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# Distance Education Administrators Starting Online Programs in Higher Education: A Case Study of the Tasks, Processes, and Challenges of Change to E-Learning

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# DISTANCE EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS STARTING ONLINE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE TASKS, PROCESSES, AND CHALLENGES OF CHANGE TO E-LEARNING

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

DISTANCE EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS STARTING ONLINE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE TASKS, PROCESSES, AND CHALLENGES OF CHANGE TO E-LEARNING

While total enrollment for Title IV universities in the United States has declined 4 percent from 2013-2018, overall online course enrollment has rapidly increased by 22 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Not long ago, distance education had limited diffusion in universities and was considered a tertiary, experimental "add-on" to education (Burnette, 2015). Now, online learning is becoming a transformative power striking profound influence and change on all aspects of higher education (Otte & Benke, 2006). Beaudoin (2015) claims this may be the most crucial change impacting education since the printing press. This study explores the tasks, processes, and challenges for distance education administrators (DEAs) developing online programs at public universities.

This online enrollment growth is managed and sometimes attributed to DEAs responsible for the timely and quality delivery of online courses and programs. DEAs do this by directing tasks and orchestrating people from every level of the organization (Otte & Benke, 2006). DEAs may hold established titles like dean or vice-president, or newer titles like chief learning officer, vice-provost of online education, or director of distance education (Nworie et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2018). Despite this rapid growth in online public universities and an increase in administrators managing this growth, there is a paucity of literature exploring the experiences of DEAs developing online programs.

In this study, I used explanatory case study methodology (Yin, 2018) to answer the research questions and provide rich descriptions of the process of change in developing new online programs at a public university. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with seven administrators responsible for starting different online programs at a single university site. A conceptual change model was created to help guide the inquiry and create a priori themes for analysis. Four progressive change process themes were established in the data: infrastructure, initiate, implement, and institute. A variety of associated tasks with each theme were explored. Additionally, current and future challenges for DEAs were investigated.

KEYWORDS: Distance Education Administration, Distance Learning Administration, Online Program Development, Higher Education Leadership, Qualitative Case Study

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# DISTANCE EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS STARTING ONLINE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE TASKS, PROCESSES, AND CHALLENGES OF CHANGE TO E-LEARNING

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Date

DEDICATION

*To my wife, Melissa, who showed unwavering support through this process and always brings joy to the journey.*

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This dissertation is one of the most rewarding and challenging accomplishments of my life. I wrote it during an unusually turbulent time in the history of our nation and world, and it represents a culmination of many years of study. However, I immediately recognize that though the individual writing was mine, I accomplish this task with a significant amount of privilege and power at my disposal. No time during this writing did my children go hungry. No time during this writing was I forced out of my home, shot, harassed, or arrested. No time during this writing was I told that I could not do it, that I did not look the part, or that I could not afford it. In the middle of a pandemic, I was healthy. In the middle of national turmoil, my house, community, and town were at peace. Many were without jobs; both my wife and I have been fully employed. I am both thankful and humbled by what I have been given, but I would be amiss if I claimed this accomplishment as only my own.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to uncover the processes distance education administrators (DEAs) employ to develop online programs at public universities. This study is timely and significant considering the rapid growth of online programs in higher education and the concomitant paucity of research describing or explaining this phenomenon. While many administrators in higher education are tasked with starting online programs, few have the experience or much research on which to draw. In this study, I will research the tasks, processes, and challenges of DEAs developing online programs. A qualitative explanatory case study methodology (Yin, 2012) was selected as the design. This design was selected considering the lack of research dedicated to this topic, the exploratory nature of this research, and my own epistemology. This study seeks to uncover this process from the DEA's perspective, providing rich description of this phenomenon that is transforming our universities. In this first chapter of the dissertation, I present the background of the study, specify the problem of the study, describe the significance, touch on the research need, and finally list the research questions and design.

## Background

In the fall of 2018, all schools in the United States participating in the Title IV federal student aid program (Title IV schools) reported around 3.25 million students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This was an increase from 3.1 million in the previous fall of 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). While total enrollment for Title IV institutions in the United States has declined 4 percent from 2013-2018, overall online course enrollment has rapidly increased by 22 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). During this same time period, graduate enrollment in exclusively distance

education courses has grown at about twice the rate as 4-year, distance-exclusive undergraduate enrollment, 38 percent versus 17 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

This online enrollment growth is managed and sometimes attributed to DEAs responsible for the timely and quality delivery of online courses and programs. DEAs do this by directing tasks and orchestrating people from every level of higher educational institutions (Otte & Benke, 2006). DEAs may hold established titles like dean or vice-president, or newer titles like chief learning officer, vice-provost of online education, or director of distance education (Nworie et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2018). Despite this rapid growth in online public universities, there is a paucity of literature exploring the DEA experience.

## Problem Statement

Historically, public universities exist for the common good, and administrators are increasingly coming under pressure to serve the public with less public funding. Because of the rapid growth accompanying the development of online programs, DEAs have a unique challenge through pioneering efforts that are largely undocumented by research. Much can be learned from how general leadership theories and models of change apply to university administration efforts, but little is known about how these approaches reflect the specific challenge of starting programs online. A significant amount of change currently occurring in higher education is associated with online program development. However, little is written about how to navigate these changes effectively, handle the major challenges, what skills are needed, or how it all could be accomplished in an equitable way. The problem to be addressed in this study is uncovering the largely unknown process of administrators developing distance education in universities.

## Purpose and Significance

This study aimed to explore current tasks, processes, and challenges for change DEAs face in developing online programs at public universities. DEAs implement distance education programs by directing tasks and orchestrating people from every level of higher educational institutions (Otte & Benke, 2006). The role DEAs play in leading change through the development of online programs is largely unexplored, especially in the context of leadership. Three areas of this process will be explored, including the DEA tasks, their challenges, and the actions used to lead change. Universities are growing rapidly in distance education, and they are dependent on leaders and administrators to direct these changes; however, these administrators have little research to guide them. The study hopes to change that by uncovering the tasks, processes, and challenges for change faced by DEAs in higher education.

### Significance

While overall higher education enrollment declined slightly from 20.5 million in 2012 to 20.1 million in 2017, students enrolling only in distance courses increased from 11.3 percent to 15.4 percent in that same period (Ginder et al., 2019; Lederman, 2018). With this rapid growth of online education, new administrative roles have formed to face the management and leadership tasks of starting new online programs. Little research exists to help understand these important DEA roles. With this rapid growth, rapid concurrent change is happening in higher education. Distance education is currently one of the most significant changes happening in higher education, and so there is a need to understand the tasks and challenges of DEAs and how they are leading and managing change in this context.

### Study Contribution

This study will contribute to both the knowledge and practice of DEAs. The research focusing on the experiences of DEAs developing online programs at public universities is lacking. There remains a gap in the literature that focuses on the tasks, challenges, and the change process when starting new online programs. While researchers like Fredericksen (2017) identify these types of leaders across the United States, all DEAs are categorized broadly, and studies like this offer few descriptions of their experiences. In addition, there is no theory of change dedicated to distance education. Thus, this study will explore common change and leadership theories that could be applied to launching online programs and then utilize a conceptual framework to help organize and guide the study. This study will contribute to research by filling gaps of understanding regarding tasks, challenges, and the underlying process of change around distance education. The results of this study should have implications for DEAs, faculty, teaching and learning centers, university administrators, and any institution that desires to develop new online programs.

## Research Need

If there is one agreement within modern distance education literature, it is that online course enrollment is increasing rapidly and bringing significant change to higher education. This rapid change means that research cannot rest on historical literature based on established educational leadership structures. Rather, it must address distance education as a significant part of the higher education landscape. Public universities are considered institutions for the common good and are currently straining under pressure for tuition growth to replace dwindling state funding. This growth often comes in the form of transitioning face-to-face programs to distance education or developing entirely new online programs.

Institutional leaders are seeking to fill new administrative roles to support this rapid growth. In a recent survey of 280 DEAs at U.S. universities, 57 percent said their position did not exist

before their appointment (Encoura Eduventures Research, 2019). Administrators, simultaneously faced with old challenges and needing to fill new leadership and management positions, suffer from a paucity of research on important themes. The following section surveys these themes and names gaps in the literature on distance education administration. The next section continues this chapter with an exploration of the literature pertaining to higher education distance education and its administration.

## Research Questions and Design

### Research Questions

The overarching research question is: What are the tasks, processes, and challenges of DEAs starting online programs at public universities? The supporting questions are:

1. What motivates DEAs to launch online programs?
2. How do DEAs overcome their stated challenges?
3. How does the typical DEA process of starting online programs compare to established change frameworks?

### Overview of Method

In this study, I will use an explanatory case study methodology (Yin, 2018) to provide rich descriptions of the process of change in developing new online programs at a public university. Descriptive case studies are helpful in researching educational innovation, where little research exists (Merriam, 1998). The primary data are from semi-structured interviews with seven administrators responsible for starting online programs at a single university site. In addition, I used publicly available documents from the single university site to help tell the story of online program development, validate information, and fill in detail gaps.

In Chapter 3, I present a conceptual framework to guide this study. I first explore four highly referenced change models, each with elements that apply to starting online programs. I then created a composite model using these frameworks as the basis. Following, I critiqued this composite model using four educational theories that emerged from the literature review. Emanating from that critique, I present a new conceptual model of change to be used as a theoretical position and conceptual framework for this study. I first adjust this conceptual framework in Chapter 5 to present the data with better organization and then create a final revised version of this conceptual framework in Chapter 6 based on the findings and discussion.

## Summary

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 2 will review the literature regarding distance education, including definitions, major literature themes, and the tasks and challenges for DEAs present in the research. In Chapter 3, I will present a conceptual model as a theoretical position to study the process for starting online programs. Chapter 4, the methods chapter, will review how I will proceed with an explanatory case study approach to help answer the research questions, describe the research setting, and my data collection and analysis procedures. In Chapter 5, I will present the findings, organized by revised conceptual framework headings, along with a final composite case study report. Finally, Chapter 6 will include a discussion of the findings, organized by the research questions, a final revised conceptual framework, and implications for practice and research.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this chapter is to review literature pertaining to the tasks, processes, and challenges of distance education administrators (DEAs) starting online programs at public universities. It begins with general themes of postsecondary distance education (DE) and then narrows to research regarding administration within those themes. In this literature review, I use an integrative approach, searching quantitative and qualitative articles, previous literature reviews, and theoretical articles of significance in distance education. This is followed by a focus on leading change within DE administration. Then, four theories used to address distance education administration in the literature are noted. Finally, I explore four models of change and present a new, equitable change model to fit distance education administration.

## Literature Review Questions

The main question guiding this literature review is: What are the responsibilities and challenges of DEAs when leading change at universities? Administration is the overall management of general business operations and policies at the institution, department, or other unit, in contrast to tasks primarily centered around instruction (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Administrators of online programs may have formal titles with the terms *online learning* or *distance education* or carry the responsibilities as one part of their administrative portfolio as a program director, department chair, dean, staff, or faculty. To further understand DEAs, the supporting questions driving this chapter are:

1. What are the major themes in recent research regarding DEAs?
2. How is DEA defined and understood?
3. What are the main tasks and responsibilities for DEAs?
4. What are the main challenges for DEAs?

5. What motivates DEAs to launch online programs?

6. How do DEAs lead change in higher education?

7. What theories are applied to DE administration?

## Distance Education Definition

For this study, it is first necessary to define the term *distance education*. Although newer terms like online learning, e-learning, and digital learning are showing increased use, distance education is still the overarching research term in databases like ERIC and predominant in journal titles. Most historical research agrees that distance education means a separation between students and teachers that must be overcome by some sort of technology (Black, 2013; Keegan, 1980, 2013; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Simonson & Seepersaud, 2019). This technology, of course, developed over time from correspondence courses by mail to one-way telecommunication to online delivery.

Distance education has been defined as "education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019, p. 10). DE has also been defined as "education that uses certain technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the student and the instructor " (United States Department of Education, 2014, p. 1). Some large online universities have contested the ambiguous qualifier "regular and substantive." Simplifying the definition and removing this currently contested concept, I define distance education as instruction that occurs through the use of technologies for students and teachers who are separated by location.

## Distance Education in Higher Education Literature

This section is organized by the literature review questions, which aim to support a better understanding of the responsibilities and challenges of DEAs. For this literature review, I first gathered articles and books spanning the years 2015-2019. Initial database searching over the years 2015-2019 returned thousands of articles, many of which were focused on online classroom level concerns like teaching methods, technologies, and student attitudes. Since this study is concerned with the administration of online programs, not teaching, the articles' titles and abstracts were screened for inclusion (Levy & Ellis, 2006) by removing those with the subjects "teaching methods" or "student attitudes." This reduced the number to 1,661 books and peer-reviewed articles. These results were then filtered manually by subject to ensure they were primarily focused on administrative concerns, reducing the number to 134.

It is clear from this review of the literature that the majority of distance education research focuses on pedagogy and the student or classroom experience. Only a small percentage address administrative topics. Despite the importance of the administration of distance education, other authors have also confirmed the small number of available articles (Beaudoin, 2003; Irlbeck, 2002; Nworie, 2012). In order to better answer the remaining, more specific questions, additional articles were found by conducting backward and forward searches (Webster & Watson, 2002) using articles that corresponded to the question by theme as starting points. I also found additional articles by searching the top ten journals focused on distance education and distance education administration. In the remainder of this section, I will use the literature to answer each of the questions.

## Major Themes in Higher Education DE

This section will outline major themes in the literature. I coded all relevant articles by emerging themes based on the article's topic and research question. Three were listed as the primary

theme in 73 percent of the articles (not including instances when they were secondary themes). These three major themes for research in distance education administration from the years 2015-2019 were:

1. Program and course development.
2. Instructor support.
3. Quality assurance.

Regarding the top theme, *Program and Course Development*, topics ranged from reviewing various models of online education (Huggins & Smith, 2015; Nodine & Johnstone, 2015; Provident et al., 2015) to converting to online from face-to-face classes (Stocker, 2018; Tüzün & Çinar, 2016), to more descriptive studies highlighting various programs (Baldwin et al., 2018; McKenna, 2018; Young, 2016). One study compared three institutions regarding organizational control over online development, finding that the most success comes when faculty and administration work together to implement quality instruction (Tannehill et al., 2018). It is significant to note that 14 of the 39 articles regarding "Program and Course Development" were related to developing massive open online courses (MOOCs). MOOCs were a common research topic during the early part of this period, and interest in them has tapered off more recently. Other subthemes included accessibility (ADA compliance), mobile learning, and developing specific programs.

Within the second major theme, *Instructor Support*, subthemes included faculty attitude and adoption (Krug et al., 2016; Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009), professional development (Alexiou-Ray & Bentley, 2015; Mohr & Shelton, 2017), specific technology adoption (Sanga, 2016; Varnell, 2016), and the unique participation of adjunct faculty (Barnett, 2018; Mandernach et al., 2015; Ridge & Ritt, 2017). Professional development is a significant concern in higher education, and with online education, new and updated skills and approaches are constantly needed. One study

used a Delphi study to survey 57 online learning experts to determine a best practice framework for online professional development and determined a list of both professional development topics and organizational strategies (Mohr & Shelton, 2017). Technology adoption is also an important consideration when developing online classes. For instance, Sanga (2016) investigated and listed the major technology issues facing 119 faculty members transitioning to a new learning management system. Instructor support was the major theme in 23 percent of the articles reviewed; however, it was mentioned as a minor theme in many of the other articles with other major themes as well. Because of the constant changing of part-time and full-time instructors, I would expect this theme would be constant across new and older online programs.

The third major theme was *Quality Assurance*. This theme pertained to administrative tasks that focused on assessing or increasing quality in distance education or focused on evaluating and improving teaching methods. Applying quality assurance, the administrator assesses a quality gap in either the course or teaching acts to help close this gap. Subthemes were split between evaluating the quality of courses and evaluating the online teachers. Articles evaluating the quality of online courses looked at general quality indicators (Miranda et al., 2017; Sun & Chen, 2016), the quality control process (Merillat & Scheibmeir, 2016), and implementing various evaluation tools like iNacol (Heller, 2018) and Quality Matters (Adair & Shattuck, 2015; Legon, 2015). One study (Baldwin & Trespalacios, 2017) evaluates 28 evaluation tools on how closely they aligned to Chickering and Gamson's (1987) *Seven Principles for Good Practice*. Other literature regarding the quality of online teachers contained topics on increasing student evaluation response rates (Chapman & Joines, 2017; Jacek, 2014), teacher perceptions of evaluations (Cicco, 2016; DeCosta et al., 2015), and other approaches to evaluating and increasing quality teaching online. One study identified the online teacher evaluation practices at a sample of ten for-profit, private, and public

universities and found that all institutions relied on a triangulation of sources and not just one evaluation method (Thomas et al., 2018).

In this section, I listed top themes, focusing on the top three themes of "Program and Course Development," "Instructor Support," and "Quality Assurance." In the next section, I discuss the motivations towards distance education for both administrators and students.

## Defining Distance Education Administration

Distance Education Administrators (DEAs) is a term used for the purpose of this study and not necessarily a designation in common use at universities. The people in these positions could be called administrators, managers, or leaders.

### Administration

The term administrator tends to be an expansive concept. Administrators in higher education are professionals who support the day-to-day activities of teaching and research and the institution's overall mission. Administrators working with distance education may hold established position titles like dean or vice-president, or newer titles like chief learning officer, vice-provost, director, or coordinator of distance education (Nworie et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2018). Fredericksen (2017) reported that 75 percent of those identified as online learning leaders reported directly to the provost, chief academic officer, or another senior academic position. However, the majority of these same leaders had held their position for less than four years. Management and leadership are two subsets of administration, which some would argue are clearly distinct (Beaudoin, 2003; Burnette, 2015; Holt et al., 2014; Irlbeck & Pucel, 2000).

### Management

Management is a subset of administration and is the process of coordinating the efficient activities of subordinates (Rost, 1991; Rumble, 1992) to achieve institutional objectives and orderly

results (Kotter, 2008; Powar, 2003). The approach is similar to a factory operation with products to create and a production timeline to follow. A manager uses their authority to attend to details and human resources in order to attain the organizational goal.

Some contend that universities, or organizations in general, are over-managed and under-led (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Carneiro, 2010; Ehlers & Schneckenberg, 2010; Kotter, 1996). Although the phrase seems somewhat dismissive of the critical task of management, this was not the intention of Bennis and Nanus (1985), who intended to correct the idea that a manager is intrinsically leading and to clarify the distinction between leading and managing tasks. A manager is concerned with handling complexity by planning and organizing the work. On the other hand, a leader works to affect change and transformation (Carneiro, 2010). A manager takes more of a structured approach, while a leader might take a more personal approach. A manager takes care of organizing and staffing the next project. In contrast, a leader is more concerned about inspiring people to the final goal or vision.

**Leadership**

In contrast, another subset of administration is leadership, which relies on influence in followers to achieve a shared vision and real change (Irlbeck & Pucel, 2000; Rost, 1991). Influence relationship is a strong predictor of successful technology implementation (Zhu, 2015). The common vision must be clearly communicated and part of a holistic strategy (King & Boyatt, 2015; Powar, 2003; Singh & Hardaker, 2014). Rather than focus on specific tasks, a leader typically creates an environment through a set of attitudes (Beaudoin, 2002, 2016). Leadership is typically about creating a culture to manage change, not just being an excellent manager. Some argue that distance education leadership is different from other leadership in higher education (Nworie, 2012), even giving it the title of "e-leadership" (Arnold & Sangrà, 2018; Avolio et al., 2000). E-leadership

is similar to the standard definition of leadership, as it is an influence relationship, but in this case, the influence process is mediated by advanced information technology tools, like e-mail and learning management systems (Avolio et al., 2000). E-Leadership is leadership but in the context of new technology.

Though leadership has specific contributing characteristics, it is not to be confined to leadership trait theory, where characteristics are held uniquely by certain people (Cleveland-Innes, 2010). Instead, leadership is situational, contextual, relational, and responsive. Transformation and the need for change strike the heart of what it means to lead (Carneiro, 2010; McRoy & Gibbs, 2009). Though managing change is an essential role for leadership, this is not to suggest that the change process can be controlled by a leader who is *good enough*. Instead, an adept leader's primary task is how the change process is shaped and mitigate the amount of disruption it creates in the institution (Green & Hayward, 1997). As Bolman and Deal (2017) state, "Like surfers, leaders must ride the waves of change" (p. 422). Consider, as well, that leadership power in academe is more distributed and demands more collaboration than in the private sector (Fredericksen, 2017).

**Leadership and Management Combined**

Kotter (1995) makes a clear distinction between leadership and management, assuming them to be roles held by different people. Kotter argued that organizational paralysis comes from having too many managers and not enough leaders. So does Bennis and Nanus (2007), who wrote that "managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing" (p. 20). The literature agrees that both are at work in administration: Leadership, which works from an influence relationship, and management, which directs decisions and tasks. Leadership and management can reside in one or more people concurrently.

Management ideals in higher education are surging as universities create cultures with more control and demands on their faculty and staff and because so many new, complex tasks need to be accomplished by multiple people (Arntzen, 2016). While those holding leadership in high regard may look down on the functions of management, it is a necessary function for the health of an organization. Flexibility is critical as an administrator shifts their strategic approach to more management to organize and complete more complex tasks and then shifts back to a higher ratio of leadership to cast the vision and motivate people forward. When used to solve a problem or reach a goal, proper management is good leadership applied.

Another concern is relegating specific roles, tasks, or people to "leadership" positions and others to "management." Leadership can happen on every level and with all stakeholders. Change within a university tends to be led by faculty with no formal administrative role (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kezar et al., 2007; Perry, 2014). Staff and administrators in the middle between the faculty and department heads can also participate in leadership. Middle managers harness their potential as they interpret and implement visions for change (Balogun, 2003; Bolman & Gallos, 2010) or use their own creativity to spark innovation in an otherwise stalled system (Kelly & Hess, 2013).

Dividing managers and leaders might create a pithy distinction, but it does not consider the changing nature of modern administration in HE. Managers could and should also be leaders, and leaders cannot always or simply delegate tasks for others to manage. One should consider "managers as leaders, and leadership as management practiced well" (Arntzen, 2016, p. 2069). So, considering the context of higher education, the complexity of developing online programs, and the necessity of both leadership and management for change, "Administrator" is an appropriate overarching term for the person who performs both management and leadership functions. With this understanding, the distance education administrator role will now be considered.

## The Distance Education Administrator

The distance education administrator (DEA) is tasked with implementing DE programs through the orchestration of people and tasks from every level of the organization (Otte & Benke, 2006). In a study of 120 colleges, Hoey et al. (2014) found that 78 percent employed an administrator dedicated to online programs. These administrators often carried titles including "distance education" or "online learning" as well as a prefix like director, dean, provost, or coordinator. In one survey, 75 percent of DEAs said they reported directly to the provost or another senior academic leader (Fredericksen, 2017). DEAs play critical roles as they function in both the traditional and the innovating contexts, crossing boundaries to collaborate with various constituents (Beaudoin, 2002). Moore and Kearsley (1996) argued that a high-level DEA is probably the most important ingredient for change to occur.

Like higher education in general, leadership in DE is understood as distinct from management. However, there is still a paucity of research related to DE leadership as a discrete area of study (Beaudoin, 2002, 2003; Burnette, 2015) in comparison to the volumes on teaching and learning in DE (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). The literature that does exist is more descriptive than analytic (Murgatroyd & Woudstra, 1989). One reason for this may be because academics tend to focus on issues of pedagogy rather than leadership (Nworie, 2012). Beaudoin (2002) defines DE leadership as "a set of attitudes and behaviors that create conditions for innovative change, that enable individuals and organizations to share a vision and move in its direction, and that contribute to the management and operationalization of ideas" (p. 132). A few years later, Beaudoin (2015) simplified his definition to "creating the conditions for innovative change" (p. 43). DE leadership is not simply managing technology, as many might presume, but motivating and influencing all stakeholders through the process of positive change (Burnette, 2015).

Leadership for distance education does not necessarily come from the top. Those in non-administrative roles can have significant change influence (Beaudoin, 2003). Change is also led by those in the middle. Positioned between the faculty and administrators, instructional designers can be effective leaders for change toward distance education innovation (Brigance, 2011; DeBlois, 2005; Willis, 1983). Essentially, teams can synergize to create a leadership dynamic that may not exist with one team member alone. A team-based approach to pre-internet distance education was developed by Lord Perry in the groundbreaking British Open University of the 1970s (Beaudoin, 2002). These course development teams would often have twenty people or more from across disciplines and skillsets (Keegan, 2013, p. 156). Today DE teams often include administrators, technologists, instructional designers, faculty, and instructors (Beaudoin, 2002).

