrong. This can't be in the course you're giving people information that could impact their careers and this is wrong," the course was then edited. So, yeah, I actually did see one. I have no idea what happened to the other two courses.

Conflict arose after post-launch of a course in a variety of ways. Participant 5 lent some insight on this issue from her vantage point; that there were many levels of conflict that could arise after the course development process when the process lacked good quality control methods or mechanisms. These conflicts included concern for the instructor teaching the course and focus on the student experience. The experience Participant 5 shared connected to conflict experienced involved another instructor finding errors while teaching the course instead of the subject matter expert. Participant 5 explained:

I think there would be conflict for another professor that or with like the other example where the other Professor who taught the class that I wrote the curriculum luckily she knew me but I still you know, if she didn't know me she would probably be really frustrated because she didn't understand where I was going with that assignment. So, I would say that's where there would be some conflict from the professor's point of view in that when there are questions or assignments that are in the class curriculum or even test questions that don't seem to tie back to the textbook that makes the professor's job harder. There would be definitely some conflict and also, students that drop out there is of course the conflict that the school is going to experience and that professor because the student dropped out because they were so frustrated and now that impacts your

own rating as well. So, I think there's multiple sources of conflict with any class that doesn't have good quality control methods or mechanisms in place.

Importance of Post-Launch Feedback

Participants agreed, based on responses, some form of post-launch feedback was necessary for a subject matter expert to adequately reflect and receive closure on the online course development process. Several participants deemed feedback was one of the most important indicators available for improving many aspects of the online education experience, from instructor performance, to course quality, to student experience.

Many study participants expressed definitive opinions regarding the importance of not only considering the post-launch phase a legitimate phase of the development process but also keeping that post-launch phase and its stakeholders in the forefront of their minds throughout the development process.

Participant 11 experienced more than one instance where he had to seek out feedback affirmatively from administration once a course launched. Participant 11 explained his perspective on the availability and importance of feedback, stating:

It definitely does not come automatically. That is something that I look to and, in part, that's why I'm able to be continuously working along with these courses for some of these institutions as we're always looking to improve it; even if like the course works really well already. We can always identify better ways to improve.

In some cases, subject matter experts were not, for logistical operations reasons, given the opportunity to teach courses they developed to check for errors, and ascertain if their visions translated to students as intended. Participant 12 shared her experience where she encountered conflict, from her lens, connected to quality control issues with

curriculum she authored after it was rolled out. Although it was not always possible for her to teach every course due to her volume of course development work, Participant 12 shared that she had no problem fixing errors made and having people report errors because she wanted the course to be the best for the students. That said, she also shared an experience where the feedback was vague, limited, and not delivered in a very collegial way, stating:

One recently though where an instructor was teaching a course that I did edits, in my opinion, was kind of rude about the way that she presented her opinion about how certain things should be worded. So, it wasn't necessarily an error, it was just she wanted it worded at a certain way. And I did fix it the way that she wanted it, but I also, tried to elicit feedback from her on a specific way that you know, "How do you think it should be worded?" and she was not willing to offer that. She just wanted me to basically wordsmith it again and do it the way she wanted it, but without her input.

Participant 1 replied:

Now when I developed that cyber course is an example. I was teaching at that very first round along with two other instructors who had a separate section so they could kind of see a spread of the different student population and instructors. And so, with that even in the first week, I was getting questions from the two other instructors who the chair had said, "Oh, [Participant 1]'s the one who developed it let's ask him your questions" and it was related to that as well. "How do I grade this, and what am I looking for in the answers so that I know what would be the right answer?" So, I kind of work to develop almost a solution set

for what the student would be providing so that they could then compare that and grade against it and that to me was somewhat of a conflict because that was outside of the scope of the development work and it became now of, okay, “I’m doing this to help these other instructors out merely because their knowledge base is kind of insufficient for them do it on their own.” So, that that was a separate conflict outside of the development, but it was a it was a secondary effect of it.

In the context of quality control after delivery of completed course content by the online subject matter expert, participants shared valuable feedback consisted of both positive and negative feedback. Participants recognized, in responses, the institutional development team was in a position to share similar positive feedback with subject matter experts. The desire to received positive and negative feedback after completing a development contract was evident from study participant responses. Participant 14 shared her perspective regarding whether she experienced any conflict surrounding feedback or a lack of feedback about either the student or instructor experience facilitating a course she authored. Participant 14 replied:

The only conflict I would say is that I never hear if a course goes well and that's disappointing you when you spend a lot of time and put a lot of effort into really putting together a good product and then you never hear like, “Wow, yeah, that worked. That was really good.” It's frustrating and disappointing. You just don't know. It's like you're throwing a baseball and you never know if anyone caught it.

Participant 14 also shared that a lack of feedback was a common occurrence for her in the course development process and that she only received feedback post-launch,

“if there's a huge problem. That is the only time I hear about it, and that's true for all six places.”

Although most participants did not have the ability to interact with other subject matter experts in the course development process, some institutions provided opportunities for networking and a face-to-face exchange of ideas. Participant 2 shared her vantage point regarding the importance of networking to remain active in the development loop and seek out post-launch feedback. She explained that one institution:

Has in-person meetings twice a year. If you choose to go, there are ones in the eastern part of the country, ones in the western part, just depends on where they are, and you can physically go to a meeting and I used to. I don't anymore. I used to go to at least one a year. So, I'd get like feedback and find out the scuttlebutt and what's going on and it everybody seemed to have the same experiences, and nobody wanted to do curriculum development because of this.

She also shared some insight from her lens about the consistency (or lack thereof) of feedback based on instructor behavior she observed regarding reporting errors as a critical component of post-launch feedback:

You've got instructors and some are just flat out lazy. Some are fearful for their jobs. Some I don't know why they're an instructor and the grade inflation is an issue. They don't report errors when they know damn well there is an error and there is a minority and there always will be a minority. It doesn't matter if we teach on-ground or online. There is a minority of teachers and administrators that do these negative things. I think for the most part people try to do the right thing and some instructors I would feel may not know who to tell that there's a problem

if there's a content issue or the course is just not aligning with what it's supposed to be doing. They may not know who to ask depending on the school the school you and I both work for we have a really good chain of command it's very clear who you get hold of and if you can't get hold of one, you know, who the next person is on the list. So, it's very clear there really isn't an excuse not to report or not to make mention of a problem at some schools.

Some study participants, in their capacity as an online subject matter expert, said they perceived conflict about content they delivered and revisions that came back to them about that content. In Participant 25's case, she shared an experience surrounding an assignment she wrote that needed an adjustment once it was student-facing. Participant 25 made that determination based on student end-of-course feedback. Participant 25 explained: "Yeah, I think everything always has room for improvement, changes, and stuff. ... I had to give them a little bit more instruction on, 'Here's how you get started on doing this; go look here.'"

The researcher then asked whether she experienced conflict serving as the subject matter expert building a class, not being offered to teach the class, and receiving zero follow-up from either instructors or student surveys. She shared that resulted in conflict for her as the author of the course "because you wouldn't know how it worked."

Participant 25 continued:

I mean you have to have some kind of feedback, you know, or it would be conflict. You'd just be kind of in the dark; did that work, you know, was the student successful? And, I don't, I can't think of a, of any situation where there

hasn't been some kind of feedback. I mean every college has some kind of way of you receiving feedback on what you write.

In instances where she hasn't seen the student survey results or didn't know which instructors were teaching the class if she didn't teach the class herself, Participant 25 further expressed the need to actively seek out feedback, stating:

In those cases where you don't get much feedback from the students in the survey, so, you're not getting a lot there. So, then the next opportunity then is to send an email to the instructor themselves. "How did that work out for you? Is there any recommendation for changes or is there something that went wrong?" So, I actually go and ask them, or I'll ask the department. "Have you heard anything from so and so," you know, "How do you think that worked out this semester?" So, you do go seek it out. You know, you can't, I don't think you can consider yourself a subject matter expert if you don't get that feedback, so, that you can make expert changes on something. People make mistakes, including subject matter experts. So, if you made a mistake or something you want to have feedback, so you know how to fix it.

Participant 25 further explained that if she was unable to access that information and was not provided instructor contact information, student survey results, or wasn't assigned to teach the class, she "would keep digging." She explained:

There's always student data. The students, you look at who passed and who failed and if you got a whole class of people that are failing you might say, "Oh gosh, is there something wrong with the way the course is written?" Or you might look at

the date on the specific assignment, they're all doing wonderful and everything except for this one thing; what's wrong with that one thing?

When asked how she would feel if told the information wasn't readily accessible to her, Participant 25 shared, from her lens, there was a much higher purpose for providing feedback than the immediate needs of a subject matter expert on a personal level. She replied:

Well, I don't know how that would make me feel because the college, any college, any institution is going to have to have that information available because that's kind of a requirement by the Department of Education that you have performance indicators....I don't know that I would work for them.

Participant 5 agreed that post-launch feedback was a key part of the development process. She, too, commented on the need to grow as a subject matter expert based on that feedback, stating:

It would be great to have feedback from the next instructor; some for the professor that teaches that class after we've done an update. I would have liked some feedback to see what I can also, for future classes that I helped write, you know, what would, what works, what doesn't work, and that helps me learn and grow. I don't get any feedback. So, that, I guess, that's the biggest frustration is I would like to get feedback and I don't until I actually teach the class and then I could see where the problems are and then I can try to help fix that at the time at least.

Importance of Subject Matter Expert Course Facilitation

Some participants shared they did not necessarily feel it was important to facilitate the class once they complete a course development. For example, Participant 8 stated that it might cause her “a little bit” of conflict, but also, shared:

Sometimes, I actually prefer somebody else to teach it first because then occasionally I might get... feedback from somebody or I might hear about, “This might not have been correct,” or, “This needs updated.” In terms of like other schools that I’ve done too, I mean, it doesn’t really make it conflict. I would actually prefer them teach it before me because I’m kind of an outsider that likes to watch compared to, in that case, instead of being more hands on.

More participants than not expressed not only an expectation but also, a perceived need to teach the courses they developed once launched. Participant 1 shared an example where he experienced conflict in this regard, stating:

The conflict is one, because there's, there's an expectation of an ongoing relationship where if you're also, teaching for those schools and then you're asked by one of the leadership, say a dean or one of the managing directors of the particular department, to help facilitate that development effort then you feel an obligation to kind of support that with the potential risk, although it's unsaid that you will lose out on courses later for you to actually teach and facilitate.

Participant 14 stated that she, too, did not feel any level of “conflict *per se*” associated with being the subject matter expert and not being able to facilitate the course to see how it worked for students. Although course facilitation was not something she

was promised, it was a personal expectation, about which she expressed disappointment when she was not able to teach the course. Participant 14 remarked:

I had that expectation but that was my own expectation. It was never stated that I would be teaching it. And, in fairness, I think that they just needed me to help with other things and that's why I didn't teach it. It's not that I couldn't; the bench wasn't deep enough. And so, they had to shuffle and that's just the way it shook out in the end.

Participant 17 commented she was in favor of the opportunity to teach a course she developed at some point in the process but definitely believed the opportunity to facilitate a course developed post-launch was essential. She explained:

In the course that I helped with in the other school, I actually taught that course so, I knew what changes I thought would be better for that class because I had been teaching it for some time. So, when it came to, you know, redeveloping the course I was like, "You know, what would be more beneficial to use, you know, a critical thinking exercise here instead of doing a discussion forum here?" or something to that, you know like that. So, I think, I think teaching it and, or at least you do not even teach it before you work on it, but teaching it afterward is, it should be part of the process.

Some study participants never found themselves in the position of not having the opportunity to teach a course they developed post-launch. Participant 18 took the position that the ability to teach post-development should be considered a "best practice." When asked if she had not taught a class after building it as the subject matter expert and

whether that would create any feelings of conflict for her in the sense that she would not be able to see how her work unfolded for either the instructor or the student, she shared:

You know, that's a great question. I've never been in that position. It seems as if best practices suggest that once a subject matter expert has developed the course, they typically teach it now there was one instance where I didn't but this was for another college for which I was not contracted to teach but simply just to develop those courses, so, I haven't heard any feedback. So, the conflict there could've been I really would have liked to have heard feedback from either the students or instructors or the department chair as to what their thoughts were on the class itself.

Participant 22 was not afforded the opportunity to teach one of the courses she developed. In voicing her feelings about how not seeing what the end result looked like, as the subject matter expert from a student experience standpoint, impacted her, she shared:

Basically that it was all the work that was put into it was you know on my part felt worthless because I wouldn't be able to see how the students reacted you know, or how they completed the processes, you know to make sure that everything was in line and that the ratios were in place, you know of what they needed to do. And so, I don't know if I want to say worthless, but it's like I said before aggravating.

Many of the study participants expressed a preference as a subject matter expert to have the opportunity to instruct the course post-launch to see what the student experience was like, and if what they built worked well or needed adjustment. On a personal level, Participant 23 shared a feeling of conflict in not teaching a course post-

development, and stated: “Yeah, I would say so. My courses are kind of my babies. So, I do, I do like to see them actually out there and then and how they’re received, so, internally, it creates conflict with me.” Participant 23 communicated his view regarding the opportunity to teach a course after developing it, stating:

Yeah, my preferred course of action would be to develop a course and at least do you know a teaching of it. I may not teach it forever but at least see it go through the wringer for lack of a better term at least one time just to see how it's received; identify any potential room for improvement. That would be my preferred choice, but that I know that's not always the case.

Participant 24 also expressed a preference and position regarding the importance of the opportunity to teach upon completion of a development project, in stating:

If I did not teach the class, there would be a small little part of me that would worry that there was a mistake and what people might think about the subject matter expert...When they found a mistake, but I would say it was a small part of me because I knew that I did a decent job and that any mistakes were minor....and they probably happen to everybody.

Although she knew the opportunity to teach a course post-launch was not always an option, Participant 25 also preferred to teach if possible, and acknowledged:

It's not really conflict. If I build a course and I write something, I'd like to hear from any of the instructors who teach it; “How did that work out for you?” You know, I'd like to have their feedback, so, I know what changes I have to make the next time when I write the next thing or make changes for the next semester.

Sometimes I like to teach the same course because I write it. I like to teach it

because I want to get a feel for how its flowing. You know, how it's working and that gives me ideas on what I can do even if changes aren't needed. I get ideas like, "Oh, I didn't think of that. You know, I could add this to it" or something, you know, if it wasn't like, "Oh you have to make this change because it's not working." You just get ideas on how to make improvements just to make something more engaging. So, having the opportunity to teach it as well as being the writer is wonderful, but you don't always have that chance to do that.

Following up on Participant 25's last statement, the researcher asked if Participant 25 was the subject matter expert building a class, receiving zero follow-up from either instructors or student surveys, and not given the opportunity to teach the class, whether that would create conflict for her as the author of the course. Under those additional conditions, Participant 25 replied:

Absolutely, because you wouldn't know how it worked...I mean you have to have some kind of feedback, you know, or it would be conflict. You just be the kind of in the dark, "Did that work?" You know, "Was the student successful?" And I don't I can't think of a of any situation where there hasn't been some kind of feedback. I mean every college has some kind of way of you receiving feedback on what you write.

Regarding the aspect of conflict felt in that situation, Participant 25 continued:

So, if I don't have the opportunity to teach the course myself, I can't see how it's being rolled out if somebody else is given that course, I can't see the final product because I'm not in the course. My name is not in there, and I don't find out about

those errors until later that somebody else made a change. So, yeah, that's a conflict.

Participant 26 preferred to teach the courses she developed as well. When she finished a subject matter expert build and the course went live to a student, Participant 26 expressed that it creates conflict if she wasn't given the opportunity to either teach that class or receive feedback about how that class went from either an instructor or a student standpoint. She stated:

When I am a subject matter expert and I develop a course. I want to teach that course on the first go-round So, that from a subject matter expert standpoint. I can catch any errors. I can review the data. I can see where the students are having issues and I can make those corrections oftentimes. When I develop certain accounting courses, I'm not given the opportunity to teach them; however, I have been known to keep my eye on the data as to see how things are going because it does concern me. I want to know that my work was correct, and the students are learning, and it was impactful, and I did not have errors. So, when I do not get to teach the course it is again a frustrating experience.

Participant 27 shared that he would consider it a conflict, personally, if he built a class as a subject matter expert for online and didn't have the opportunity to either teach it or receive feedback about the course experience from the instructor teaching it. He also mentioned that the opportunity and sense of conflict may vary depending on the institution's development process, comparing two different experiences. He said:

I think that the only way you're going to know if a course is successful is if, you know, you have the subject matter expert teach it. Now, there may be situations

where a school employs subject matter experts that don't teach courses. You know, I have worked at a school before where they actually have, you know, a subject matter expert in business that writes the business curriculum and that there's only been one school out of you know several that I've worked at, and this is one particular school. I did not develop curriculum but like I said, they employed subject matter experts to write the courses and they did not teach the courses. So, in that situation, I think that would be okay because they could get it, you know feedback, from the actual instructor who did teach it and then they could update the course as needed. But you know, personally, if I develop a course, I want to be the one to teach it simply from the end point that you know, it may look great on paper, but you don't know how it's going to work until you're actually in it and it's running and so, if something needs to be changed on the fly, I want to be able to do it. If something that I created and developed did not, does not work as I thought it might, then I know I can either make an update then or I can change it going forward, but I need to be the one to know okay, you know this works, this doesn't, and that sort of thing. So that's why, for me, it's important to teach the course that I develop. And every school, like I said, every school that has contracted me to develop courses says they'll assign me to teach them when they first run and I continue to teach so, it's I haven't had an issue with that, but I would have an issue. Yes.

Participant 5 said:

I think one is teaching the class after because a good one like after you've been the first one to teach that class to make sure everything's working and it makes

sense to the student and to see because I know like in that class on the unit one exam I think out of 23 students only one got an A and everybody else got Cs or lower so I could see that there was obviously something wrong with that exam. So, if I was the first one to teach that, I could have gone through to see which questions were the most, you know, the ones that got me, they got wrong the most and look at those questions to see and review all the questions just to make sure they made sense and it wasn't a student issue that it was a test issue, and I feel like I could we could have especially like I think teaching it actually not just once but me and the other Professor teaching it more than once until we can get all of the issues worked out or kinks worked out would have been, that would be my suggestion. Another one, of course, would be harder to implement, would be to have somebody take the class and see themselves to see how it looks from the student's point of view to actually take the class and do all the work. But that would be a little bit more difficult to implement. But I think at least teaching the class a couple of times after I think would help would be very helpful for someone who's written curriculum.

Participant 7 agreed:

I think that if you ask any subject matter expert that question the answer is always going to be yes, I would like to be able to fix what I didn't do. Well, I would like to be able to catch things where maybe that instruction doesn't make any sense. So, when I get push back from students, I can clarify that, and we can do a better iteration. The next time the course is run, I can let people know what needs to be altered. When a third party teaches the course the first time they're not going to

know what you were thinking and so, they're going to have to try to interpret that and if you're not in the same organization like you were a contractor and you don't work there, it's a problem. So, the university I work for right now, we have a requirement that if you write the course you teach it the first time for that specific reason, which means that this fall my schedule is going to be nuts because I wrote nine courses that all run for the first time in the fall. So, I'm going to be doing a lot of that but there are some courses where, as the chair, I've made the decision not to teach it the first time and I had to of course get permission from the Provost for that. But because I felt like I was too close to the content and I wanted someone else's perspective. When it comes to teaching the courses when they roll out or not teaching them, the conflict comes into play is if I didn't do something well, if I'm not the person who teaches it and I didn't do something well, I'm not afforded the opportunity to make the adjustment.

Participant 9 commented:

I think to fully evaluate that I needed to teach the course. So, when I get through all those courses, if I'm sure if that's not happening then I'll then, you know, then that we can make those recommendations having developed them. I think we were able to come up with techniques that satisfied what they needed to walk away with as well as meeting the framework of the course itself, but I think to fully answer that question I need to kind of go through the course and teach it to students and see how they're how they're testing and how they're getting that information and how it's related to them...So, from the value of a subject matter expert standpoint, I think it's really critical that the someone who's developing the

course should be closing the loop and at least a running through the course in a live classroom forum at least once because that's how you're going to know if your techniques are working or not. And when I worked with [one university], I would develop the course and teach the course and I would make the adjustments right after and it'd be fresh in your mind and you'd be able to you know validate that things worked well, and I think it's really important whoever's developing these because, one, if you're going to continue to develop in the future you may be doing things that aren't working, but you may not know it if you don't get an opportunity to see it. So, it's going to make you better at developing the course in the future for other courses and also, you know just confirming that what you put together is working well...I would, I think that the only way you're going to know if a course is successful is if you know you have the subject matter expert teach it. Now there may be situations where a school employs subject matter experts that don't teach schools, don't teach courses, you know, I have worked at the school before where they actually have, you know, a subject matter expert in business that writes the business curriculum and that's the only been one school out of you know several that I've worked at and this is one particular school. I did not develop curriculum but like I said, they employed subject matter experts to write the courses and they did not teach the courses. So, in that situation, I think that would be okay because they could get it, you know feedback from the actual instructor who did teach it and then they could update the course as needed. But you know personally if I develop a course, I want to be the one to teach it simply from the stand point that you know, it may look great on paper, but you don't

know how it's going to work until you're actually in it and it's running and so if something needs to be changed on the fly I want to be able to do it. If something that I created and developed did not, does not work as I thought it might then I know I can either make an update then or I can change it going forward, but I need to be the one to know okay, you know this works, this doesn't, and that sort of thing. So, that's why for me it's important to teach the course that I develop.

Participant 28 echoed:

I put my heart into my work and it's very important to me and very close to it, and I'm committed to producing the best quality work when I turn out a course on all levels and for all the stakeholders involved. So, to not see how that materializes in terms of the student experience has been frustrating for me and disappointing when I haven't been able to teach the course after developing it to see how it unfolds as an instructor. And logistically, being able to teach that course would also give me the ability to see what works well and what doesn't work, what needs to you know, have a deeper dive, and why. More importantly and often, you know, if I would teach the class and come across something, I could make additional edits when given the opportunity post roll out to improve those areas and they were in need of improvement. So, you know, I would want to make those changes; there are often minor errors. Also, that need to be corrected no matter how tight the process is. There's always something that's missed. No matter how many people proof it.

Concerns About Non-Subject Matter Expert Instructor Perception

Connected to the issue of the inability to teach a course post-launch and the lack of feedback throughout the development process is another sub-theme that emerged. This subtheme focused on the subject matter experts' concerns surrounding the perceptions of the subject matter expert by other instructors teaching the content the subject matter expert developed. Based on study findings, subject matter experts' concerns generally stemmed from conflict as a result of other instructors having a first look at a course they developed where a fix may have been required. Most subject matter experts who perceived conflict related to other instructors teaching a first run of a newly developed or revised course expressed frustration regarding not having had the opportunity to see how the content flowed and was received by the students. Some participants expressed feelings ranging from frustration to embarrassment that their reputation was at stake. One described feeling "horrible" and another subject matter expert was "mortified." Participant 12 explained, in reference to courses she updated that she wasn't teaching, she made herself available as the subject matter expert to the instructors teaching those classes to clear up any confusion or correct any errors, and she felt it was her responsibility to do so, if they found something wrong. In instances where the instructors were frustrated by either the content or errors from her subject matter expert work, Participant 12 shared:

Yeah, maybe. Maybe once or twice; especially everybody there is kind of "go with the flow". But you know when it happens over and over again, not just errors from me but just errors in general from the processes there, the instructors get upset when they're constantly finding the same errors over and over again.

Participant 16 explained that in situations where she, as a subject matter expert, received feedback that faculty members facilitating the course she built had challenges, it made her feel “horrible.” She elaborated:

It's horrible because when I develop a course, I have several things that I have to keep in mind one. Is it manageable in the time frame of the semester: six weeks, 10 weeks, 12 weeks, 16 weeks, right? Can the student manage this work with all their other obligations? And, are we giving them the content that they need and if we pull content out, you know, how are we going to address it in a different way? Then, I have to take in mind that the faculty member who's facilitating the course, do they have the expertise to answer questions and whatever on the topic and the content and are they going to get paid enough money for the amount of work that is required to meet the expectations? And, a lot of times the answer is “No.” And so, you can't make these courses too difficult for them or they're not going to want to teach it. But it has to be rigorous enough for the student to get what they want...really challenging to meet both of those criteria. When I write something and use my words then I, you know, somebody might need to go in and double-check my grammar and spelling whatever but I'm talking to my colleague and I'm giving them instruction on, you know, “So this is what this assignment is,” about how you're going to grade it, whatever, but then when I turn it over to these instructional designers and they change all the words or they change the instructions for the students and I couldn't do anything about it. Oh and one of the reasons that I have been so, frustrated in this particular course is I, for example, my first course, I wrote it over the summer and I handed it in August 1st, the first

day of the windows of development for this course; it was August 1st to December something. I didn't hear anything from my Instructional Designer. So, I played with it a little bit and made some changes and I sent it to him again in October. He didn't start working on it till like three weeks before it was due and one day, I get an email and he says, "The course is done; time is up. No more changes. It is what it is", and I was livid because I was ready on day one and he mismanaged the time. He's done that on four courses with me. We have a new Instructional Designer. I told her I don't want to do it this way. It's June 10th. This is due on the 15th. We've been working on this for weeks, due on the 15th, and I got to now fit into my schedule reviewing this and all these changes and I just have to decide what you know how much time I can put into it. It's infuriating and there's nothing I can do about it. Completely different department. I'm lucky to be on the course development schedule pretty much. That's what I'm told.

Participant 2 shared that at one institution, the subject matter expert's names are available for all to see, which can lead to concerns over others knowing the subject matter expert made a mistake. She said:

They can very easily look that up. Okay, it's in our, there's a database that the school maintains because if you have content, your issues, you go to that main database, you look who the subject matter expert is who's responsible, and then you email them asking for clarification or point out an error. So, yes, your name is way out there in the whole university.

Participant 21 commented on the perceptions of other instructors teaching courses she built, stating:

What makes a good subject matter expert? Well, obviously understanding the subject, but I think with that, I think having an idea of instructional design like actually, you know, yes, you're the subject matter expert but looking at not only you know, what's good for the student, but what's good for the instructor, you know in the sense of what's the realistic grading, especially with organizations that are very on top of it and making sure that the students get the feedback appropriately in a timely fashion. You know how accounting, how long that's going to take to grade? So, it's not just designing the course, but also, kind of thinking about that instructor who's going to be delivering that course. How long is it going to take them to do that? And then, just being creative, you know, looking for ways to make it more engaging for the student. I've been an online student for a decade, and I can tell you there's classes that I've enjoyed and classes that I've hated. And it sometimes comes down to the assignment itself, you know, making sure that assignment...most of the students are adult learners and to make sure that you can keep an adult learner engaged as they need to understand why this assignment is important could help them in their profession or in their work versus something that you know, I've heard some students or other at school that it's just busy work. So, making sure that as a subject matter expert you're designing items that don't feel like busy work for the students; that they're actually getting something out of it.

Participant 24 cited several emotions tied to instructor perception of her work as a subject matter expert. She shared her feelings about seeing how her work unfolded live from an instructor and a student vantage point, which created conflict, explaining:

In two ways. One emotion or feeling that I had was a sense of pride and a sense of accomplishment that that there were multitudes not just me looking at it but multitudes of people looking at it and learning from it and that gave me a lot of pride that I created something that a lot of people are learning from. The other feeling that I had was embarrassment when I would find a typo or something or a quiz question that was incorrect; the sense of being a little mortified because I wanted to always do a good job.

Participant 25 shared perspective to the contrary of most participants that, as the subject matter expert, she could not “isolate” her mind as a teacher. She explained:

I’m the subject matter expert but in my mind, I cannot isolate my mind from a teacher because if you're acting as a subject matter expert you also have to put your brain into the footsteps of a teacher. “If I'm in the classroom, is this going to work?” And, because I've been a teacher for 31 years as well as a subject matter expert, I have to, I have to step into those shoes as well as the other shoes because if you know, you can't be an architect to build a building and say, “Here’s a beautiful drawing of what the house is going to look like or the building's going to look like” that but have absolutely no concept, of how construction is done. Otherwise, you got a picture, but it might not work. And the picture may be beautiful. But yeah, I'm saying we do with being a subject matter expert you've got to step into the footsteps of the people who were actually going to deliver that content and if it doesn't work, it's worthless.

Participant 5 stated:

Well, I'm sure like, I think I was a little bit more maybe forgiving because I knew I had some part in writing the curriculum for this class, but I think if I hadn't or if another professor taught the class, I feel like wow, I you know, somebody else may have taught this already and they probably thought we did, you know what we were doing or you know that we didn't have the book in front of us here. Or we don't use the textbook or and I feel a little embarrassed that somebody may have taught this class and it had these errors in it and they're gonna think it was me that did that but they don't really know who wrote that or who built it but from in that sense,

Participant 7 explained:

So, I was like well that guy probably thinks I'm a moron. So, I was like, well I said, "I apologize but it appeared" and I kind of covered it when I emailed him back and said, "It appears that you're missing a primary resource that was built into the course. Here's a link to the primary resource where you can get it. It was an OER it was a couple of OER material pieces that I used," and I said they're still active. I double-checked to make sure they're active and then, "Here's a course, the PowerPoints in terms of how I taught this stuff and here's the answer sheets." It didn't have the answer sheets to grade what the students were doing. I said, "Here's the answer sheets to the cases" and he was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so glad I reached out to you. I was a little nervous. I wasn't sure if you were going to respond." That was like, "Well, I apologize" and he's like, "Well, you know, I thought it was weird. He said that you always had such a good reputation; everybody talks very highly about you and I just thought it was weird that this

course was just so, so, out of whack.” I was like great...yes, that bothered me and I reached out to a friend who still works there and I said, “Is this normal?” and he's like “Sadly, yes,” and I said they should probably tell us that when they hire us. He goes, “Yeah, they probably should,” so...

Participant 8 shared:

I felt like I was going with what they wanted instead of what probably needed to be done, which is, which is totally fine because it's, it's what they wanted, but if another instructor were to get ahold of it, they would probably have questions or feel uncomfortable as well... because if there's, if they have questions, or they need something fixed, or they have a question on a specific material, um, I'm happy to answer that. I would like to answer it so they can understand where I was coming from so they can progress it to the students.

Focus on Student Experience

Many of the subject matter experts interviewed shared their thoughts on the importance of placing focus on the student experience. In fact, many of them endured personal and professional hardships to push through the conflict they perceived to ensure the students would benefit from quality course content. Participant 1 described an instance of conflict that occurred during development of a cyber security course. Multiple issues surrounding important enhancements to the course from a practical, work knowledge standpoint were perceived by Participant 1 as potential threats that could impact the quality of the course. Participant 1 elaborated:

I think it would have impacted the classroom because I did teach that class a couple times after I had we had developed it and got really good feedback from

that. I think it would not have been as strong. I really feel the students would have kind of you know, on a student survey you get a number of different opinions, of course, but when you have content that they know doesn't match reality, you know, if they see news stories that are about something and they are taking a course on security and that course doesn't touch on some of those things that they've seen, then they kind of wonder of how comprehensive it is or what are they paying for at the end of the day with that institution. So, I think you know for me looking back on that if those changes had not been made the course itself would have suffered as well as those students at that school.

Participant 11 appreciated the conflict experienced working with instructional designers on one development project, explaining that he felt it ultimately led to better content overall that enhanced the student experience. He asserted:

Two of them made my life extremely easy and one of them created conflict. However, it was appreciated conflict where we were trying to work out constantly the best ways to better the student experience. And that was a conflict that I appreciated. I always request for that individual just because I like that going back and forth but come to the content and then there was three, three that I work with that I would prefer not to work with again. They didn't really contribute to anything and made things a little bit more complex than necessary.

In response to a question regarding the instructional designers he had worked with (some helpful and some not as helpful), Participant 11 explained how his experience with instructional designers resulted in a perception of conflict for him from his lens as a subject matter expert, stating:

I felt like they didn't really care about the student experience and they just wanted the content just provided to them and I didn't feel like there were checks and balances put in place for them to like evaluate any problems in terms of the course set up, all the details associated with it. I just didn't feel like they were doing their ID job in this case.

A key driving force behind him making additional inquiries was attributable to his focus on the student experience. Participant 11 continued:

I think it's more so the student experience that I care more so of. Without a solid student experience, we lack on retention for students and so, long term that affects the school. So, I'm all about making sure that we retain the students as best as possible. So, that is what that triggered me to make those some inquiries and updates.

Participant 14 cited the importance of the student experience in the context of being asked what qualities she believed constituted a good subject matter expert, stating:

I think what makes a good subject matter expert is of course, they need to have content expertise, but someone who can take that, all the pieces that make up an entire topic and they can organize them and pair them down into meaningful components that enable student learning.

Participant 15 explained her work ethic and commitment to the student experience as a subject matter expert, elaborating on the reasons she placed the students in front of what may be perceived as being her needs. She explained:

When I'm instructing, I take my work and my commitment very seriously and I find that most of the students that are in an online format, whether it be at the

graduate level or the undergraduate level wherever they are in the process, I think they often choose online because they're also working and so I felt like I knew that their time was also, very precious to them and important to them and I wanted to make sure that whatever I was providing or expecting of them was respectful of their time and the things that they were trying to balance as students and I was one of those students as well when I went through the doctoral program. I went through a blended program and was working full-time and balancing and so that's something that feels very real to me and I feel very responsible to make sure that I'm you know, providing something to my students that they can actually you know do and try to limit their stress as much as possible when you know that balance already creates stress, but I don't want more stress created because there are so many unknowns built into the course.

Participant 17 commented on reaching beyond the development window for the betterment of student success:

I know you know, once you're paid for it what you're doing and then it's kind of you know, the goal is we're all working together for student success. So, I, you know, if I can help out another instructor, even though I'm not teaching that class, but I built that class. I'm going to help out.

Participant 18 concurred, saying: "I do want to ensure that the students are getting the best experience out of what it is that I've pulled together."

Participant 2 expressed:

We're trying to get a finished product that meets standards and helps the student obtain their degree to move forward in their career. Whatever school it is. We all

have the same thing we're trying to do with this material. So, we all need to work together to get to that goal. Sometimes I don't think people understand what the end goal is. This is about the final product for the student and utilizing this information to help them get their degree and a job; every school, every level of education. We're all doing the same thing.

Participant 20 shared her commitment to the student experience, stating:

I think one of the main reasons why I put more time in ... it was partly because I wanted to provide a good experience for the student. And so that meant that I needed to push through these issues as opposed to just letting them go or giving a half-hearted attempt or just quitting and saying, "Oh. Forget it, I'm not going to do this process or see it through to the end." So, yeah that is definitely a driving force, is wanting to provide the students with the best possible experience.

When asked whether she encountered any conflict from her vantage point that impacted the student experience in a negative way, Participant 20 replied:

No, but I think a lot of it is because I did my best to absorb all of the consequences of that conflict, if that makes sense. I would rather eat or lose the time then have it affect the end product.

For Participant 21, the student experience was the focal point of her most impactful conflict experienced as a subject matter expert in the online course development process. Working with another subject matter expert/program director on the development, Participant 21 described how she sensed conflict arising as a result of opposing approaches to the course development. She explained:

So, I think with the one that had the most impactful conflict was working with somebody else who was also a subject matter expert but was the program director and when she had a vision of the way the online class or the courses were running, which wasn't a realistic vision to keep the program sustainable with students. So, reviewing what she wanted, she wanted me as the subject matter expert to create a more of an instructor-centered course versus actually making it a very good student-centered course.

In explaining the collaborative perspective, she brought to the table as a subject matter expert in the online course development, she equated her focus on the student experience to staying current to ensure students got up-to-date, translatable content.

Participant 21 commented:

In the end it's always about the student. So, the subject matter expert is a, they have intimate knowledge of the subject being taught. But when you're looking at that design and deliverable it's what is going to best help the students at this time. So, there's a lot of push in in this particular profession to move towards those advanced degrees in advanced thinking. So, it's taking what do students really need to know when they walk out of a class? You know, it's fine to say I take X class. But if you teach them things that are from 5–10 years ago versus kind of staying on the edge where you kind of have to look at the class each time to say making sure that you're staying on the current topics. With that it's, you always bring it back to the student.

Many subject matter experts performed work beyond the end of their contract without requesting additional compensation because, to them, the student experience was

the most important point of focus. Participant 21 further explained, in the context of making additional changes to a course post-launch, she would not ask for additional compensation, replying:

No, because it's just it is what it is. Like I don't it's about the student in the end.

So, as long as the course is a good course at the end. You just kind of add it to your...you just get it done.

During her interview, Participant 22 shared that, in her role as a subject matter expert, she spent lots of extra time and extra legwork on tasks such as verifying books. When asked why she did the extra work, in terms of driving forces or motivators that impacted a subject matter expert's willingness to take those extra steps or fight those fights, Participant 22 replied:

I'm like, "How about this? I like to learn, and I don't want to put something out there that somebody's not going to enjoy learning or that they won't benefit from."

I think that is not worth my time to put out and it's not worth a student's time when they're not going to get anything from that information. If there's something that I can do to, you know, to help the students succeed and meet their goals and you know get through school and have an understanding and knowledge in that field, I want to do that. I don't want to set somebody up for failure with information that is not useful to them.

When asked about her feelings if her name was attached to a class where there was misalignment between content and objectives, Participant 24 said:

Okay, so, I don't know that my name would physically be there. I just knew that it was wrong. To have a course that didn't match these objectives. So, even if my

name wasn't physically visible, I had a hard, ethically, I had a huge problem that existed and that it was out there for students to learn from, so, I had an ethical problem with it, not so much worried about my reputation or something like that.

Participant 28 shared:

I guess my ultimate conflict and my ultimate disappointment in all of these examples that I've given you is that, you know, knowing everything I know going through everything I've gone through with my knowledge and experience over many, many years of developing and teaching, I would have thought that there, you know, I tried to turn out the best product overall for students and the student learning experience. That's always been my main focus. There are other stakeholders, but they're always my main focus because at the end they're the ones you have to graduate, take the skills, and get a job and you would think that during this process there would at least be a shared goal of the learner experience or the best learner experience and the ultimate skills and abilities to be able to get a job, but more often than not I felt like the student suffered at the hands of the process and there was nothing I could do about it...I think that ultimately it's that shared goal, you know, whether, I thought about this a lot when I had situations where I was online, there was a team that was curriculum and then there were also faculty on ground and everybody had competing interests. Everybody wanted something different for whatever reason, whether it was personal or professional or just egotistical whatever the reason was behind what they wanted out of the process it seemed to be different and it was always curious to me that the student and the student experience and the student outcomes weren't always the shared

goal that that led everything else. I never understand, I never really understood that and always felt that the student experience and the student takeaways should be the overarching and overriding important theme. But it seems that sometimes things get a little too petty for that and it's unfortunate.