Research suggests that DE leadership is different from traditional higher education leadership (Beaudoin, 2003; Nworie, 2012). DE leadership has a unique set of demands and necessary skills. Even though this is the case, there is a paucity of research focusing on challenges that DE leaders face. Beaudoin (2003) found that 70 percent of the DE literature was centered around theory, practice, and integrating technology. Because of this, there remains a gap in the literature regarding verified best practices, common challenges, and solutions in DE leadership at higher education institutions. Still, some understanding of the roles, tasks, and responsibilities are found in the literature. These will be described in the next section.

## DEA Tasks and Responsibilities

In this section, I explore the main tasks and responsibilities for DEAs. Most distance education responsibilities listed in the literature seemed to fall under the administrative category of management rather than leadership.

### Leading Change

First and foremost, the DEA's main task is to lead and manage change (Beaudoin, 2016; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Otte & Benke, 2006). This primary task is not to simply manage the technology of change, like with the implementation of new software for online learning, but change itself. As mentioned, the DEA is only able to control a fraction of the change process but can help shape the direction and the amount of disruption that happens. In this way, a DEA can create the conditions for innovation but not necessarily *make change happen*. For instance, how many online programs and courses will be launched at one time, how many enrollment starts a year, and how many new instructors are hired can all be controlled and shift the nature of the change event.

An early step in the change process is for DEAs to identify and resource DE innovators in the department or university. By starting with these innovators, the DEA will start gaining ground more easily where work is already being accomplished. Identifying and resourcing DE innovators allows a DEA to create smaller victories and examples of high-quality courses and programs to help spur more adoption throughout the institution. The DEA will also need to manage themselves and upgrade their own skills and knowledge in this constantly changing environment (Nworie, 2012). DEAs need to model the flexibility and change that they expect to see in others. In this way, the goal of bringing change is not just for the specific change itself but for the transformation of the people, institution, and culture involved.

**Professional Development and Support**

The second most important DEA task is managing professional development and ongoing technical support for instructors and faculty (Barnett, 2018; Beaudoin, 2003; Dooley, 2005; Floyd, 2003; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Nodine & Johnstone, 2015; Terosky & Heasley, 2015). Though development and support are interrelated, faculty development is a systematic approach to improve the quality of teaching by responding to learning gaps of the faculty members (Bergquist & Phillips,

1975), whereas technical support is ongoing, available, as-needed help and advice. Development would include directing job-based skills learning for faculty, full or part-time instructors, and content expert developers. One common approach to faculty development in higher education is offering workshops for instructors that often center on implementing technologies like learning management systems (LMS), video conferencing, or other tools into course delivery. However, professional development should not just be focused on technological matters but on pedagogical themes as well (King & Boyatt, 2015; Lane, 2013).

Beyond developing faculty through workshops and targeted technology training, ongoing and accessible technical support is essential (Bates, 2000; Maguire, 2005). Both administrators and faculty seem to agree that support is important in developing distance education (Wickersham & McElhany, 2010). Some argue that faculty support is highly correlated with creating high-quality online programs (Angolia & Pagliari, 2016; Hartman et al., 2019; Moore, 1997).

While support is a top perceived need for faculty, it is one that is not being met. In a survey of 10,700 faculty members from 69 colleges and universities, most faculty rated their institutions below average in online teaching support and incentives (Herman, 2012; Seaman, 2009). Perhaps this is a result of high expectations from faculty for support provided by the institution, especially when adopting new innovations. In one report, 58 percent of postsecondary online administrators cite faculty instructional design support as lacking in online program development because of insufficient resources (Encoura Eduventures Research, 2019, p. 24). However, this same report noted that 58 percent also listed faculty autonomy and academic freedom as a reason for not providing direct instructional support. So, there may be multiple and perhaps complicated relationships behind why support is not available for faculty. Effective support, however, is not just

about workshops and responding to technical issues but about creating a supportive, relational community among faculty (Lewis & Ewing, 2016; Vaill & Testori, 2012).

Though facilitating professional development may be considered more of a "management" function, it can serve as a platform for change that inspires stakeholders to adapt to and welcome innovation. Otte and Benke (2006) found that faculty development might be the most important piece of developing an online program. They also add that it may also be the DE leader's greatest challenge. As Beaudoin suggests, this is one way for a DEA to "operationalize one's vision, not just espouse it" (2016, p. 18). Developing and supporting instructors is an essential task for DEAs.

**Building Trust**

Building relationships and trust with the personnel network is a task that weaves through all that DEAs do to develop online programs (Burnette, 2015; Holt et al., 2014; Otte & Benke, 2006; Portugal, 2006). While some from more of a top-down perspective or the private sector might term this as the "management of personnel," in higher education, a DEA will need to work across many layers of personnel, often with those who do not report directly or indirectly to them. These relationships would include those in information technology, instructional design, admissions, marketing, faculty roles, and part-time instruction. Faculty, particularly, will need a more collaborative approach since they hold final authority regarding decisions on instruction (Fredericksen, 2017). Collaborations may also include those outside of the department in web design, state compliance, and budgeting. Working relationships might be informal, but literature also suggests that formal relationships were more associated with successful innovation implementation (Zhu, 2015).

**Managing the Technical Work**

Coordinating the various personnel, the DEA is tasked to help various work transpire on schedule. Liaising with information technology is an important task (Otte & Benke, 2006) as they are the gatekeepers for all essential technology used as a lever for digital delivery of classes and communication. It is also essential in the online environment that any technical issues are quickly resolved (Clark, 2012). Building relationships connect to an overarching approach as DEAs are encouraged to lead with a transformative style (Beaudoin, 2016; Portugal, 2006).

**Creating a Culture of Quality**

Promoting a culture of quality (Ehlers, 2010; Matkin, 2010) is another task that is present among DEA duties. Although often referenced as a "quality assurance" task (Eom & Ashill, 2018; Irlbeck & Pucel, 2000), creating a culture of quality goes beyond implementing quality management systems, rules, and policies to developing quality as part of everyday conversation. Rather than just checking boxes, DEAs should inspire quality and continuous improvement as part of an ongoing culture of quality.

**Curricular Administration**

Another common task for DEAs is curricular administration or leadership (Otte & Benke, 2006). Though DEAs are tasked with overseeing course development (McNeal, 2015; Rumble, 1992), curricular leadership helps guide not just the delivery of the content but content planning itself across the program. This could be complicated if the DEA is not necessarily a subject matter expert, but also because curriculum can be sensitive territory for faculty. It does, however, all connect to the timely and quality delivery of online programs. If the learning objectives designed into the courses are unclear, it can become challenging to create the course from an instructional design standpoint. Alternatively, if the curriculum is not finished in enough time to begin development, it may cascade into issues with student enrollment and starting classes.

### Facilitating Emerging Technologies

DEAs also facilitate implementing emerging DE technology (Beaudoin, 2016; Knowles, 2007; Matkin, 2010; Nash, 2015; Portugal, 2006). This takes an awareness of what DE technology is current and developing. The DEA should model a state of consistent learning as they assess and adopt new ideas but resist adopting them too early (Beaudoin, 2016). Though change, and not technology, should be the primary concern of a DEA, selecting and implementing technology still plays a critical role in the transformation of universities (Zhu, 2015). DEA should be the ones helping to lead this change.

### Leading Vision

To be effective, DEAs must not only manage, but they must also lead. There are several strategic actions or approaches associated with more successful DEAs. Like higher education leadership in general, first in importance is for a DEA to be goal or vision-oriented (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005; Zhu, 2015). This top-down approach to leadership includes communicating the mission and value to the organizational unit, as well as serving as an overall champion for innovation. Overall, effective management tasks like development and support are only possible when the DEA can rise above the day-to-day demands and lead others towards a vision of an environment conducive to adoption and change (McNeal, 2015; Rumble, 1992; Terosky & Heasley, 2015). Of course, with any management or leadership effort in higher education comes challenges. Next, I outline the typical challenges of DEAs, followed by an exploration of motivations.

## DE Administrative Challenges

The DEAs providing leadership for the development of DE, whether they are directors, key faculty, deans, or provosts, are faced with significant challenges to providing quality and accessible education online. In addition, there is a historical culture within HE, and specifically faculty roles,

that may resist the innovation of teaching through the internet with the associated loss of the old ways in the physical classroom. DE, in a way, is a response to the overall external challenges mounting against higher education institutions like reduced funding, increased competition, globalization, and the rise of for-profit universities (Cleveland-Innes, 2010; Matkin, 2010). However, there are challenges that are unique to the functioning of DEAs.

**Faculty Resistance**

The most highly cited challenge to implementing distance education was resistance from faculty (Beaudoin, 2016; Broskoske & Harvey, 2000; Fredericksen, 2017; Howell et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2011; Markova, 2014; Oblinger et al., 2001; Vasser, 2010). While general resistance from faculty is not a unique challenge, faculty concerns about DE that foster resistance are complex and persistent. Some resistance stems from a lack of resolve for the tension between pedagogy and technology (Beaudoin, 2016). Related, some faculty were fearful of design teams who might disrupt the way they taught the material in face-to-face, lecture-based classes (Vasser, 2010). Associated with this, some dealt with feelings of incompetence in new technology (Vu et al., 2016). Others had concerns about their intellectual property and how it might be distributed on the internet or monetized beyond their control (Aaron & Roche, 2015; Rhoades, 2017). Sometimes faculty receive a lack of recognition for developing distance education courses and so lack the motivation to make distance learning a priority over face-to-face teaching, writing, or research (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Some instructors are concerned about having meaningful roles in their future teaching online (Beaudoin, 2015). Faculty resistance and concerns about DE are the primary concern for DEAs.

**Utilizing Personnel Networks**

DEAs are also challenged by having to utilize a personnel network to complete the DE task (Chow, 2013; Murgatroyd & Woudstra, 1989). For instance, implementing a new type of online

assignment might demand approval from a dean, feedback from a colleague who also teaches the class, implementation help from an instructional designer, and troubleshooting from technical support. Thus, developing online programs involves a complex web of people using unbundled skills rather than a traditional "faculty-does-all" approach. In addition to the DEA, these people could include faculty instructors, course developers, instructional designers, and technologists, to name a few. Often the DEA manages these people with important and rapid deadlines in place (Beaudoin, 2016). There are some ways in which DE development is more like project management than it is traditional university leadership (Gardner et al., 2017). Tensions can arise in such situations as timely production is demanded from the administration, while faculty and designers want to take time to build creativity into their courses (Murgatroyd & Woudstra, 1989). This system of people is intricate and challenging to manage towards the task of implementing DE, which is already full of complexities of its own.

**Pleasing Multiple Stakeholders**

At the same time, DEAs are challenged by trying to please multiple stakeholders (Kovel-Jarboe, 1990; Oblinger et al., 2001; Otte & Benke, 2006). Stakeholders in HE, like students, faculty, staff, deans, and even the public or government, often have different agendas that conflict with one another (Green & Hayward, 1997). While faculty might be thinking about rigor in an online course, students might be considering accessibility, and administrators might be concerned about budget. This creates a complex political challenge for the DEA as they attempt to please or at least *appease* interested parties. Often these parties are not part of the actual development of the online program but, by association, are affected by its development.

**Quality Assurance**

While the main DE challenges relate to working with the faculty, other personnel, and stakeholders, another challenge is keeping DE quality high (Beaudoin, 2016; Murgatroyd & Woudstra, 1989; Vu et al., 2016). This is mainly a concern as institutions look to scale their programs either in enrollment or the number of courses offered (Clark, 2012). Quality is also a concern as DEAs desire to increase access to more students across what is called the "digital divide" (Beaudoin, 2015, 2016). The digital divide in DE is the gap between those students who can access online learning and those students without access because of the lack of technology, often as a result of socio-economic, cultural, or geographic positions.

**Transitioning Programs to Online**

The most prominent DE administrative challenge is that of supporting the transition of courses from physical to online delivery. This includes the adoption of technology and a modality shift from face-to-face to digital instruction. This change is often met with resistance from the faculty (Beaudoin, 2016; Luongo, 2018; McNeal, 2015). There are many reasons cited for this resistance. First, faculty report that it takes great effort to convert existing courses to online delivery (Prottas et al., 2016; Ray, 2009). It is natural to resist the extra effort, especially when faculty may already feel like they are stretched too thin. At least one multilevel analysis argued that age, years in the position, and years of experience were not predictors of technology adoption, as some might speculate (Jackson, 2017). Others suggest the reason for resistance has more to do with concern over quality (Stocker, 2018) or the lack of control of the curriculum and content (Beaudoin, 2016; Singh & Hardaker, 2014). However, more studies point to the lack of training as the reason behind faculty resistance to online courses. Without question, many studies argue that support for both part and full-time faculty is key for transitioning to online education (Krug et al., 2016; Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Ridge & Ritt, 2017). Faculty education and support are the paths towards

reducing resistance to developing online programs (Brewer & Brewer, 2015; Mohr & Shelton, 2017), recognizing that it is not just about knowledge but also about faculty identity (Thanaraj, 2016).

The challenge of transitioning to an online program helps understand why faculty training and development is one of the highest concerns for distance education administrators (Fredericksen, 2017). Perhaps it is also why faculty development appears prominently in administrative roles as indicated above and why administrators feel they are not keeping pace with faculty needs (Kibaru, 2018). To help make the transition to online courses, Vaill and Testori (2012) suggest a three-part strategy of initial orientation training, mentoring from an experienced online instructor, and ongoing support services. The administrative challenge of transitioning courses online, a process often resisted by faculty, takes both management and leadership to overcome.

**The Iron Triangle**

Three concerns of cost, quality, and access, have been bundled in what is called "the iron triangle," suggesting that it is difficult to attain all three at the same time in distance education (Daniel et al., 2009; Poulin & Straut, 2018). The cost of developing and executing the program is a major concern for administration, especially in a world of decreasing state funding. Startup costs for online education can be high (Minnaar, 2013; Salmon, 2010). While some hoped that distance education would result in a new influx of cash, many have experienced increased costs, especially upfront during development (Moore et al., 2015; Picciano, 2015; Saba, 2016). Access is a related issue. As student debts increase, tuition is a factor for students being able to attend school. From the administration side, there is much pressure to keep costs low while increasing student access (Nodine & Johnstone, 2015; Van Hook, 2018). While evidence does suggest that distance education is increasing access to higher education in underserved populations (James et al., 2016), some are

concerned that access and lower cost come at the price of quality (Beaudoin, 2016; Nash, 2015). As distance education access is increased and prices are lowered, one concern around quality is the ability to distinguish a rigorous program from online "diploma mills" (Chau, 2010). An online diploma mill will provide a degree for any customer who is willing to pay the price. As vetted faculty become more distant from the delivery of online courses, this becomes a greater challenge.

**Part-time Faculty**

Another administrative challenge is working with an increasing ratio of part-time instructors teaching online courses (Ridge & Ritt, 2017; Tipple, 2010). Historically, professors would guide the curriculum, develop the course, and teach. In the fall of 2017, part-time instructors or "adjunct faculty" were just under half of all faculty in degree-granting postsecondary (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Though the motivation to hire part-time faculty is often because of budgetary restraints (Mandernach et al., 2015), this shift increases administrative costs, especially regarding turnover and training (Hardy et al., 2017). It also leaves institutions vulnerable as they become more and more reliant on adjunct faculty for teaching (Picciano, 2015). Administrators must overcome the challenge of not seeing online faculty face to face and the difficulty of creating a learning community among teachers who may never occupy the same physical space.

**Other Challenges**

Other, less mentioned, challenges included student support (Nodine & Johnstone, 2015) and the changing needs of younger "digital natives" (Beaudoin, 2016; Minnaar, 2013). As DEAs attempt to overcome these challenges, they often are leading within organizational structures that were designed for a different time and a different kind of school (Nworie, 2012). Though the literature articulating these challenges is well informed, many are written from the writer's own perspective rather than from survey or interview data. There is a need for empirical data from both

qualitative and quantitative approaches to clarify further and quantify the challenges of DEAs. Next, I will explore the motivations behind online learning.

## Motivations of Administrators and Students

With the rapid expansion of distance education, two motivational questions are essential to ask: What motivates DEAs to launch online programs? What motivates students to take online courses?

### Administrator Motivation

As one might suspect, the most common response in terms of administration motivation for launching new distance education programs was increased revenue (Alstete, 2014; Betts et al., 2009; Miller, 2014; Nash, 2015). As budget concerns loom in higher education, distance education has been viewed as a strategic choice to boost enrollment and income. The second most common administrative motivation was the desire to increase access for students to attend school and earn a degree (Moloney & Oakley, 2010; Stocker, 2018). Many public universities started as land-grant institutions with a mission to serve and educate the working class in their state (Association of Public and Land-Grant Institutions, 2012). At the end of the first decade of computer distance education, some educators believed that this innovation could serve as a more affordable route to education through economies of scale as it spread the cost of development over a large enrollment (Inglis, 1999; Whalen & Wright, 1999). Studies suggest that there continue to be cost savings for delivering courses online (Battaglino et al., 2012; Herman & Banister, 2007).

In 2011, as Sebastian Thrun watched the enrollment of his Stanford University artificial intelligence class jump from 200 the previous fall to over 160,000 from across the globe (Yuzer, 2014), many thought that these “MOOCs” (Massive Open Online Courses) would be the solution for scalable, affordable education. It stood to reason that perhaps universities would need to start

lowering their tuition or even offer more classes for free just to compete. However, the CHOLE report from Quality Matters (2018) reported that 75 percent of surveyed universities charged the same tuition for online and face-to-face, implying a strong majority of students are not benefiting from any cost savings. Another study also confirmed that tuition in online and face-to-face courses was generally the same; however, once fees were added, 54 percent of these same institutions were charging more (Poulin & Straut, 2017). In contrast, in one earlier study, online courses typically cost less and online tuition is in decline (Deming et al., 2015). This same study suggested that the higher the share of students online, the lower the price. Scaling and affordability may be connected to online education. Increasing tuition income, providing more access, and lowering costs for students are intricately related and top motivators for administrators starting distance education.

### Student Motivation

In contrast, students who enroll in online programs seem motivated mostly by what they perceived as a more flexible educational experience (Layne et al., 2013; Southard et al., 2015; Xu & Xu, 2019). Distance education marketing materials promote phrases like "flexible learning," "online, on your time," and "anytime, anywhere." In a recent survey of 3000 online learners across a variety of programs in 2019, 91 percent counted flexibility in their top three reasons they enrolled in an online program (Wiley Educational Services, 2020), with which, in another study, 88 percent of students agreed (Pastore & Carr-Chellman, 2009). This allows students to access education from rural areas or those who are not able to move for school because of family, finances, or work (Harris & Martin, 2012; Moore et al., 2015).

## DEAs Leading Change

Previously in this chapter, I wrote that the DEA's main task is to lead and manage change (Beaudoin, 2016; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Otte & Benke, 2006). In this section, I examine the

question “How do DEAs lead change in higher education” by highlighting the current higher education context of change and then addressing the role of DEAs regarding the shift toward distance education.

**The Context of Change in Higher Education**

Leading change in higher educational institutions is an increasingly complex endeavor. Some might contend that, until now, our universities have not changed in hundreds of years (Bates, 2010; Cross, 2010). It is true that the hierarchy of the professorship and the classroom lecture might appear much the same as they did before the protestant reformation. While institutes of higher learning have been among the most stable organizations, in other ways, they have historically bent and responded to the societies changing around them (Arntzen, 2016). The long tradition of higher education leadership is evolving. New roles and responsibilities are being expected in response to an increasingly competitive market rife with expanding for-profit universities, multiplying non-profit institutions, and open-source information available to all (Angolia & Pagliari, 2016).

The current organizational structure around higher education leadership is shifting as well. Arntzen (2016) organizes higher education into two models: the university college and the university. In the university college model, the academic staff is separately organized according to profession with unified leadership led by a dean. In the university model, institutes are organized by academic discipline, still led by a dean, but with support and human resource responsibilities delegated to the broader university unit. Currently, there seems to be a trend towards the university model as core tasks and support are moving from a decentralized location, in the departments, to a centralized office (Paolucci & Gambescia, 2007; Salmon, 2010; Vu et al., 2016).

Universities are unbundling faculty members who, in the past, were responsible for developing the course, teaching the class, and even mentoring and guiding the student (Kinser,

2007; Vasser, 2010). The task of teaching would still be the responsibility of the department, while other tasks like course development, information technology, and student services might be moved to a central office. A semi-decentralized model has support for faculty from central offices, while the faculty themselves remain in their colleges and departments (Howell et al., 2003). An example of this would be when a university has one central office for faculty development and teaching excellence, which reports to the provost, while faculty are managed by an individual department and dean. It seems the centralization of some services can have a positive effect on faculty attitudes and success (Rouseff-Baker, 2002; Tomei et al., 2016; Vu et al., 2016). However, problems can arise when it is unclear who has the final responsibility or oversight for certain tasks and people. This shift in centralization and swiftly changing structures may be contributing to a trend of ambiguity prevalent among higher education leadership today (Nworie, 2012).

One influential change, much broader than leadership, is the emerging questioning of long-held concepts of knowledge and the purpose of academic communities (Bates, 2010; Salmon, 2010). Education is not unaffected by the new information age, which connects students to more data than they could consume in a million lifetimes. For centuries, academe held monopolies on vast bodies of knowledge, but with the advent of the internet, schools and teachers are viewed as one more source among many. Is the university an ancient source of knowledge that now seems outdated, out of touch, and out of reach? In this current higher education context, the challenge of transformation could ultimately become a quest for institutional meaning (Carneiro, 2010). With the rapid adoption of DE in higher education comes disruption and change. Lasting, positive change in higher education is possible but will not come easily, not without resistance (Bates, 2010) and not without leadership dedicated to the task.

**DEAs Leading Change**

Among significant changes in the last two decades is an increasing shift to DE. With almost 3.3 million students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses at Title IV institutions in the fall of 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), online students represent 16 percent of total enrollment and a significant and growing share of the students that administrators are charged with serving. This rapid growth of DE in higher education also precipitates change. Not long ago, distance education had limited diffusion in universities and was considered a tertiary, experimental "add-on" to education (Burnette, 2015). Now, DE is becoming a transformative power that is striking profound influence and change on all aspects of higher education (Otte & Benke, 2006). Beaudoin claims this may be the most crucial change impacting education since the printing press (2015). Still, the potential of DE remains unsatisfied in many institutions (Minnaar, 2013). In the wake of this rapid change, leadership in universities is scrambling to manage the disruption and ideally lead this change into institutional transformation. DEAs are managing and leading this change.

## Emerging Theories in Distance Education Administration

A final question for this literature review is, "What theories are applied to DE administration?" Addressing this question provides service to the development of a novel conceptual framework for change in Chapter 3. An overarching challenge for DEAs is that they often operate in administrative structures that are bound in tradition and designed for a different era of higher education (Burnette, 2015; Nworie, 2012). Theory can help guide researchers and practitioners through critical reflection on policies and practices in the classroom (Higgs, 2013). In total, four major theories emerged within the distance education literature. The first two of these, the Industrialization of Education (Carnoy, 1974; Illich, 1971; Keegan, 1980; Peters, 1994; Toffler, 1970) and the Capitalization of Education (Bowles & Gintis, 1977, 2002; Braverman, 1998; Chau,

2010; Zacharakis et al., 2014), could be considered “critical pedagogies.” Critical pedagogy is a type of critical theory that seeks to confront power relations and justice within the educational sphere (Steinberg & Down, 2020). The second two of the four theories I discuss are the leadership theories of Transformational Leadership (Barnett, 2018; Beaudoin, 2003; Fredericksen, 2017; Nworie, 2012) and Transactional Leadership (Beaudoin, 2002; Burns, 1978; Portugal, 2006). In this section, I will briefly describe these four theories and their applications. These theories will be included in Chapter 3 as I present a new conceptual model of change for distance education administration.

**The Industrialization of Education**

As early as 1967, Otto Peters criticized distance education as "industrialized education" (Peters, 1994). Keegan (1980), the distance education historian, went a step further, labeling it the "most industrial form of education" (p. 21). Both overall online enrollment and online school size grew rapidly in the years that followed. Beyond this “massification” (Freire, 1973) of online schools, distance education conforms to this "factory model of education" (Callahan, 1962; Sobel, 1969) by incorporating marketing, mechanization, division of labor, line management, quality control, and standardized mass production in course delivery (Powar, 2003). Borrowing Ritzer's (2013) phrase, distance education has easily adapted to "McDonaldization." As schools scale larger, classes are mechanized, and consistency is enforced across courses, developing an online program may be more like operating a fast-food franchise than running an academic institution.

Lending support to the industrialization theory, Paulo Freire (1970) critically describes the “banking model” of education, in which teachers deposit knowledge into students through one-way transactions. This banking model has also been applied to the characterizations of distance education (Boyd, 2016; Kash & Dessinger, 2010). Saba (2016) theorizes that as our education

delivery becomes industrialized into standardization and conformity, so our learning becomes devoid of variety. In much of the literature, distance education uses the industrialization theory as negative criticism towards the current state of distance education, but some research is more pragmatic, giving advice on how to successfully manage the industrial nature of online program development (Gardner et al., 2017).

**The Capitalization of Education**

The second theory is what scholars call "the capitalization of education" (Bowles & Gintis, 1977, 2002; Braverman, 1998). Also called "the retail model" of education (Shugart, 2013), it is more recently being applied to distance education (Chau, 2010; Zacharakis et al., 2014). This idea of capitalism closely relates to theories applied to distance education like the "new imperialism" (Tikly, 2004) and Foucault's theory of governmentality (Edwards, 1995; Hodge & Harris, 2012), which refers to existing power structures that support the status quo. Capitalization uncovers the financial motivations for industrialization, which is high among administrators (Alstete, 2014; Betts et al., 2009; Miller, 2014; Nash, 2015). Students, too, enter this consumer relationship as they shop around to various schools, decide on the best value for their dollar, and demand their money's worth (Beaudoin, 2003; Chau, 2010). In addition, faculty-created content is becoming monetized as online courses they have developed go beyond their own virtual classrooms and are sold again and again (Aaron & Roche, 2015; Rhoades, 2017). The for-profit online education sector is often criticized for exchanging quality for quantity to expand profit (Beaudoin, 2016); however, public and non-profit institutions are not immune from the same motivations driving the development of distance education.

**Transformational Leadership Theory**

Practitioners and researchers widely apply leadership theories in business, health care, and higher education. The leadership of distance education is no exception. “Transformational leadership” is common in the distance education literature (Barnett, 2018; Beaudoin, 2003; Fredericksen, 2017; Nworie, 2012). As the label implies, this type of leadership does not result in simple adherence to orders but in change for both the follower and culture (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978, 2003). Transformational leadership also supports the importance of ethical considerations, leading to moral decisions and actions (Northouse, 2013). This aspect could tie into the critical theories of industrialization and capitalization of education by giving a moral compass or foundation for change.

**Transactional Leadership Theory**

Burns (1978) identifies “transactional” as the second kind of leadership, which, in contrast to transformational, is a basic transaction or exchange between leader and follower. For example, when a leader asks for a worker to do a job and the worker gets paid. An example in the development of distance education would be a DEA hiring and paying a faculty person to develop an online course. In transformational leadership, the DEA may have the same transaction, but in addition, inspire the faculty with a vision for how online could transform their teaching. Alternatively, the DEA might raise the faculty level of morality by connecting course development with increased access to underserved populations or reach of the important message of the class. So, the challenge for the future of distance education leadership is to shift from the transactional management of specific task direction to the more transformational leadership of inspiring and motivating stakeholders towards a new vision of education (Beaudoin, 2002; Portugal, 2006).

## Literature Review Summary

This review focused on the current literature regarding distance education administration and leadership for change in universities and specifically managing and leading online graduate programs. First, definitions for distance education were addressed from a historical and current research perspective. The working definition for distance education for this review was instruction that occurs through the use of technologies for students and teachers who are separated by location. Second, a review of the literature regarding the administration of distance education in public universities was considered. This integrative review found that the three major themes for research in distance education administration from 2015 to 2019 were program and course development, instructor support, and quality assurance. The idea of instructor support persisted alongside of other themes as well. Major tasks for DEAs were discussed, including leading change, professional development and support, building trust, managing the technical work, creating a culture of quality, curricular leadership, facilitating emerging technologies, and leading vision. Major administrative challenges were also found, including faculty resistance, utilizing personnel networks, pleasing multiple stakeholders, quality assurance, transitioning programs to online, the iron triangle, part-time faculty, and others. Critical theories of distance education were also explored, including the Industrialization and the Capitalization of Education. Two common leadership theories, Transformation Leadership and Transactional Leadership were discussed in relation to DEAs. Finally, leading change in higher education was addressed, including important distinctions and tasks for DE leadership and management. This literature review provided valuable insight into common research approaches, but it also uncovered research gaps, as well as future potential research questions, which I explore in the next section.

## Literature Gaps

This review of literature helped to identify that while there is some speculation regarding the administration of distance education, there is little empirical research that explores the experiences, challenges, or tasks of DEAs. Theories abound regarding what DEAs should do and how they should do it, but little research on what they have done and what worked in leading change. In addition, I was not able to find any theories that were tested against real-world experiences of DEAs starting online programs in higher education. There is no question that DE is growing and that DEAs are initiating and managing these changes, but there is a paucity of research about the DE innovation process and DEA experiences.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature regarding the tasks and challenges of DEAs starting online programs at universities. After presenting the questions driving the literature review, I first defined distance education and the need for research before beginning the literature review. For the review, one hundred thirty-four books and peer review articles from 2015 to 2019 on the topic of DE in higher education were selected and explored. This review was pursued with the purpose of establishing what tasks and challenges were already present in the research. The primary tasks for DEAs were identified as leading and managing change (Beaudoin, 2016; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Otte & Benke, 2006), professional development and support for instructors and faculty (Barnett, 2018; Beaudoin, 2003; Dooley, 2005; Floyd, 2003; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Nodine & Johnstone, 2015; Terosky & Heasley, 2015), and building trust (Burnette, 2015; Holt et al., 2014; Otte & Benke, 2006; Portugal, 2006).

Alongside these tasks, the administrative challenges I found included faculty resistance (Beaudoin, 2016; Fredericksen, 2017), quality assurance (Beaudoin, 2016; Murgatroyd &

Woudstra, 1989; Vu et al., 2016), transitioning programs to online (Beaudoin, 2016; Luongo, 2018; McNeal, 2015), and working with part-time faculty (Ridge & Ritt, 2017; Tipple, 2010).

One gap in the literature was the lack of any common or unifying change process, theory, or method that was being applied to the starting of online programs. Consequently, the next chapter explores potential change theories and presents a new conceptual framework that I will use for both guiding the data collection and analyzing the data.

# CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Distance education (DE) is expanding at a rapid rate in higher education. From 2012 to 2017 in the United States, university students enrolling exclusively in distance courses rose from 11.3 percent to 15.4 percent (Ginder et al., 2019; Lederman, 2018). Three million students enrolled exclusively in what the US government considers "distance education" courses at Title IV institutions in the fall of 2017 (Ginder et al., 2019). It appears that this expansion of distance education will continue in the foreseeable future. In a 2019 survey, 89 percent of Chief Academic Officers at public universities reported plans to expand online programs and offerings (Jaschik & Lederman, 2019, p. 26). Along with these plans to expand DE comes disruptive changes for higher education and the faculty teaching, many of whom have taught "status quo" for decades in their lecture-based, face-to-face classes. This seemingly continuous and disruptive trend is reshaping once-stable universities with or without their cooperation (Beaudoin, 2015).

As noted in the previous chapter, managing change is an important task for a DEA. Several distance education researchers have noted that managing the shift to online education is more like running a business than leading academe (Beaudoin, 2002; Powar, 2003). The nature of the work divides tasks of support, technology implementation, and course development among staff, a shift from the traditional view of faculty-does-all. It is in this context of significant change in higher education that conceptual models for change are much needed. While some researchers are starting to consider DE leadership as a unique subset of study (Avolio et al., 2000; Nworie, 2012), only a few have considered how DEAs are leading change in regards to new development in online learning (Beaudoin, 2015; Floyd, 2003; Marshall, 2010; Parlakkilic, 2013). The reason for the direction of this study is the significant need and paucity of research about leading change for distance education administrators.

In this chapter, I describe four highly referenced change models found in the literature, each with elements that could apply to launching online programs. However, no single model was a fit, so I then organized and created a composite of these models. This composite model was then critiqued using the other four theories that emerged from the literature review. Emanating from that critique, I present a new conceptual model of change to be used as a theoretical position and conceptual framework for this study.

## Models of Change for Distance Education

Understanding change in organizations can be framed from a variety of established change models. In this chapter, I explore four different change models and then develop a summary of these models to help explain similarities. No single change model was a complete fit for change in distance education, so following the treatment of each model, I offer a new composite change model inspired by these models but tuned for distance education administration and a more collaborative leadership style. The models discussed here were selected from several models that focus on the process of change.

I used three main criteria for selecting four change models to use in this study. First, using Google Scholar and the Web of Science, I focused on change models that were highly referenced. Second, I wanted to use change models that had been the subject of empirical studies, not just a businessperson's personal reflections and ideas. Third, to be considered in this study, the model needed to be a good fit for what I already understood about leading the development of online programs in my own experience and from the literature. In this, for a model to be helpful, it needed to focus more on implementing a new vision or innovation versus necessarily fixing a problem, either in people or a system. Some change models focus on specific problems like negative employee feelings (Kübler-Ross et al., 1972) and process gaps (Hiatt, 2006) rather than problems

DE attempts to address, like student access and flexibility. Another similar kind of model is Lewin's Change Management Model (Lewin, 1948, 1997), which uses three stages of unfreeze, change, and refreeze. Though highly popular, I felt it did not have enough specificity for a detailed innovation process. As well, Lewin focuses on change that resolves social conflict (Burnes, 2004), not change for launching new innovations. Another popular approach, the McKinsey 7-S Model (Waterman & Peters, 1982), focuses less on the process and more on developing a positive organizational culture for change. The research questions in this study focus on the process of launching online programs. While these change models above and elsewhere could help with understanding an aspect of online program launches, they either were not highly referenced, not based on empirical studies, or were just not the best fit overall. Not all of the following models have been applied to distance education previously, but they have components that lend themselves to the development of new change initiatives and relate to implementing new innovations in organizations. With these criteria in mind, I chose the following four change models to explore:

1. Kotter's Eight-Stage Process for Change. (Kotter, 1995, 1996)
2. Cummings and Worley's Five Major Change Activities. (Cummings & Worley, 2008)
3. Kouzes and Posner's Five Leadership Practices. (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Posner, 2016; Posner & Kouzes, 1988)
4. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Model. (Rogers, 2003)

The first two of these change models focus on more traditional, top-down forms of leadership. The third, though still top-down, is guided by a transformational leadership approach, creating more of a collaborative process approach. In contrast to the first three models that focus on the leader, the final diffusion model focuses more on the innovation itself, with consideration for change agents within the organization. The diffusion model was a natural addition because of the

similarities that DE shares with innovation or technology implementation and related change. All of these models have been used as frameworks for change in higher education with technology or distance education.

## Kotter's Eight-Stage Process for Change

When John Kotter wrote an article for the Harvard Business Review titled "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail" (1995), it was received with great interest. Managers resonated with his list of organizational mistakes and his eight-stage framework to help successful change occur. Just a year later, he published a book simply titled *Leading Change* that explored the problem and process in more depth (Kotter, 1996). What started as research from a few dozen companies has now, more than two decades later, been applied by many across the world. Kotter's books and articles have been cited by thousands, making it an important work in change management, as both practitioners and researchers have wrestled with what makes change work in organizations. In a newer, 2012 edition of *Leading Change*, Kotter writes that this material is even more relevant now than it was in 1995 because the speed of change continues to increase. Kotter's framework is an eight-stage path of the following:

1. Establish a sense of urgency.
2. Form a powerful guiding coalition of people.
3. Create a vision.
4. Communicate the vision.
5. Empower others to act on the vision.
6. Create short-term wins.
7. Consolidate improvements and produce still more change.
8. Institutionalize new approaches.

These eight stages could be organized into early, middle, and final or ongoing stages. One could also consider these stages as pre-launch, launch, and airborne. In the pre-launch stage, it is important for a leader to spark motivation in the organization, and this happens by developing a sense of urgency. The author suggests that if the people are not motivated, then a leader must develop a narrative that speaks to the necessity of the moment for action. While communicating authentic urgency is helpful to shake complacency in a company, at times, Kotter praised savvy business leaders who created urgent situations, like job or profit loss, to spur motivation. While urgency is important, manufactured crisis seems to be an underhanded approach to good leadership intent on building trust. The second stage in the path, still in the prelaunch stage, is the leader's formation of a guiding coalition or team of people. Though most of Kotter's framework is top-down, its second stage is a collaborative phase where relevant stakeholders are welcomed into the change process. The third stage is creating a vision, which is accomplished with this guiding team. Creating and articulating vision is a common element among most change frameworks (Cummings & Worley, 2008). Articulating the initial vision will not be perfect but will be an essential step toward a clear and correct vision for change built on the organization's values and mission.

The launch stage is where action and movement begin and where significant resistance will occur as well. Launch starts with the leader communicating the vision. As previously mentioned, Kotter's model has a "top-down" orientation. Though he does allow for room for collaboration in creating the vision, communicating the vision falls squarely on the shoulders of the leader. This vision needs to be clear and communicated again and again in various forms to be heard. More than just understood, the vision needs to be acted upon by the workers. The best way to help the workers follow through on the vision is by the leader removing any obstacles that might stand in the way of action.

Keeping a change initiative airborne is difficult, especially because actual change can take a long time. This is why it is essential to build small victories into the process to allow for celebrating successes along the path to change. Small victories come with a warning: beware that complacency might beset workers before the full job of change is complete. Essential to keeping the initiative airborne is also consolidating improvements, which means starting and streamlining the actions and system to allow for more change to occur. Leaders must not let up at this point if they want to want lasting change to occur (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Finally, leaders should implement these new approaches and improvements into the organizational system through policies to create a new organizational culture.

The Kotter change process is not necessarily linear, as there may be starts and stops, moving forward and backward between stages to complete the task. Kotter does emphasize, however, that all eight steps must be addressed by leaders for lasting change to occur. Kotter's eight stages have been tested among other change literature, though not as rigidly, comprehensively, and prescriptively as Kotter suggests they should be applied (Appelbaum et al., 2012). In the end, Kotter asserts that the central challenge for all eight stages is not a strategy, systems, or even culture, but "changing people's behavior" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 2).

### Cummings and Worley's Five Major Change Activities

Cummings and Worley (2008) researched organizational development at several interactions, such as entering the process of organizational development, diagnosing the process, and designing interventions. Their chapter on "Leading and Managing Change" distills a wide diversity of practice and advice into five major activities that contribute to managing change effectively:

1. Motivating change.

2. Creating a vision.
3. Developing political support for change.
4. Managing the transition.
5. Sustaining momentum. (Cummings & Worley, 2008, p. 164)

Cummings and Worley (2008) wrote that motivation for change starts with working to overcome resistance and create readiness for change in the stakeholders. The approach goes more in-depth and more authentically than Kotter's call for "urgency," which strikes as superficial and manipulative at times. In this case, the foundation for motivation is preparing the people for change. A large part of motivation is overcoming resistance. Resistance can happen at a system or personal level. It often comes from sources of technical, political, and cultural resistance. Resistance to distance education can cross all these sources as the status quo of previous decades of instruction and managing instruction is threatened. Strategies for handling resistance include welcoming participation and involvement, giving empathy and support, and effectively communicating (Cummings & Worley, 2008).

The second step for Cummings and Worley (2008) is creating a vision, which they identify as a leadership, not management, activity. Vision is the constructing and communicating of a desired future state and is found in most leadership frameworks (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 2012). As a foundation, the core ideology of the vision is explained, showing both the "what" and also the "why" of their change model.

The third step is developing political support for change. Cummings and Worley (2008) described an organization as individuals and groups loosely structured together in coalitions by preferences and interests. Any change may threaten the power balance as these coalitions fight for

scarce resources. Change agents must develop their own power base by developing new coalitions and working with those established ones to help them see the need for change.

The fourth step is managing the transition. Transitions will take time and effort, needing a period to reach the desired vision. They identify four activities to help, which are "activity planning, commitment planning, change-management structures, and managing the learning process" (Cummings & Worley, 2008, p. 176). The learning process includes new skills and knowledge needed to support the new behaviors.

The final step involves sustaining the momentum of change. Initial change will easily be routed by people who naturally gravitate back to the old structures and behaviors. Cummings and Worley (2008) suggest five activities to help sustain momentum: providing resources as need, developing support for those doing the change, honing new skills, reinforcing new actions, and keeping focus on the vision. Cummings and Worley recognize that change management is a complex undertaking that should adapt to the situation. Regardless, these five aspects seem to have support across a variety of organizational development literature. This approach is useful in understanding change towards distance education in universities.

### Kouzes and Posner's Five Leadership Practices

Kouzes and Posner approach change from a leadership trait perspective through their book "The Leadership Challenge" (2012) and a leadership characteristic scale named the Leadership Practice Inventory (Posner, 2016; Posner & Kouzes, 1988). They focused on identifying and developing transformational leadership traits (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978). In transformational leadership, change happens in the follower and the culture, beyond just following directions or orders. The leader is asked to reflect on their own actions, as ethics and values are foundational for the transformational leader. Burns writes, "Transforming values lie at

the heart of transforming leadership, determining whether leadership indeed can be transforming" (Burns, 2003, p. 29).

A central component of the Kouzes and Posner approach is the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI), an empirically derived survey instrument measuring five leadership practices. As of 2016, Posner writes that the LPI had been used in several hundred studies and almost 2.8 million respondents (Posner, 2016). The internal reliability and validity of this instrument are consistently good across numerous populations. This instrument asserts that exemplary leadership could be evaluated by five practices. Each of the five practices has two associated leadership commitments (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 15) (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Kouzes and Posner Five Practices and Ten Commitments for Leadership*

| Practice | Commitment |
|---|---|
| 1. Modeling the Way | Clarifying values by finding your voice and affirming shared values |
| | Set the example by aligning actions with shared values |
| 2. Inspiring a Shared Vision | Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities |
| | Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations |
| 3. Challenging the Process | Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve |
| | Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4. Enabling Others to Act | Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships<br>Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence |
| 5. Encouraging the Heart | Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence<br>Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community |

First, modeling the way, involves the leader determining their own values and the shared values of the organization and then aligning these values with action. This is leading by example rather than leading by command. When leaders model values, it commands attention and followership. The Kouzes-Posner first law of leadership is "If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the message" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 38).

The second is inspiring a shared vision, which is a practice in two parts: creating the vision and enlisting others. A vision is an imagined, positive, and exciting future for an organization. By enlisting others to share a common vision, leaders can inspire rather than command commitment from followers.

In the third practice, challenging the process, leaders push for a change from the status quo. Improvement can only come through modifying at least some of the typical actions of an organization. Whether it is through a new idea, a quality initiative, or the implementation of new technology, leaders take risks by using outside levers to affect change.

However, fourthly, it is essential in order for change to happen that others in the organization are enabled to act. True change leadership happens through empowerment, collaboration, and relationships. Generally, people will not feel enabled unless they have substantial levels of self-determination, support, and competence. Trust goes a long way when enabling others to put action toward a shared vision.

Finally, the fifth essential leadership action is encouraging the heart. As goals are reached and visions are realized, it is vital to celebrate through appreciating the contributions of every person involved. Encouraging the heart creates a culture that upholds the values, celebrates the victories, and continues to follow the vision forward.

## Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation

The Diffusion of Innovations (DoI) theory was popularized by Everett Rogers (2003) in the book of the same name, with conceptual roots stretching back to 19th-century sociologist Gabriel Tarde (Kinnunen, 1996). Tarde's guiding thought was that the more people interact, the more likely a novel invention will diffuse (Kinnunen, 1996). Kinnunen (1996) wrote that "Innovations change the course of social phenomena and help people to adapt to their changing environment" (p. 433). Rogers' fifth edition of Diffusion of Innovations retains the same basic diffusion model in his first edition published in 1962. Rogers started diffusion research on technologies in agriculture, based on the diffusion model by Ryan and Gross (1943). What developed through the following decades was the application of diffusion to new contexts, like education, communication, and public health, and with new technologies, like the cell phone and internet. Field experiments and leader research were also performed over the years to test the findings.

Rogers (2003) wrote that diffusion is a four-part process in which "(1) an *innovation* (2) is *communicated* through certain *channels* (3) *over time* (4) among the members of a *social system*"

(p. 25). This communication process is unique in that it contains not just words or information but new ideas. This diffusion also means social change, as systems and structures are altered by the new idea.

Innovation can be a new idea or a physical entity - even a virus. However, most examined innovations are a kind of new technology, defined as designed instruments to reduce uncertain outcomes. Technologies are perceived by users to have five characteristics relative to diffusion: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability (ability to try out an innovation), and observability (Rogers, 2003).

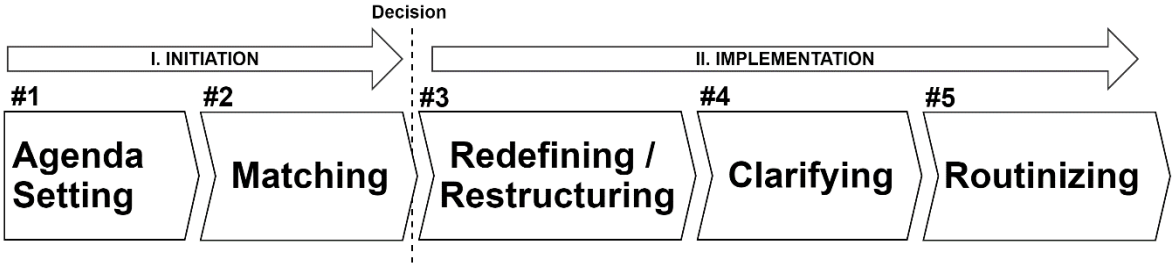
One concept guiding the diffusion process is that an innovation is adopted at different rates by those divided into five successive groups: Innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. When graphed, the diffused idea creates an "S" curve across time, with slow adoption at the start with a few early adopters, to quicker adoption in the middle, with adoption leveling off at the end with the laggards. These ideal types were developed through empirical research (Rogers, 2003).

The "change agent" is a person who influences the adopters' innovation decisions in a particular direction (Rogers, 2003, p. 393). Change agency, innovation evaluation by adopters, and the flow of information between adopters and change agents occur mainly through interpersonal networks. Rogers (2003) calls this the "diffusion network" (p. 300). How interconnected a person is to a social system has a direct, positive relationship to their innovativeness. If one wants to innovate in a network, the common approach is to find and utilize opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are often people separate from the change agents and have characteristics unique from the average follower. Opinion leaders tend to be more innovative, are quicker to bring in ideas from outside the group, are accessible, and at a higher socioeconomic level (Rogers, 2003).

Rogers' four-part communication process: "(1) an *innovation* (2) is *communicated* through certain *channels* (3) *over time* (4) among the members of a *social system*" (Rogers, 2003, p. 25) is often cited in research along with the actors involved in innovation. While this process is helpful for understanding diffusion theory, a better conceptual model for the leadership of change is Rogers' five stages of the innovation process in organizations (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Five Stages in the Innovation Process in Organizations adapted from Rogers (2003, p. 448)*




This process is broadly divided into two major stages of initiation (planning for the adoption) and implementation (putting the innovation into use), divided by the decision to adopt. The initiation stage involves two major actions of agenda-setting and matching. Agenda setting is when a problem is identified, and it creates "a perceived need for an innovation" (Rogers, 2003, p. 449). Sometimes the innovation process is launched when a leader makes a choice for an innovation before the need or problem is identified. In other words, leaders sometimes select solutions looking for a problem to be solved. The second initiation action is matching, which involves making a conceptual fit between the problem and an innovative solution through testing. This degree of fit directly relates to the compatibility of the innovation, as discussed earlier.

The second major stage, implementation, consists of three actions of "redefining/restructuring, clarifying, and routinizing" (Rogers, 2003, pp. 450-457). Redefining/restructuring is when the innovation is re-invented to work in the organizational context

and structure. Success will occur in this action when both innovation and organization change and flex to some degree. If the innovation creates significant change in the organization, it is called radical or disruptive innovation and can spur much uncertainty and resistance within the potential adopters. As adopters in the organization accept and talk about the innovation, clarifying occurs. Finally, routinizing happens when the innovation is no longer a separate innovation but is absorbed into the culture and participated in regularly.

Though the diffusion of innovation idea is now many decades old, unlike other behavior models, interest in this model is steady, and it continues to be used by scholars and applies in our continually changing, innovative, and networked world (Rogers, 2004; Vagnani et al., 2019). The five-stage innovation process is an excellent fit for distance education research, as DE is leader-driven in higher education and is an innovative combination of a pedagogical idea (the ability to teach without being face to face with students) and technology (the use of computers, networks, software, and other innovations to bridge the distance gap).