Participant 3 stated:

It made me angry. I'm a very student-focused person. I believe in our kids and I had seen I was doing this for very personal reasons because as a teacher and as a tutor, I had seen so many kids who loved music and heard solid musicians who had said, "I'm dropping out of college. I'm dropping out of music school because I'm not smart enough to do Theory" and that wasn't the issue. The issue was that they weren't being taught theory in a way that worked for them. So, I came into this with a lot of passion and to hear then that you know the perception that I had back from the tech department and from some of their higher-ups. I actually even complained to the vice Provost about this because I was just so frustrated that those kids didn't matter. I mean I took it very personally that those kids didn't matter. You know, it's actually one of the biggest reasons that I left that university. That and other experiences led me to believe that that university was about the money and not about the students, and I felt that that university had strayed from its mission and its mission statement and was, by not doing simple things to improve student learning, I was watching these students be devastated and I couldn't handle being in a place anymore that wasn't willing to actively make change to benefit the students as much as they were actively willing to raise the student's tuition. So, yeah, I left. I couldn't handle it.

Participant 6 shared his feelings regarding the blanket use of group projects as a source of conflict because in his field, he believed they were “counterproductive to the whole student experience.” He continued to explain:

There's a tendency to be formulaic with respect to “Our classes should look like this, there should be this many discussions that are this many points each. There should be this many written papers that are this many points. You should have this many exams with this many questions,” you know, so, that is a little frustrating because as a person I've designed a wide range of classes. I know one size doesn't fit all ... the longer the Universities worked with our online programs, the more the more formula-driven they tend to be and every class looks, you know, generically the same, which is good and bad I guess from the student perspective.

Participant 7 also left an institution after an experience where she found herself in a position of advocating for students located in a foreign country because she felt the students were being “shortchanged.” She shared:

Well, honestly, these students wouldn't know the difference because they're not from our country. So, they don't understand, you know, they don't have the exposure and the experience to know what they don't know. So, you know, if you look at it from the end-user perspective, they're learning material that is foreign to them. It's even in a language that's not their first language, so they don't know that what they're getting is less than what they deserve from an actual application standpoint. So, they wouldn't see anything different because they don't know that this is there. They don't know that there could have been so much more. Do you

know what I'm saying? I know that from my perspective as a subject matter expert they're being shortchanged...So, there was and of course, those were the ones that ended up being very short lived in terms of in my portfolio because if you don't care that your student or your instructor is going to struggle with the content and if you don't care that this is not really providing them the experience that they deserve then I don't want to work for you because I'm not in this industry because I am trying to get rich. I'm in this industry because I want to make a difference in my actual overarching discipline, which is healthcare.

Intrinsic Commitment to Quality

The data collected from the study participants revealed many facets of online course development and the character of the subject matter experts who took on those important projects. Although the subject matter experts were paid for their work, based on participant responses, many went above and beyond what was expected of them for a variety of reasons. Whatever the driving force for deciding to press on in the face of conflict, in most instances, for the participants, it came down to an intrinsic commitment to producing quality content.

With respect to a sense of responsibility, many study participants expressed their sense of responsibility took precedence over other feelings of conflict they experienced during the development process. Participant 4 continued a project despite conflict because she knew there were no other options; no other subject matter experts who could “design the course the way that it needed to be designed.” Beyond that, she shared that the program meant a lot to her and it was that personal commitment to ensuring a quality

end product that enabled her “to push through [her] emotions and perhaps swallow a little bit of [her] own pride to make sure that the work was done correctly.”

Participant 14 also expressed feeling responsibility towards producing a quality course for the students, stating:

I care very much about the students and it made me just it made me physically ill thinking that the students who had paid money for this class had the wrong content in their hands and I just felt like as a person who works for that organization. It was my job to fix that for those people.

Participant 2 also grappled with conflict when faced with a situation that she said caused her high levels of frustration and stress:

I remember that I would actually wake up in the middle of the night trying to come up with alternative ways to get the content into the course so it would be acceptable as I take my work seriously and this, oh my God, it was an awful experience.

Other subject matter experts equated their commitment to quality as a matter of pride in their work. From the standpoint of making changes, the researcher asked Participant 24 about her perspective as a subject matter expert regarding the course she built and whether she felt a continuing responsibility to it, or felt like her job was done as the subject matter expert, without any additional obligations post-launch. Participant 24 replied:

In terms of doing what's been asked of me by my employer, I feel like the job is done, but just for a personal sense of pride, if I was asked to make changes, I would. Because I just personally want my best product out there.

Participant 3 recalled finding herself in a unique situation on one development project where she had to use the university's own data to champion her efforts to provide content that she, as a subject matter expert, knew was essential not only for student learning but also, for program retention. She explained:

I found myself having to make that argument too, saying I know this is not a primary development issue. I know this is not something where we're developing a new stream of revenue for the university, but I need you to remind you that you know, if we have an enrollment of 450 students and we lose 30% of those after the first year, that's a \$120,000 per student that we have lost for that department.

Participant 5 stated:

You learn as you go how to, you always improve and progress but I mean, of course it was frustrating at the time but I really care about it and I really want to continue improving it and doing it and if I see that there's an opportunity...I'm going to ask if I can fix it, or I'm going to fix it, even if it's...whether I'm paid or not I would have fixed it because I feel like that's, I care. I care enough about it that I want it fixed regardless of you know, the pay, because that's, it's a calling for me. So, I'd rather, I would do it either way.

Participant 27 said:

As the course writer if, you know, I don't want to be audited by the school because they don't audit of course, but if I was ever questioned by somebody, you know who was actually looking over my courses that I've developed, you know, and they say "Okay, excuse me, you know, I noticed in week two of this course, you know that your objectives don't align with your material that week, you

know, how did this happen?" I have to answer for that, so I want to make sure that everything I do I can answer to and I have an explanation and a rationale for why it is the way it is. And so, that's why when they wanted to make these changes, I said no and again it was very respectful because you know, they have their you know, I respect their position in what they do. I felt they weren't respecting mine and what I do.

Theme 4 – Insufficient Compensation

A final theme that emerged from this study was that of insufficient compensation based on professional experience and industry standard. The majority of study participants expressed they often felt underpaid for the assigned subject matter expert work or that they were assigned additional unpaid work that most felt required to do. Participants expressed many emotions regarding the conflict that resulted from the financial implications, the necessity of future subject matter expert work, schedule challenges, and their work ethic. Subject matter experts referenced making as little as 10 to 20 dollars an hour for work based on years, or even decades, of professional experience and holding multiple degrees. This theme yielded four sub-themes: financial implications, schedule challenges, work ethic, and necessity of subject matter expert work. Some key words subject matter experts used to characterize their feeling when recalling instances of conflict related to insufficient compensation included: work, time, compensation, pay, teach, students, contract, rate, and worth.

Participant 12 raised a point about the negative impact on the subject matter expert market as a whole, based on accepting less for subject matter expert work, when

asked if she was given information on the compensation and the process before she committed to do the work. She replied:

Yes, but what I was given up front as far as the process and the work involved ended up not being correct. It ended up, you know once I started getting into it, it was more work than what I was initially led to believe...I will say as far as the pay I think this is just my opinion as I get older and I do this more and more. I think that online subject matter experts should not sell themselves short if they know how to write curriculum. They should not take work where they were the organization is trying to pay them minimum wage. I think once you have experience in developing classes you need to set your price at a reasonable hourly rate. I mean if you were someone who was for example developing an app and you had that that experience developing an app and no one else can do that. You would ask for a hundred, hundred fifty dollars an hour, but then you know there's these subject matter experts out there that are taking \$20 an hour and not only does it hurt the rest of us who actually know our worth because and they're saying "Well, this subject matter expert will do it for this amount." It's just, you know, I think it's bad business for these schools to want to pay bottom dollar for something that not everybody can do.

When asked about the compensation structure and subject matter expert work she performed, Participant 21 stated: "Everybody's compensation rate is different. I feel like some places the rate is less than it should be." Participant 28 replied:

Definitely. I had a couple of different experiences that would either make me think twice about working with an institution in that capacity or just would make

me definitely not want to go down that road again. I mean, I could give you some specific examples of things that were just so frustrating that it makes you wonder why you're doing what you do.

In some instances, subject matter experts did not perceive conflict surrounding the compensation piece. For example, Participant 16 commented:

For the most part, no. I got paid extremely well for what I did there; might have been a couple of instances where it was rated as a lower revision and needed more revision and it took more time, but I can't say that pay was a conflict at all.

Participant 26 said:

I know that it happens in my circle because I've turned down subject matter expert work where the pay was just so, minimum that I've turned it down and started demanding at least fifty dollars per hour, and when you don't get that you know, my assumption is that directors and managers go on to someone who will write for less than that amount. And that doesn't necessarily mean that's a good subject matter expert. Not everyone is a good subject matter expert and I think you get what you pay for.

Financial Implications

In many of the examples of conflict shared above regarding a number of higher education institutions, many study participants described conflict from their vantage point as the online subject matter expert in online course development work that not only impacted personal policies, interpersonal relationships, work dynamics, and decision-making processes but also affected the subject matter experts' personal finances. Most participants expressed that despite the conflict, they performed additional work; often not

a result of their own mistakes, for no additional compensation. Some were driven by their work ethic. Many often put their personal feelings and perception of conflict aside for fear of losing future paid opportunities. Some subject matter experts left or refused to perform future work for an institution as a result, despite the loss of future earnings.

Participant 16 described experiencing conflict from her vantage point as the online subject matter expert on a development project where she performed the work required, but decided not to continue with the institution in the future. She stated:

I developed a course and it had to be developed emergently because they needed to teach it, and I was going to be the instructor and they worked with a contact person and everything was great but this place never sent me the final course to redo and when the course opened just days before it opens to the students it's a mess. It's four weeks longer than the semester and it's this, that, and the other and, basically, I had to fix it myself. It took me eight hours of which I didn't get paid for and I had to fix it myself and hope that they changed the master so that if it runs again, the person coming in has the corrected version that I was quite upset about and actually, I won't do any more course development work for that University. Pay was great.

Participant 27 also found himself performing additional work, not only for a few revisions, but for an entire course build. He explained:

Well, that's the thing. No, they didn't compensate me for developing the course at all. It was part of what I had to do to teach so, I was paid, you know per credit hour to teach that course, but I developed it and there was no compensation for developing it at home.

Participant 26 also experienced conflict surrounding compensation that caused financial impact. She was not given any additional compensation for having to write a class twice. She stated:

I was not given any compensation. No compensation for any time lost, no compensation for the for the first development of the course, no compensation for the second development of the course; nothing...I mean when I'm when I had to do it the second time the first time I knew I was not going to get paid for the development because it was going to be my course to use over and over and others were not allowed to use it.

When the researcher asked Participant 26 how that conflict surrounding the lack of compensation made her feel, she replied:

For the second time I felt like I was...I almost felt like it was illegal time worked at that point. I felt like it wasn't built into my teaching contract which ties into subject matter expert work, so I felt like I was most certainly doing overtime work in a way, and I did feel like I should have been compensated for the second build.

Participant 1 commented:

Sure, and I think one of them that I would say is kind of a common thread across all of those is, is really related to the compensation offered for the amount of effort and the expectations of that developmental work. So, when I say that it's routinely not a large amount of compensation typical pay rates are, I feel, lower than what would be expected for the level of knowledge that you're providing and that's been routine across each of those organizations that I kind of indicated I've done development work for... I mean most of it all ties back to the economic

aspect and you know, was the juice worth the squeeze of what are you going to get down the road potentially from an organization?

Participant 14 shared:

There is conflict in around not being compensated for additional time spent when something happens, so, I think that it's kind of a summary of all of those things that the conflict is that you are typically paid per course, not per hour of work. And so, if the hours end up being much, much more, you aren't compensated for that in most cases. One organization I work for that's not the case, but the other five that is the case.

When asked whether she ever calculated her hourly compensation for a subject matter expert project where she felt like the work had spiraled out of control, Participant 14 replied: "Yeah, I did and on one, I think it came out to something like \$10 an hour."

Participant 12 described her decision to leave an online course development project after just a week, stating:

Just starting to do the writing and then realizing that they were going to keep kicking it back. I can remember another one that I was really upset about because of what they were requesting and the amount they were paying. I'm not sure if I can tell you exact details about it because I'm pretty sure I didn't end up finishing it because of the pay and the fact that what they were asking was ridiculous for the amount of pay.

Participant 17 also shared her experience regarding compensation based on perceptions of adequacy and compensation in terms of initial expectations versus what it ended up being, at the finish line. She remarked:

Yeah, actually. I think the contract was to do you know x, y, z, and you're told you know, "this is the way you're going to do it. These are the deadlines and you need this done by this day, and this done by this day." And I mean, that's pretty clear. The problem I found was after the fact when I was approached afterward to go back and completely revise something and I wasn't getting paid for it and that, honestly, I didn't like that at all. I felt now I'm working for free ... if it wasn't acceptable the first go-round when it went through then, you know, it should have been brought up then.

Participant 17 lent some insight into how unpaid additional work situations unfold, saying:

Some time goes by and all of a sudden, "Oh, you were the one who worked on this course. This needs to be fixed or this needs to be corrected or this needs to be changed and we need this back by you know, X date" and all of a sudden I'm like, well, I thought I had, you know, fulfilled my contract. I thought that it was over and then now all of a sudden I'm working for free and it's not, that just didn't sit right with me and that's why at the end of the day, I mean, I wasn't like I said, I didn't get my feelings hurt when I wasn't asked to do anything else because I just I felt it was too much for you know, the time that I put into it and the pay it; really was a lot.

Participant 26 described one course development project where all deliverables were to be turned in together at the finish line. When asked how she perceived that experience, she remarked on the affect such situations can have on the timing of compensation, replying:

As long as it did not as long as it did not involve me completely doing a task wrong. Like I said with the presentations. If I needed to go back and change, maybe five that I submitted in the end. Another conflict with that is pay, where you may develop an entire course and it may take you 60 days and there's no pay until you turn everything in and it gets reviewed and that takes another 10 to 15 and then you submit an invoice and you may you may wait 30 days.

Participant 2 also addressed the issue of financial impact resulting from conflict she experienced based on the online course development process where she eventually taught one of her courses and found that only 75% of the content she built was in the course. She remarked that, "The rest was absolutely unknown." Based on that experience, Participant 2 decided not to work as a subject matter expert for that institution going forward. The researcher asked how that impacted her as a subject matter expert and her willingness to do course development at that university or elsewhere. Participant 2 replied:

So, it impacted my bottom line, my income potential because besides teaching, the subject matter expert work was a whole separate department. So, you actually were getting two paychecks. So, that really made a difference for my bottom line, but that wasn't as important to me as having good quality because my name's on this. I don't want to be connected with bad work. So, yeah, that was, that was a big hit on that.

Participant 21 did not ask for more compensation when faced with additional work, stating:

No because it's just, it is what it is. Like I don't, it's about the student in the end.

So, as long as the course is a good course at the end you just kind of add it to your, you just get it done...I just took it as part of the process.

In another situation, Participant 21 didn't reach out for support when she experienced conflict resulting from additional work stemming from the selection of a text with no additional instructor resources. She explained:

Well, I knew the timeline was available to do like so, the timeline was available for the better book with no resources the person that was my point person knew that we were choosing the book with no resources, but it didn't equate to more compensation because we chose a book with no resources.

When asked whether she felt this was fair to her, she replied: "Life isn't fair."

Schedule Challenges

Many study participants expressed the perception of conflict arose in the online course development process centered around their time commitment and the financial implications of schedule slow down issues. Many confirmed that such slowdowns became impediments to meeting some of their other professional or personal obligations. They also, expressed this conflict translated to feelings that the situation was "not fair," "not equitable," "frustrating," and "overwhelming."

Participant 7 stated:

Whether it's a per weekly rate or whatever and then we balance that out with our other workload. And so, when I was looking at taking on these contracts they were like, "Oh, yeah. This is how much it's going to be, and it should take you this amount of time." Okay, no problem. That's a pretty fair rate. I can do

that...And so, then when they asked me to do the second class, I went to team lead and said, "Listen, this is how many hours it took me to do the first course. This is what I experienced if this is going to be the same thing from each course moving on, I'm not interested in doing any more classes" I don't want to dedicate, you know 67 hours on because they give you like 12 days to actually build the content and for a five-week course and I'm like, okay no problem, but it's in [a learning platform that] is not the most user-friendly stuff with its tiles and its complexity and so I went through this process and I'm like, this is not equitable like because I have so many restrictions in terms of where I can go. The amount of hours I'm having to spend to find content that I feel is relevant as a subject matter expert is way too long because I can't use sources that I normally use because you've limited it to, you want only your library or you want only these three things outside of that library.

Participant 11 described resulting schedule issues in the development process in one situation increasing "so dramatically" that he questioned working for the institution again in the future. He commented:

So, what that type of stuff, that scenario specifically it did cut into the times being that there were like strict deadlines for each component to be completed. So, by the time that goes the idea comes back to me I make the changes. It's starting to hit to the what the deadline is already, but when it goes to like the program manager and the dean of students, they review it. There's literally like sometimes it's a day or half a day to get all those changes back to them and depending on what their expectations were. All the time would have to be spent on that

particular project. And so, it's not something that worked out. Well, there was a conflict on that part as well as the overall time commitment that you have set for a particular task in that case with the compensation, you know, there's a set amount already and you set it based on the number of hours that you're planning to work for and if that is increased so dramatically like for this particular project, it doesn't make it worthwhile. It's something that you know, you tend not to want to work and then develop for that organization.

Participant 14 found herself conflicted at one point, causing her to perform a cost-benefit analysis to decide whether to take on a project. She explained:

I basically just thought through the costs and benefits of doing it. I also, had to decide if I could do the work or if I couldn't do it because there were times where I just didn't have capacity then I would have to say no if I did have a capacity and it was something I could get done then I usually just did it so that I wouldn't have to miss out on teaching.

Participant 20 mentioned conflict arising amid concerns regarding time and schedule, explaining:

It ended up causing me to work much more than I had anticipated working on this project because v, “well, I'm getting paid this much to do this job, or I have this many hours in the week that I'm going to devote”, and whether or not I'm done with something that I'm going to you know, I'll just say I'm done and move on. I want to do a good job and see it through to the end.

Participant 17 also cited time and schedule constraints versus compensation as having an impact. She remarked:

No, I there were there weren't any other conflicts and like I said, it wasn't anything I took personal or I hope no one else took anything personal. It's just I think I realized that it just, I didn't have it. I didn't have the time. It was just it's just too much work for what it was worth and you know, as far as the hours that I had to put into it combined with the responsibilities that I had to my full-time career as well as you know; a family and working as an online instructor and a ground instructor. So, it was just personally for in my in my position. I just I took on too much.