### Summarizing the Four Models into a Composite

All four frameworks carry similarities, particularly as they are grouped under three action stages of initiate, implement, and institute. By adding one more preparation stage after initiate labeled "imagine," the four frameworks can be summarized and compared in Figure 2 under these four novel headings of initiate, imagine, implement, and institute. Note that the process order generally follows Kotter's framework and that specific actions from other frameworks were rearranged in terms of sequence to fit this summary model.

**Figure 2**

*A Summary Table of all Four Frameworks*

| Stage | Initiate → | | Imagine → | | | Implement → | | | Institute |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kotter (1995)** | Establish a Sense of Urgency | Form Guiding Coalitions | Create a Vision | Communicate the Vision | | Empower others to act on the Vision | Create Short-Term Wins | Consolidate improvements / produce more Change | Institutionalize |
| **Cummings and Worley (2008)** | Motivate change | Develop Political Support | | Create a Vision | | | Manage the transition | | Sustain Momentum |
| **Kouzes & Posner (2012)** | Modeling the Way: Clarify personal values, shared values, and align with actions | Enabling Others to Act: Fostering collaboration | Inspiring a Shared Vision: Envision the future<br><br>Challenging the Process: Initiate outward innovations | Inspiring a Shared Vision: Enlist Others | **Point of Decision** | Enabling Others to Act: Increasing self-determination | Challenge the Process: Generate small wins | Challenge the Process: Learn from experience<br><br>Encouraging the Heart: Recognizing Contributions | Encouraging the Heart: Creating community |
| **Rogers (2003)** | | | Agenda Setting / Matching | | | Redefining/ restructuring | | Clarifying | Routinizing |

Applying only one of these frameworks would be difficult since DE implementation is a complex process with many factors and actors to consider. This complexity is why a combination of approaches might be most effective. To address this complexity, Figure 2 has combined the top-down approaches of Kotter and Cummings and Worley, with the more transformative approach of Kouzes and Posner, in addition to the innovation approach of the diffusion model. It does seem that a leadership-driven approach to change does produce positive movement, especially at the beginning of the process, as it takes vision to move a group of people in the "status quo" in a new direction of change. It is difficult for an organization to coalesce around a vision unless there is a person who will direct the process to a conclusion. Further, difficult but strategic decisions must sometimes be made in regard to staffing or budget that are out of the control of a bottom-up leader but would help with direction and motivation for the organization as a whole. However, such a top-

down approach is not necessarily the most effective, at least not in isolation, and particularly in producing long-term change. In contrast, top-down change programs often fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Eisenstat et al., 1990). Versatility is critical for more positive change outcomes. By adding the transformative approach, there is more consideration for the adopters and less of a focus on the leaders at the top. Also, by adding the innovative approach, this combined model incorporates the unique process that the new innovative technologies follow. The summary was created to bring the strengths of each model together and to organize these strengths so that they might naturally be applied to changes toward distance education.

### Using Additional Theories to Review the Change Models

This section will summarize and then use the four additional theories presented in the literature review to critically address the presented composite change model. Four major theories emerged from the distance education literature and were reviewed more fully in Chapter 2. The first two were "critical pedagogies," the Industrialization of Education (Carnoy, 1974; Illich, 1971; Keegan, 1980; Peters, 1994; Toffler, 1970) and the Capitalization of Education (Bowles & Gintis, 1977, 2002; Braverman, 1998; Chau, 2010; Zacharakis et al., 2014). The Industrialization of Education is the concern that education is reducing students' variety and freedom by operating like a factory or a bank. The Capitalization of Education is the concern that education is becoming a product to be marketed to consumers (the students) with financial profit as a goal. The second two theories found in the literature are the leadership theories of Transformational Leadership (Barnett, 2018; Beaudoin, 2003; Fredericksen, 2017; Nworie, 2012) and Transactional Leadership (Beaudoin, 2002; Burns, 1978; Portugal, 2006). These theories work together and espouse that the ideal, Transformational Leadership aims to give agency to those being led, in contrast to Transactional, which is more of an exchange of work for benefit.

In one way, all of these theories could be considered critical pedagogies; they consider the voice and the power of those being led, not just the leader. Using this lens, a critical question for this composite change model could be: At what points are the voice or power of those being led being oppressed? Except for the Rogers (2003) innovation model, the other models incorporate some level of cooperation with the followers in the first "initiate" stage. Kotter uses "guiding coalitions," while Cummings and Worley (2008) develop political support at this stage, and Kouzes and Posner (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) "foster collaboration" (see Figure 2). Kotter and Cummings and Worley focus on gathering followers to follow the initial vision. Kouzes and Posner at least develop the vision for change alongside of the followers and with their input. In all cases, there should be a stronger voice for the followers to allow for feedback and correction at the first stage in the process before initiating the change and not just fulfilling the vision of the leader.

While follower feedback could be collected at every stage of the process, another important feedback loop point could be at the end of the "implement" stage (see Figure 2). It is at this stage that Kouzes and Posner (2012) recognize that it is important to learn from the experience, and Rogers (2003) seeks to clarify how innovation is effectively being implemented. There must be a way for the followers, those usually doing the day-to-day tasks of implementation, to reflect back if the innovation is working from their perspectives. It may be working from a technical sense, but maybe somehow it is unjust, unfair, or unkind. It is during the implement stage that power should be given to either correct the course of action before institutionalizing or, in more drastic situations, take the process back to the initial stage and rethink the vision from the start.

A final loop should be created after or during the final stage of "institutionalize," where the change is set into routines, momentum is sustained, and change becomes embedded in community or culture is created. It is at this moment that the process of change is not over but should be looped

back to the first stage, and the question asked: How shall we continue to change as an organization? Creating ways for the model to have feedback loops that followers would have the power to enact will help to create a more just and equitable change model that considers all members of the change process.

## Creating a New Conceptual Model for Change

In this section, I simplify and adapt the composite change model with distance education as the innovation of change and higher education as the context. I will discuss the limitations of the four models and why a new model is a better fit for DEAs starting new online programs. After presenting the new model with the forward sequence only, I apply the critical theory approach, as explained in the section before, by adding feedback loops at key points in the model. Leading change towards DE in higher education could take several forms. However, with DE, innovation primarily deals with both the implementation of new ideas (distance pedagogy) and new technology (online delivery via the internet). Typically, the innovation process is applied in an organization unit (like an entire university, a college, or department) by a higher-level administrator (like a dean, provost, president, or distance education administrator) to those who must follow the demands of change (the instructional designer, technical support, faculty, and the part-time instructors). In this dynamic, the literature emphasizes the importance of providing support and development, both pedagogical and technical, to faculty developers of online classes (Bates, 2000; Lane, 2013; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Nodine & Johnstone, 2015; Wickersham & McElhany, 2010). Dooley (2005) suggests a three-pronged use of development, support, and incentives to promote faculty participation in adopting DE effectively. All of these DE considerations will fit into this new change model.

Any one of the four individual change models were insufficient to apply to DE for various reason. I will explain the various reasons organized by the four stages in the conceptual framework. The first stage of the process, "initiate," leans heavily on the value-centered vision casting of Kouzes and Posner (2012), where university units can be rallied into expanding their enrollment and reach by offering new programs online. At the same time, a focus on values could simply affirm much of what the faculty are already doing and start a slow path that may never result in action. Therefore, the Kouzes and Posner approach is not sufficient for motivation. To strengthen the motivation stage, Kotter's (1995) and Cummings and Worley's (2008) approaches help to create a sense of urgency and create stronger motivation for the change process. Also, regarding the first stage, while the Rogers (2003) model strongly supports the innovation end of the process, it was weak on the leadership side, especially at the start of the process where follower participation is so crucial. This may work in a technology company, but in university units, DEAs are often working with faculty who are, in many ways, not subordinate to the leaders creating change.

Much of the approach in stage two, "imagine," is similar across the four models, except Kouzes and Posner (2012) create a stronger approach for not just sharing the vision but enlisting followers. One rationale for naming this stage "imagine" is the more collaborative nature of the word. A typical business change model requires clear top-down leadership from CEO or manager. In public higher education, the faculty, especially tenured faculty, often have more power and guiding influence than deans or directors. A collaborative approach is needed in higher education.

In stage three, "implement," more explanation of what it means to "empower" is added in the context of developing distance education. Self-determination exists in the other models, but the literature stresses that DE also needs technical support, professional development, and incentives to be effective (Bates, 2000; Dooley, 2005; Lane, 2013; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Nodine & Johnstone,

2015; Wickersham & McElhany, 2010). In the interest of creating a more flexible model, I also added an action in the middle of stage three called "flex," purposely placed there to give permission for change in both the innovation and adopters. Especially when implementing technology in the modern world, change takes time, but capabilities change quickly. The change process needs to be as agile as possible at every stage. In addition, even if faculty or other stakeholders do not "flex" their power, the power dynamic should be recognized. Kouzes and Posner (2012) also help to refine the end of the "implement" stage, not simply by clarifying the process or consolidating improvement, but by learning what did and did not work from the experience of implementing the change so far.

Finally, in the fourth stage of "institute," the action is to sustain the change through policies and routinizing actions. As part, it is important to develop community among the university unit at this time, honoring the original motivations and values for change and reminding participants why change happened. This stage becomes a blend of each change model, creating both a transactional dynamic, through policies and routines and a transformational dynamic, through creating culture. While "encouraging the heart" espoused by Kouzes and Posner (2012) is essential, so are the more day-to-day transactional activities.

Considering these broad strokes of DE innovation, the context of higher education, and the limitations of the individual change models, a careful application of the composite model concepts produces the following new change model (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*The Distance Education Change Model*

| Initiate → | | Imagine → | | | | Implement → | | | Institute |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivate | Collaborate | Envision | Explore | Share | Point of Decision | Empower | Flex | Learn | Sustain |
| Motivate openness for change through value sharing and urgency awareness | Collaborate early with adopters to form support for change and guide the process | Envision a positive future together | Explore and select the ideas and technologies of innovation | Share the vision and enlist others | | Empower adopters through self-determination, technical support, professional development, and incentives | Flex Allow for change and adjustment in both the innovation and adopters and celebrate small wins | Learn by clarifying approach, considering what worked, and encouraging contributions | Sustain the change by creating policies, routine activities, and community that honors the original motivations and values, supports the vision, and welcomes ongoing change |

The Distance Education Change Model consists of four major leadership phases and nine supporting actions. The four major leadership phase categories each start with the letter "I": Initiate, imagine, implement, and institute. To describe an action, the simple verb forms of these actions were used intentionally, like implement, versus the noun state of the word, implementation. The nine supporting actions are intentionally sequenced in progressive order as motivate, collaborate, envision, explore, share, empower, flex, learn, and sustain. An explanation of each action follows, followed by an explanation of the process dynamic.

**Initiate 1: Motivate**

Change is motivated through value sharing and urgency awareness. Coupling ideas from both Kotter (1995) and Cummings and Worley (2008), this first stage creates a conducive environment for change, preparing the adopters, overcoming resistance, but also creating a sense of authentic awareness of the need for urgency. Kouzes and Posner (2012) clarify that foundational values are essential to guide the change process. In higher education, driving values for distance education are often related to student access, quality instruction, preparing students for jobs, or expanding reach about a particular discipline. One quality of this stage that should be added or included is "openness to change," which will help prime the conditions for initial and future change

plans. Therefore, creating motivation for distance education aligns with shared organizational values from the inception of the process.

**Initiate 2: Collaborate**

Too often, non-administrative adopters, like faculty or technologists, are included too late in the decision to start an online program. This reduces the possibility for opinion leaders and change agents to rise out of the lower ranks that could help the change cause. Including stakeholders early also gives more time for the late adopters, or laggards, to adjust to the potential for change. People holding significant political power within an organization could exist across the spectrum of support. By collaborating across all levels of adoption, it not only builds political support but knowledgeable guidance that more accurately considers the implications of distance education in their particular area of responsibility.

**Imagine 1: Envision**

Imagine starts with envisioning, which is the dream of a preferred future as an organization. What vision of online education can be brainstormed and imagined by the organizational unit? If all levels of adopters are included in the vision process, it can help faculty and staff feel like the vision is a dream rather than a nightmare passed down by administration. Envisioning a positive future is an activity where outside innovations could be introduced in a less threatening way as "possibilities" and "what if" scenarios, rather than forgone decisions.

**Imagine 2: Explore**

Before innovations are implemented, approaches to distance education should be explored for fit, with a practical discussion of what technologies or capacities the unit will need to launch the online program. Characteristics of what makes a more diffusible innovation (relative advantage, compatibility, less complexity, trialability, and observability) should be considered at this time

(Rogers, 2003). Cummings and Worley (2008) suggest that an ethical dilemma can occur when leaders try to implement technical change when they do not possess the technical know-how. Instead, because of the complexity of organizations and in higher education, the complexity of the power structure, processes, and decisions should be pushed down to lower organizational levels and not dictated from the top. The explore action is an excellent stage to involve all stakeholders in the shaping of distance education in their unit before it is too late.

**Imagine 3: Share**

At this stage, it is time to share the collaborative vision for distance education that was collaboratively developed and enlist others to share the inspiration for the vision. Kotter (2012) emphasized that most organizations under-communicate the vision, and in no small amount. Effective communication happens through simplicity, leaving out technical terms, metaphors, and repetition. A common and clear understanding of the direction and goals help foster inspiration in faculty and staff. This vision for distance education must also be modeled by leadership for effectiveness.

**Point of Decision**

There is a moment of decision when the actions of initiate and imagine up to that point have been mostly dialog. At this point, there must be a commitment to move forward into the next phases, which will mean risking time and resources towards change. This moment often includes a vote at a faculty meeting or a decision by a dean or provost, depending on the structure and the unit. If the work in the previous phases has been accomplished, this decision point will be easier. Otherwise, stakeholder resistance may stall the movement toward distance education. Most decisions forward will meet at least some resistance because with forward movement comes change.

**Implement 1: Empower**

After the decision to launch the distance education program, the implement phase starts with empowering. Adopters are empowered for distance education when they have self-determination, technical support, professional development, and incentives. Self-determination happens when adopters feel "strong, capable, and efficacious" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 244). When introducing a new idea like online teaching, which combines shifts in both pedagogical approach and technological knowledge, veteran teachers can feel like "neophytes" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 379). Feeling incompetent is demotivating for change, especially when it threatens faculty identity. Technical support and professional development support faculty competence through distance education change. Choice also empowers faculty, for instance, by giving technology options rather than prescribing what faculty will use. Empowerment applies not just to faculty but also to other support staff and administrators that are involved in the work of online change. Empowerment helps create what Rogers (2003) calls a "participatory democracy," where individual decisions to adopt distance education represent votes in favor of change.

**Implement 2: Flex**

At this stage, leaders should allow for adjustments in the shape of distance education and celebrate small wins. Bates (2000) confirms that utilizing distance education strategies will result in significant changes in the organization and management of higher education. The relationship between administrators, teachers, and learners is affected as well as the essential work and identity of faculty. These changes demand flex for faculty who sometimes have gone decades without any systematic changes. At the same time, there should be flex built into the shape of distance education at this point as well. No distance education technology or pedagogy should be so rigid or timeline so tight that it must be implemented immediately and uniformly for all. As both the adopters and the

innovators feel the stress of flex, this is an excellent opportunity to revisit the values that motivated distance education in the first place and celebrate small wins.

**Implement 3: Learn**

At this stage, it is crucial to clarify the distance education approach so far, consider what is working, and encourage the contributions made by both innovators and adopters. The overall change approach may seem clear to leaders, but for faculty and staff, it may not be as salient. Adopting online education can take months or even years, and so a common understanding of vision and objectives cannot be assumed. It is essential to reflect on the process and consider what worked and what did not in implementing the vision so that process changes can be made and best efforts focused on productive activities. Encouraging the contributions of all adopters is vital as another way of supporting the difficult work and stress of change in the faculty and staff, as well as identifying what changes are worth celebrating.

**Institute 1: Sustain**

Distance education change is instituted and sustained by creating policies, routine activities, and community that honors the original motivations and values of the change effort, supports the vision, and welcomes ongoing change. Adopting distance education necessitates policies to help guide and maintain the intended trajectory. These policies should be a direct result of the entire change effort, including the underlying values that started the process. Policies should be put in place to sustain the vision, but not restrict further positive change. With distance education, change will continue to happen at a rapid rate, and so a change effort is never complete. Ideally, a change effort transforms an academic unit's culture to lead into rather than resist ongoing change. By creating a culture of change, a community can form around values and motivations rather than structures and specific innovations.

**Process Dynamic**

In Figure 3, the horizontal directional arrows only move laterally from left to right between the four major headers. As with most typical change models, the task is linear, sequential, and has a completion point once the final change is instituted. Taking into consideration the critical theories mentioned earlier and the importance of giving followers a voice, an augmented model, the Distance Education Equitable Change Model (DEEC), calls for loopbacks to replicate a more natural and equitable model of change. The power structure is such in higher education that both administrators and faculty carry considerable influence. So, a much more collaborative approach to change, throughout the process and not just at the beginning, should be considered in contrast to the more corporate top-down or purely linear models. Change is also an ongoing process, and so the model should never be completed but return back to the starting point once the sequence is done. These loopbacks are potential paths for the change process to take if the forward path is unclear, unjust, or completed in sequence (see Figure 4). In this next section, I will explain the four potential loopbacks in the DEEC.

**Figure 4**

*The Distance Education Equitable Change Model (DEEC)*


| Initiate | | Imagine | | | | Implement | | | Institute |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivate | Collaborate | Envision | Explore | Share | Point of Decision | Empower | Flex | Learn | Sustain |
| Motivate openness for change through value sharing and urgency awareness | Collaborate early with adopters to form support for change and guide the process | Envision a positive future together | Explore and select the ideas and technologies of innovation | Share the vision and enlist others | | Empower adopters through self-determination, technical support, professional development, and incentives | Flex Allow for change and adjustment in both the innovation and adopters and celebrate small wins | Learn by clarifying approach, considering what worked, and encouraging contributions | Sustain the change by creating policies, routine activities, and community that honors the original motivations and values, supports the vision, and welcomes ongoing change |

Loopback 1 (L1) occurs from collaborate back to motivate. This is the first loopback that occurs in the process and could continue in a circular motion until an equilibrium is tipped to create an opportunity to start the imagine stage. A change leader should be in a constant state of motivating and collaborating with potential change agents, creating a continual dynamic that is ready for change, and thinking about the next distance education innovation. It could be that this stage is started with or without a particular distance education initiative in mind but could be more problem-oriented or as a think-tank. It may take years of motivating and collaborating before the time is right to move forward into the next phase. Alternatively, some incubation could continue to occur in this phase while other aspects of distance education move forward. Another reason why a loopback might happen is that the values of a particular group motivating distance education are unclear or in conflict. It is important to clarify values first before moving on.

Loopback 2 (L2) occurs at the point of decision. This should be a natural point in the DE process to loop back and rethink what is being envisioned. This does not mean that change will not occur or the process is stalled, but it is better to regroup and redefine the vision than to try and move forward in the process with a vision for DE change that faculty are unsure of implementing. Often decisions are forced when the dean, provost, or other administrator has the power to make the final call. However, resistance to distance education from faculty or staff may not be just general resistance to change. It may be the cause of an unclear or even unjust vision. An example could be the decision for a type of software without assurances that it will serve those with accessibility issues or an online learning approach that reduces student voice. These are issues of justice that an administrator may not consider, but an instructor sensitive to a student with a disability or who is part of a minority group might.

Loopback 3 (L3) connects the end of the implement phase to the start of the imagine phase. This is a crucial check for a flexible distance education initiative. After leaders and change agents consider what worked and what did not, if the DE initiative demands a major overhaul, one that cannot be fixed with slight adjustments or changes, they must be prepared to loop back to re-envision a new future. If the change is not re-envisioned, it may be an inaccurate picture that gets instituted into the culture of the organization. Worse, if a faulty innovation is implemented into culture just to "complete" the initiative, it could have damaging effects on the organization and undermine future change initiatives. Hopefully, this loopback is not needed, and any learning at this point can be implemented as distance education continues to move forward. However, too many times, top-down administrators just continue to drill the implement stage, refusing to take a step back and take the vision back to the drawing board.

Loopback 4 (L4) stretches from the final phase, institute, to the first phase, initiate. This signifies that the change process is never complete. Part of changing the culture is not just changing by developing a new online program but changing the organizational position towards all change. Vasser (2010) writes that "change is inevitable but managing change is a choice" (p. 5). Change will continue to happen around and to higher education. Leaders have the choice to learn to manage and ideally lead into this change to bring about true transformation in our universities.

## Chapter Summary

By reviewing four significant change models, summarizing these models, and then adapting the summary to fit DE administration and critical theories better, I have created a new Distance Education Equitable Change Model (DEEC) that will help guide my research into the tasks, processes, and challenges of DE administrators. This framework helps to conceptualize where DE leadership stress points might occur and further conceptualizes the leadership change process.

Integrating the feedback loops also guides a style of leadership that may work better in higher education and, in the end, is more equitable. This new conceptual framework also helps communicate the ongoing nature of change and how both the leaders and participants are an integral part of the change process. As described in the next chapter, methodology, this conceptual framework is used as a theoretical position to guide the interview questions and as help to frame the analysis of interview results.

# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Distance education (DE) is proliferating in higher education, and with expansion comes change. This study explores the tasks, processes, and challenges for distance education administrators (DEAs) developing online programs at public universities. DEAs implement distance education programs by directing tasks and orchestrating people from every level of higher educational institutions (Otte & Benke, 2006). First and foremost, a DEA's main task is to lead and manage institutional change (Beaudoin, 2016; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Otte & Benke, 2006). The overarching research question for this study is: What are the tasks, processes, and challenges of DEAs starting online programs at public universities? The supporting questions are:

1. What motivates DEAs to launch online programs?
2. How do DEAs overcome their stated challenges?
3. How does the typical DEA process of starting online programs compare to established change frameworks?

## Chapter Organization

In this chapter, I will first describe the details of the qualitative case study design, along with the rationale and supporting literature. Second, I will describe the research setting and sample selection. Third, I will explain the data collection procedures. Fourth, I will describe the process for data analysis. Then, I will explore my epistemological position and my role as a researcher. Finally, I will present some potential limitations of the study.

## Study Design

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) assert that a qualitative study could be designed in many ways, with various overlaps of qualitative research types, guided by the theoretical framework and the research questions. In this spirit, this study will use a qualitative, explanatory case study approach

(Yin, 2012, 2018) as the methodology guided by the need to answer the research questions. The case study approach is often used for evaluating educational innovation (Harrison et al., 2017). The primary data are interviews with seven DEAs involved with starting online programs at a public university.

Merriam (1998) writes that a qualitative case study is an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 27). Yin describes four types of case designs: holistic single-case, embedded single-case, holistic multiple-case, and embedded multiple-case (Yin, 2018). This study is a holistic single-case, as the goal is to understand the whole case in its real-world context, and it deals with a single unit of analysis, the DEAs starting online programs (Mills et al., 2010). The actual case is a unit around which there are certain boundaries and serves as "the main unit of analysis" (Yin, 2012, p. 6). In this study, the bounded case is the experiences of DEAs starting online programs at a large, public university. I delineate this phenomenon in the primary research question as to the DEAs' tasks, processes, and challenges.

Ary et al. (2010) list the typical steps in educational research as:

1. Problem selection.
2. Literature review.
3. Strategy and instrument development.
4. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation.
5. Reporting results.

This case study is not unique in that it also follows this typical educational research sequence; however, the case approach shifts some emphasis in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, as outlined below. I will communicate the final findings through the final case report rather than a table of recommendations or generalized results.

Yin (2012) describes three main categories of exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory case studies. All case studies are at least, in part, descriptive, and this study will primarily be descriptive in nature. Innovative education programs are often the subject of descriptive cases, as little research has yet to be accomplished (Merriam, 1998). Descriptive cases are intended to convey detailed accounts of the cases, providing rich descriptions by detailing the sequence and actions of events. This design will use the concept of triangulation, drawing from multiple DEAs across a single university to increase the quality of the findings (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). However, a secondary use of this case study is to be explanatory as well. An explanatory case study is useful when "how or why" questions are researched in addition to the "what" of descriptive studies (Yin, 2012, p. 4). This study researches the descriptive questions focusing on the tasks and challenges of starting online programs, as well as the how or why of the process.