Participant 27 shared his emotions surrounding the time/compensation issue. He replied:

Oh, it was very frustrating not only from a lack of compensation standpoint because you know, my time is valuable and I have other things that I also do and you know, it was very frustrating some not only lack of compensation standpoint, but it was also frustrating from a time pressure standpoint because I had a month and a half. You know, we were, they made the announcement in July and courses ran in mid-August and I had I was scheduled for three courses in mid-August. So, I didn't have to redo all five of the courses at that moment that I had to redo three of them because I was teaching three of them beginning...I don't know if it was the second or third week in August. I don't remember but I had a little over a month and a half to develop three courses basically from scratch in addition to my other responsibilities at other universities plus my full-time job. So, it was it was very, very frustrating.

Participant 7 experienced financial implications after starting a project, realizing that the initial expectations were not aligned with the actual work required. She commented:

Whether it's a per weekly rate or whatever and then we balance that out with our other workload. And so, when I was looking at taking on these contracts they were like, oh, yeah. This is how much it's going to be, and it should take you this amount of time. Okay, no problem. That's a pretty fair rate. I can do that. So, then I got halfway through the first project and realized somebody wasn't being candid because the amount of actual work to make the deliverable in the format with the amount of detail and the amount of resources because they would even limit the types of resources you could use because everything was OER there was no textbook which is great on the surface until they start limiting the resources you can use to get the OER material from and you can't find relevant content. You can't find current content, you know stuff that's less than three, five years old, you know that kind of stuff or they would complain, "Oh, well, this is too old." Well, that's not in, it's in the criteria of the year range you gave me saying that we could have content that's between, you know, 12 to 15 years old. Well in business, it doesn't change that much, you know what I'm saying? So, yeah, so, you're not gonna have a lot of variety in terms of how you get some of this information. And so, the reality of how many hours it took me to do and the first course I did was just a five-week course, but the amount of hours it took me to actually do the work for the first course compared to the payment rate was not equitable at all.

Some schedule impacts led to uncompensated duplication of work, through no fault of the subject matter expert. Participant 28 described one such instance, explaining:

So, eventually after I had begun repulling graphic, but they had to I had to stop and explain to them that you know, that just was not fair and you know, I had other obligations that were keeping me from redoing work that I had already done and completed. I had turned in all of the units and you know all of their additional edits and changes in what they wanted for the content basically put me back so behind the course had not yet delivered on time. They only submitted half my pay. Which was quite the conflict in and of itself.

Participant 14 shared:

So, I was writing a particular course and I was probably a quarter of the way through and then I was notified that the text had changed but I had already invested quite a bit of time in that and so I had to start over with a brand new text. I had to review that and get that get all of the deliverables still completed on time despite the fact that so much of the work had been done. I wasn't compensated for the additional time. I don't know how I wasn't in the communication. I don't know if I just got left off of an email. I don't know if I wasn't given the correct information when the project started. I don't know but it was very frustrating because a huge part of subject matter expert work is project management and time management. And when those things happen it pretty much destroys your entire plan and can set you way back. And personally, I am not someone that produces sound work when I'm pressured, when I'm under the gun. I tend to make mistakes

and I don't want to make mistakes. And so, that creates a lot of conflict for me when those things happen, especially if the deadline isn't pushed back.

Participant 22 felt that at the finish line of one project, what it took her from a time standpoint did not align with what she was told at the outset in terms of expectations. She said: "No, it was more it seems more than." When the researcher asked whether she would have performed more subject matter expert work based on that experience, Participant 17 stated:

I probably would have turned it down honestly and I did. It was overwhelming. Maybe that's not so much for other people. You know, this is my part-time job. So, for a part-time job, I was spending more hours than a full-time job would, and you know I still got a full-time job that I have to work. So, I didn't feel like I had the time for it to do it. It was just it was too much of a headache.

Work Ethic

Many subject matter experts expressed facing the prospect of extra, uncompensated work with determination and a willingness to persevere, citing their work ethic as a motivator for completing the work despite the potentially inequitable circumstances. Participant 11 spoke about the issue in conjunction with instances where an instructor would reach out to a subject matter expert and ask for supplemental resources or clarification. Beyond that, the question of additional compensation was raised in the context of whether he was compensated for that additional work. Participant 11 stated that he did not receive any additional compensation for the additional work, but he also did not feel that was inequitable. He said:

You know, I never thought about from that perspective. I just thought about it more so that I develop the content and it's my responsibility to make that content the best as possible. So, it didn't matter if you weren't getting paid additional for it if there were issues with it, it's your responsibility to make it better.

Regarding conflict surrounding compensation and a feeling of inadequacy based upon what the ask was and what she was being paid to do, Participant 15 replied:

I felt that there was. So, I've taught, I teach other courses and leadership for this university and there's a set amount just as an adjunct instructor, whereas with this other course that I was teaching and building the compensation was based on the number of students that were in the course. And so, it was actually ended up being about half of what the usual compensation was for the courses that you teach and so it I felt as though I was doing much more work than in the other courses, but yet I was being compensated at about half the rate.

When asked whether she requested to be compensated differently, Participant 15 continued:

So, at one point there was something that had come up in an email that I had seen at the University and it led me to believe that there was a different compensation or an additional stipend that had been built in with the realization of the work that needed to be done. And when I questioned the course developer the program developer about this it she said, "Oh, let me check into that," and then she didn't get back to me and then I questioned her again towards the end of the course and there was there was no communication. So, I felt as though she just never, she never got back to me on that. So, and in like I said here I am going into

this again in July and not really knowing what I'm expecting, not really knowing what's going to happen. But I feel that commitment to these students because it's the same group of students. Yeah, I was going to ask.

Although Participant 18 stated she did not feel a conflict *per se* regarding compensation connected to scope of work, she explained:

I can't say that that's been a conflict. Of course. I would have loved more but I'm grateful to share that in any of the tasks that I've undertaken with course development. It was already spelled out early and again, you know, that's the good thing when things are clear. So, there were no surprises. So prior to my even accepting the opportunity to develop a course, I was clear as to what the expectations were and what in many cases what time would be required of me in that process too even in the instance where after the course has kind of rolled and has gone live and I've had someone to come back to me for adjustments that has been totally well within the realm of what was paid and compensated because again, I think that is a part of course development. You have to tweak it; you have to make adjustments over the course of three or four runs of that class.

Participant 14 dealt with compensation issues as follows:

Well, I suggested that perhaps I should not be the subject matter expert for that project, but I was asked to reconsider and I decided that I would since I had already said that I would complete the project that I would move forward and complete it.

Participant 18 chose to finish a build despite perceiving conflict on a development project. She elaborated:

I think that's more of a character instance of my character because if I start something, I'll finish it. But I'll let that inform my future decisions as to whether or not to take on any other projects. But yes, it was successfully completed, and all parties were again amicable at the end and we were able to roll out a finished solid product.

When it got to the point where an institution started trying to give him additional responsibilities beyond what he thought he was contracted to do for a certain amount of compensation, Participant 23 stated:

Yeah, that did add to the to the conflict because both parties, myself and the college, went into it with an understanding of what was expected and how I would be compensated and once those things changed without changing the compensation associated with it that that definitely got to more conflict.

Participant 23 did not ask for more money based on personal pride, explaining:

No, because you know my own personal point of pride if you will was that I had agreed to do this course, I agree to accept this amount and payment. So, I never considered renegotiation. It was more of hey, I've done what you've asked me to do. I'm not going to do anything else. I didn't feel the need to ask for anything more than that.

When asked whether he was given any additional compensation for extra work associated with not having any resources and the conflict that created for him, Participant 27 shared:

Well, that's the thing. No, they didn't compensate me for developing the course at all. It was part of what I had to do to teach. So, I was paid, you know per credit

hour to teach that course, but I developed it and there was no compensation for developing it at home. Very much so, and it wasn't something that I really expressed because at the time I you know needed that supplemental income, so, it was nothing that was going to, it wasn't a deal breaker for me per se; something that I was not going to lead to "school over" at that time, but it did create conflict. Yes, and I did express my displeasure to the supervisor in a respectful way of course, but nothing ever came of it. It's just the way that the school operated so, you know, yeah, I was not compensated at all.

Necessity of Subject Matter Expert Work

The final sub-theme under the umbrella of insufficient compensation was necessity of subject matter expert work, focused on decision making, driving forces, and dilemmas encountered because of potential adverse financial implications (loss of teaching opportunities). Connections between acceptance of subject matter expert work and teaching opportunities were prevalent in participant responses. Based on participant responses, the ability for subject matter experts to teach (or not teach) could have impactful financial consequences on an educator's livelihood. Subject matter experts who desired the ability to teach often found themselves faced with conflict in the online course development process that led them to a decision point when it came to deciding whether to dig in on issues important to them and their pursuit of creating content to provide the best student experience, or whether to create content driven by other team members who didn't possess subject matter expertise and teaching experience in order to "soldier through", "fly under the radar", and preserve their ability to teach the course post-launch.

As many participants touched on in other themes, often the driving force behind their decision not to push back when faced with conflict was due to their fear of losing current or future subject matter expert and teaching opportunities at the institution. Based on participant responses, several situations arose in the online development process in their role as subject matter experts that left them “personally conflicted,” which influenced their decision-making processes, placed them in personal and professional dilemmas, and ultimately became a driving force for their subsequent actions and reactions.

Many study participants explained their conflict experiences in the context of a personal conflict or dilemma. Such dilemmas were often expressed as circumstances where they faced a crossroads in the online course development process that prompted the need to make difficult decisions on a variety of issues. For example, whether to take on a lengthy, deliverable-driven project for much less than they could make teaching or consulting, whether to advocate for themselves and the content they believed in, or whether to perform additional work without compensation at the risk of losing future subject matter expert and teaching opportunities.

Participant 1 asserted:

So, I think that intersection of you know, I'm already doing it more or less as a favor both to them because I was asked to kind of help out, you know, but also, in my interest of later on having courses offered to me, so, those two kind of competing demands kind of thing. Okay, just suck it up and make it happen rather than giving the best product available in kind of deprecating what I actually would turn out to give to the student with lesser, a lesser offering.

Participant 9 explained:

I felt that the university in the process for developing those courses was managed in a very organized manner and so that was refreshing, and I felt completely supported through those conflicts. So, that was helpful. So, I'm just going to, so, I'll just you know, the pay scale and the amount of time putting into these is not in alignment with industry. I guess I'll just I'll just put it that way, so, you know my time and my, so, I'm personally conflicted with that. I like doing it. It's fun to do but a lot of you know time for things and the compensation isn't, doesn't come close to what my normal compensation is, just put it that way. I'm not getting close to what I normally get compensated as a professional, so I really, you know...but I enjoyed working at the University so I kind of look at it as well, this is my contribution to get more classes, that's the compensation.

The issue of compensation and time became a source of conflict for Participant 14 when she was given an additional 10 to 15% of work on top of what was initially communicated as expected. Participant 14 said of the situation:

I would say yes, it certainly, it was sort of an internal conflict and it made me think. It didn't become an external conflict. So, it bothered me, it annoyed me, but I did not take that forward and request additional compensation.

Participant 6 stated:

So, you just did whatever and there's a lot of a lot of instructors who end up being subject matter experts because you know, you're an expert because you worked as a consultant somewhere and then you do this on the side just for something else to do but you feel like you know that within the university structure, you don't really

actually have authority because you're not tenure-track, you're not going to be tenure-track, and you're a pretty easily replaceable commodity. So, from that perspective, it's great to have values but and standards but at the same time if you want to continue to teach you just kind of put that in your back-pocket half the time.

Participant 4 said:

I said, "I have to think about this. I really have to think about if I'm going to do this work or not," and I called my boss back and she's like, "if you don't want it," she's like, "we will find someone else to do it." But again, it was that situation where I knew that there was not another person who had the expertise to design these courses and who knew the accreditation standards that we needed to uphold in the design. So, I agreed that I would do it.

Participant 14 was also approached to make adjustments to a course she developed. When asked if she felt it was her error to correct, Participant 14 replied:

I have to think about my answer to that. I guess I did feel like it was my error because I take personal ownership of the work that I do. But it felt unfair because I had been given the wrong content to work with.

The researcher asked Participant 20 how he worked through challenges he encountered with inconsistencies and untimely responses in the course development process. In the context of this sub-theme, Participant 20 grappled with whether to seek assistance to resolve the conflict he perceived and commented:

I could have done better. In sitting back and thinking through these things in preparation for the call. Just finding myself going, "Why don't I just, you know,

“speak up or talk to somebody else about the issue to get it resolved?” But what I ended up doing was just politely continuing to ask questions and going forward with what I thought would be the right thing to do. You know, I had a fork in the road and wasn't sure if left or right made sense. I just picked one and did it if I didn't have a good answer. Sometimes that led to having to go back and redo things or but I just did my best to soldier through because I was, to be perfectly frank, I was happy to have a job and I wanted to do a good job and I didn't want to be a problem for anybody or develop a particular kind of reputation with, “Oh, you know, [Participant 20], he's just complaining for the sake of the complaining.” Like I said, though, that probably wasn't the right approach. I should have been a little more vocal and assertive with my concerns, but I ended up figuring out what I needed to do, and it was an unpleasant experience, but it got done.

As discussed above, many subject matter experts in this study shared experiences of course development that led them to make decisions based on the conflict they perceived. A sub-theme regarding their decision-making process(es) emerged from these experiences that provided insight into which factors they considered and their thought processes regarding conflict-driven decisions.

Participant 1 said:

I think that's one of the biggest ones that I've seen, the aspect of kind of balancing that trade-off of, “if I don't do this development effort, am I okay with not getting another course from this institution?” In some cases I would tell you I've made that decision and said, “Yep, I'm okay with that.” and have kind of, you know,

seen the ramifications of that...for me it comes into the more of the economic one because kind of the bang for the buck mostly because I have a good full-time job and I'm not dependent on piecing together adjunct work from a number of institutions to make a living...So, for me fundamentally, I look at how long my relationship has been with that organization, whether it's you know, just a single year or if it's you know, say 10 years. I look at how that school works with their courses, like if I'm happy with their overall structure of instruction. Like do I, do they have a large number of administrative requirements? Do they have, what's the overhead look like for teaching in their classroom? And then I kind of balance that against how many courses have I had with them. What's my ongoing kind of income with that relationship? And then, I gauge that against what this effort would require to do part of the development work.

Participant 28 shared:

And you know in the end compensation was a source of conflict for me on a lot of different levels, you know at a higher paying level the pay didn't seem sometimes like it was enough for what was being asked and on other levels, what was being asked at some institutions wasn't confined to what was represented, so, that all connects back to the process, the feedback, the timelines, and the distraction; it all intersected some in some instances. For example, you know, I walked away from the process feeling very frustrated and that my hard work did not translate as fully intended to maximize my subject matter expertise because all of the adjustments; because of all the adjustments that were required of me finally, you know. At

some institutions I was able to teach the courses they authored, which is something that's very important to me on a number of levels first.

Participant 26 expressed a feeling of being easily replaceable that influenced her decision making in the development process, stating:

It makes you feel like, I don't know. There's something out here in the subject matter expert world where we don't get paid enough and it makes you think if you argue about the work you do get that you may not get asked back. I mean I was an adjunct so they could have easily let me go. I think it was kind of fear of unemployment. I feel like if you push back there's always someone right behind you waiting to step up. So, I feel like you just kind of go with the punches if you want the pay.

Participant 6 shared:

I'm going to make a business decision, you know, obviously the compromise is what you think is right. And certainly, you know, that's not something you want to do if you have a choice. But I hadn't like I said. I was early in my career in higher education and I thought well, I don't want to blow it so, and I didn't have my PhD yet. So, I said I will definitely go ahead and make that compromise.

Participant 27 also, made decisions influenced by the conflict she experienced, but was careful to do so, “in a respectful way,” explaining:

Very much so, and it wasn't something that I really expressed because at the time I, you know, needed that the supplemental income, so it was nothing that was going to, it wasn't a deal breaker for me per se; something that I was not going to leave the school over at that time, but it did create conflict. Yes, and I did express

my displeasure to the supervisor in a respectful way of course, but nothing ever came of it, it's just the way that the school operated so, you know, yeah, I was not compensated at all.

In some instances, experiencing conflict in the design process led to a subject matter expert's decision to no longer work with an institution or as a subject matter expert in general. Participant 11 described an experience that translated to so much conflict that he discontinued a work relationship with an institution. He explained:

It was a third-party organization that I work with ... and they required, you know content to be done in a very specific manner and after that project they offered additional ones and I just said no because it was too much focus on process and so the one with the 30% content 70% clerical; yeah.

Some participants compartmentalized the conflict, understanding that the conflict was with an individual as opposed to the institution as a whole. When asked how the conflict she experienced regarding the strained interactions with her instructional designer impacted her, Participant 4 explained how she thought the conflict impacted her perceptions of being a subject matter expert for online course development by stating, "It didn't. That situation was exclusive to her. It wasn't exclusive to how [that institution] designs courses and cultivates a team environment."

When asked if there were some instances where the process created so much conflict for her that she turned down future course development work, Participant 28 replied:

Definitely. I had a couple of different experiences that would either make me think twice about working with an institution in that capacity or just would make

me definitely not want to go down that road again. I mean I could give you some specific examples of things that were just so frustrating that it makes you wonder why you're doing what you do.

In terms of the driving force(s) and what the subject matter experts felt was ultimately important to them, many study participants who sensed conflict were driven to make certain decisions as a result.

Participant 1 stated:

So, I think you know for me looking back on that if those changes had not been made, the course itself would have suffered, as well as those students at that school. And you know, I would have just moved along with it and said, "Okay, here you go, I'm done," and then kind of wash my hands a bit, moved away. But when I had a little more ownership, then I was kind of, you know more invested in how that came out.

Participant 1 also shared:

I think that kind of shades the perspective somewhat, you know for me. It's more of a relationship thing to like, do I know the person and how long have I known the person that's asking me to do or help work on the development, and then do I feel some type of obligation to make that happen for them, you know a personal level as well not just a financial reward. So, that's kind of a shaping of that but not necessarily, you know any additional conflict. And I don't have any strong, you know feelings towards it one way or the other. It's just kind of I do, more fact-based I guess, and just say is it worth the time and effort to keep this relationship with the institution or with the individuals involved or not and go from there?

As the subject matter expert who felt she was not paid her worth, Participant 22 re-evaluated whether she was willing to continue to work at an institution in any capacity. She explained: “I told them I couldn't teach there anymore. It just wasn't worth everything that had to be done. The compensation wasn't worth it.”

Participant 7 replied:

Well, I think that there are people out there who because of who they are, their industry experience and what they have from a knowledge base can in some respects dictate their payment rate when they work on subject matter expert work and then others you just have to take what they do and you have to make a decision. Most of the time for me personally when it comes down to a decision of to accept or reject a subject matter expert contract, the money is not a driver. It's usually, am I interested in the project? Am I excited about the content do I think I can bring my experience to the table well and provide an engaging experience for a student? If I don't feel like I can do that then I will turn the project down. It has nothing to do with the money. I mean I've taken some contracts where I'm paid, you know less than a Walmart greeter to do the work and then I've taken some contracts where I thought it was ridiculous the amount of money they were spending to do this project when I could have got it done in like two weeks but their process they dragged it out for six weeks and they pay you ridiculous amounts of money to do it. I mean, I'm not going to say no to the money, but I just thought it was a poor use of their resources.... I'm very candid upfront with them and ask a lot of very pointed questions now before I accept a contract. I have learned that I need to know some specific things upfront. Doesn't necessarily

mean that they are deal breakers, that I would not continue to move forward with the project again, it kind of depends on what the project, is my interest level.