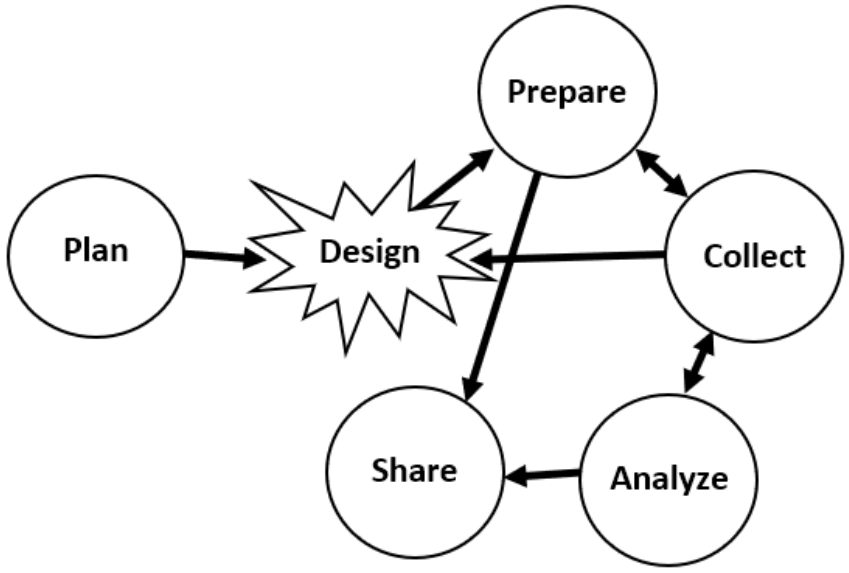
Yin (2018) also asserts that a theoretical proposition is useful in a case study to "guide design, data collection, and analysis" (p. 15). I will use the conceptual model from Chapter 3 as my theoretical proposition to first guide the study design, considering how to best approach learning about the DEAs' experiences in a rich way, and then use the findings to bear light on the conceptual framework. The conceptual model will also help guide the data collection, using questions related to individual stages of the framework. In the analysis phase, the theoretical categories will help organize the data, and then the data will be used to further critique and test the theoretical framework.

There are key features particular to the case study approach which befit the aims of this study. Yin (2018) states that "unlike other research methods, a standard catalog of case study designs has yet to emerge" (p. 25). Though Yin allows for an unstandardized approach and freedom of study design, Yin also stresses the need for structure. Yin (2018) suggests six connected stages in

designing a case study: plan, design, prepare, collect, analyze, and share (see Figure 5 below). There are at least two relevant differences noted in this figure compared to the typical educational research approach described by Ary (2010) above. First, Yin's approach allows for non-linear and iterative informing of each stage on the others. Accordingly, I have made small tweaks to my design and my analytical approach as I have collected data. The second difference in Yin's approach identifies the final stage as "share," meaning that the findings and discussion may or may not include interpretation, generalizations, or strong conclusions. For my study, findings and analysis will shed light on the theoretical framework and so display some natural analytic generalization (Yin, 2018).

**Figure 5**

*Yin's Six Stages of Case Study Design*



**Method Rationale**

By focusing on a qualitative-only study, this study better answers the research questions than by using quantitative methods alone or spreading the effort across both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This approach aligns with my own epistemology by focusing on fewer participants, allowing me to dig more deeply into their experiences and handle questions of motivation deliberately yet indirectly as necessary. The DEAs may be more willing to talk about sensitive aspects of their responsibilities with more careful attention to each subject. Though tempted by the idea of applying quantitative methods to seek generalizability, I believe rich descriptions of the DEAs' experiences will provide an in-depth understanding for readers and better answer my research questions. I am also convinced that the reader could come to their own applications for their contexts by providing rich descriptions.

The process of starting online programs is fairly unknown in the literature, as Chapter 2 showed. Yin (2018) suggests that a single case study may be worth conducting if a situation has not been previously researched empirically. In this way, descriptions alone reveal new information. Since this phenomenon of starting online programs is relatively unstudied, the conceptual framework gives some structure and guidance to what could be an abstract task. At the same time, the critical application of the data to the theory allows study of an unknown subject without cemented presuppositions.

Case studies are not exclusively exploratory in nature but explanatory as well. Yin (2018) states that “some of the best and most famous case studies have been explanatory” (p. 6). In this study, I chose to use the interview data to test the conceptual framework to help explain the online program starting process, at least from the perspective of the DEA. This approach will help explain the how and why of the process through comparison layered on top of a rich description.

Yin (1981) also suggests that the need for a case study occurs when "an empirical inquiry must examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 98). The phenomenon of starting an online program is deeply entrenched in the context of higher education. This poses some challenges to clearly define the case and how the phenomena and context diverge. Since some of the practical purposes of this study are to bring more detail and light on this subject within higher education, the separation is not needed, and the blending of context and phenomenon is welcomed.

The hope for this study is to retell rich narratives of distance education challenges and successes. Ideally, to tell stories that other DEAs might read to inspire and improve their own practice as they attempt to bring change to their institutions. I want to draw from the experiences of actual DEAs rather than from outsiders speculating about their experiences. Currently, I believe there is a great need in the literature and in higher education for this research and methodological approach to explore online program starts.

## Research Setting

This research is interested in focusing on the leadership perspective of starting online graduate programs at public universities. There is value in adding to the research that might further public higher education, making it more accessible and affordable, especially for economically and geographically disadvantaged students. Public universities also carry some structural similarities and are prominent across the United States, so readers may find themselves in similar contexts to make comparisons.

### Research Site Selection Process

This study collected interview data from seven DEAs within a single university. While I could have selected any university that successfully developed online programs, my main criteria

were not related to an institution's success from a quality or enrollment standpoint. Rather, the site needed to be large enough to identify multiple administrators who had responsibilities for developing programs online. For-profit universities are certainly enrolling thousands of students and could be considered. In the fall of 2017, the four largest U.S. postsecondary institutions by online enrollment were all private (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). However, I am more interested in contributing to the research and success of public universities, which, by mission, operate for the public good. So, I chose to study a public university as my research site.

Public universities offer various programs across multiple levels of education for both degree and non-degree seeking students. The most comprehensive of universities are 4-year doctoral degree-granting institutions. These institutions typically offer non-degree certificates, associate degrees, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral-level studies. In the fall of 2018, there were 398 4-year doctoral universities in the united states, with only a handful of them reporting no online students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). As the most comprehensive type of university, there is a need to understand how administrators at these schools lead the development of distance learning programs. It is also essential to understand tensions between the driving values and expansion of programs online related to the public university mission.

Regarding a specific case among these universities to research, I considered selecting from "crucial cases" (Given, 2008, p. 70), which would be those in similar institutions that are known to have success in the area of distance education. I researched the current top 4-year doctoral degree, public universities and arranged them in order of fall 2018 online enrollment numbers, making a list of potential research sites. I could have selected any of these top schools for research. Such schools tend to have many DEAs working across different departments who have experience launching online programs. I was concerned that I would not be able to access the personnel for interviews at

one of these large institutions, especially the very largest ones. Also, by selecting the largest university, I had some concern that the site would be so exceptional or unique that it would lack any potential for generalizing to a larger audience. In one of the smaller, but still substantially sized, universities on my "crucial case" list, however, I had direct contact with two administrators involved in developing online programs across the university. When I reached out to ask for their participation in advertising for this study, they graciously agreed.

**Research Site**

The selected research site is a public, 4-year doctoral institution located in the southern United States. Big University (BU – pseudonym) has a long history of serving their state through a variety of over 220 degree programs. BU is divided into 13 colleges, which are all served by the central distance learning department they call "BU Online" (BUO). BU Online is a "catch-all" label that I will use throughout this dissertation for several connected central offices that provide online faculty training, course development, student recruitment, program evaluation, and program marketing. Around 20 years ago, BU was one of the first universities in the United States to explore distance education and now boasts over 90 fully online degrees ranging from bachelor to doctoral. BU pride themselves on their high national ranking and long history of bringing economic development and educational opportunity to their state.

## Sample Selection

The sampling approach was a purposive sampling strategy to interview those directly involved in starting online programs at BU. I was not interested in those who had oversight from a distance or took credit for launching the program from a centralized position, but to interview people who were directly involved, no matter their formal or informal role or title. The reason for purposeful sampling was to "select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions

under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Purposeful sampling is ideal for selecting individuals with a particular knowledge (Creswell & Clark, 2011). A first-tier contact advertised my study invitation (see Appendix A) to potential interviewees on my behalf via e-mail to avoid the potential of cold-calling. Potential subjects were asked to contact me if they were interested.

Through those who responded, I also asked if they would be willing to pass my invitation on to others as a method of snowball sampling (Creswell, 2005). The boundaries around the DEA sample could be challenging to define, as many DEAs are not indicated by formal titles or website descriptions, so this method of sampling proved effective in finding ideal interviewees. Both study invitation and follow-up e-mails clarified my criteria that the interviewee was directly involved in starting at least one online program at the university. Since the sample is not a natural group, like a president or provost, the research questions themselves determined these clarified boundaries for the interviewees (Borgatti et al., 2018).

In the end, I was able to interview seven DEAs at BU. The overall sample size number was smaller than needed in a quantitative approach. In case studies, researchers should aim away from considering the number of samples or cases needed and instead consider how the final reported case "sheds empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles" (Yin, 2018, p. 38). So in this study, it is not about the quantity of individual interviews but rather the quality of the final case report and triangulation with my theoretical proposition as detailed in the conceptual model.

One common, public document source used was the institutional website, which gave further information about the online programs described. In addition to specific program pages, news articles were also helpful to triangulate data. In a desire to keep the anonymity of the study site, I have not included these documents in the references. These were supplementary, not primary,

sources of data. By considering interviews, documents, and any other artifacts as well, a case study is able to address a "full variety of evidence" (Yin, 2018, p. 12).

## Data Collection Procedures

The primary data are one on one, semi-structured interviews with seven DEAs involved with the launching of online programs at BU. In order to develop rich data, the interviews were semi-structured so that I could go deeper into critical areas as the interview developed. The procedure of this qualitative research study was guided by principles aligned with a qualitative explanatory case study (Yin, 2018). In case studies, important questions are focused on the characteristics of an individual, organization, or group to answer the research questions.

Second, I created brief field notes as I was conducting the interviews. These notes recorded overall impressions and salient features that stood out from the interviews as they happened. I made notes under the heading of each interviewee (DEA 1 through 7), as well as notes that might apply to the interviews as a whole.

Third, I examined publicly available primary documents, including the institutional website, newsletters, other interviews, and marketing, to help understand the online program that is part of the phenomena. This followed the interview step so that I could use interview data regarding the program name and timeline to help locate relevant documents. The goal was to use the documents to help create a rich description of the case but still as a secondary source.

### Instrument

I developed an interview protocol (Appendix B) containing semi-structured questions that seek to understand the complexity of the challenges of DEAs as they lead and manage change through the development of online programs. The protocol includes a demographic section and a semi-structured, conversational interview list of questions focusing on the experience of the DEA.

My research questions (see Appendix B) were categorized under the main headings established in my "Distance Education Equitable Change Model" described in Chapter 3. Those headings are: initiate, imagine, implement, and institute. The sub-themes of this conceptual framework inspired many of the more in-depth questions. After the main category questions, I asked questions regarding the biggest challenges (historical and future) and asked for feedback on the categories and change model. Though these were a priori categories, the interviewee had an opportunity to think outside of these categories and provide any other information that might not have "fit."

## Data Analysis

My data mainly consisted of seven 60-80 minute transcribed interviews, field notes, and supporting documents. Yin (2018) writes that one can do case study data analysis "by pursuing any combination of procedures, such as by examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining (narrative and numeric) evidence" (p. 164). Assembling the raw case data first involves collecting all the data for the case. For this study, transcribed interview data were collected as the bulk of the data. As a pre-analysis phase, the interviews were read and re-read. This is the "data immersion" phase (Tracy, 2013, p. 188). Regarding the formal steps to analyze the data, I took the following steps:

1. Created category constructions (Merriam, 1998) using a priori major themes from the interview guide and subthemes from the conceptual framework in chapter 3. This created a "start list" for deductive coding (Saldaña, 2021, p. 39).
2. Assembled the raw interview data into a spreadsheet database organized by participants (DEA1 through DEA7) (Yin, 2012).
3. Stage 1 coding: Applied manual structural coding (Saldaña, 2021) directly on the spreadsheet. Here, structural coding is a combination of deductive codes from the

coding start list, derived from the interview questions, and inductive codes, capturing concepts in the data to both "code and categorize the data corpus" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 129). This coding approach works to label broad themes on semi-structured interview data with the same questions across data sets (MacQueen et al., 2008).

4. Stage 2 coding: On a second pass, I open coded interview data, paying attention to text that is not coded, demands a secondary theme, or is an answer to another question in the interview (and so may be out of sequence). From these codes, I grouped for missing themes and subthemes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and added the codes and themes to the codebook as they were created.
5. Assembled and coded the document data with the a priori themes and subthemes, as well as any open coded themes from the codebook as supported.
6. Re-evaluated major themes and created a list of updated headers based on the findings.
7. Wrote individual participant summaries based on updated themes and codes.
8. Utilized content analysis word frequency counts (Krippendorff, 2004) as queries emerged from summarizing the data.
9. Using salient features from the individual participant summaries, created one written, composite, mixed, final case report of the DEA experience in narrative form, focusing on the commonalities and using the "story moments" to bring rich detail. This is the classic approach to composing a single-case study (Yin, 2018).

Near the end of this process, I started to mix the data. Finally, I wrote a final case study using the case records. The final case study narrative attempts to tell the story of the case in a way that provides rich description and illuminates details. In the final case report, Yin (2018) encourages

researchers to compose the final case study "creatively and with some flair" (p. 219); however, not in a fictional way that would give readers concern about the research validity.

Theoretical propositions can be beneficial to case study analysis with an added result of acting as one more source of evidence (Yin, 2018). After these eight steps of analysis, the developed conceptual change model, as described in Chapter 3, will be compared to the final case. The conceptual framework helped frame the DEA's actions and bring further understanding and organization to the data collection and analysis process. In reverse, the case study will also be used as a critical analysis of the change model in terms of what is similar or different from the case study data.

Though the results of this study, perhaps, should not be generalized to a wider population, the results will carry a naturalistic generalization (Stake & Trumbull, 1982) when readers apply the results intuitively to their own contexts. Naturalistic generalizations can have a more significant impact than statistical ones because the reader comes to their own conclusions and applications (Tracy, 2013). Though this is a qualitative case study, every effort has been made to make this a rigorous, empirical study.

## Researcher Beliefs, Biases, and Epistemological Position

I would consider myself a constructivist, pragmatist, critical theorist. I tend to have a constructivist nature as I use inductive research methods to find the participants' viewpoints and build knowledge into themes or patterns. I see knowledge as a social construct that comes from conduct. Social reality is constructed by people and mostly in people's perceptions. So, my research is seated primarily in this epistemology, understanding that any knowledge gained is an interpretation of this social construct. Because of this, I lean toward a more qualitative approach, and particularly the case study approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2012, 2018).

However, I am also a pragmatic son of Dewey (1917, 1986, September, 2015) because I believe we can know (to an extent) what works and what does not in educational practice. Regarding pragmatic philosophy, Dewey wrote that it should "develop ideas relevant to the actual crisis of life" (2015, p. 28292). I believe in having a purpose in research and constructing knowledge that could potentially inform and make the world a better place. I believe in seeking solutions to problems, and this seems to be the very nature of research. Education as a whole intends to be a solution to a variety of problems. So, specific research problems create a conflict between what is and what could be, creating research questions of "what, why, and how." As Hickman (2007) writes, "Where there is no conflict, there is no need for inquiry" (p. 64). Educational inquiry seems like a natural fit for pragmatism.

Bredo and Feinberg (1982) explain three somewhat opposing epistemological positions: logical positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory. I am, in part, also a critical theorist. In critical theory, the knower is much more connected to what is known. There is mutuality, but neither has a full picture of the other. The knower can affect what is known and be affected by the known. Mutual shaping occurs as knowledge is sought, and it guides further inquiry. The philosophical work of Hegel and Marx, and then later Jurgen Habermas, form the foundation for critical theory. I have been deeply impacted by the related "Liberatory Pedagogy" writings of Freire (1970) and hooks (2014). Critical theory attempts to bring together the positivist and interpretivist approaches by understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each. At the root, knowledge is understood in an evolutionary light as a potential for social change. With this, the critical theorist's interests are cognitive, practical, but ideally emancipatory. Critical theory may name and confront power differentials in various systems and so is often considered deconstructive. However, the true goal of critical theory is positive social change.

My position as a pragmatist, constructivist, critical theorist will influence the questions I ask, how I hear the answers, and how I interpret the data. One, as a pragmatist, I will look for solutions and definitive answers through questioning. I will look for themes that might be present across multiple DEAs and ways that these themes could provide solutions for other DEAs, bringing change to their institutions. However, balancing those answers as a constructivist, I will also recognize that answers are a matter of perspective and steer away from final prescriptive conclusions in my analysis. So as a pragmatist-constructivist, I will present some implications for research and practice at the end of this study, but with disclaimers. Finally, as a critical theorist, I may be sensitive to power differentials, unjust motivations or actions, and places where leadership brings change against the wills of followers. This could be a disadvantage, as critical theory could be predisposed to finding power differentials where none exists.

## Potential Design Limitations

First, there are limitations inherent in the sample. While the outcomes of this study should be helpful for DEAs and other administrators, the methodology and small sample size limit the ability to generalize these findings. Also, this case study focuses on a single institution for the sample, which may create an unbalanced view of the experiences of the DEAs. One institution may show a particular challenge or process because of the structure or overall leadership that others do not. However, the size of this sample is ample for an explanatory case study.

Second, a limitation in my data collection methodology may be biased, both internal in my own experience in starting programs in higher education and the conceptual framework guiding how I expect the process to work. One measure used to balance this limitation is understanding the framework as conceptual, inviting criticism through the interviews and my analysis in the process. I

include open feedback questions in my interview questions to help gain insight into the weaknesses of the conceptual framework and gaps in my constructed categories.

## Summary

First, this chapter described my qualitative, explanatory case study design (Yin, 2012, 2018), along with the study rationale and supporting literature. Second, I described the process of selecting the research setting and sample selection along with rationale. Third, I explained the data collection procedures, which mainly consisted of seven semi-structured interviews, field notes, and related documents. Fourth, I described my customized eight-step process for data analysis based on Merriam (1998) and Yin (2012, 2018). Then, I explored my epistemological position and role as a researcher. Finally, limitations to the study were listed. In the next chapter, I will utilize my data analysis process and present the data.

# CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

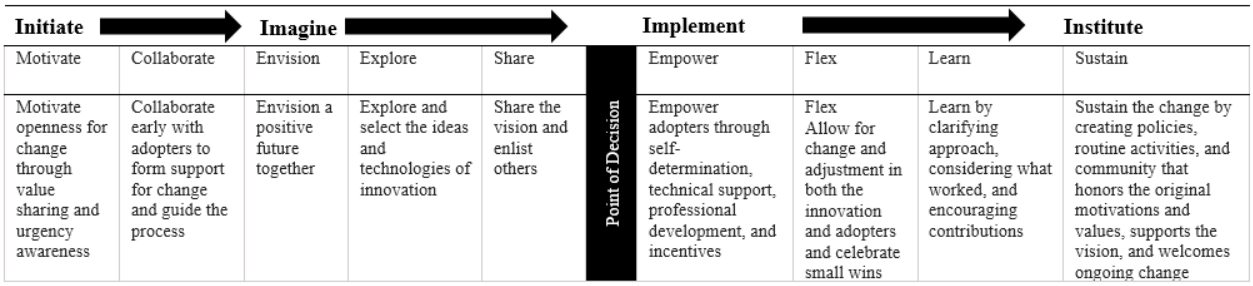
In this chapter, I present the findings from the interview data and document search regarding the tasks, processes, and challenges of DEAs launching online programs in higher education. The central data was from seven research study participants who were distance education administrators from a single higher education institute. All DEAs had firsthand knowledge of all stages of the online program start process, from idea to the first student to instituting policies. So that participants could share their lived experiences freely, I used pseudonyms (DEA1 to DEA7) to replace their real names. Likewise, I replaced any mention of a specific program with "the online program" or another generic description. Any mention of their U.S. state was replaced with "state." Throughout this study, I used the pseudonyms of BU (Big University) for the institution and BUO (Big University Online) for the centralized online department to avoid identification. Document findings were also summarized and redacted. I used plural pronouns when possible for gender neutrality and to increase anonymity. In this chapter, I will first explain how I organized the interview data per interviewee and the rationale behind the organization. I will then present the data per interviewee (DEA1 to DEA7) and close this chapter with a composite case report, summarizing all the interviews together.

## Organization of the Data

The original plan was to organize the interview data by each heading (stage) of my distance education conceptual change model below (Figure 5). However, participant feedback on the model suggested significant enough changes that I decided to reflect on and revise this change model before presenting the data, versus leaving it to the reflections in the last chapter.

**Figure 6**

*The Distance Education Change Model*




I included a question in the interview to solicit critical feedback from the interviewees regarding the change model headings and coded any time an action or answer seemed "out of sequence." Overall, the model seemed logical to the participants. For example, DEA7 said:

> But I think as an onset, I mean, totally logically makes sense for me as a model. I mean, you have to have your idea phase, and then you think about the logistics of it, and then you do it, and then it becomes institutionalized, so it makes sense.

However, through analyzing the data, I found that some adjustments to the model better reflect the interviewee's lived experiences starting online programs. I made four significant changes based on participant feedback when comparing to my original conceptual change model.

First, it seemed from the interviews that the initiate and imagine stages were not distinct categories and certainly not sequential. In the interview data, I found all the actions related to initiate and imagine subcategories except for one, explore. The actions in these categories also all preceded the implementation stage. DEA1 said, "It's not exactly (obviously) how it happened in BU, but it's a very logical sequence." Most agreed that the progression between initiate and imagine made logical sense, but it just was not what they experienced. A more precise delineation was before the program start and after the program start. So, for now, I will blend both initiate and imagine into one stage

called “initiate” and still follow that with the stages implement and institute. This “initiate” stage will include subcategories of first actions, motivations, collaborations, envision, and share.

In a second consideration, it seems the categories overlap in the DEA’s experiences. For instance, I conceived of “implement” beginning with the program start (enrolling students), but it seemed some DEAs thought differently. For instance, many of the DEAs referenced course scheduling and curriculum building in response to the questions regarding implementation. Likewise, some policies that should take place during the “institute” phase happened while implementing. For example, DEA2 realized early in implementing their program to make a policy for balancing class sizes. For these reasons, the conceptual model should reflect overlaps between the stages to allow for actions that might seem “out of sequence” from a model standpoint but happened naturally in the DEAs’ real experiences. When reflecting on the proposed model, I believe DEA3 was trying to express both the sequential and flexible nature of the process when they said:

> Everyone always wants to, not you, *people* want to they want to put together a blueprint, and some people can't see it as a blueprint. They see it as a this is how you *have* to do it, you know? And so creating something that gives people a license, it's almost a decision tree - I put almost everything has a decision tree. So even within your four categories, people could branch a different way, and you're still going to get to the next phase, you know what I'm saying?

I appreciate how the interviewee let me as the researcher off the hook (as if I was *not* trying to establish a blueprint for launching online programs). As I present the interview data, the lived experiences of the DEAs may be messier than initially considered, and I may move subcategories between major themes, as the data warrants. A preliminary application of this idea of overlapping stages is represented in Figure 6 below.

Third, the "point of decision" was not found in the interviews to fit cleanly into the model's center. DEA4 had their point of decision to start the online program near the beginning of the process, which was in coordination with receiving the blessing of the department chair and college dean. DEA5 took about eight months to research the potential, carefully envisioned the new program, and had multiple conversations with administrators along the way before making a decision. This was similar to DEA6's experience, who spent time making connections with local industry leaders, creating a clear plan for the program, getting feedback from students, and garnering support before launching. DEA7 was not sure if an online program needed approval but then speculated that it probably did take a faculty vote. Somehow, DEA3 never received approval but just launched it and asked people to either get on board or move out of the way. DEA3 said, "I just informally said, hey, here's what I'm doing. Who wants to teach?" When it was a clear point of decision to other DEAs, the decision point came at different times in the process, from before anyone in the college even knew the program was happening (DEA1) to after the courses were fully envisioned (DEA2). I will consider the point of decision as a subcategory before "implement" as part of the initiate stage. I may consider an "area of decision" for my final conceptual framework revision in Chapter 6.

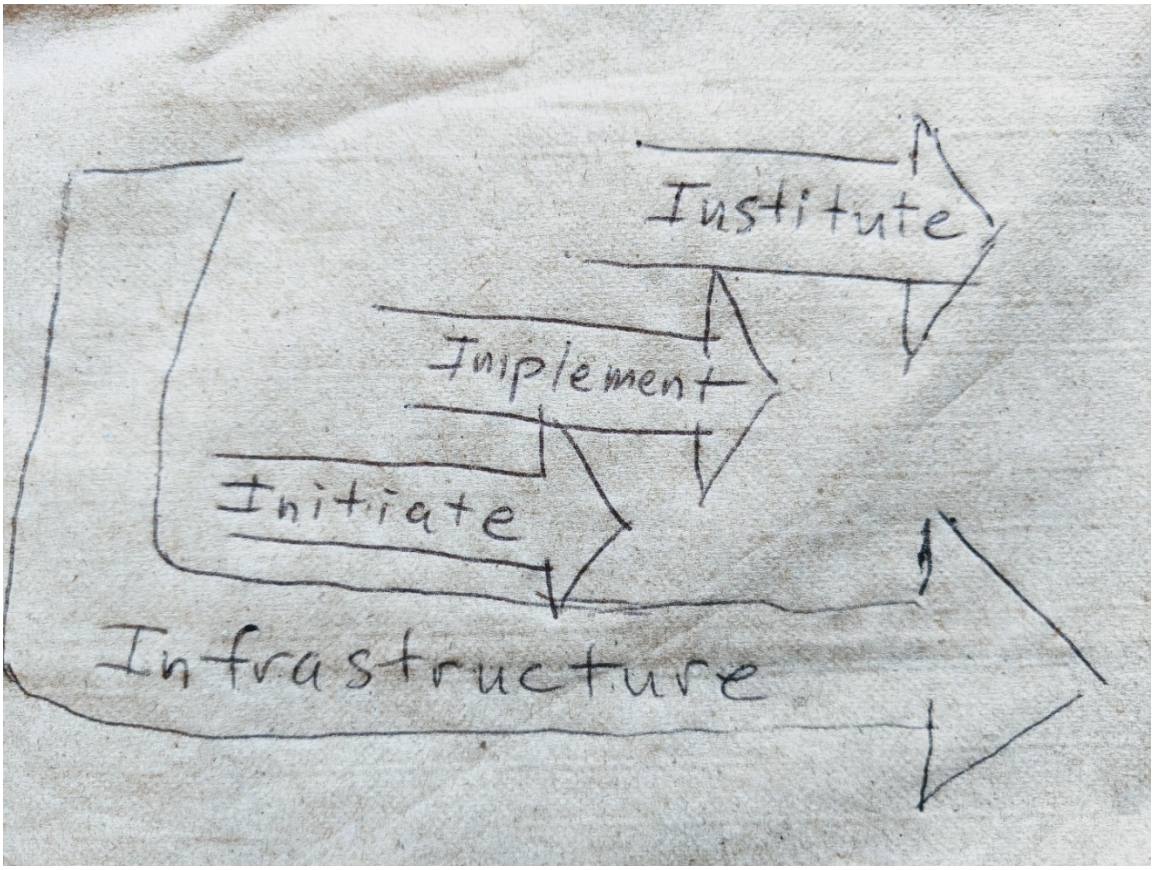
A fourth change is the addition category called "infrastructure." This came as a direct critique of the model and unsolicited suggestion when discussing the change model. While interviewees were never asked if "infrastructure" should be included in the model, they offered this theme unprompted. DEA5 offered some excellent descriptors of this missing category calling it an "institutional ecosystem," "institutional knowledge," "institutional capital," and what DEA5 called "wrap-around support." In addition to this idea that this category might wrap around the entire process of launching an online program, in conversation, DEA5 suggested that infrastructure might

"flip to the front as sort of a catalyst." Infrastructure relates to how BU offered central technical and instructional support, data analysis, and instructor training. However, the concept of "culture" or "university culture" was found In Vivo in most interviewees (DEA1, DEA3, DEA4, and DEA5). Culture is related to more intangible aspects of the organization, often described as "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 269). DEA7 had a more tangible suggestion that "assessment" was missing in the change model. This may be a good inclusion into the infrastructure aspect, perhaps near the end of the change process. In retrospect, it is not surprising that my change model did not include culture or infrastructure, as I intentionally passed on approaches like the McKinsey 7-S Model (Waterman & Peters, 1982) that focus on such organizational elements in favor of focusing on the change process.

A working napkin sketch of the change model as reflected in the interview data and described here is shown below (Figure 6). You see in this figure that the stages are more blended and less clear-cut. I will return to evaluate further and update this change model in Chapter 6 once I have analyzed all the data.

**Figure 7**

*A Napkin Sketch of the Potential Change to the DEA Change Conceptual Model*




Following the rationale above, using the modified headings with an additional heading (Challenges) from the interview structure, I use the following to major headings and potential sub-categories (when present) to organize and present the findings. For understanding and as part of a "key" for the data below, I have also included the essence of the questions used in the interview for each section:

**Interview Data Organization**

1. DEA introduction (What do we know about the DEA?)
2. Infrastructure (What exists before and outside of the department for support?)
3. Initiate (What started the process?)

a. First actions (What were the initial actions?)

b. Motivation (What was the motivation for the DEA? For the University?)

c. Decision point (When was a final decision made to start the program?)

d. Dissenters (Was anyone resistant to the idea? How were they dealt with)

e. Collaborate (Whom did the DEA work with?)

f. Envision (Was there a brainstorming or visioning time?)

g. Share (Was the vision shared with others?)

h. Develop (What tasks were done to develop the program?)

4. Implement (What happened when the program started?)

    a. First actions (What were the initial actions to implement the program?)

    b. Flex (What flexibility or changes?)

    c. Learn (What did they do to seek feedback and learn?)

    d. Wins (Did they celebrate any wins?)

    e. Empower (Were the DEA or others empowered to do the job?)

5. Institute (What happened after the program was started?)

    a. Policies (What policies were put in place after the program started?)

    b. Routines (What policies were put in place after the program started?)

    c. New programs (Were there new programs started or imagined after the program started?)

6. Challenges (What challenges do DEAs face in starting online programs?)

    a. In process (What were the biggest challenges of the process?)

    b. Overcoming (What was done to overcome the challenges?)

c. Future (What are the biggest challenges for online programs in the next five years?)

## The Interview Data

The interviewees are organized from DEA1 to DEA7, numbered in the order the interviews were conducted. While some of the tasks, processes, and challenges are shared across the seven DEAs, as detailed below, each DEA was a unique type of person. Many of them felt like they were special cases, and they were right to an extent. This is one reason why I chose to give each DEA a unique nickname: DEA1, the outlier; DEA2, the detailer; DEA3, the piloter; DEA4, the pioneer; DEA5, the culture builder; DEA6, the accidental administrator; and DEA7, the central analyzer. Though labels run the risk of oversimplifying and categorizing, I gave these monikers to the DEAs after coding, analyzing, and summarizing each of their interviews as a way to personalize their approaches.

Publicly available document data that were searched and coded are included throughout this section, presented under various headings supporting the participant interview data, rather than under a separate "document data" heading. The data below are organized by the categories and the rationale listed in the section above. When the subcategory label was not present in the data, the subcategory heading was not included.

### DEA1: The Outlier

DEA1 served as the senior associate director in their school at BU for 13 years. The online bachelor's degree that DEA1 helped launch is one of three large programs at their school and the only one fully online. One calendar year passed between the first idea for the program and the semester in which it started. This was the quickest of any of the programs described in this study. DEA1 seemed eager to talk about their experience; they responded and conceptualized themselves

as a straight shooter and potentially an "outlier." DEA1 feels the strain of the size of their school, which is quite large. They describe the faculty as "consistently spread too…way too thinly." In contrast to what people may picture at universities, with faculty taking summers off in a relaxed atmosphere, DEA1 says, "It's not how things operate at BU. It's just…it's constant. It's a constant onslaught. When you when you have [so many] students at your university, you realize how big you are, and all that that constitutes." Many other administrators can understand this constant pressure and hectic pace. However, the way DEA1's program started, which I will explain below, is unique. This is why DEA1 is nicknamed "the outlier."

***Infrastructure***

When I asked DEA1 if the larger university infrastructure communicated values to help start this degree, they responded, "So yes and no, if you know what I'm saying. There was a culture around us that supported—nothing direct." DEA1 said the university "was just surprised as we were…" when they read about the new program in the paper. However, DEA1 cited two specific ways the larger university (BU Online) supported their online initiative: through incentivized training and ongoing instructional design support. First, every faculty member goes through university-level training to teach online with BU Online. The institutional website confirms that this is a minimum of 80 hours of training, covering topics like effective online assessments, designing interactive course activities, and managing your online course. Upon course completion, faculty are given a small stipend. Also, on completion of the training, each faculty member is assigned an instructional designer who will assist them, as DEA1 says, "until forever. Until one of you, whichever one of you, resigns, fires, retires, whatever, moves on…So you'll always have that person as your instructional designer."

***Initiate***

**First actions.** As we discussed the first actions of starting this program, DEA1 clarified, "So, there was no planning process. There was no, like, 'Here is the genesis, and we're going to work our way out of it and hope it was OK. Here you go.' So, this will screw up your research a little bit. So, I'm sorry, but it'll be, I guess, I'll be an outlier." In a way, DEA1 spoke the truth. This first interview completely disrupted my conceptual framework and the presuppositions I started this study with: That starting an online program was a planned, deliberate, linear, processed decision. Online programs do not just "happen." However, one day a faculty member walked up to DEA1 and said, "Hey, did you hear about this degree?" DEA1 said, "What do you mean, degree?" The faculty member showed DEA1 the local city paper, listing out the new online degrees that were coming to BU. It sounded like the degree (by the title) should clearly be part of DEA1's school, but they had never heard anything about it. They asked the interim director, and they had not heard of it either. DEA1 asked around, and no one at the school knew anything about starting this new degree. So, they contacted the provost (who was as surprised as they were) and claimed this "unknown" degree. DEA1 said that because they are so busy, this program would have never happened without the unique way it came about. "In ways that saved a great deal of time because of that piece, so we didn't expend so much psychological energy in that effort."

**Motivation.** Even though it was not a calculated decision to start the program, the motivation to claim it and not just let it slip past (or allow another department to claim it) was because of "disciplinary integrity." DEA1 said, "Making sure that those research scholars and those individuals who knew what the hell they were talking about would actually be the ones developing the program." They did not feel like they had the time or the resources but could not let the program fall into the wrong hands.

**Decision point.** DEA1 did not know of a point at which a formal decision was made to start the program. This may be because of the unique way in which the program came about.

**Dissenters.** There were some dissenters in the school who were against starting the online program, but it was more "hemming and hawing." There was no formal resistance. The nature of the resistance manifested itself as questions whether the classes could be taught online from a pedagogical standpoint because of the subject matter or delivery. However, DEA1 summarized it as resistance to change: "I think part of that is just it's the C word. It's change. People don't like change, and they're scared about it."

**Collaborate.** To launch this program, DEA1 worked closely with an associate professor, who was the resident subject matter expert and whom DEA1 called "kind of lead faculty member in this." DEA1 indicated that the faculty member's involvement was not a formalized leadership position or role. DEA1 also pulled in two other teaching faculty members, plus a program coordinator and a couple of staff members. As a team, their workflow was intermittent and as needed. DEA1 said, "things were broken off, and we would come back together, break off, come back together."

**Share.** Outside of the faculty enlisted to develop and teach the classes, there was little time or effort to share the vision of this program or onboard others to help. The larger faculty only need to approve the curriculum, not the delivery mode. DEA1 indicated that starting a new program, typically, would be driven by faculty out of need. They said, "So the modality seldom comes up unless it's really germane to the course in some way." However, at their monthly faculty meeting, DEA1 shared the story of how this new program came about. They recalled that "luckily, we have a very collegial group of faculty who enjoyed the experience a little bit, got a good laugh out of it, but worked to advance it as much as possible."

### *Implement*

**First actions.** Although this might be considered a pre-implementation action, DEA1 had to move quickly to get the curriculum through the correct channels, meeting deadlines so the program could launch as expected. DEA1 extensively worked with the faculty, who took ownership of creating and scheduling the classes needed to launch the program. DEA1 also worked with the advising center to connect with interested students. In this, DEA1 also had to repurpose faculty to help fill in the staff gaps as no new resources came with this new degree program.

**Flex.** DEA1 had a flexible attitude towards implementing the new program. They said:

> Those are some of the challenges and just testing things out, what works, what doesn't work, you know, always learning things. If you've ever been through launching a new degree, it's no matter what the degree is, it's oh, that didn't go as we planned. We had to modify this. You know, we tried something new. Maybe we should try that kind of thing. So, there were tweaks along the way to make sure that students can matriculate successfully.

**Learn.** Though there was a formalized process university-wide for assessing learning, there was nothing formalized for specifically assessing the launch of the new program. However, DEA1 conceded that it might have been because the program "came out of nowhere." Most of the feedback regarding the online program DEA1 received was from students through their advising office.

**Wins.** DEA1 said "celebration" would be a strong term but that there was some applause at the faculty meeting when the curriculum was approved. Also, as the program grew, there was talk and celebration of the enrollment growth at the monthly faculty meetings along the way.

### *Institute*

**Policies.** After the program launch, DEA1 instituted an equitable load policy for faculty so that their work would be based on student enrollment in their classes. This was not only because of the online program but because of their residential classes as well.

**Routines.** DEA1 noted a routine change that they called more of a "procedural" change than a routine. This procedure was to make the respective online and face-to-face versions of the same course connected to the degree program so that students would not load up the online version with enrollment. Since so many students would sign up for the online version of the class and one research methods class, in particular, it would not leave room for the fully online degree-seeking students, preventing them from matriculating.

**New programs.** DEA1 is not seriously considering any new programs in their school. They explain:

> It's not necessarily that we're not talking about online degree programs; it's more that we don't have the resources to where we're struggling with filling the existing curriculum that we have. Right? So that is an inherent challenge that we have right now. So, to offer another degree program with all this would spread more thinly.

### *Challenges*

DEA1 noted that the top challenge related to how the online program came about so quickly. It was challenging to handle the condensed timeline and mentally prepare themself for launching the program. Early in the interview, DEA1 noted that the speed was somewhat helpful for the program's progression because if faculty did not keep up, they would not resist. However, when pressed about the speed of launching the program later, DEA1 acknowledged the negative aspect of not being psychologically prepared for the program. They said:

> Well, the first one comes to mind is making this thing come to fruition out of nowhere. When you think about what you're doing, we don't have the luxury of sitting here going, "what is [it] going to look like?" Right? But if you think about that, you know, you anticipate certain things at least, and it's always going to be things that surprise you. This is a big surprise to commit to launch a whole new degree program in one semester, for all intents and purposes.

Overcoming this challenge to have a successful program, DEA1 credits the "brilliant faculty." Meaning, they work with very intelligent people who have a deep commitment to the work. DEA1 also mentions the supportive staff. DEA1 said:

> So, it's…it's the people, the humans, that really were the thing that made it happen within the school specifically…There was support from other areas, but it was obviously it was completely driven out of the school. And those folks are the ones who made it happen.

Throughout the interview, a noted secondary challenge was that DEA1 felt like faculty are spread too thinly trying to support and teach this program. DEA1 directly calls this a "lack of resources." Perhaps it is not surprising that the primary resource for overcoming the challenge of starting the online program, people, is also a concern regarding how much they are being worked and stretched to make it successful.

As the biggest future challenge in the next five years, DEA1 listed continued online competition and the "drain on the faculty." DEA1 listed the many other institutions, for-profit and non-profit, following the online trend and getting into the game. And then, with the growth of the program, and this increased competition, it will take more work to get faculty to run and teach in it.

**DEA2: The Detailer**

DEA2 was a faculty academic administrator who had been in their school for 14 years. It was the kind of job that just grew in responsibility the longer they were there. DEA2 does a lot of staffing hires and works between the administration, faculty, and adjunct instructors. One added responsibility in recent years included leading the start of an online master's program. DEA2 describes themselves as the "nuts and bolts person" who helps with any support needed to launch programs in their department. This includes supporting the faculty initiator and helping to take care of any administrative needs related to the program moving forward. DEA2's answers were very detailed and exact, explaining carefully how the process was working from their role. It took around two years between the first idea and launch of their most recent online program. A timeline that DEA2 felt was "pretty fast, actually." In light of DEA2's concern and sensitivity to the administrative needs and details, I have nicknamed DEA2 "the detailer."

***Infrastructure***

DEA2 is mainly responsible for course scheduling, course sequencing, and ensuring the faculty get the training they need to develop and teach the courses. They rely on BU Online for the training and to help develop the courses from an instructional design and technology standpoint. Faculty are responsible for developing the courses once assigned. DEA2 would "reach out and say, 'hey, we're developing this program. I want to develop this course, and I need some assistance with this.' And that's when their instructional designer will step in and assist." This training and support infrastructure was in a "ready state" whenever the college needs them to move forward with an initiative.

While DEA2 seemed happy to have BU Online handle the development of the course, there was an underlying negative tension between DEA2 and BU Online's marketing department regarding the recruitment of students. DEA2 explains one of their biggest challenges: working with

BU Online to recruit students. In short, DEA2 feels that though BU Online handles recruitment, the BU Online staff lack deep program knowledge and are not giving students accurate and complete information. This burden of student engagement and advisement is now falling on faculty. DEA2 explains:

> All our faculty, but in especially those that are fully online programs, have found themselves having to do a lot of one on one and type of reaching out individually to students to keep them engaged, keep them motivated, keep them focused, ensure that they have all the tools and technology and access that they need to continue their program. And that's taken an enormous amount of time for all our faculty. Significant.

Digging deeper into the analysis and beyond the face value statement, more clues to this tension between the school and BU Online emerge. Contacting BU Online because of low recruitment was used as an example by DEA2 as one kind of action after implementation. DEA2 said, "So, if [in] the implementation of the program, something is not happening, like we're not getting the recruitment or the level of engagement in the moment, … then I reach out to BU Online and say, 'Where are the obstacles like we talked about before?'" In a separate event, DEA2 also quipped that when BU Online started marketing and creating a web page for the new program, "And they've got their own system in place for taking it at that point." This statement could be taken at face value on its own, but in the light of other comments about BU Online marketing, it may have been a stab at BU Online's system *that was not working the way it should*.

***Initiate***

**First actions.** When new programs are initiated in their college, DEA2 provides more of a support role, someone on the administrative side who helps navigate obstacles and less of the catalyst for starting the program online. DEA2 considers the viability of a potential program in light

of curricular and programming obstacles that might exist, helps overcome these obstacles, plans the next steps, and then makes sure the faculty get the support they need to see it to program launch.

**Motivation.** The primary motivation for this online program came from faculty concern that if their program remained as a face-to-face offering, they would lose their program due to declining enrollment. The threat of losing the program was real, as other programs in their college were suspended or deactivated because they were no longer viable from an enrollment perspective. Adding the online option opened the program to new markets. There was also a sense that their graduates were professionals who were needed in the market, so developing an online program was also in response to perceived market demand. DEA2 said, "So this was an effort to increase enrollment, have a broader audience to this particular program based on other programs that have been successful with a fully online program so that we believe that this was worth a trial."

**Decision point.** DEA2's role was to ask the primary faculty contact all the questions about how the new program would be operationalized and pull in other stakeholders that might need input before the decision is made. Approval escalated then to the college and university levels once major concerns were addressed on a department level. With this description, I would place the decision point happening right before the implement point. DEA2 was the clearest of all the participants that online programs must have approval. They said, "No faculty does it without the approval or support of the department level and sometimes in both department and college-level support. Ever. That doesn't happen."

**Dissenters.** Some faculty resisted the idea of launching the program online. For some, it was a belief that their particular content could not be taught online. DEA2 explained that their type of program:

> ...lends itself more, or at least the program faculty mentality believes, that that type of training is lent itself more to face-to-face type of methods. It's… so it's been a little bit of a journey getting to the idea that we can have productive, fully online programs. And so that's required a lot of research and investment and conversation and time to get to that point with these programs.

Other faculty had concerns that the main faculty member who represented the program could manage the work of putting the program online. With the lack of success in some of their other traditional programs, perhaps it was a concern that this program would go in the same direction. However, DEA2 felt like with the faculty's level of support, "her only obstacles were herself."

**Collaborate.** DEA2 calls the process of collaboration "conversations at multiple levels." The faculty member who wants to start the online program will reach out to DEA2 and may also reach out to the program director at the same time. They will converse back and for regarding the process and viability. DEA2 believes that "it requires a lot of people to manage the planning to ensure that everything unfolds in a timely manner."

**Develop.** Other than clarifying the idea of the program and taking care of administrative requirements, no development happened until after approval was made. DEA2 makes sure there is a development plan in place and hands the development of the course and program to BU Online. DEA2 said, "They've got their own system in place for taking it at that point. But it all has to be approved for the director of the school and the faculty. And then it goes straight to BU Online."

***Implement***

**First actions.** DEA2 had very little to do with the process once it was approved on the college level. They said, "The rest of it, if it's fully online, it goes to BU Online, and they do, they

implement." At this point in the process, DEA2 is there to ensure the courses get scheduled as needed.

**Flex.** DEA2's overall approach was, "If it's planned well, it should run smoothly." DEA2 referenced that there might be external factors to respond to (like a global pandemic) or lower than expected enrollment. In the latter, DEA2 would then work with BU Online to address any obstacles. However, there was just an expectation that the plan would unfold as expected, without a need to change or make adjustments. DEA2 pragmatically said, "And that's the way I look at it. If you do the front end where there's going to be minimal backend work because you've got a plan in place. Just responding to the plan."

**Learn.** DEA2 cited much program feedback coming from both formal and informal organizations outside of BU. DEA2 called this their "boots on the ground" in the community. Based on these direct partnerships or involvement with faculty, they seek feedback on how well their program works since their students are embedded in these organizations after graduation. In addition, BU has a department of "institutional effectiveness," which utilizes tools and surveys on an annual basis. This feedback is partly comprised of student survey responses and student progress data. Faculty access the feedback to improve their courses. A third way the DEA2 and the members of the program learn about what is working or not is through some of the faculty piloting their courses first before they are officially offered as part of a fully online degree program. In this way, faculty and developers can make changes to the courses to make them more effective before they are implemented. This is another example of how the real-life experience of the DEAs does not fit the conceptual change model as subcategories like "learn" work across various stages.

**Empower.** Throughout the interview, DEA2 spoke a lot about supporting the faculty doing the development. Sometimes support is presented in a more "here it is, come and get it" way, but for

DEA2, it was more of proactive empowerment of the faculty. For instance, DEA2 explained it this way:

> And I think that's true for every faculty member. Then they need to know that they have support, some support in moving it through. And that is the role of the administration in any unit is to offer support to faculty. That is my role. Whatever faculty needs is to offer them a level of support, guidance, direction, whatever they need.

DEA2 noted that yet another tactic to empower faculty to develop online programming is by giving them the freedom not to have the courses all developed first before implementation. In this way, faculty in this college can teach and develop the course at the same time. DEA2 said regarding the faculty response, "there's a sigh of relief and then a reimagining of, 'oh, I can do that!' as opposed to, 'whoa, I don't think I can do that since there's no way we can have this all developed and ready to go prior to approval from the committee."

***Institute***

**Policies.** One policy DEA2 put into place was a plan to limit students in the fully online version of a face-to-face program. This happened quickly after implementing the program, not in "retrospect" after the program was fully deployed.

**Routines.** DEA2 said one routine was to provide more support for programs with low enrollment that are struggling. This would mean working with the faculty on their program goals and objectives, providing help as needed. Another routine was to have more intentional contact by the program coordinator with BU Online regarding the recruitment of students. This intentional contact is related to the first routine of program support, as student enrollment is tied up with ongoing contact moments with students. DEA2 said, "And I think we all know that our coordinators are best to speak to their programs, whereas somebody who is removed from the

program doesn't know all the nuances of the program or the student situation to best inform them of how to move into the program."

***Challenges***

DEA2 listed one challenge was getting some proposed courses approved in order to launch the whole program. Sometimes, they said, this is an obstacle that they do not have control over. To overcome this challenge, DEA2 cites the power of supportive, open dialog among administration and particularly with their new director. DEA2 also spoke of "escalating" a conversation within their college up the ranks in a positive, productive way. DEA2 explained how a conversation is escalated and their role in the process:

> So sometimes it will be escalated directly to the dean and that formable administration for some kind of level of direction, either through the director or and then the director to the dean. And then, if I'm needed at any one point in time, I'll be there. But otherwise, I'm just added as support.