...one of those questions [that] is now on my list when I take subject matter expert work is you know, "If I write this course, will I be the person who teaches at the first time or will I be afforded the first right of refusal?" is typically how I ask it for the course when it runs.

Participant 6 stated:

The other ways some of the institutions "hand out assignments" at one of the universities I worked for they would send out an email list of here's all the courses that are available in the next year next fall and spring and it's first come first serve, you know to sign up for them. It's like, what the heck is that? You know, so, it's just another way of making sure you understand you are completely replaceable here. So, that question has come up before were there, you know, "Gee are you interested in doing this?" And if you're not someone else will and if someone else, you know, becomes that expert in that content, then you may or may not be the one that teaches that class next time it comes up. So, if you don't think that that's an issue, I would suggest you're not paying attention to how things really work.

Participant 1 explained:

And so, I turned it down and you know because of the infrequency of courses I was getting from them already. I didn't feel that there was a danger to me doing that because there was no big payoff from it either way, and I did see a drop in courses. There was about a six-month period where I was not offered anything

from them which was fine. And then I had a course offered, you know about seven months after that fact of one single course and it just wasn't...it becomes where it's not worth your time with some of the administrative hurdles and what they actually do on a consistency basis. So, at that's an example where it just wasn't worth that payoff at the end.

Participant 12 made the decision to leave further opportunities with one institution behind as a result of conflict. When asked what drove her decision not to perform any more curriculum work for them, Participant 12 cited the factors of “process and pay,” replying:

It was overall not wanting to do curriculum for them. They were doing major updates to classes and I would have been involved and I just didn't want to do curriculum for them anymore.

Participant 7 stressed the lack of respect for her professional expertise as a driving force in her decision to leave an institution as a result of conflict she experienced in the online course development process, explaining:

To have all of that industry experience and all the education supported all the things that are supposed to make you the expert and then have people still look at you like you're not when you know, you are at some point time in your career. You just say, “you know what this is it I'm out. I don't have to put up with this. There are other schools who want to leverage my talent and do it well and do it in the right way and so I'll just take my talents elsewhere” You just get to the point where like, you know, you become selective in terms of what you do and I'm extremely selective now as a result of these two specific experiences. I am very

selective about who I will do subject matter expert work for and for what, especially in terms of remuneration, and how much I'm being paid to do it.

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of participant profiles, including participant demographics, and the findings of the study. The 28 study participants recounted individual experiences that evidenced commonly shared perspectives. These commonalities revealed the collective essence of “navigating conflict”. The findings of this study showed the participants perceived conflict in the experience of being a subject matter expert in higher education online course development, which required a deep commitment to producing quality online course content under challenging circumstances, often being required to “go the extra mile” and do additional work, unpaid, but motivated by their work ethic and commitment to the student experience. The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study yielded the following insights about the meanings and essences of the subject matter experts’ experiences.

The findings of this study answered the seven research questions posed and satisfied the three primary goals of this research. The data collected, represented by the four emergent themes, fully satisfied the goal to gain a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content. Participants were candid in sharing their experiences during the course development process. Each subject matter expert in this study experienced instances of conflict that arose when developing course content. Potential sources of conflict encountered by the subject matter experts throughout the course development process included: misalignment of expectations in the form of lack of role and procedural clarity,

poorly defined processes, and change in scope of work; work dynamic challenges including lack of respect for professional expertise, lack of team member field experience, personality clashes, communication barriers, delivery time frame issues, lack of support from administration, and other boundaries; insufficient post-launch quality control, such as whether subject matter experts could teach a newly revised or developed course, concerns regarding the perceptions of other non-subject matter expert instructors teaching a newly revised or developed course; and insufficient compensation issues as a result of financial implication, schedule challenges, and the necessity of retaining or obtaining future teaching opportunities.

Participants described many feelings about what conflict meant to them in the course development process ranging from low impact to high impact. Feelings relayed by the subject matter experts regarding the conflict experienced included frustration, concern, anger, and self-doubt. When confronted with perceived challenges, subject matter experts used various techniques to manage the conflict encountered, such as communication strategies, enlisting the support and assistance of administration, and focusing on the student experience and their work ethic as motivating factors to complete the work assigned. Subject matter experts described various ways in which they needed to make adjustments as a result of the conflict; sometimes riding out the conflict, sometimes swallowing their pride, and sometimes advocating for themselves and escalating their concerns to accomplish what they felt was appropriate given their level of professional expertise.

The subject matter experts described various implications conflict had on the course development product, such as compromised course content that did not include

some of the subject matter experts' content, assignment formats that were not considered to be the best fit for the subject matter being developed, and inability to complete the development loop by teaching the course post-launch to check for student understanding and accuracy of content. Participants also described the implications conflict had on relationships with others involved in the course development process, which included trust issues, lack of respect for professional expertise, personality clashes, and communication issues.

The findings showed that the techniques used by subject matter experts impacted the direction of the course development process in various ways, such as improved course quality, improved development processes, and enhanced student experience. The adjustments made by subject matter experts impacted the final course product by ensuring that students were receiving accurate course content, enabling them to gain the knowledge necessary to succeed in employment settings. Adjustments also impacted the relationship dynamics between subject matter experts and members of the design team, such as instructional designers, by opening the lines of communication, clarifying roles and responsibilities, increasing collaboration and teamwork opportunities, decreasing delivery time frame issues caused by delay or lack of feedback, and fostering mutual respect among design team members.

Chapter 5 includes the summary of data analysis and discussion on the four themes in the context of existing literature, limitations of the study, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, implications of the findings, and contributions to the field of conflict resolution.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential implications of conflict experienced by subject matter experts in the online course development process through examining the lived experiences and perceptions of how subject matter experts faced and reacted to conflict in the online course development process. It aimed to shed light on the meaning participants placed on their lived experience specific to their perception of conflict in the online course development process. This study filled a gap in the literature and was important to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the conflict experienced by subject matter experts, the potential implications thereof, and possible conflict management strategies that could positively impact the experience of the subject matter expert, the content deliverables, and the direct and indirect stakeholders. Additionally, this study contributed to the field of conflict resolution by providing a view through the lens of the subject matter expert, which has the potential to assist all members of design teams to better identify, avoid, mitigate, and manage conflicts stemming from a variety of sources in the online course development process.

The findings of this study answered the following research questions:

1. What were the potential sources of conflict encountered by the subject matter expert throughout the course development process?
2. What did the conflict mean to the subject matter expert in the course development process?
3. How did the subject matter expert manage conflict in the course development process?

4. What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the course development product generated by the subject matter expert?
5. What implications did the conflict have, if any, on the relationships with others involved in the course development process?
6. What adjustments, if any, did the subject matter expert make as a result of the conflict?
7. How did those adjustments impact the final course product and the relationship dynamics?

In this study, thematic analysis of the data collected was facilitated using NVivo 12 Plus software. The researcher performed bracketing prior to and during the data analysis process. Once interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the interviews, familiarizing herself with the data. NVivo provided the platform for further organizing the data. The import feature of NVivo was used to import the interview transcripts from Microsoft Word, and demographic data in the form of descriptive codes from Microsoft Excel. The researcher then used the editing feature to format the transcripts to prepare for thematic coding. Other features of the NVivo software used included mind-mapping, word-count queries, question-level queries for participant profiles, interview formatting, node creation, case classification, thematic coding, and various charts and reports. Preliminary themes that emerged from the data at the conclusion of the interview process, upon review of field notes, were used to create nodes. The researcher performed descriptive coding on the 28 transcripts based on the initial themes. Throughout the coding process, themes were refined and combined into

meaningful groups representing the final four themes and 21 sub-themes. Using NVivo, the researcher created a mind map to visualize thematic relationships.

After bracketing, as part of the phenomenological reduction process, the researcher horizontalized the data, and delimited the horizons, refining and combining the data, with depth and overlap in mind, to reveal themes (nodes in NVivo). The researcher chose to code larger blocks of data to provide necessary context. Each theme was reviewed for credibility and uniqueness. The researcher then analyzed the resultant themes to ensure all data was accounted for. At that point, the researcher created individual textual descriptions and reduced those to a composite textual description, representing “what” conflict was experienced by the participants.

A goal of the next step of the process, imaginative variation, was to create individual structural descriptions, representing “how” conflict was experienced by subject matter experts. These individual structural descriptions were reduced to one composite structural description. To produce the report, compelling examples representative of the themes were selected from the coded data for final analysis, relation to the research questions, satisfaction of goals, and links to existing literature. The researcher performed pattern coding during the final production of the report for the most meaningful presentation of the findings. Finally, the composite textual and composite structural descriptions were integrated to synthesize the essence of the phenomenon in this study, “navigating conflict”, discussed further in the findings below. All activities performed in NVivo were memorialized in a Project Event Log, which was exported to Microsoft Excel for recordkeeping purposes.

The findings provided some much-needed insight into the subject matter expert's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and the meanings thereof, and connected those to impacts on the subject matter expert, the course content deliverables, the online course development process, and the direct and indirect stakeholders. Four main themes resulted from the analysis of the qualitative data, which affirmed that the study participants, on the whole:

1. were confronted with misalignment between the initial and final expectations,
2. experienced work dynamic challenges (including professional relationship dynamic impediments),
3. recognized insufficient quality control involvement post-launch, and
4. felt there was insufficient compensation based on their professional experience and the perceived industry standard.

These four themes answered the research questions posed in this study, providing a deeper understanding of the potential sources of conflict, the meaning of conflict to subject matter experts, how subject matter experts managed conflict, the implications of conflict on their course development product and work relationships with design team members, adjustments the subject matter experts made based on the conflicts experienced, and the impact of those adjustments on the final course product and work relationship dynamics.

This chapter includes a discussion of the findings, and how the findings linked to existing literature, limitations, implications of the findings, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, contributions to the field of conflict analysis and resolution, and the conclusion resulting from this qualitative research.

Additionally, the findings demonstrated how the three primary goals of the study were met, which were as follows:

1. gain a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content,
2. identify techniques used by subject matter experts when confronted with perceived challenges, and
3. assess how those techniques impacted the direction of the course development process, from the perspective of the subject matter expert.

Discussion of the Findings

In light of the research questions discussed above, the findings in this study suggested that conflict to some degree was experienced by subject matter experts at all levels of experience and in all phases of online course development. The subject matter experts in this study expressed emotions based on their lived experience ranging from annoyance, to frustration, to feelings that they: were not given adequate information regarding the development process, including team member roles and responsibilities; experienced a variety of complications related to poorly defined development processes; were required to perform additional work for free, which at least two participants characterized as potentially “illegal;” and often had to rely on their integrity and commitment to the project to navigate conflict and complete the work. Subject matter experts interviewed perceived a number of work dynamic challenges and barriers in the online course development process, such as a lack of respect for their professional expertise, inadequate communication and feedback, lack of support from administration, and design team members overstepping their roles and “crossing boundaries”. Conflict

was also perceived on multiple levels by subject matter experts stemming from post-launch course quality issues that limited their ability to follow a course through its first run, to ensure course quality connected to their professional reputations, and resulting in adverse financial impacts from loss of additional teaching income.

The emerging themes shed light on the fact that enhancements to the online course development process could be incorporated at the institutional level with relatively low impact for a resulting high return on their investment. The findings further supported the need for institutions of higher education to acknowledge these issues and take affirmative steps to incorporate strategies to improve clarity of process, promote effective communication, foster team building and collaboration, and educate team members regarding all stages of conflict management, from identification to resolution. Regardless of the source of conflict identified, it was clear from the data collected in this study that all subject matter experts experienced conflict situations, many of which required them to work outside the scope of their initial expectations without commensurate compensation, and under conditions that left them feeling frustrated, angry, offended, disrespected, or taken advantage of.

Theme 1 – Misalignment of Expectations

The first theme that emerged from the participant interviews in this study was that of misalignment of expectations between the initial and final expectations of work assigned to the subject matter experts in the online course development process. Almost every participant in this study (25/28) expressed that, in their experience, this misalignment caused conflict in the online course development process. Participants in this study perceived conflict stemming from misalignment issues in a variety of ways and

points during the development process, including lack of instructions received at the outset of their projects, lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities for themselves and other members of their development teams, lack of information regarding the “bigger picture”, confusion due to procedural variances among institutions, impacts to personal and professional time, changes in the work assigned after acceptance of the project without prior discussion and agreement, and varying levels of rigidity in the online course development process structure. Many of the study participants shared experiences where they perceived conflict resulting from a misalignment of expectations between what they were initially told about what the work entailed in an online course development project, and what actually transpired after they had accepted the assignment based on those initial expectations.

Consistent with the literature, many of the subject matter experts interviewed in this study were, at the very least, initially unclear on the role instructional designers were to play in the online course development process. This lack of clarity invariably left subject matter experts unclear on their own role, or at least questioning their role in the development process as a result. The literature affirms that, “issues that develop between faculty SMEs and instructional designers could be avoided if SMEs were given information about the purpose of instructional designers in the course development process” (Hart, 2018, p. 79).

Hart’s findings align with the findings in this study as demonstrated by many subject matter experts expressing experiences of conflict as a result of what they perceived as a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities, sometimes well into the development timeline. Twenty-five of the 28 participants interviewed cited a lack of

procedural and role clarity as a main source of conflict. Many times, the lack of clarity centered around the role of the instructional designer assigned to the design team versus the role of the subject matter expert regarding delineation of responsibilities. As a result, the findings revealed the likelihood of subject matter experts perceiving conflict when working with instructional designers.

According to Xu & Morris (2007, as cited in Hart, 2018), “some challenges faculty SMEs find when working with instructional designers on online courses include not really understanding what is required of them in the course development process” (p. 31). This aligns with the lived experiences shared by the subject matter experts in this study. As the data collected in this study revealed, subject matter experts expressed this lack of clarity was a significant contributor to the conflict they perceived in the context of expectations. The study participants collectively have experience in online course development with at least 10 different third-party or higher education institutions, and most voiced concern over this critical misalignment of roles and responsibilities at almost every institution mentioned. Further, this misalignment created conflict at many different stages of the online course development process, often caused by a “domino effect”, and presented impactful work dynamic challenges between subject matter experts and instructional designers.

Consistent with the findings in this study, role clarity can be a foundational problem. Perceptions from the instructional designers’ vantage point on the scope and role of subject matter experts presented challenges when examining interaction between subject matter experts and instructional designers. In addition to a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities, there were variations for subject matter experts working at

multiple institutions when it came to instructional designer involvement, which presented challenges regarding expectations. These findings support the need to implement initiatives and successful strategies to foster better relationships between subject matter experts and instructional designers, such as those suggested in Hart's (2018) study (Chao, 2011; Pan & Thompson, 2009; Singleton et al., 2011; Stevens, 2013). Such strategies focused on instructional designers' efforts to improve work relationships with subject matter experts "to ensure that high-quality courses were the result" (Hart, 2018, p. 94). Some strategies are simple to integrate into the online course development process, such as meetings early on in the process. According to as Tessmer (1993, as cited in Hart, 2018), the literature suggests that, "faculty SMEs and instructional designers should take some time to meet at the beginning of a course development project to fully discuss the course outcomes and goals so that both parties start on the same page" (p. 94). Most participants in this study mentioned misalignment regarding course outcomes and goals and several participants confirmed, from their perspective, the effectiveness of meeting with their instructional designer to work through a conflict, in person when possible.

Research confirms the effectiveness of such success strategies because:

Many higher education faculty members simply do not have knowledge of the field of instructional design and are unsure of the contributions made by instructional designers to a course development project and to the field of higher education in general. (Salentiny, 2012; Sharif, 2014; Sharif & Cho, 2015; as cited in Hart, 2018, pp. 93–94)

Hart (2018) noted the participants in that study seemed to agree that relationships between instructional designers and subject matter experts will improve when

instructional designers gain credibility in the eyes of faculty members. That said, one of the ways for instructional designers to immediately gain credibility with a subject matter expert is to increase clarity of process by solidifying roles and responsibilities up front. The literature advocates that “instructional designers must make an effort to build a rapport and a relationship with the faculty SMEs they are assigned to work with” (Hart, 2018, p. 83). Along these lines, research supports instructional designers and subject matter experts should meet more than just once at the beginning of a development project (Keppel, 2004, as cited in Hart, 2018). Many of the subject matter experts in this study resorted to phone calls or meetings in an attempt to resolve conflict, which reinforces the notion that preemptive meetings would have the same or greater success.

Although many of the subject matter experts in this study expressed they appreciated the need for and input of instructional designers in the development process, significant misalignment of expectations and barriers to communication led to conflict situations that often undermined both the process and working relationships as a whole. “Quality of instruction within any type of higher education course is defined as the process in which learning takes place” (Kinne & Eastep, 2011; Outlaw, Rice, & Wright, 2017; as cited in Hart, 2018, p. 1). The function of a subject matter expert in online course development is to provide subject matter expertise as a foundation for quality of instruction by building course content that engages students, and provides a practical and foundational basis for student learning, including translatable, employable skills, that enhance the overall student experience. Most subject matter experts shared they experienced a development project where they received little to no instruction. Even those participants with years of experience expected to receive clear instructions at the

outset, as every institution and every project was different. Whether there was lack of clarity up front or things became unclear as the development process continued due to lack of feedback or a change in the scope of work, the participants expressed frustration that their expectations were not met on many occasions, often costing them time and money for unexpected additional work they were asked to perform to meet the changed expectations of their projects.

A corollary to the lack of clarity in the online course development process was a poorly defined process. The implications of a poorly defined development process can be pervasive and the ramifications thereof far-reaching. Most participants in this study (24/28) shared experiences that caused them to perceive conflict as a result of a poorly defined development process. Hart (2018) identified the relation of a well-defined process to positive impacts from the instructional designer's perspective. The lived experiences of subject matter experts tasked with online course development in the present study aligned with those findings. Conflict perceptions were correlated with process, as a theme, with sub-themes connected to adverse implications.

In another study, conducted by Mudd, Summey, and Upsen (2015), focus was placed on a learner-centered approach, emphasizing the importance of collaboration. Standard design practices correlated to a positive student experience. Too much discretion, lack of structure, and faculty independence can create problems. Collaboration is therefore an essential element that provides a necessary check and balance to the overall course development process; potentially increasing success and redirecting emphasis on the student experience. According to Pawl (2018), "the complexity of online

course development is an important task that requires expertise, time, and thoughtful planning” (p. 74).

The findings in this study align with the guidance in the literature on expectations and the need for a level of uniformity (Tannehill et al., 2018). Tannehill et al. (2018) asserted, “the more ability an organization has to ensure standards of design and practice, the more likely there is to be a positive student experience in the online classroom” (p. 32). Trammell et al. (2018) echoed this sentiment, maintaining, “a key component of successfully designing online course shells is to have consistency and structure” (p. 176). As many experienced subject matter experts in this study expressed, every institution was different, and the development process varied greatly at the external institutional level. This makes institutional consistency on an industry level a difficult goal for a variety of reasons.

According to Stenersen (1998), institutions must develop a system analysis and design that takes into account the need for unique system designs tailored for the different institutions. This “systems thinking” approach was found applicable to distance education institutions to ensure institutional alignment of goals and organizational elements (Stenersen, 1998). The goal of internal consistency among design teams within an institution, however, is achievable with increased focus on clearer expectations. In the present study, guidance on expectations, and a level of uniformity, surfaced as reoccurring themes.