DEA2 explained that the director favors "hashing it out" and having difficult conversations with faculty to overcome obstacles and meet program objectives. An example given by DEA2 was how a course needed to be part of the program but was not approved for online, slowing the launch of the online program. The difficulty was that this course was in another department. So, a faculty member decided to overcome this obstacle by recreating the course, causing friction. This was a conversation that was "escalated" to resolve the issue. These actions, for DEA2, leads to a highly transparent school. DEA2 said:

> And it's important that we're transparent in what we're doing. And we really, as a school, try to be highly transparent and include all those who have in some kind of stake in the outcome that have feedback and then have conversations about their obstacles to try to come to an

arrangement that's reasonable so it doesn't block the progression of a program if it's not impeding on any other programs.

In terms of challenges in the next five years, DEA2 cited marketing and student recruiting, particularly as it works through BU Online. From DEA2's perspective, many of the students who make first contact for the program do so with a marketing person. DEA2 emphasized passionately that these people did not have the knowledge base to help direct the student properly. DEA2 explained:

> I mean, you're not going to get that from a general marketing person sitting behind a connect desk that just is responding based on a set of questions and answers that they have in front of them. And I think that's really essential to the growth of the program… And really good students that could be really that are a good fit for the program. But they just are falling short because they're not getting the direction or guidance, the level of guidance that they need.

Despite the challenges, DEA2 said some of the most hopeful words about both the challenges and opportunities with online education. They said:

> You know, there is (pause). And we can finish with this, but there is an enormous amount of pressure right now in education to reimagine themselves. It's happening already. And this idea of online learning being so accessible to everybody, there's a lot of pressure on faculty to recreate their programs and offerings online, whether they're suited for it or not… that idea of community innovation in education, we're really trying to create space for our faculty to imagine and recreate in a way that has best outcomes for everybody and best serves the individual students and not mandated expectations of who they should become. But help nurture them in who they already are naturally - innately can become. So, I feel

like that's the future of education. But, you know, when you get bogged down with all these administrative things, rules that you need to do it's really hard to create space for that. And that's what we're trying to do right now and the challenge. So how do you find a balance with everything? And that includes online versus face to face. Where is the balance, and where is the best balance?

**DEA3: The Piloter**

DEA3 is an associate professor in one of the schools at BU who helped start an online master's degree program. They estimated nine months to a year between the first idea and the program launch. DEA3 has been in this position for around 20 years. Throughout the interview, DEA3 described themselves as a "piloter," a "grassroots one-man show," "not a traditional thinker," and a "field of dreams person." DEA3 also admitted, "So I am not a top-down go to my superior and ask for this…I'm going to flesh it out, I'm going to present the solution, not the problem, and say, here's what I'd like to try." This is the approach that they communicated throughout the interview. Accordingly, DEA3 seemed more focused on their own actions in launching the online program rather than others' involvement. Word frequency enumeration is common in content analysis (Grbich, 2012). In a word frequency analysis of the interview, see Table 2, DEA3's most common word was "I" while the other DEAs were "the" or "and." DEA3 made almost three times as many "I" self-references than DEA1, the outlier, and DEA5, the culture builder.

**Table 2**

*"I," "The," and "And" Word Frequency Enumeration for Each DEA*

| Word | DEA1 | DEA2 | DEA3 | DEA4 | DEA5 | DEA6 | DEA7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | 101 | 120 | **296** | 251 | 100 | 183 | 198 |
| The | **313** | **362** | 196 | 435 | **249** | **282** | **364** |
| And | 213 | 312 | 211 | **545** | 155 | 253 | 172 |

DEA3 gave the impression of a "straight shooter" who just tells it like it is. At one point in the interview, they half-apologized to me, "You know, Jason, it's tricky because I know there are right answers to all of these things." I told them, "I don't want the right answers; I want your answers." DEA laughed back, "Believe me, you've got the right person!" Going back to DEA3's very first description of themselves, I have nicknamed them "the piloter."

***Infrastructure***

DEA3's relationship with BU Online was more complicated than some. While they respected what BU Online does, they did not find them very helpful for the work they were trying to accomplish. Within the conversation, DEA3 often paused, trying to be fair but also honest about BU Online's involvement in launching their online program. DEA3 said:

> I didn't really lean on BU Online at all because they were really trying to get faculty who had no idea how to use a computer. And it wasn't helpful to me because I was looking more at the design side and saying, I don't care if you can create a multiple quiz test online; anybody can do that… I kind of spent the bulk of my time thinking about: what else can we do?

While other DEAs lauded the importance of the training BU Online gives for their faculty to teach online, they were somewhat dismissive, saying:

> They have a very well-established center for teaching and learning and whatever our online supports are. And so when I came to BU, it was a requirement… and I kind of was able to be exempt from that since I had already created online programs.

At times, DEA3 was critical that BU Online was not more supportive in pushing the use of new technology forward. For instance, often DEA3 had to create new solutions themselves (a more visually appealing LMS experience or usable templates) or purchase technology themselves (software and computers to push the limits of how they were trying to teach online). Also, while other programs leaned on BU Online for support and development, DEA3 said they mostly developed their courses in-house in what they called "family-style." They described their process in the following way:

> Any type of events or any of those things were done internally and, you know, like I will describe as family-style, it has been a family-style organic process for us compared to most places. That said, though, there's still the university, and they're still supporting everyone. And they supported all my colleagues who needed help. So, BU Online helped everyone who needed help. But in terms of the actual planning and design, that was all internal, and it continued; it pretty much continues to be.

However, DEA3 appreciated how BU gave a course release for anyone developing an online course. They said:

> Obviously, that made it a lot easier to get colleagues to be willing to build an online course. So, it certainly wasn't like, you know, last year when people were just thrown online, people had a semester to build an online course. So, the course release definitely helped. And I

think that anyone who's trying to build something from scratch, I think that it's important to do that.

***Initiate***

**First actions.** DEA3 conceived of starting the online program on their own as part of writing a grant. As part of this grant, they imagined two main aspects: creating student cohorts who would learn and work together in the learning and thinking differently about how they can make online learning more visual and interactive. Like many grants, once it was funded, DEA3 explained, "it's like, 'Okay, great, you guys start next week.' It's like, 'Oh, okay!'"

**Motivation.** DEA3 had two motivations, one professional and one personal. Professionally, they wanted to launch an online program to reduce the costs for their faculty. They said, "There's infinite ways that technology could have been used differently over these last 20 years to reduce costs for everyone and to maximize the time of faculty and the time of students." From the personal side, DEA3 knew online education was coming and did not want to get left behind. They said:

> So as somebody who loves to teach, I want to get in front of that wave. I wanted to still create a system in which faculty were still relevant to the educational process. And we've all seen again over the last 20 years…everybody should have seen that was coming. And right now, everybody should know it's coming even faster and harder. What can a human person bring to the learning experience in an online environment? I felt like I need to get in front of it. I didn't want to become obsolete.

Regarding the institutional motivation for taking programs online, DEA3 said:

> I know you know - you work in higher ed, and I know there's things that I'm supposed to say…No, it's been hard. I think that BU does value [pause]. The best thing about BU as a faculty member, especially from the time I started here, is that they're aggressive. They

> really are aggressive. You know, it's a young, aggressive university. So, they aggressively jumped on to online learning…They value the same as I do this idea of making sure everybody has access to something in our community. They really do. So, I didn't…I never felt like it was a recruiting game. Obviously, we have lots of students. You know what I mean? …So, I'm sure there's a mission statement somewhere. I'm sure they have a lot of written information on all of that.

However, DEA3 did agree that they had a shared mission of commitment to the community and that BU Online started from that mission.

**Decision point.** Any questions about approval or decision points came back to similar stories about DEA3 just doing the work rather than asking for approval or help to do the work. DEA3 said:

> And at the time, I was in my thirties, so trying to convince people who had been in higher ed for 20 or 30 years that this was going to ever be meaningful would have been a complete waste of my energy. So, I never tried. I never even tried. I just said, here's what I'm working on, you guys. If it works, I'll loop you in. And so, by the time when everyone saw how much fun we were having, of course, other people wanted to join it. And I mean, that's a stretch. But you know what I mean?

**Dissenters.** DEA3 did not remember anyone dissenting, which they attribute being because online programs were "already a culture of the university." However, it might have also been because of the way DEA3 went about the work. They said, "I've always been the 'piloter' here, so - nobody dissented. You know, nobody ever said, no, don't try that. Nobody. The only thing I ever got was we don't have that [technology you are requesting]."

**Collaborate.** DEA3, at first, described their approach as more of a lone-ranger type pioneer in regard to online education. They said:

> I'm much more of a grassroots person. I would rather I don't want to waste everybody else's energy. Let me try it. Let me pilot it. Let me have a proof of concept, and then I'll roll it out to you, and you can choose to join us or not.

Though DEA3 was a self-described lone crusader for these online programs, they also had a team of people to work with as the program was implemented into more classes than she could teach. Carrying forward the idea of the "family-style" development, DEA3 met around a dining room table to collaborate with other colleagues over the program. They described:

> I have a dining room table that's pretty famous right now because all of my meetings with anyone was always, "let's go to my house, and let's sit down and sketch this out." So my colleagues who were interested came over, and we literally just started sketching out who was interested in which courses…and what courses do we still need, and who do we have to develop it.

**Envision and Share.** For DEA3, the process of starting the online program was very little about envisioning or sharing the vision and more about executing the program without others impeding them. Their process was more about doing the work rather than pitching the work to others. They describe, "It was more people getting out of the way, which was actually helpful. So, it was more… (pause). It wasn't about people helping. It was about people saying, hey, run with it." DEA3 did not have the energy to try and convince other faculty to their ways but did share the vision directly with the students. They said:

> I'm the *Field of Dreams* person, you know, let me build it, and then they'll come, you know what I mean? It's like…I can't spend all of my energy trying to convince people to do

> something for me professionally. It's easier for me to build it out with like-minded people. And in this case, as you can imagine, yeah, it was students because they were younger and more mentally flexible and more willing to take things and run

**Develop.** As described by DEA3, all development happened "shoulder to shoulder," working together collaboratively with other faculty and students as colleagues. They did not lean on BU Online for development.

### *Implement*

**First actions.** The first two actions DEA3 did after receiving funding from the grant were recruiting students and faculty who were a good fit for teaching online. DEA3 describes the process of recruiting online teachers and implementing the program:

> So, for the implementation, the first thing I had to do was to identify my colleagues who were interested in teaching online because, again, you know, it's a goodness of fit thing. I'm not trying to take people who don't want to teach online and make them teach online. So, I received the funding. I recruited students, and I recruited colleagues who were interested in teaching online.

**Flex and Learn.** DEA3 said it was "all interpersonal. I mean, again, it was so collaborative." Since they were working so closely together and developing shoulder to shoulder around the dining room table, they could flex and adjust as people were getting feedback about how their courses were going.

### *Institute*

**New programs.** DEA3 is presently trying to get a new undergraduate program approved.

### *Challenges*

DEA3's biggest challenge was the university's democratic organization when trying to get new programs approved. They said, "It's not a nimble system." This is in part to do with the interdependence on other programs and what courses are offered. So, if another program "holds" a particular course, it is difficult to get that course approved online unless they also have a will to do that. DEA3 explained:

> Yeah, I ran into obstacles last spring, people not wanting to put their courses online. So, I have to plan so far in advance to launch something in the fall. And they're saying no…That's a barrier for anybody who's interdependent with other program areas who are trying to offer an online program. So that has been my only and largest frustration in teaching online for 20 years. That has been my biggest frustration.

The second biggest challenge was the visual limitations of their computer learning management system. DEA3 does not feel there are enough opportunities to take the visual design further and make it more of a commercial product. Though BU charges the students a tech fee, it is difficult for instructors or faculty to access these funds and use them in the online classroom.

In terms of the biggest challenge in the next five years, DEA3 believes it is the question of how the school can rethink and reposition itself online to make its experts look great. They believe the opportunity is there to distribute the best of what they have to a larger audience, but they suffer from being early adopters of online education. DEA3 explains:

> Their courses still look the same as they did 20 years ago. How's that possible? So, the challenge, I guess, if there is one, is that disruptive process…People are still trying to tread water instead of trying to swim out to sea. I'm just trying to get to the beautiful island…Swimming to that island, Jason!"

**DEA4: The Pioneer**

DEA4 was an assistant professor in their department for six years while starting the first online program. They then went on to start BU Online at the university and help start many other programs. DEA4 had many experiences with BU Online, which I relay mostly in the infrastructure section below. Since so much was relayed as part of BU Online and did not directly answer my research questions, there are less data beyond what is in the infrastructure category. Overall, DEA4 seemed to genuinely love the work they did, both with launching the first online program and BU Online. Throughout the interview, DEA4 spoke with a sense of pride in what they accomplished. They said:

> But it was the most fun I've ever had. And it was a challenge, and it was a challenge to convince some people that it was OK to do and but that they didn't have to do it if they didn't want to do it. I mean, that was part of the deal was. But as success breeds success, I think.

DEA4 also felt like they were a pioneer, taking actions in a way no one else had done before. They said:

> I think the way we did things, that you see, is different from anybody else. And that's OK. It fit our institutional culture that enabled us to grow the things that we did and provide the support that we did. And like I said, it wouldn't have happened at some other institutions. Couldn't have…

Since DEA4 was the first to start an online program at their university, essentially build the infrastructure needed to move forward, and then to go on to start BU Online, I have nicknamed them “the pioneer.” The online culture at BU did not exist when the pioneer was establishing new delivery paths for distance education.

***Infrastructure***

DEA4 developed their first online program at BU before BU Online existed. There was no central support or infrastructure at the time. Shortly after they launched the program, they had a meeting with a high-up university technology administrator. They had to show them "this online course" on their laptop. Through my document research, I found various news stories about this university administrator over the years, citing awards from national associations and accolades regarding his innovation at BU. However, no mention of DEA4's name was to be found.

After the development of this first online program, the provost asked DEA4 to start BU Online. DEA4 asked, "What is that going to be?" The Provost replied, "I don't know. You're going to create it." A core feature of BU Online was to start the online teacher training that so many of the other interview participants referenced. DEA4 described it in this way:

> They came into our training program, which was a semester-long every Friday, from eight to noon or nine to noon, and we ran it the same way we ran this first course, all interactive. Faculty members meeting each other and from all different parts of the university. And they came out of it just raving about what they learned. They thought they were going to come in for the most part and learn how to code pages and learn the technical stuff. And what we really taught them was how to teach and how to apply teaching strategies which they have applied in their face-to-face classes.

On DEA4's recommendation, the Provost made the training mandatory for any faculty who would teach online. Though this might have caused some resistance at first, BU online set up the training in such a way to respect the knowledge of the faculty member, and they made the course title reflective of a graduate course. Rather than calling it "Teaching Online 101," they used a graduate-level number. Then the graduating faculty were called "Web Vets" would return to help in the training sessions later, recognizing the successful and innovative work they were doing online.

DEA4 felt that the BU Online support system was essential to online success at BU. Throughout the interview, DEA4 kept returning to the support available as part of the infrastructure over the years. They said:

> And so these online programs, while they're virtual, if you will, we have to have the physical support here in order to make that something that they feel comfortable embarking on, you don't just to launch a ship and find once you get out there that you only have one tank of gas and it's not enough to get across the ocean, you know, or you're not prepared for a storm that comes up.

***Initiate***

**First actions.** For DEA4, the idea for the online program started with the need and professionals calling them. They said, "Our enrollment was dying, and I was getting phone calls from all over the state from professionals begging me to offer them a course for an independent study." Instead of an independent course, where they would go to the students, DEA4 considered putting the program online to give access across the state.

**Motivation.** DEA4's motivation was both out of a sense of survival for the program and responding to the need. They explained:

> Well, our motivation was pretty self-serving initially that we didn't want to get fired. We didn't want our program closed. We knew there was a need. And so, the motivation was to reach a larger audience than we were able to by driving to our branch campuses.

In terms of motivation on a university level, DEA4 had a conversation with the president of BU near the beginning of the program launch. The president did not set enrollment growth goals, though they certainly understood that more students meant more money. The president said to DEA4, "I want people to be able to come here if they can. I want access."

**Decision Point.** The point of decision for DEA4 came when they took the program to the department chair and college dean to get their blessing. DEA4 said:

> I felt like we needed to put the whole program online in order to save the program and to provide access to these teachers throughout the state that needed it and that. I mean, that was my argument with my then department chair and with our college dean because I needed their blessing before I just launched out there into outer space.

**Dissenters.** Some faculty members resisted the idea of launching an online program, and DEA4 felt like it was due to their attitude about teaching online. They said:

> There were people who didn't think you could teach online. And most of them are people that didn't use the online resources that were available in the mid-90s to their advantage anyway, and they loved the face-to-face class. They loved to be on the stage. And so, they couldn't see themselves not being there. And I said, "Just watch and see."

DEA4 felt these faculty dissenters could be overcome through training. From the very beginning, DEA4 believed this training was the cornerstone to changing the culture at BU.

**Collaborate.** DEA4 believed strongly in having the right people around to help. They often spoke of a "right-hand person" who they constantly worked with, who had instructional technology skills, to launch the program. DEA4 explained:

> So, I had had a lot of grants over the years, and I had this wonderful graduate assistant who was a techy person, an instructional design major, and I sat down with them one day and said, look, I want to put our courses for this first summer online.

DEA4, the graduate assistant, and the university administrator mentioned previously, became what DEA4 called the "three musketeers." They constantly met to strategize and implement BU's first online program.

### *Implement*

**First actions.** The first action for DEA4 when launching the online program focused on faculty support and training. Their two main goals were for successful faculty and successful students. DEA4 believed that the only way faculty could be successful was through support. They describe the dynamic during this stage:

> But what I found was that during this implementation stage is when faculty members really work, they got into our training program… we have the instructional designer working with them side by side as well and meeting during the week. So, they saw the support, and they saw value.

**Learn.** DEA4 collected student data during the first course they launched, focusing on "what the students thought of it and what was successful, what didn't seem to work right or work well as we expected success rates and the like."

### *Institute*

**New programs.** While DEA4 did not create new programs while in the college, they went on to work for many years with BU Online, helping programs launch across the university.

### *Challenges*

One challenge was that DEA4 was having difficulty getting technology innovations to happen, particularly with the school website. There was an IT person who was a gatekeeper for the website and would not allow them to make changes. DEA4 ended up going to the supervisor above the IT person to get the access they needed. "Much to the chagrin of the webmaster," DEA4 said.

Another challenge was getting adequate funds to push the vision for online programs forward. DEA4's main partner in all this, I will call DEA4.1, was always arguing with the university administration for money to expand support for new technologies, instructional design

help, or knocking down office walls to make video studio space. DEA4 tells one story about taking an overnight Eurail ride from a conference with a university administrator. DEA4 says:

> DEA4.1 and the university administrator were sitting in the seat next to me. Going at it the whole time, as DEA4.1 was arguing for increased funding for a new initiative that we wanted to do, and I mean, that was the fight all the time. And it happened wherever the two of them were.

**DEA5: The Culture Builder**

DEA5 is the associate dean of academic affairs in their college. They have been in this position for two years, although at the college for almost nine. DEA5 started a master's program, which took about 18 months from idea to students. Perhaps an unexpected twist is that DEA5 describes themselves as "not a tech person at all." This seems similar to some other interviewees, who found tech people to collaborate with to actualize the vision. DEA5 is quick to mention BU Online and all the technical support the program received. At the same time, they seemed to show a significant amount of initiative building support among their peers for launching the online program, many times physically walking the hallways and going office to office, creating the culture of online. DEA5 seemed confident of the quality and success of the new online program. This confidence seems warranted as a news story on BU's website reported a top-ten national ranking and a top-5 worldwide ranking in their program category. Since DEA5 talked about the changing culture of their college and how they went to considerable lengths to build that culture from faculty to faculty, I have nicknamed them "the culture builder."

***Infrastructure***

**BU Online.** DEA5 mentions BU Online several times throughout the interview and is very complimentary of their help. At one point, they call it the "institutional ecosystem." DEA5 stresses, in this longer quote, just how essential BU Online support was to them:

> So, I'm not saying it was a low-risk agenda, but we knew the support was there… I never knew the people at BU Online before, but you just knew they knew what they were doing, which isn't always the case. So that institutional security, the sort of knowledge that was the foundation for a very, very strong BU. And I've advised other institutions…They understand totally what they need to do, but they don't have the support. So, I can go with a blueprint, "You need to do this, this, this, this…" of course, they haven't got the support behind them. So, I would say, yes, we can take the progress. We've done very well. We've been very innovative in all this, but we've had the support wrapped around us, and lots of other people haven't got that. So, the institutional knowledge, the institutional capital, it was there before my initiation. So, we were operating in a very comfortable, supportive, very generous environment.

It sounded like the entire college embraced BU Online's training and support as DEA5 reported 72 full-time faculty had been trained to teach online.

**Culture.** DEA5 said that a culture of online developed internally in their college but still connected to the work of BU Online. This went beyond the learning, beyond creating the program to a growing sense that people were excited about their online programs. They said:

> Because, you know, Jason, there's a big difference between having one or two courses, going to a program, and a culture of online. Now there's a real culture. And I would say that kicked in about three years ago. People just were talking about it. They were getting excited about it. Everyone's continually learning. And it's funny with some of our colleges at BU,

> they're still anti-online, and the problems they've had with COVID - oh my, we've had nothing. We've had less complaints. We've had less parents on the phone nagging than we would have in a normal year. It's been astounding. We were dreading it. To be honest, this time last year, we were dreading it. It's been as smooth as anything had been. Incredible.

***Initiate***

**First actions.** DEA5 researched the program's potential for about six to eight months to start. In this research, they became convinced that the top need for their student population was flexibility, mostly because of the student work schedules and typically long hours at the particular profession. Talking about interaction with other faculty around this idea, DEA5 said:

> I have the faculty saying, "Oh, if students can't be bothered to come to campus, then they don't deserve to be in a master's." It's like: you guys - all students are working! They're working!...They work at night, you idiot. You know, that's the way it works. So, the demand really came from the students. It was very, very clear they weren't looking for online education. They were looking for flexible schedules. And the easiest way to be flexible is by delivering online.

In a news story found on BU's website, a student from this program agreed and said, "Going back to school for a master's degree was always something that I wanted to do, but I decided to take the leap when BU came out with a flexible program that matched what I was looking for."

**Motivation.** DEA5 stated that their top motivation for launching an online program was to "build the quantity and quality of a program" that they felt should have been much larger and better years ago. Taking the program online was a "vehicle" to increasing enrollment and program quality.

On the student side, the motivation was for flexibility. Their market is working students who can study from home after they get off work. DEA5 said, “it was very much driven by the need for flexibility - that was key.”

**Decision Point.** As soon as DEA5 spoke to the students, they knew launching an online program was the right direction to go, but it took time to convince the dean.

**Dissenters and Share.** It seemed DEA5 had people on every side he would call “resistant” to the idea of launching an online program. First, the industry leaders connected to the program were resistant; however, those employed by those leaders were very supportive. The leaders wondered if the subject matter could be taught online, but the employees wanted the flexibility to learn from home.

Second, the faculty were resistant for similar reasons. DEA5 described, almost mocked, their reactions, “This is not what we do. Oh, my God, this is terrible. How can you teach this program online? This is just shameful.” DEA5 used a fair bit of time working directly with the department chairs and literally “good old-fashioned walk the corridors, speak to people.” DEA5 was convinced that the online program would happen, and like some of the other interviewees, had the attitude of “you can either be on the bus or not,” even though they spent some time convincing others to join. Some of the movement was peer-to-peer as well. DEA5 called the corridors “powerful” and said that “positivity flowed quickly.”

Third, the dean was one of the dissenters who took some time to convince. Eventually, DEA5 convinced the dean by comparing the enrollment to other places, including the smaller geographic area that DEA5 lived previously to BU, and building trust. Now, since the COVID pandemic of 2020 forced all institutions online, their college is one of the leaders at BU. DEA5 said

with a chuckle, “So I just let them think it's their idea. That's fine, as long as you give me what I need. I'm of an age, Jason, I don't need the praises or whatever.”

Another approach to winning over the faculty was moving 90 percent of their summer teaching online. Summer teaching was a very lucrative season for faculty. For students, it was a popular time as well. DEA5 said, “So it was a little bit of, OK, you want summer teacher? That's the way it goes. They saw the dollars, and it was a huge incentive to get on board.” So, between the drive from the students, the tenacity of DEA5, and leveraging summer teaching opportunities, they persisted, won over the industry, faculty, and dean, and launched the full program online. DEA5 boasts that their program now has over 400 students a year.

**Collaborate.** DEA5 did not collaborate with people in the college but partnered closely with the administration and staff of BU Online, first with the teacher training but then especially the technical and instructional design help. Regarding the instructional design help, DEA5 explains:

> I don't know how BU found a resource to do it, but it takes away that apprehension, the nervousness. And I just call them, and they're incredible. And so, BU have put the resources where it was needed, to be honest.