A comparative examination of institutional processes detailed by subject matter experts in this study suggested that a potential source of divide between instructional designers and many subject matter experts was too much rigidity and the inability to

build course content using the best options available due to structural and technological limitations. Most participants in this study desired a higher level of structure in relation to the process itself, but some were opposed to too much rigidity in terms of their specific disciplines; aiming to avoid a “cookie cutter” approach to development that may not be the correct fit for all subject matter experts across the board. That can be distinguished from the findings of Mudd, Summey, and Upsen (2015), in that the rigid format was a university-dictated format for a consistent experience that may not work perfectly for all disciplines, but did standardize the student and faculty experience in terms of clarity of expectations and delivery format.

Mudd, Summey, and Upsen (2015) conducted learner-centered research based on how to collaboratively involve a librarian in the development process for overall success, and, ultimately, for the student, using the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) model. Although the possibility of librarian integration was not specifically raised in the interviews of the present study as a point of focus, librarian involvement was referenced in relation to one institution using large design teams. The parallels of process track-through, from the beginning to the end of course development, aligns well as a potential structure for mitigating some potential conflict areas that were raised in the interviews, including collaboration, role clarity, and curricular alignment. Challenges in these areas were all sources of conflict communicated in the interviews.

Key areas of focus in this study included the learning process, quality, and consistency. Stein (2014), acknowledged that a collaborative experience is integral to high-quality course production; therefore, it is important to harmonize the relationship

between subject matter experts and instructional designers (Stein, 2018). This research reinforced that of Pawl (2018), who noted:

Without a doubt, designing online courses requires a team approach that embraces collegial discussions between professors and instructional designers. The Department considers this to be a fluid process as the professors carefully reflect on successes and determine areas for continued growth and learning. (p. 75)

Based upon the level of conflict the data reflected in this study flowing from misalignment of expectations, the research is encouraging that employing a team approach may alleviate much of the conflict experienced by the subject matter experts in this study and potentially reduce or eliminate the other negative consequences experienced, such as changes in the scope of work, discussed more below, and the consequences of inadequate compensation.

The findings represented by this theme, Misalignment of Expectations, added to the understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing content due to misalignment of expectations; specifically with respect to lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities, repercussions of a poorly defined development process, and changes in the scope of work assigned. Subject matter experts utilized techniques such as meetings and other communication strategies, advocating for their positions to instructional designers and other design team members, and relying on their personal and professional integrity and commitment to the work when confronted with perceived challenges. These challenges impacted the direction of the course development process in some instances, by compromising the accuracy of course content, delaying the development process, and changing the scope of work assigned.

Theme 2 - Work Dynamic Challenges

Work dynamic challenges was another important theme in this study that highlighted the subject matter experts' perception of conflict due to issues such as compromised interpersonal work relationships, lack of communication and feedback, and personality clashes. Strained work dynamics can start a project off negatively, and have a continuous, detrimental effect throughout the project. Many subject matter experts in this study expressed experiencing conflict as a result of a perceived lack of respect for their professional expertise, poor or non-existent communication, and the need to enlist administration for support. Conflict resulting from a poor or affected work dynamic can set the tone for an entire project, leading to more conflict over longer development contracts. Stevens (2013) advanced the idea that relationship dynamics were necessary to identify steps for improvement of productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency in development process. He asserted that instructional designers and subject matter experts are both necessary in the course development process. As such, a positive working relationship between subject matter experts and instructional designers is essential (Stevens, 2013).

In this study, the findings demonstrated correlations under the sub-themes of Communication and Feedback and Respect for Expertise and Professional Confidence. The most predominant correlation was associated with subject matter expert and instructional designer dynamics (Hart, 2018). Related correlations were also present with the sub-theme of Team Member Field Knowledge, in the context of parameters, overstepping, and associated implications (Hart, 2018). According to Singleton et al.

(2011), different backgrounds and areas of expertise may account for this; which results in inevitable conflict in some instances (Singleton et al., 2011).

Although it was evident the majority of the subject matter experts in this study understood and appreciated the specific value instructional designers added to the development process, there was also a resounding and louder cry for a certain level of respect for the subject matter experts' professional expertise from the instructional designers, and the need for team members to stay within the parameters of their roles and responsibilities. The existing literature promotes the idea that consistent communication and conflict management are integral to strengthening the instructional designer/subject matter expert relationship (Pan & Thompson, 2009; Singleton, Toombs, Taneja, Larkin, & Pryor, 2011; Stevens, 2013). Bringing this goal to fruition would help decrease perceptions of conflict that could ultimately directly impact the production of higher quality course content (Stevens, 2013). In this study, very few subject matter experts referenced knowledge of the availability of avenues for conflict resolution during their development experiences.

The subject matter experts in this study shared many perceptions of conflict arising during data collection, which resulted from work dynamic challenges during the online build process in their roles as subject matter experts. One of the most impactful sub-themes was a Respect for Expertise and Professional Confidence. The literature advocates teamwork and collaboration as keys to success in the online workplace. To that point, inclusion of instructional designers on online course development teams has been seen as positive and important on many levels. Kanuka (2006) and Stevens (2013) acknowledged the value of bringing together faculty subject matter experts with

discipline specific expertise and instructional designers with expertise in methods of pedagogy. Successful collaboration between subject matter experts and instructional designers leads to online courses that enable students to comprehend the course material (Kanuka, 2006; Stevens, 2013). This integration, however, has its challenges, including conflict perceptions from the lived experiences of subject matter experts, based on the findings of this study.

As the literature has shown, studies involving online course development issues from the vantage point of the instructional designer revealed “All of the participants stated that their main focus was helping faculty members develop and/or revise their online courses, although even the scope of how much they helped the faculty SMEs in the course design process varied somewhat” (Hart, 2018, p. 63).

Many participants in this study expressed they understood the instructional designers on their design team were there to assist them in the process but also expressed a lack of clarity as to where the instructional designer’s duties ended and the subject matter expert’s duties began, and what constituted an appropriate level of support. It was the perception of the majority of the subject matter experts that the instructional designer functioned to facilitate the development process and provide feedback, but that the subject matter expert authored the course content. This, however, was not always the case according to the subject matter experts in this study.

Focusing on process, there is a connection between the present research and an assumption in Hart’s (2018) study that there are instances when instructional designers are unable to comply with a subject matter expert’s requests pertaining to course design because of policies and procedures of higher education institutions regarding course

design and development. These connections scaffold the lived experiences of subject matter experts experiencing conflict in the present study related to process changes and findings regarding communication, conflict, and strategies. The participants in this study made it clear that, many times, instructional designers stepped outside of an institution's policies and procedures, causing the subject matter expert to seek administrative support for their position.

“A successful online course development project involves not only a SME but also an instructional designer who has knowledge of the pedagogy involved in designing a course for the online format” (Brown et al., 2013; Outlaw et al., 2017; as cited in Hart, 2018, p.3). Many subject matter experts (18) perceived a lack of team member field knowledge along the continuum of the course development process. Whether this perception was purely subjective or objective, it was clear from the data collected that, as Singleton et al. (2011, as cited in Hart, 2018) noted, “because instructional designers and faculty SMEs come from different backgrounds and have different areas of expertise, conflict can sometimes be inevitable” (p. 95).

The existing research and the findings in this study show that from the vantage point of subject matter experts, instructional designers do not generally possess field subject matter expertise. As such, it is important that instructional designers “remember that while they are experts in designing instruction, they are not the content experts” (Hart, 2018, p. 78). Instructional designers should “offer some suggestions for improvement but not demand” that subject matter experts follow those suggestions (Hart, 2018, p. 78). That said, for this approach to truly work from a procedural standpoint, institutions need to buy in to this approach and fully support the professional experience

and academic achievements of the subject matter experts. The views of subject matter experts interviewed in this study aligned with instructional designer perceptions that “Such negative effects, if they are not dealt with promptly, can result in the breakdown of the course design process and the development of a low-level online course” (Hart, 2018, p. 75).

According to Wagner & Hulen (2015), instructional designers can, in fact, be valuable members of online course development teams within higher education, as they possess specific knowledge of learning theories and instructional design models that are the keys to improving the quality of instruction within online higher education courses. While this was found to be true in some instances, many of the study participants perceived conflict arising from instructional designers who stepped out of their expected roles, crossing into what the subject matter experts considered to be their territory of authoring content based on their professional experience and subject matter expertise. Instructional designers can add value by offering a fresh perspective in the development process and assisting subject matter experts in keeping the level of the students’ knowledge about the subject matter at the forefront of focus. This collaborative effort can result in improvements to the student experience in online higher education courses.

According to Hung (2013), in today’s workforce, not much can be accomplished in research and knowledge when an individual is working without the benefit of a team. The real-world problems that exist today are complex and far exceed the cognitive ability of one individual (Thompson & Ku, 2010, as cited in Hung, 2013). Employing a team-based approach has been shown to be beneficial to developing online course shells for several reasons (Trammell et al., 2018). Collaboration provides a well-rounded approach

combining the expertise of multiple practitioners from various vantage points. At least one subject matter expert in this study directly referenced preferring the ability to collaborate with other faculty and team members to “bounce ideas” during the online course development process. According to Trammell et al. (2018), “a team-based approach allows for the course to have minimal ‘kinks’ or shortcomings, because members of the team have a wealth of experiences that have been successful and unsuccessful” (p. 165).

The qualitative data collected in this study supports the need for course development professionals to learn and hone interpersonal and collaborative skills in an effort to enhance the process of course development and, therefore the quality of content, and the student experience. As noted by Thompson & Ku (2010) and Hung (2013, as cited in Hart, 2018), it is up to instructional designers and subject matter experts alike to develop the ability to work as collaborators with team members to succeed in their field. The development of collaboration skills through integral training as part of the development process would alleviate much of the conflict experienced by the subject matter experts in this study who spoke to the issue of conflict arising that required additional intervention from supervisory levels all the way to the Provost. At least one study participant commented on the need for a mediator in the course development process to help manage resulting conflict, supporting the need for additional research on the subject of conflict management and implementation of conflict resolution strategies at the institutional level. This begins with developing an understanding of conflict, by all members of a design team, to serve as the foundation for transitioning to conflict management.

An initial investment by institutions in training and professional development for those involved in the higher education course development process has the potential to translate to the minimization or prevention of conflict in the online course development process. According to Hart (2018), “because conflicts between course development teammates can often make or break a course development project, it is important for both parties involved to have knowledge of the best methods for managing conflict when it occurs” (p. 17). When learning to manage conflict, it is important to understand exactly what conflict is. According to Wall and Callister (1995), conflict can be defined as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party” (p. 517). In the case of a faculty subject matter expert and an instructional designer working together on a course development project, conflict may arise when two parties disagree about assessment format or which sources of information to use when developing the course.

Trammell et al. (2018) noted several benefits to using a team-based approach in online course development. Key benefits included access to multiple experts as contributors, collaboration opportunities that would not otherwise be available, and the opportunity to work through “kinks” from different vantage points and multiple perspectives. The research ultimately showed utilization of teams in the online course development process was promising and potentially connected to student success and faculty development (Trammell et al., 2018). The subject matter experts in this study were not generally opposed to the use of teams. The findings in this study suggest a team-based approach in online course development could alleviate instances of conflict if implemented with an appropriate level of clarity and ground rules.

Even if the process for course development is clear, there will be times when professional opinions differ and instructional designers and subject matter experts will not agree on the best approach to developing course material for learners, which could lead to difficulties (Stein, 2014; Stevens, 2013). A lack of instructional design knowledge on the part of subject matter experts and a lack of subject matter experience on the part of instructional designers can lead to disagreements during the development of a course (Stein, 2014). Such disagreements can compromise the quality of the online course content. According to Blake and Mouton's (1964) dual concerns theory, which is based on the principle that individuals have two primary motivations regarding interpersonal conflict, these competing motivations can be at odds and become a source of conflict between team members. Instructional designers and subject matter experts need to learn to balance the concern for production and the desire to retain interpersonal relationships (Holt & DeVore, 2005).

Many subject matter experts in this study expressed frustration stemming from perceptions of not being heard by instructional designers when trying to explain industry specific skills needed by students to secure employment in their field upon graduation, to the point that they found themselves sacrificing content quality, “throwing their hands up”, and “going with the flow”. Some made the decision to avoid conflict in the interest of securing future development and teaching opportunities while others simply wanted the process to end so they could move on. These potential end results of conflict in the development process align with the literature in terms of impacts, contributions, and output. “Stevens (2013) indicated that a strong, positive working relationship between faculty SMEs and instructional designers is one of the keys to the development of a high-

quality online course, and that both parties are necessary in the development process” (Hart, 2018, p. 4).

Essential elements of effective interpersonal dynamics are trust and rapport. It was evident from the data collected in this study that many subject matter experts felt their professional expertise was under attack and that the instructional designer and the institution lacked confidence in their skills despite their vast resumes and practical field experience. In the context of trust-building and conflict resolution strategies, parties confronted with conflict often perceive that they are not being heard. The literature supports that “instructional designers should be willing to listen to faculty SMEs’ ideas regarding course development rather than simply trying to convince them to do things the way an instructional designer would” (Hart, 2018, p. 78). Here, the art of communication was a key component of successful collaborative work relationships that must be fostered and supported at the institutional level.

Collaborative, combined feedback and contributions were constant themes in the interviews conducted in this study. When working with teams, challenges arose. Communication or lack thereof was a critical point of focus of many study participants. According to Hixon (2008, as cited in Trammell et al., 2018), “clear communication about all aspects of the course and expectations within the team is critical to decrease frustration” (p. 169). Effective communication is integral throughout the online course development process to avoid, mitigate, or manage conflict that could potentially cause delays that stall or otherwise adversely impact a development project. For example, one participant in this study described a situation that called for faculty subject matter experts to make extensive revisions right before a launch date. Although they were told months

prior to the date about upcoming changes, they were given no indication the revisions would be extensive. This lack of communication caused the subject matter expert in this study to leave her position immediately upon receiving the untimely update to allow the institution to replace her as quickly as possible.

One point that was very clear from the information participants shared was that higher education institutions are different. Organizational climates and structures varied, and their development processes were different, which made finding a level of industry consistency virtually impossible at the time of this study. The issue of communication was raised in a number of contexts by subject matter experts experiencing conflict in the online course development process. As related to misalignment of expectations, effective communication was a critical element that could have virtually eliminated the lack of clarity issues experienced by almost every study participant. Xu & Morris (2007, as cited in Hart, 2018) noted that, “instructional designers should possess the ability to communicate well with faculty members as well as possess technical and instructional design expertise in order to properly advise faculty on the best methods for instructing learners in their subject matter” (p. 31). This perspective was echoed by several participants in Hart’s (2018) findings, who:

Agreed that communicating with faculty SMEs at the beginning of a course development project and developing a solid plan with specific goals in mind for completing the project can help to improve the instructional designer-SME relationship and ultimately improve the quality of the course they are working on together. (p. 78)

Another participant's perspective in that study confirmed the findings in this study, stating "that having such a plan in place at the beginning of a project can minimize problems and conflicts that may develop later in the project" (Hart, 2018, pp. 78–79).

These findings are significant in terms of informing institutions of higher education of the importance of clear, specific roles, expectations, and goals from the outset of a project, as well as the need to affirmatively implement conflict management strategies to avoid breakdowns in the online course development process that could potentially have a negative impact on student learning and the student experience. Conflict has the potential to, based on factors including communication, stall or break down course development projects, and adversely impact online course quality (Stevens, 2013; Hart, 2018). Tidwell (2004) asserts communication holds a much higher degree of importance due to its involvement in the conflict as well as the conflict resolution.

Although the Hart (2018) study noted faculty subject matter experts "do not want to feel like they are being made to do things or feel like they have to change anything," many of the subject matter experts interviewed in this study expressed feeling conflict and resisting changes to their content based on perceptions their subject matter expertise was in question, and instructional designers generally lack the requisite subject matter expertise to question them (p. 78). There were, however, others who cited a lack of feedback in the online course development process as a source of conflict. Many subject matter experts had expectations of feedback and were willing to make changes if asked. Many participants recalled the lack of communication in the development process led to future unexpected, unpaid work that they found to be unfair and inequitable. Some participants went so far as to describe some of this extra work needed to meet the

institution's changing expectations as potentially "illegal". This can be a paradox in that a lack of feedback, due to lack of communication, gives subject matter experts a false sense of security or the impression that they are not valued. However, the literature shows an apparent perception on the part of instructional designers believing that subject matter experts do not want to change things, and assumedly would not want or appreciate feedback.

Implementation of regular communication and opportunities for management of conflict are two key strategies identified in the research as leading to potential improvement of the subject matter expert/instructional designer working relationship. Improvements in this relationship have had a positive impact on course quality (Pan & Thompson, 2009; Singleton, Toombs, Taneja, Larkin, & Pryor, 2011; Stevens, 2013). According to Xu and Morris (2007, as cited in Trammell et al., 2018), challenges stemming from communication are derived from negative team member interpersonal dynamics, lack of calibration of workload among contributors, schedule challenges, resource limitations, and a lack of institutional reward.

Many of those interviewed identified best practice areas of importance in their approach to subject matter expert work and felt inhibited or not supported when trying to build the best course possible because of conflict. At least one participant stated she was afraid to ask questions during the development process because of how she might be perceived, given that she was an "expert" in her field. Managing the conflicts identified would better enable subject matter experts to accomplish those best practice areas of importance in their work and benefit the most from teams (versus being inhibited by team members for the reasons identified in the interviews). According to participants in this

study, there were times when issues simply could not be resolved, and the subject matter expert would reach out to his or her supervisor for assistance. Once both parties were able to discuss their points of view, they were able to find ways to work through the conflict and continue with the course.

The potential for conflict was present in team settings as well. These conflicts can have significant impacts on individuals, processes, and the end product. This potential for conflict can be far-reaching and demands attention to explore potential avenues for conflict management. A starting point is understanding what constitutes conflict. De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer and Nauta (2001) noted “the effectiveness of individual employees, teams, and entire organizations depends on how they manage interpersonal conflict at work” (p. 645). Conflict can be welcome despite its negative connotations. According to Singleton et al. (2011), “conflict can be considered functional when its results are positive and when the people with divergent views intend their disagreement to have positive result” (p. 151).

Stevens (2013) asserted that once both parties in conflict feel understood and respected by one another, a much stronger relationship exists, yielding a higher quality end product, and a more engaging and informative higher education online course. Hart’s (2018) research showed that most participants agreed there was no set process for conflict management in the online course development process. Participants in that study found themselves developing their own methods for handling conflict, using approaches such as discussing the situation with instructional designer colleagues, negotiating and attempting to compromise with subject matter experts, communicating regularly from project start to finish to build relations with the subject matter experts, and turning to a supervisor or

other leadership for assistance (Hart, 2018). Tannehill, Serapiglia, and Guiler (2018) acknowledged the importance of administration and faculty working together, asserting that to do so would result in the optimal situation for the creation of quality online courses and the most effective online instruction. This also required administration and faculty acknowledge the student experience and subsequent learning should be the ultimate goals (Tannehill et al., 2018).

According to Singleton et al. (2011, as cited in Hart, 2018), “conflict management involves open communication between the two parties in conflict, problem-solving strategies, the ability to deal with emotions, and gaining an understanding of the positions of the people involved” (p. 4). Once both parties in conflict feel understood and respected by one another, the course development project can begin or can continue with a much stronger relationship between the instructional designer and the subject matter expert, which can lead to the development of high-quality, engaging, and informative fully online courses in the higher education setting (Stevens, 2013). This was evidenced by the examples shared by participants in this study who were successful in managing and resolving their conflicts through reaching out to their instructional designers and maintaining open lines of communication.

White (2000) acknowledged the potential for elevated frustration associated with team member delay impacting others, and related barriers to reaching the finish line in a timely manner. Clarity in communication in all facets of the course and expectations among the team is critical to decreasing frustration (Hixon, 2008). Open mindedness also has the potential to decrease frustration. According to the research of Trammell et al. (2018), assigning team members work on content that aligned with their areas of

expertise led to an elevated level of enthusiasm. The use of a behind-the-scenes project manager enabled focus on timeliness, facilitation of resolutions for encountered challenges, and negotiation of personality conflicts (Trammell et al., 2018).

Ground-to-online course development adds another layer of complication for subject matter experts who are not familiar with the intricacies of online course development. Participants expressed the belief that, in their experience, ground instructors approached online development as though traditional class lectures, assignments, and assessments could be used successfully in the online modality, which is not the case. Faculty subject matter experts experienced in teaching ground courses can find it frustrating to learn that their known method of course development does not translate well to the online format (Brigance, 2011). Several participants in this study shared seeing that ground-online disconnect in their developments.

Wall and Callister (1995, as cited in Hart, 2018) noted that “different personality types can be a major catalyst for conflict. A personality clash is likely to be in the making if an instructional designer is very deadline- and process-driven, and the faculty SME they are working with is not” (p. 18). In this context, a team approach could provide the opportunity to combine the experience of the discipline experts and the instructional designers (Luck, 2001). Teams are not immune to a divergence of perspectives between subject matter experts and instructional designers on the best methods for presenting course material to learners, so the potential for conflict still exists (Stein, 2014; Stevens, 2013). Some faculty members have minimal experience in online course development and many instructional designers may lack experience in the subject member expert’s area of expertise. This can lead to a potential clash of perspectives in the online course

development process in different contexts, potentially compromising the quality of the online course and the relationships among professionals involved in the process. This potential was manifested from the perspective of the lived experience of online subject matter experts in the course development process in this study.

In the Hart (2018) study, one participant expressed that “conflict between an instructional designer and faculty SME can arise from something as simple as a personality clash between the two” (p. 76). Another stated that:

Many of [her] conflicts have come about as a result of SMEs not understanding the intricacies of securing permission to use certain materials found online, or of ensuring that a course is being developed in adherence to the Americans with Disabilities Act. (Hart, 2018, p. 76)

A third participant explained that:

Conflicts can arise because a SME simply does not understand why certain items within a course must be designed a certain way. For example, some faculty SMEs do not know the proper methods for constructing instructional objectives and how to align content with those objectives. (Hart, 2018, p. 76)

Some instructional designers expressed experiencing difficulty with subject matter experts not wanting to make corrections in courses because “they did not feel that the change the instructional designer suggested was warranted, or they did not have the time to make the changes” (Hart, 2018, p. 76). A different view was seen from the lens of subject matter experts in this study who experienced a lack of feedback from instructional designers, rude or insensitive delivery of limited feedback, or instructional designers who made unilateral changes to subject matter content.

It is interesting to note the difference in perspective between subject matter experts and instructional designers. One instructional designer in Hart's (2018) study stated, "They either love me or hate me." She continued on to say that some of the faculty subject matter experts see instructional designers as "an infringement on their job" (p. 65). None of the subject matter experts in this study expressed a feeling of infringement unless changes were made without collaboration. According to Trammell et al. (2018):

It has already been described that working within a team has numerous advantages. That is not to say that a team-based approach does not have its drawbacks. Some noted drawbacks of working within a team (as opposed to individually) are negative interpersonal dynamics with the other team-members, unbalanced workload between group members, difficulty keeping on schedule, limited resources, and lack of institutional rewards (Xu & Morris, 2007). Frustration can also increase if one team member causes a delay in the work, as it can delay the work of the other team members as well, which may create barriers to finishing the course by the appropriate time (White, 2000). (p. 169)

According to Hart (2018), "just like instructional designers, faculty SMEs 'feel like the work they create is great,' and instructional designers should try hard not to offend them" (p. 78). The findings in this study supported the notion that competing egos accounted for many instances of conflict felt by subject matter experts in the online course development process. Therefore, the collaborative process should aim to create an end product that is the culmination of team members with varied backgrounds sharing ideas and constructive feedback and leverage the specific talents of all team members.

This presents the question of whether team members should be concerned with offending others or being sensitive enough to be offended by others when it comes to the process of collaboration. Providing course development team members with the means to communicate more effectively with each other could help build rapport and trust, improving relationship dynamics, and enabling more effective collaboration towards the highest quality final product for the students. The nature of online learning is not unlike the online course development process in that much of the communication among team members takes place online, without the benefits of tone, body language, and non-verbal cues to facilitate mitigation of conflict.

Some studies report that “instructional designers only want to be of service to [SMEs] and to help them” and that if instructional designers communicated this sentiment to subject matter experts during the development process it might serve to encourage subject matter experts to be “more willing to work with instructional designers and listen to their suggestions” (Hart, 2018, p. 78). By contrast, many participants in this study recounted a different perspective of instructional designers based on their perception of instructional designer interactions and attitudes exhibited in unilateral decisions such as changing course content, and thereby changing the specific meaning of that content, or rejecting what they considered legitimate concerns regarding the need for industry-specific content or certain student deliverables in a particular course.

Communication is a two-way street. As evidenced by the existing research and the findings in this study, there appears to be a disconnect when it comes to the perception of whether instructional designers or subject matter experts are willing to compromise in the online development process. Further research could provide valuable insight into

whether providing training to foster more effective communication between instructional designers and subject matter experts as a part of the development process could alleviate preemptory strikes on the part of instructional designers to delineate their boundaries and responsibilities in an off-putting way that prematurely sets a negative tone, and potentially adversely impacts the development process. By the same token, such initiatives might serve to provide subject matter experts with more clarity at the outset of a development project that may deter them from rejecting an instructional designer's suggestions out of hand due to lack of field experience. Several study participants questioned the point of hiring a subject matter expert if they would not be allowed the freedom to create online course content based on their professional expertise, knowing what students need in terms of employable skills in the workplace. These sentiments are consistent with the current research reflecting instructional designers' perceptions on causes of conflict between them and subject matter experts (Hart, 2018). One participant in that study explained that, "some conflicts [she had] experienced with faculty SMEs occurred because the SMEs felt like they were losing their academic freedom as a result of having to follow university-mandated course design processes and procedures" (Hart, 2018, p. 75). It appeared from the data collected in this study that there may have been a fine line between what was perceived by some as "academic freedom" and others as "subject matter expertise". The research suggested setting clear expectations and fostering open and consistent communication could serve to alleviate many of the conflicts arising in the online course development process in this area. The process could be further enhanced by increased clarity of team member roles and responsibilities in the

form of mutual education of what each team member brings to the online course development table.

Collaborative theory, team design theory, and conflict management theory were advanced by Hart (2018) as strategies instructional designers could use to strengthen their working relationships with subject matter experts in online course development projects and learn how the experiences affected online course quality. By acknowledging the potential for and existence of conflict, instructional designers can better focus on the vantage point of the subject matter expert and gain a more comprehensive understanding of conflict's causes and impacts. From the instructional designers' lens, in the Hart (2018) study, the findings chronicled one view that subject matter experts, as content experts, felt "they should be allowed to construct the courses as they saw fit" and another expressed that faculty subject matter experts believed "instructional designers were being too judgmental about the material the SMEs were submitting because the instructional designers simply did not understand the subject matter or the needs of the students" (p. 75).

The findings in the Hart (2018) study, from the instructional designer perspective, were consistent with the feelings expressed in this study that often conflicts arising between instructional designers and subject matter experts in the online course development process resulted from a subject matter expert's lack of understanding the purpose of the instructional designer in the course development process. Many participants in this study expressed they felt limited by instructional designers in exercising their academic freedom to create content they felt was necessary based on their professional expertise and field experience. It appeared to be not only a matter of

respect for professional expertise but also, and more importantly, a need to ensure students were provided information in the course to support learning for their subject in an effective, well-aligned, and comprehensive manner based on objectives and industry demands. For example, in this study, Participant 1 recalled advocating for additional course material not included in the selected text, arguing that leaving such information out of the course would lead to an end product that did not contain all of the information students would need to succeed in that field of study upon graduation. This example highlights the critical perspective subject matter experts bring to a design team as practitioners and experts in their field that extends beyond the confines of the text and format.

This quandary was expressed by several subject matter experts who pondered why they were hired and whether they were a necessary part of the design and development process if their expertise was ultimately discounted or dismissed altogether. These perspectives affirm it is through awareness, training, communication, and clarity of process members of design teams will develop a critical, mutual understanding of the unique expertise each person brings to the table, and how to leverage multiple talents with focus placed on the student experience. The findings in this study tied directly to its conceptual framework, based in part on collaborative theory. Colbry, Hurwitz, and Adair (2014) characterized collaboration as “any on-going interpersonal interaction not characterized by a significant power imbalance with the express purpose of achieving common goals” (p. 67).

While members of a design team may share a common goal “to produce a high-quality, engaging, and informative course,” routes to that common goal appear to diverge

when individuals misunderstand or lose sight of the collective approach (Hart, 2018, p. 15). According to Hart (2018), “when two or more people collaborate on a project, it should be done with the understanding that each person has something valuable to contribute to the project and that no one’s ideas should be ignored” (p. 15). Research shows that the “ultimate quality and coherency of a completed project” is directly proportional to the “amount of collaboration that occurs during the course development process” (Thompson & Ku, 2010; Zundans-Fraser & Bain, 2016; as cited in Hart, 2018, p. 16). If design team members can find what some study participants called a “happy medium” in their efforts to collaborate on course development, it could benefit work relationships, job satisfaction, and course content quality that promotes student engagement and learning. Such efforts by those involved in the process could lead to a true partnership that prevents power struggles among individuals working together and increases productivity, quality, and morale on a project (Holsombach-Ebner, 2013).

Hart’s (2018) study reinforced the positive impacts of conflict management in the instructional designer and subject matter expert context. In the context of dual concern theory, “conflict management is what people who experience conflict intend to do, along with what they actually do” (Van de Vliert, 1997, as cited in De Dreu et al., 2001, p. 646). Tidwell (2004) promotes viewing conflict resolution in cyclical terms. Each component of conflict resolution is complex and responses often prompt additional inquiry. Conflict resolution requires the presence of opportunity, capacity, and volition. Opportunity requires time. Capacity requires the ability of those in conflict to resolve it. Volition (will) is the desire to resolve the conflict. If all three components are not present, conflict resolution can still be attempted, but will not be successful because those trying

to resolve the conflict will quit, or some form of remedial action will be taken to alter the situation (Tidwell, 2004). When managing conflict, the focus can shift from whether the conflict is positive or negative to how, and how effectively, the conflict is managed. According to Gordon (2003), effective conflict management is a vital asset in the form of a prime source of energy and creativity in a system.

Findings in the Work Dynamic Challenges theme heightened the understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing content regarding work dynamic challenges such as lack of respect for professional expertise, lack of team member field experience, communication and feedback issues, delivery time frames, and other boundaries. Subject matter experts employed techniques such as meetings, enlisting support from administration, and other collaboration strategies when confronted with perceived challenges that impacted the direction of the course development process due to a lack of feedback from instructional designers, lack of support from administration, and personality clashes among design team members.

Theme 3 - Insufficient Post-Launch Quality Control

Many subject matter experts expressed a desire to receive post-launch feedback in an effort to follow up and ensure course quality, positive instructor experience, and positive student experience. Receiving feedback and being able to modify the course to reflect the feedback received were perceived by some subject matter experts as resulting in a complete system. One method of ensuring expectations of online students are met is through quality course design and quality teaching (Tannehill et al., 2018). With the exception of subject matter experts who designed a volume of courses that did not allow them to feasibly teach all of the courses they developed; the majority of the subject

matter experts expressed a strong preference to teach at least the first run of a course after a development cycle. Anderson (2002) noted the need for curricular alignment: the idea that there should be a measurable relationship between instructional activities and materials with assessment of learning.

In the Hart (2018) study, instructional designers were asked to describe any negative experiences with subject matter experts and how those experiences affected the quality of the resulting courses. Instructional designers in that study expressed some subject matter experts experienced trepidation and apprehension about collaborating with instructional designers to develop courses, which caused the majority of problems experienced during course development projects (Hart, 2018). In this study, some subject matter experts expressed feeling hesitant about approaching instructional designers with questions. Failing to ask questions early in the process could lead to issues farther along in the design process, including during the post-launch phase of course development.

Instructional design theory suggests the construction of a course be focused on student learning as opposed to simply placing content in an online course shell (Reigeluth, 1999). The participants in this study all had online course development experience and did not underestimate the breadth of the process of online course development. Instructional designers use design theory for guidance pertaining to specific approaches to reach course goals and to provide greater opportunity for student success, according to Reigeluth (1999). Although the understanding and the application of an instructional design model are not always in alignment, focus is best placed on the end result and the process early on in application of the theory.

Croxton & Chow (2015) employed systems thinking and systemic change as the guiding framework for understanding organizational goals (macro) and issues involving design and development (micro) in the creation and offering of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). They noted the importance of having well-qualified team members (faculty and production specialists), and a carefully implemented instructional design process providing a constant feedback cycle between the production team and users (Croxtion & Chow, 2015). By proposing the usage of systems thinking for online learning and formal higher education, Croxtion & Chow (2015) set out to “turn chaos into organization and develop a plan for success regardless of paradigm shifts and rapid changes in technology, learning environments, learner expectations, university goals, and organizational infrastructure” (p. 95). According to Croxtion and Chow (2015), the key aspects of instructional design are ensuring the learner is central to the goal, designing learning activities that add value, and enabling learning that engages students, in a performance environment setting involving learning application.

The optimal situation to allow for the creation of quality online courses and the most effective online instruction is for administration and faculty to work together. Both should acknowledge that the student experience and subsequent learning should be the ultimate goal of everyone. (Tannehill et al., 2018, p. 33)

The findings in this theme, Insufficient Post-Launch Quality Control, promoted a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing online course content regarding insufficient post-launch quality control; specifically, concerns for instructor perceptions, the importance of feedback, and the importance of post-launch teaching opportunities. Subject matter experts employed techniques such as focusing on

the student experience and their intrinsic commitment to creating quality content when confronted with perceived challenges. These perceived challenges impacted the direction of the course development process due to a lack of post-launch feedback, inability to complete the development loop with a teaching cycle, and the overall effect on the student experience.

Theme 4 - Insufficient Compensation

The final theme that emerged from the data collected in this study centered on the lack of, or lesser, compensation for subject matter experts performing their contracted work, or performing additional unexpected work assigned after commencement of the project. Participants expressed a range of financial implications arising from conflict experienced in the online course development process. The findings showed there were notable financial implications; both direct and indirect.

Some impacts on subject matter experts associated with insufficient compensation resulted in schedule challenges and work ethic dilemmas that necessitated making difficult decisions and evaluating driving forces regarding whether to confront a challenge or take on future subject matter expert work. Many subject matter experts expressed the desire to teach post-launch for both course content evaluation and financial reasons. The impact of not being able to teach the first run of their student-facing content had a potential effect on the content, as reviewed in Theme 3, and the subject matter expert's financial bottom line. In most instances, participants working as subject matter experts were also adjunct instructors at that institution, relying on teaching as their primary source of income rather than course development compensation. There remains a gap in the literature regarding compensation-related decisions subject matter experts

make that have the potential to impact the subject matter experts' financial picture, their future employment opportunities, and the ultimate quality of student-facing course content that presents an opportunity for additional research based on the findings in this study.

Many subject matter experts also found themselves in a position of personal conflict when faced with the dilemma of unexpected work for no compensation. The question for the subject matter expert then became whether or not to voice their frustration at having to perform extra work for no pay, at the risk of losing future teaching opportunities. Additionally, several subject matter experts referenced substandard pay structures in comparison to what they could expect to make as a consultant or otherwise based on their professional experience. Some expressed frustration that was mathematically based on the time spent for course development factoring in additional unexpected work, with some projects paying only \$10–\$20 an hour. Another participant raised the issue of pay in a bigger picture context, maintaining subject matter experts who accepted lower paying development projects negatively impacted the subject matter expert market overall. Some subject matter experts turned down work because the pay was simply too low.

Some participants in this study also expressed concern there would always be someone to accept the work for lower pay. This raised apprehension regarding whether the subject matter expert taking the lower pay was capable of producing the same quality work, making reference to, “you get what you pay for.” For those who performed the work, more often than not they performed the work due to their strong work ethic and professional drive to create quality content. The other key factors motivating subject

matter experts in that regard were the student stakeholders and the subject matter expert's desire to ensure the best possible student experience.

Many subject matter experts based future decisions of whether to continue with an institution either as a subject matter expert, or in any capacity, on frustrations stemming from having to redo work or discovering that some of their subject matter expert content was missing from the course when it launched. The level of frustration expressed appeared to increase when additional, uncompensated work was assigned beyond the subject matter expert's initial, expectedly mutual, expectations regarding scope of work. Many study participants shared making the ultimate decision to press on and complete additional, uncompensated work as a matter of personal pride, professional work ethic, or an overriding commitment to the student experience. Still others either refused to do the work, left the project, or left the institution.

It was clear from participant responses there were, in some instances, institutional assumptions that once hired, a subject matter expert was expected to work under the same contract perpetually for no additional compensation. One study participant referenced a contract to author a manual. The institution extrapolated the contract to have her make changes in perpetuity with no conceivable end date, and no additional compensation. Others who developed online course content shared similar experiences, noting they were asked and required to revise courses they initially built with no additional contract. Not only did this extra work cause subject matter experts difficulties with their personal and professional schedules, many also expressed they felt the ask was unfair or inequitable, causing them to feel very frustrated and overwhelmed. One subject matter expert found

herself so conflicted at one point that she began performing cost benefit analyses before deciding whether to take on new subject matter expert work.

Study findings support additional research would be beneficial to gain deeper insight into connections between compensation, scope, perceptions, parameters, and impacts of those involved in the online course development process in higher education. One specific area of focus is the impact of financial implications on subject matter expert decision-making processes, including whether to accept course development work and whether to complete a course development project. The findings in this study suggested the industry of online higher education stands to lose or continue to lose quality candidates as a result of the aforementioned compensation practices that create strained work relationships and situations subject matter experts perceive as creating conflict. The stakes are potentially high if vastly experienced, extremely skilled industry professionals are unwilling to accept subject matter expert course development work due to financial implications.

The findings in this theme, Insufficient Compensation, enhanced the understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing online course content regarding insufficient compensation with respect to concerns for financial implications, schedule challenges, and the necessity of subject matter expert work. Subject matter experts employed techniques such as relying on their personal and professional work ethic to motivate them to finish a project or making decisions to continue (or not) based on their need for future work assignments when confronted with perceived challenges that impacted the direction of the course development process. Impacts to the course development process included lack of adequate compensation that

affected subject matter experts' decision-making processes regarding whether to complete a project or accept future assignments from an institution and being faced with compensation-related dilemmas that affected their commitment to further advocate their position for better content that would result in better course quality.

Limitations

Despite the value these findings offer in filling a gap in the literature, there remain limitations that must be addressed in the context of their potential implications. The first potential limitation identified concerns relating to the researcher's ongoing participation in the online course development process, and involvement in online higher education in several capacities, at multiple institutions. Bracketing was performed at the outset of the research and at several additional steps throughout the research process to account for this limitation. Bracketing was first performed prior to selection of the study participants. Thereafter, it was performed on the topics and research questions during the interview process, and periodically, as needed, during the data analysis process.

Regarding participant responses, one potential limitation was the tendency for participants to offer socially desirable responses in the interview process. Education professionals may be even more inclined to present themselves in the most favorable light, especially when addressing a conflict experience and its causes. The researcher undertook efforts to mitigate the potential for such tendencies by formulating questions that were experiential and insight-based in nature. This approach was aimed at eliciting interview responses based on details of experience, reconstruction of events, and specific examples to avoid abstraction and generalities. Follow-up questions were used effectively

to probe beyond superficial responses to extract the true meaning of the feelings and perspectives held by the subject matter experts.

With respect to the collection method, one potential limitation included that each subject matter expert had distinct and different professional and online course development backgrounds. Additionally, examining the lived experiences of the participants, while valuable, cannot be viewed completely in a vacuum, as there is no definitive timeline attached to the conflict situations experienced. For example, conflicts relayed regarding a particular experience may have occurred earlier in a subject matter expert's course development career. Perception may therefore have been influenced by a general lack of experience in course development or a particular institution's online course development process. The knowledge gained from initial conflicts experienced would likely alter future perspectives and lived experiences, and perhaps even change perspectives of past experiences upon reflection that differed from perspectives experienced in the moment. A second limitation in this context is the inability to make generalizations from the findings due to variations in the online course development process at various institutions in scope, structure, and direction. This diversity of practice among higher education institutions potentially impacts the ability to make generalizations due to the vast array of potential effects on the subject matter expert, the process, and the content, and extensive variation in direction based on perceptions of conflict. One additional limitation regarding the collection method included the fact that all participant interviews were audio-only recordings conducted via GoToMeeting.com. The data collected could therefore only be analyzed from an auditory perspective,

without the added benefit of observing potentially enlightening nonverbal cues and body language that could have shed further light on the lived experiences of the participants.

As a result of the data collected from the 28 participants interviewed regarding conflict they experienced in their role as a subject matter expert in the online course development process, this study identified certain areas of practice that would benefit from further in-depth review. The results of this study suggest the following areas of practice in which further examination is recommended:

1. Subject matter experts should seek out information and tools to increase their conflict management skills as they encounter conflict in the online course development process, respect and confidence issues, or team members who leverage situational power. Additionally, active pursuit of methods for identification of conflict, conflict styles, and conflict resolution strategies will help lead to improved professional interactions and more efficient online course development, benefitting all parties.
2. Subject matter experts should seek opportunities to expand their professional network and support fellow colleagues. They should work with colleagues and share their experience and knowledge in the context of emergent themes such as: avoiding the “domino effect”, navigating personalities and increasing self-awareness, strategies to avoid conflict and communication, and barriers, and the importance of streamlining the process through these strategies to maximize compensation by decreasing delays in completion caused by re-writes, lack of initial role clarity, and enhanced overall work dynamic.

3. Higher education institutions designing and developing curriculum should seek out feedback of experienced subject matter experts and make clarity of process, including roles and responsibilities of team members, a priority at the outset to increase efficiency, decrease confusion, and minimize delays; providing a clear means for administrative support as a neutral third party for conflict resolution, increased work flow, and decreased delay and frustration.
4. Higher education institutions should review currently utilized course development processes and require design team training for all members aimed at increasing role clarity, responsibilities, steps, and expectations to promote mutual professional respect, understanding, collaboration, and team work, in an effort to institute constructive changes to enhance the online course development process work relationships and reduce the potential for conflict escalation.
5. Higher education institutions should work to decrease current organizational barriers to communication, increase feedback, encourage synchronous methods of collaboration, and implement additional support systems to improve communication by leveraging technological resources, such as web conferencing, to increase personal connections, and decrease conflict between design team members and subject matter experts.

Recommendations for Future Research

The lived experiences shared by subject matter experts in the online higher education course development process signified the multitude of variables in motion with potential for a vast array of impacts to direct and indirect stakeholders. This study provided a framework to identify future focused research efforts, through the exploration

of online higher education course development from the lens of the subject matter expert, with no parameters other than experiences of conflict from that vantage point. That approach exposed a litany of potential opportunities to open the door to subsequent research for in-depth examinations of isolated causes, connections, and impacts. The themes and sub-themes analyzed in this study presented opportunities to isolate single variables and conduct research specific to the variables to examine causal connections.

Focused on process, and course development, additional research opportunities exist to explore the viability of streamlining the online course development process in an effort to reduce conflict, increase efficiency, enhance course quality, and improve the overall student experience connected to procedural enhancements. Areas of concentrated focus for exploration include increased clarity of instructions; interplay of team dynamics; team roles, responsibilities, and parameters; communication impediment mitigation; contractual parameter clarity; compensation commensurate with industry standards; and structured administrative support.

Centered on conflict, there is a need for further research to better understand how and why conflict surfaces, perceptions regarding conflict from the different vantage points, interplay dynamics associated with conflict, training focused on communication and interpersonal dynamics, conflict management technique utilization, effectiveness of conflict management measures, and correlated impacts and implications. Focused areas of potential impact, in the isolated factor additional research opportunities, include increased student retention, higher student satisfaction, competency proficiency demonstration elevation, employable skills improvement, and enhanced instructor and subject matter expert satisfaction.

Implications of Findings

This study used the methodology of transcendental phenomenology to report a valuable vantage point of subject matter experts working at various higher education institutions who performed online course development. The feelings and thoughts expressed by the study participants provided a critical base of knowledge regarding how subject matter experts experience and understand conflict in the higher education online course development process. The recommendations for practice are based on the descriptions provided by study participants. The findings of this study answered the research questions and satisfied the research goals. The research goals of this study were to gain a deeper understanding of conflict perceived by subject matter experts developing student-facing higher education online course content, identify techniques used by subject matter experts when confronted with perceived challenges, and assess how those techniques impacted the direction of the course development process, from the perspective of the subject matter expert.

The research questions posed yielded insights to better understand the conflict experienced by subject matter experts in higher education institutions developing online courses, the meaning they attach to that conflict, and the potential sources of conflict encountered by the subject matter expert throughout the course development process. The data offered viable strategies for how subject matter experts can manage conflict in the course development process. The implications of conflict subject matter experts experienced and described have ramifications on course development products generated by the subject matter experts that extend far beyond the scope of a single course being developed, including impacts to subject matter experts, course development processes,

course content deliverables, and direct and indirect stakeholders, and development team relationship dynamics.

The findings of this study have relative implications for researchers, students, instructional designers, and higher education administrators. The subject matter experts' voice was heard through the lived experiences they described and the phenomenon they defined. That essence, "navigating conflict", is at the core of these recommendations. These findings have several significant implications for both assessing and refining the higher education online course development process in a positive way, particularly for purposes of meeting institutional and industry standards and enhancing the overall student experience.

Subject matter experts and the course content they build are central to the success of higher education institutions. Subject matter experts can advocate individually and collectively for reforms to the online course development process. In situations where an institution is not perceived to offer opportunities for process improvement, subject matter experts should serve as advocates and communicate the potential value of reevaluating processes for quality control and enhancement. The participants in this study expressed utilizing strategies for conflict resolution led to improved work dynamics, better course quality, and increased satisfaction in the process overall. Subject matter experts should make use of opportunities to expand the impact their perspective can offer to improve online course development processes across multiple institutions of higher education. These findings offer a starting point for determining the importance of the effect conflict has on course development and course quality. This study contributes to the critical

dialogue regarding the need to minimize conflict in the higher education online course development process.

Contributions to the Field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

This study highlights the importance of incorporating conflict resolution tools into the online course development process for a number of reasons. Primarily, incorporating strategic conflict resolution skills into the course development process has the potential to reduce conflict among team members and enhance communication. Good communication is generally more difficult to achieve and maintain when working online as opposed to working in a face-to-face environment, given the inability to observe body language and nonverbal cues that lend insight into a person's overall position. Additionally, without the benefit of hearing the tone of a statement, the possibility exists for misinterpretation because of limitations associated with traditional online forms of communication such as email. Incorporating tools such as web conferences with video could help alleviate some communication barriers and minimize conflict. Adjusting communication mechanisms and techniques presents the opportunity to potentially reduce timeline delays due to misunderstanding, and effect positive change overall in demeanor and approach to help remedy lowered confidence, impaired work dynamic, and an overarching perception of lack of respect of professional expertise.

It is expected that the findings in this study will further contribute to the field of conflict analysis and resolution by highlighting how instances of conflict and interpersonal dynamics arise in the online course development process. By opening a dialog on these issues, subject matter experts may potentially facilitate opportunities for enhanced identification and management of conflict situations that emerge from a variety

of factors in the online course development process. In tandem with these expectations, additional contributions include the conflict management field assisting higher education institutions to educate members of design teams in the definition and identification of conflict, and develop policies and procedures to effectively identify, mitigate, and manage online course development conflicts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how and when in the online course development process subject matter experts perceive conflict and the meanings they placed on their lived experience of the conflict. Study participants interviewed experienced conflict at every stage of the online course development process, including after the process had technically concluded. The genuine candor of the subject matter experts participating in this study demonstrated their commitment to the betterment of the higher education online course development process, the student academic experience, and the field of higher education as a whole, and led to the identification of four key themes and 21 correlated sub-themes that offered an important and not often shared insight into the online course development process through the lens of the subject matter expert.

It is the intent of this researcher the findings serve to contribute to the fields of conflict resolution and higher education online course development by tightening the divide among online course development team members and assisting in enhancing the overall online course development process. This study filled a gap in the research and was needed to better understand the nature of conflict in the higher education online course development process from the lens of the subject matter expert, resulting subject

matter expert and institutional consequences, and possible areas for application of conflict resolution strategies to positively impact retention, instructor and subject matter expert satisfaction, student learning experience, competency proficiency achievement, and demonstration of employable skills.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Consent to Conduct Study



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

To: **Tammi A Clearfield, PhD Conflict Analysis and Resolution
College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences**

From: **Angela Yehl, Psy.D.,
Center Representative, Institutional Review Board**

Date: **June 24, 2016**

Re: **IRB #: 2016-256; Title, “Conflict in the online course development
process: A transcendental phenomenological study of the lived
experience of the online higher education course developer”**

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review under **45 CFR 46.101(b) (Exempt Category 2)**. You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

- 1) **CONSENT:** If recruitment procedures include consent forms, they must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.
- 2) **ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS:** The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me (954-262-5369 and Angela Yehl, Psy.D., respectively) of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result

of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.

- 3) **AMENDMENTS:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.

The NSU IRB is in compliance with the requirements for the protection of human subjects prescribed in Part 46 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46) revised June 18, 1991.

cc: Dustin Berna, Ph.D.

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letters



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Email to Prospective Participants

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Entitled

Conflict in the online course development process

A transcendental phenomenological study of the lived experience of the online course developer

Hello, my name is Tammi Clearfield, and I am an adjunct faculty member teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels, in the online modality. I am also a practicing attorney of nearly twenty years in South Florida. I'm in the final stages of completing my Ph.D. degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University. This winter, I will be compiling research information to complete my doctoral dissertation, using a phenomenological approach to explore the meanings of the lived experiences of subject matter experts developing courses for the online modality who experienced conflict in that process. I am sending this message to invite you to participate in this study.

The approach for this project is quite simple. Approximately 20 individuals will be participating in this study: men and women who hold graduate degrees and have served in the capacity of subject matter expert for course development in the online modality. You will be interviewed, virtually, using either a conference call line or a webinar meeting format, about the meaning of your lived experience of conflict in the online course development process while working as a subject matter expert. In the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience in terms of the conflict in the online course development process while working as a subject matter expert, the situations that influenced or affected your experience(s) of conflict in this setting and other related questions. Absolutely no questions will be asked outside the scope of that area. The interview will be conducted by me remotely from Miami, Florida, and will be recorded so that I can transcribe the interview for analysis. The entire interview process will take no longer than two hours.

Prior to the interview, I will ask you to sign a consent form which outlines the goals of the research, any potential risks and benefits to you, and the fact that you may choose to leave the study at any time. There would be no further involvement or commitment on your part following the interview.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nova Southeastern University, and I will conduct my research in keeping with the guidelines and standards approved by NSU's IRB, taking precautions to protect your confidentiality and privacy. Any report of the study's findings will make use of pseudonyms, and will not include any information through which you could be identified. If you have any question about the process or any other matter pertaining to the study you may ask it directly to me or call my cell phone.

I sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this study if you worked as a subject matter expert developing online course content and experienced conflict during the process. If you are willing, please contact me with your affirmation and any questions that you may have at the phone number or email address below.

If you choose to participate, I will follow up with additional details and respond to any questions about the research process and areas of focus. You will then have the opportunity to sign a voluntary consent form that fully explains your right to discontinue participation at any time with absolutely no repercussions. I will begin the interviews process as soon as I have assembled all participants with appropriate approvals and voluntary consent forms.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

With warm regards,

Tammi A. Clearfield, JD, MS, CFC, RI
Nova Southeastern University Graduate School of Humanities & Social Sciences
Department of Conflict Analysis & Resolution
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314

Appendix C: Participant Release Agreement

Research Consent Form and Interview Scheduling

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my PhD study. Attached is the IRB approved consent form for your review and execution. If you have any questions at all, about the study and/or your participation, I am available to answer your questions.

Interviews will be conducted from June 3, 2019 to June 15, 2019. I am available morning, daytime, and evening hours. I am available weekdays, and weekends, to work around your availability. Please include your top three preferred slots for the interview, which will be conducted using GoToMeeting, in EST. The interview will take no longer than two hours.

Thanks again, very much,

Tammi Clearfield, JD, MS, ABD

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Tammi Clearfield. Thank you so much for taking time from your schedule to participate in this research. A little bit about me, as we begin our interview. I have been involved in higher education since the early 90s. Currently, I am an adjunct faculty member teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels, and manage online curriculum, in the online modality. I am also a practicing attorney of over twenty years in South Florida.

Initially, I reached out with an invitation to participate that included some overview information. Based on your willingness to participate, I followed up with a Consent Form. I returned a fully signed copy of the Consent Form attached to the e-mail with our interview log in details. The Consent Form outlined key areas of importance including the goals of the research, any potential risks, and your ability to choose to leave the study at any time. Do you have any questions about the Consent Form, of the interview process before we get started? If you do have any questions along the way, feel free to stop me at any point, and ask. Also, if you need a break, during the interview, please let me know and we will pause to give you the time that you need.

So let's talk about what brings us together today. The purpose of this research project is to explore the meaning of the lived experiences of subject matter experts developing courses for online higher education, who experienced conflict in that process. The focus is on you, as the SME, and your perceptions, interpretations, connections, and, overarching experiences centered on conflict. The information you share about conflict is based on your lived experience, as the SME. Specifically, the meaning of your lived experience of conflict in the online course development process while working as a SME. This is from your lens, based on your lived experience.

The research is confidential, not anonymous. I will be using pseudonyms to review to the participants who are contributing to this study. You will not be identified in any way.

OK let's get started. First, please share a little bit about yourself.

- Degrees, areas of expertise
- How many years have you been involved in online higher education
- Tell me a little about that experience
 - o How many different institutions
 - o What positions
 - o What roles
- Experience as a SME
 - o How many different institutions

- Approximately how many different classes did you work on as a SME in some capacity
- In what subject(s)

Let's shift our focus specifically to your experience as a SME in Online Higher Education.

Initial questions:

When doing SME work for Online Higher Education, did you experience any form of conflict?

- Tell me about the conflict
- Set the stage for me to understand how the conflict arose from your vantage point
- What were the circumstances
- Who was involved
- What were those individuals responsible for in the online course development process
- What was your relationship with them
- What was the basis for you classifying what happened as conflict from your standpoint
- What precipitated it
- Was it sudden, or did it escalate
- What contributed to the conflict
- What caused the conflict
- What do you think could have prevented the conflict
- How long did the conflict go on for
 - Tell me how you remember it developing
 - Tell me how you remember it making you feel
 - Tell me how you remember it impacting your SME work, if at all
- How did that duration compare to the overall duration of the SME work
- What are the ways the conflict impacted you
- Describe the emotions surrounding the conflict that you remember experiencing
- As you reflect back, how do you feel about what took place
- How do you think the conflict impacted others

In thinking back on conflicts when doing SME work, what percentage of your course development experience do you think involved some level of conflict

- How would you describe the different conflicts you experienced, from your standpoint

- How did the conflict make you feel
- How, if at all, do you think the conflict you perceived impacted your SME work that was in motion when the conflict arose
- Do you think that conflict trickled over into any other of your higher education responsibilities
- How, if at all, did the conflict impact your approach to future SME work

As you think about all possible connections, that could be tied back to the conflict, what comes to mind?

- Direct connections
- Indirect connections
 - o Instructors teaching the course with the curriculum you developed
 - o Students
 - o Retention
 - o Employable skills

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience with Conflict when working as a SME, specific to your memories, thoughts, or feelings?

POSSIBLE: Follow up questions:

Describe something you remember about experiencing conflict when working on online course development as a subject matter expert. Be sure to describe the event as well as the memory you hold. Be as specific and detailed as possible.

1) Describe something you remember about experiencing conflict when working on online course development as a subject matter expert. Be sure to describe the event as well as the memory you hold. Be as specific and detailed as possible.

(2) What about the incident made you classify it as a conflict?

(3) What was it like to experience that conflict when working as a subject matter expert developing the online course?

(4) Describe your feelings about being confronted with conflict while working in that capacity?

(5) What did you do when you felt there was conflict?

(6) How do you feel that conflict impacted you?

(7) How do you feel the conflict impacted your work?

(8) How do you feel that conflict impacted your relationship(s) with others involved in the process?

(9) How do you feel that conflict impacted your overall experience serving in the capacity as a subject matter expert?

(10) Are there any other impacts because of the conflict?

From there, as needed, the following prompts can be incorporated: Can you tell me more about the event you are describing? Exactly what happened? What conflict connections did you feel were present?

Thank you for sharing your lived experience with conflict when working as a SME in online course development for higher education.

In looking ahead, I am doing approximately 20 interviews. It is going to take me some time to go through the transcript to analyze your information (responses), and the responses of others. Would it be ok with you, if I have clarifying questions, or need additional information, to reach back out to you? May I do that by e-mail, or would you prefer I call you? It is also possible that I may ask you to review my analysis of your data, would you be willing to do that if the need arises?

Thank you so much for your time. I truly appreciate it. I think this is a really important study that will enable greater insight into understanding what it is like to stand in the shoes of a SME doing online course development work for higher education specific to conflict, connections, and impacts. That vantage point is very important, for insight and the identification of potential additional research opportunities to look at more narrow areas in greater detail. Once I wrap up, I will certainly share my dissertation and any publications with you.