### *Implement*

**First actions.** DEA5 says that the actions to implement the program were gradual. Much had to do with the ongoing support of BU Online as they developed the individual classes. They felt like they had as much support as they needed.

**Learn.** To evaluate how the program was going, DEA5 said they leaned on student surveys called “Student Perceptions of Instruction” (SPIs). They were surprised that from the beginning, “student feedback was positive,” even when compared to their face-to-face classes. Some of this,

they believe, was because best practices like "regular communication" were drilled into them through the BU Online training. They felt they launched without any negatives.

**Empower.** In some ways, the BU Online training empowered the teaching and developing faculty to succeed. The success of some of the faculty then rubbed off on others. DEA5 said, "We all had a lot of training…two or three of my colleagues absolutely became excellent…everybody followed them…just see their personalities and their passion for the whole thing just mushroomed." For DEA5, it gave them confidence, and it was crucial that in this way, "nobody was thrown in the deep end."

### *Institute*

**Policies and Routines.** DEA5 expressed that they do not have all the answers, not ones that have been put officially into policies, but they are changing their approach to the modalities of their online courses. They have seen how synchronous technologies, like Zoom, can work and are considering how to leverage video conferencing in their classes. At the same time, they see how asynchronous video is better for some classes, like data analysis and statistics, so that students can split-screen and replay as needed. They are re-evaluating how they are investing in their faculty and their online courses.

### *Challenges*

The only small challenge DEA5 cites was plagiarism and cheating online, which they call "awkward moments that you have to solve." Even if not everyone in their college is a "true believer," they believe online education works. Students have had a positive response from the beginning, and it has all been without any major challenges.

In the next five years, DEA5 speculates, "Are we going to reach a point where we overdo it?" They wonder how far they can push it before the balance tips, especially after the COVID

epidemic. This creates an element of caution as they move forward to keep watching and listening closely to their students and their industry.

**DEA6: The Accidental Administrator**

DEA6 was an assistant professor in their college for over four years. They started an online master's degree, which took about two years from idea to student start. One thread for DEA6 was the passion for the subject matter. For many of the other DEAs, it seemed they could have started any number of programs. DEA6 focused on one particular sub-discipline inside of a larger, technical discipline. DEA6 was there to teach and do research, not necessarily start an online program. They seemed to be more of an "accidental" leader, describing offhandedly, "it seems like I'm heading the thing for some reason… I kind of call for meetings, and people show up. (haha)." DEA6 was not caught up with formal positions or titles and said, "I get invited to weird meetings that have been invited to before. I guess I have a title now somewhere." DEA6 did not seem to have any formal training for leadership or administration. When I explained the change model, they said, "when you were just mentioning those stages, I was trying to rewind the events, and I'm like, 'I wish I knew that there were stages to do that kind of stuff!' (haha)."

Overall, DEA6 did not think of themselves as a planner and said, "We probably just winged it like nobody's business. (haha)." DEA6's easy-going attitude, for the most part, came across as they were quick to laugh about the whole process. There was one word, however, that took the smile off DEA6's face: Curriculog. The computer-based curriculum management system used to propose and approve any curriculum changes at BU. DEA6 mentioned it three times throughout the interview, each time with disdain: When they were asked about first implementing the program, making changes to the program, and about the biggest challenges to launching the program. DEA6 almost rants:

> I'm supposed to deal with something called 'Curriculog,' which is a monster in itself, which I'm not trained to do. Like, what is that thing? I know how I can create a syllabus. I can create a program description. But…I don't know where to start! Yes, my input is required, obviously. But if you look at it, it's a very, very personal experience. And in my opinion, it should be more streamlined in general.

Curriculog became a symbol of DEA6's frustration with the bureaucracy needed to launch a program and the need to accomplish tasks they were not trained to do and were outside of their "toolbox." On top of Curriculog, they mention marketing among a list of other duties and frustrations. They explain:

> I think the other major thing that I have sort of a bone to pick with is that I ended up, if you think, if you look at the process, I'm supposed to do a lot of things that are not in my toolbox… And I don't think it should be this way: that you have to reach out to the marketing people, and literally you have to write the flier for them. They make it nice, but you do everything! Right? So it's like I'm now doing marketing or doing Curriculog, doing reach out, and doing... And it's fun if you're pursuing that light at the end of the tunnel. But it also is frustrating because you also have other major functions you have to do. You have proposals. Your students are still doing what they're supposed to do. You're not doing what you're supposed to do… I have teaching loads, and I teach in classes and grading and all kinds of stuff. So, it always gets pushed back… I'm not trained in that. I can't write nice things about things like (haha). I'm not designed to do that kind of thing. Right? Or he would send you a flier, and you require your input on it and so on. Right?

DEA6's issued a final line which summed up the frustration with the administrative tasks well, "you feel like you're wearing too many hats, and some of these hats do not fit." As I will explore below,

DEA6 was most interested in teaching and research, not in the many administrative duties that came with the role of starting the online program, and so I nicknamed DEA6 “the accidental administrator.”

### *Infrastructure*

DEA6 said they didn’t ask for anything from a budget or resource standpoint to start the program. They did not mention BU Online at all in response to the open-ended questions, unlike other DEAs. When directly asked if they worked with BU Online, DEA6 briefly answered, “So we work with BU Online on a course-by-course basis, not for the program, so I did some work with them.”

### *Initiate*

**First actions.** DEA6 noticed many students were employed by a particular industry employer, so they contacted the employer to see if there was an appetite for an online degree in coordination with the company. DEA6 explained the first step, which was a conversation with the company:

> ‘You're taking all my students. How [could] we make this more tailored towards what you guys need and also benefit us in terms of downstream supply of students, downstream supply of research projects so that we can collaborate on similar topics of similar interests?’ So that's how it all started. It started by – I reached out to those guys, and we started thinking about, OK, is there a way we can create a master's program that is fitted or tailored towards the industry needs in the area?

The formal relationship did not work out as planned, but they ended up still launching the online degree with students across many industry employers, not just the one they contacted. DEA6

started building the individual courses online in parallel with getting the program developed and approved.

**Motivation.** When asked about motivation, DEA6 quickly responded, “I think it's just because I love to teach these topics - that started the whole idea.” For them, it was not about the program or strategic growth, but because there was a topic that had not been taught before and felt it would work best online. Related, DEA6 also felt their disciplinary topic was not well represented in their department, even though it was a popular topic for students and in the industry. DEA6 shows his commitment to the subject matter, even when it was difficult to push forward. They explained:

> I guess I kept myself motivated to keep moving forward because I wanted it to happen. I invested my time. I invested effort in it, and I wanted it to, you know, to flourish at the end of that road. So that's what I think. That's what kept me going.

**Dissenters.** DEA6 said there was not “a big push back” to the idea of starting this program online. There was, however, a concern that there were enough instructors to teach, partly because of the cross-over with other departments. The administration was concerned because they could not make faculty teach in overload situations if that was needed.

**Collaborate.** No official committee exists in the school or department, but there is a small group of five faculty interested in the program. They met just once or twice before the program began, mostly to give teaching assignments and consider how the classes overlap. Into the implementation stage, the group worked officially in an “on needed” basis. DEA6 said, “The thing is, the committee is not a lot of people, so a couple of phone calls can take care of it.”

**Envision and Share.** DEA6 shared the vision for this program, mostly at the beginning of the process when they were garnering support and before a decision was made to start the program. First, DEA6 provided slides for a presentation to the industry to show the potential for the program.

When the local industry returned interest and provided the number of students they might send to the program, DEA6 proposed the idea to their department, using the enrollment numbers as ammunition. They explained:

> So, I did a couple of presentations in our department meetings about the program, and I think it should be where I think it's useful, what I envision, what the downstream benefits would be in terms of research, supply of students, and a good collaboration between us and [the industry]. And it got voted on, and it got approved by our department, and then it went up the chain.

### *Implement*

**First actions.** DEA6 listed creating the syllabus, getting it approved through Curriculog as part of the implementation stage. They also cited creating a committee to talk about any overlaps in courses during this time. In addition, DEA6 worked with the departmental marketing person and also with the university-wide marketing people. The output was to create fliers and put marketing information on the website regarding the program. DEA6 expressed some frustration with dealing with the marketing process. They said, "And I don't think it should be this way, that you have to reach out to the marketing people and literally you have to write the flier for them. They make it nice, but you do everything! Right?" All these actions happened before the first students started in the program.

**Flex.** In response to asking if everything went as planned, DEA6 replied, "It didn't work out as it was supposed to (haha)." They had tailored the program for a particular company, but the formal relationship never materialized after some back-and-forth interaction. So, the online program launched as just a general program. The positive side is that the program became one that anyone at BU could now join. At the time of the interview, the company continued to be interested.

**Learn.** In terms of formal feedback after the program launched, there was a marketing survey, DEA6 supposes to test the interest, but they did not see any results from it.

### *Institute*

**Policies and Routines.** DEA6 sees the importance of continuing to meet with the informal committee surrounding the program and potentially making it more formalized. As they explained, "because that's how you sustain it. Like, you want to find people who are willing to teach this course or these courses. And the content are not overlapping. And look at your colleagues' input and approval." DEA6 was also serving on both the department and university graduate committees and used these positions to "close the loop" on the program.

### *Challenges*

The biggest challenge for DEA6 in the launching of this online program was working with the BU bureaucracy. As described in the introduction of the DEA6 section, they cited working with the Curriculog system several times. In addition, they listed getting program approvals and serving on various committees when they really wanted to focus on teaching and research. They explained:

> I think that just to keep it going. There's a lot of bureaucracy. Just to keep things going was sometimes a chore. You start with these big dreams and let's make it happen. And then you're faced with all kinds of procedural things.

Later, DEA6 continued:

> The process itself is not streamlined... I think that was the major thing in this whole process, that this idea of dealing with the bureaucracy over the steps and that you have to do a lot of functions that you either don't have the training for or, to be honest, you're not interested in doing at all (haha). I like research. I like teaching. I like to have this program, but we're not interested in doing marketing. I don't want to do it. It's just I don't. Maybe I'm not interested

> in going on the software and figuring it out and copy-pasting stuff from whole catalogs and editing and then getting feedback that you didn't do it right. It's a mess! (haha). I'm not even supposed to do this!

Related, DEA6 told a story of coordinating with another department who were also supplying courses to the online program. DEA6 explained, "And then I get emails from students like "I cannot see that course that should be offered by the [other] department (haha). I was like: Come on, man!" It was frustrating for DEA6 when they worked so diligently on the bureaucratic aspects of program and course approval and then for the other department not to follow through, negatively affecting their program launch. Along with this bureaucracy was the difficult timing of all the tasks, both how long it took but also how the academic year drove deadlines. DEA6 said:

> There were sometimes that I always had this fight, like when things don't go as fast as you hope and you kind of like, "OK, so are we going to wait another year for this damn thing to take place?" (haha) And there's a cyclical nature to academia, as you probably know. If we don't catch the fall, we won't probably do it until next fall or something like this…

To overcome this challenge, DEA6 found that being part of different committees helped to "close the loop" on the program approval. DEA6 was part of the department graduate committee and also the university graduate committee, which gave some say in progressing courses forward and inside understanding of the timelines. Despite DEA6's challenge of bureaucracy took about two years from start to finish, but they were not dissuaded. They pushed through and finally launched the online program. DEA6 said, "I guess I kept myself motivated to keep moving forward because I wanted it to happen. I invested my time, I invested effort in it, and I wanted it, you know, to flourish at the end of that road."

**DEA7: The Central Analyzer**

DEA7 is an associate dean in their college who mainly focused on academic and student affairs for their undergraduate programs. They have been in various dean positions for 12 years and spoke with confidence and authority as someone comfortable in their administrative position. DEA7 has collaborated with BU Online to help start several online programs in their department. They spoke of it taking 6-8 months for a fully online course to "turn on" with the caveat that many programs are already, at least mostly, represented online, and creating the online program is more of the "official aspect." While some other interviewees rarely mentioned BU Online or the main university, the working relationship with BU Online was central to the interview conversation and answers. DEA7 described themselves as a collaborative partner with BU Online and spoke of the main administrator on a first-name basis. DEA7 described, "We have very open communication. There's not a lot of towers here." From DEA7's description of events, they helped start the online programs from more of a central, data-driven vantage point. They were also very connected with the central BU Online office. For these reasons, I have nicknamed DEA7 "the central analyzer."

***Infrastructure***

There are two ways that DEA7 identified infrastructure as part of the development process. First, DEA7 communicates and collaborates with BU Online to identify potential online programs. BU Online uses data to monitor the courses being offered, and on an annual basis, sends DEA7 a report regarding what online courses already running might lead to a fully online degree program. DEA7 then contacts those departments to see if there is a potential for launching the full program online. In this way, BU Online acts as a catalyst for starting the online program idea.

Another aspect of infrastructure that might be considered an "internal infrastructure" is developing the readiness of faculty to teach in an online program. DEA7 explains:

> Well, I think something obviously that's critical is that do you have the faculty with the experience and credentials to actually teach in this format so it can you deliver the courses effectively in an online environment? So, there's that's part of the infrastructure that needs to be present.

***Initiate***

**First actions.** One unique viewpoint by DEA7 is how they experience the university in the role of a catalyst starting online programs. DEA7 explains:

> So, in my role in the college is for the undergraduate programs, is that actually facilitate and work with our BU Online office to identify and onboard online programs. So generally, what has happened is we have existing physically offered programs that meet a certain threshold of courses that can be offered online. And we will, if that threshold is met, basically we will embrace it and adopt that as an online program as well. So, in my college, I have helped onboard. Well, I've helped, I've been in the process of onboarding quite a few programs.

In short, BU Online keeps an eye on the courses being offered, and on an annual basis, sends DEA7 a report regarding what courses that are already provided online might lead to a fully online degree program. DEA7 says, "basically asking me to pursue with the program directly: Is this a candidate for an online program?" They said that all their online programs, except one, started with BU Online identifying an already existing "critical mass" of courses being offered online. In this approach, there may be very little course development that takes place, more acknowledging and advertising for the total package of courses being offered in a degree. This seems to be more of an approach to online undergraduate degrees that already share some core classes. In this way, DEA7

says, “it's kind of assisting existing things to be better organized and to be delivered officially in that way.”

**Motivation.** The main motivation cited was to give more students access to education. DEA7 said:

> I would say it's just giving more students access to, I mean, this is not canned, but to the quality education BU provides. I mean, it's a (pause) it's a way to meet students where they are so that they can achieve their educational goals…it actually gives the whole student population more access to this diverse learning experience.”

DEA7 believed that BU Online authentically lines up with this motivation for student access as well. They said, “So there's definitely the undocumented access mission that is BU. So, it's giving access to students. And I know that that's a motivation.” However, DEA7 may concede to a related motivation for larger enrollment. DEA7 explains:

> I mean, I think blatantly, honestly, it's definitely the student enrollment motivation. I mean, the more, I mean, this will be a virtual butt-in-seat, more butts-in-seat the better, the more tuition-paying students. So, get greater access for that. But I mean, our BU online programs, the student learning office that supports them, know they are such a quality group of individuals. They are, really. So, I think their motivation first, honestly, is really about student success and meeting with students where they are and providing the opportunities.

The third motivation on top of student access and enrollment is the consideration of community or industry needs. DEA7 said, “they'll put the feelers out in the community as well to see if there are other opportunities to provide greater - it's industry support and it's community support. But it's the support the students would need too.”

However, for one of the programs in DEA7's college, the motivation seemed to be more of a curricula choice. The program leaders wanted to offer a new way of delivering the content and interacting with the students and the subject matter. The online program was birthed from a curiosity of how they could deliver learning to students in a new way.

**Collaborate and Decision point.** To launch a program, DEA7 mainly worked with the department chair, a faculty program director, and potentially a student advisor. Their main task was to come to a decision point for the program: will they offer the program fully online? Beyond the decision point with these people, DEA7 then leaves it up to the department chair to work with the rest of the faculty and staff that might be involved in the program's launch. Eventually, faculty would vote on the new online program as part of governance.

**Dissenters.** DEA7 said that it was usually the exception if there are dissenters, but they would be "because someone's opposed to change or opposed to it not being traditional." Alternatively, DEA7 suggested that some dissenters might have justifiable reasons. Though most faculty have learned that the majority of courses can go online, they said:

> We could have dissent because clearly, obviously, the curriculum, the learning outcomes, the delivery of the content isn't feasible for an online course… But to fully move a program online when we know we've got little gaps, those gaps add up, and that becomes a bad student experience over time, so that there should be dissent to that because it's not the right thing to do pedagogically. But, you know we don't have the online, if you will, forced down our throats, so we don't have the dissent in that regard.

In terms of dealing with dissenters, DEA7 encountered faculty members who were just not interested in teaching or developing online. DEA7 had more of a "pass them by" approach and explained:

> The goal is quality instruction. And if I've got a faculty who is offended by teaching online, why in the world would I put that person in a classroom, in an online classroom? They'll do a bad job. I'll keep them in the traditional setting.

**Explore and Envision.** One of the programs in DEA7's college envisioned from the very beginning a different audience and experience for the students. They were doing much more "front initiative thinking," as DEA7 called it, about how students could have a "truly online experience" beyond just offering the same content across the internet.

***Implement***

**First actions.** It was difficult for DEA7 to identify specific actions regarding implementation. There was some mention of planning in accordance with the program goals, but these actions seem a better fit as part of the initiate stage.

**Flex.** DEA7 seems accustomed to the idea of flexing after the program has launched. DEA7 said:

> I think in almost every program that I've turned on, traditional online, whatever, there are always revisions to the program after the first year. So, you just kind of have to pay attention to those signals, whatever they are. Like I said, of course, sequence order, enrollment patterns, et cetera.

**Learn.** DEA7 was looking at student retention levels and considering appropriate responses but did not have any formal feedback loop for faculty or students outside of the larger university "institutional effectiveness" program. They agreed there "absolutely should be."

From a "learn" standpoint, I asked DEA7 if there were any ways that an online program could be stopped or canceled. They said it was possible because of low enrollment, but they had not

stopped a program directly. In speaking of one program with low enrollment, DEA7 said, “It should be canceled. Discussions went differently, and it's still active today.”

### *Institute*

**Policies.** DEA7 said some on-campus “major days” were moved to the online format so that all students could participate. As well, BU Online developed an advising support office just for online students. One additional policy is allowing easier transfer credits from other programs for online students.

### *Challenges*

DEA7 described two main challenges. The first related to the main way DEA7 interacted with the online program starts: Do they have enough courses to deliver the online program? DEA7 seemed very focused on this idea and mentioned, “it really always goes back to…” and “I just, I think really, the courses are going to be the most critical thing.” Second, that they have the right student supports in place. This relates to a previous topic regarding the student attrition rate in some programs. To overcome this attrition issue, DEA7 has met with BU Online to strategize. They plan to put together a faculty advisory group to look at the data and discuss possible causes. Then, they will look at any student survey data and further analyze the concern. Essentially, they will identify the barriers and take a brainstorming approach to identify opportunities to overcome identified barriers.

Regarding the biggest barriers in the next five years, DEA7 had one tangible challenge and one philosophical one. The tangible challenge is regarding student attrition. They said, “Students are starting and not completing. That's always a challenge.” The philosophical problem is where is the university heading in terms of its online versus traditional intents? DEA7 explained:

> We are a traditional institution, BU, we're not an online institution, but there may be a tension that arises if there is more pressure to grow and grow and grow online programs. What's the balance that the institution needs to have with respect to that? Now, that's not my challenge, per se. But I think as an institution, if we're really starting, if we really intend to push and promote online programs, to what degree are we pushing and promoting them? When does it tip the line where we have a more online focus than a traditional institution focus on what does that mean for the mission or the purpose of the institution?... Now, I think it's going to be the bigger mission statement sorts of questions.

## Final Composite Case Report

A standard approach to presenting a single-case study is through a single empirical report that follows a series of questions and answers (Yin, 2018). The nature of my data collection through semi-structured interviews and the use of a priori structured coding makes using the question headers natural for organizing my final case report. Merriam (1998) writes that there is "no standard format for reporting such data" (p. 220). Yin (2018) suggests that one of the most important considerations when sharing the case study findings is identifying the audience. While I know my primary audience is my dissertation committee and my mother, I hope this final report is helpful for other administrators in higher education to understand better the lived experiences of those launching online programs. I believe those reading will benefit from clear headers and strong organization so that they could easily find areas of interest. Ideally, those reading would come to their own conclusions but find some insight, comfort, strategies, and support as they read this case study. I will directly address the research questions in Chapter 6, discussion and conclusions.

Merriam (1998) asserts that there are a variety of ways to present case studies, and the diversity of style in reporting is only increasing. However, a distinction should be made between

fictionalized scenarios, sometimes called case studies, and an empirical case study report based on data. Case study research must be based on an empirical method and present empirical data (Yin, 2018). In constructing this final case report, I summarize the data around the main categories, as I did when presenting the data from each interviewee earlier in this chapter. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest one can retain focus on the research questions by addressing propositions. Below, I start with a brief description of the site so that this case study report could communicate in a stand-alone fashion. When selecting what data to include, I concluded it would be most helpful to describe the most common experience when it was the most common, and then the variety of experiences when a variety was evident. While some might find generalizing to the most common experience helpful, I believe showing the variety of administrator experiences may yield more significant benefits. My original goal for this case report was to provide one common, cohesive DEA experience of successfully launching an online program. However, instead, I found seven very different experiences with some commonalities. The case report attempts to address both the differences and the similarities between the DEAs. One of the strengths of a qualitative case study report over a quantitative conclusion that reports measures of central tendency is the ability to provide descriptions of the variations. My very first interviewee said, "So this will screw up your research a little bit. So, I'm sorry…" and I assured them this is exactly what I wanted from my data: real-life experience. So, the next section provides the real-life DEA experiences in launching online programs.

## A Case Study of Distance Education Administrators Starting Online Programs at a Public University: The Tasks, Processes, and Challenges

Big University (BU) is a public, 4-year doctoral institution located in the southern United States. It has a long history of serving its state through a variety of over 220 degree programs

offered through its 13 colleges. BU was a pioneer in distance education, starting its first online programs over 20 years ago. They now boast over 90 fully online degrees ranging from bachelor to doctoral levels. The colleges, and their faculty and staff who start and run these degrees, are served by the central distance learning department they call "BU Online" (BUO). BUO provides online faculty training, course development, student recruitment, program evaluation, and program marketing. Though BU did not start as an online school, as they developed the capacity of BUO as they grew. BU has grown exponentially in the last decade, making it one of the largest public universities in the country. Though they are a large university, they pride themselves on their high national ranking and long history of bringing economic development and educational opportunity to their state.

**Introducing the Distance Education Administrator**

The key players in the development of online programs, and subsequent growth of the BU, are the distance education administrators (DEAs). None of the DEAs interviewed for this case study had "online," "distance education," or "e-learning" in their job titles. All the DEAs were college-level faculty and staff who held titles from assistant professor to academic administrator to associate dean. The average length at their current position was around 11 years.

I applied nicknames to each DEA, giving handles to understand the type of person they were and the actions they took: DEA1, the outlier; DEA2, the detailer; DEA3, the piloter; DEA4, the pioneer; DEA5, the culture builder; DEA6, the accidental administrator; and DEA7, the central analyzer. Before the research, I would have expected a predominant "type" of person to become apparent from the analysis. Without articulating it previously, I expected all DEAs to be a little more like "the piloter," someone who is a headstrong catalyst for change and pursues the vision for online learning with unapologetic tenacity. Perhaps I was also expecting more of a "culture builder"

since building a culture is essential to moving initiatives forward. Many leadership books pay homage to both the "the piloter" and "culture builder" types, which may have skewed my expectations. In this study, it became clear that no one "type" of person was a DEA starting online programs at BU.

## Infrastructure

Infrastructure relates to how BU offered central technical and instructional support, data analysis, and instructor training to the colleges. Participants were not asked if "infrastructure" should be included in the model; they offered this theme unprompted. DEA5 offered some excellent descriptors of the university infrastructure, calling it an "institutional ecosystem," "institutional knowledge," "institutional capital," and "wrap-around support." In addition to this idea that this category might wrap around the entire process of launching an online program, in conversation, DEA5 suggested that infrastructure might "flip to the front as sort of a catalyst." Overall, this seems to be the case, as every DEA mentioned the university's involvement to some degree in launching their online program, but not to the same degree for each DEA.

### *Institutional References*

As I analyzed the interviews, it seemed the DEAs varied in terms of the strength of connection to the larger university or BU Online. To help measure this connection, I decided to conduct a word frequency analysis to see how many times each DEA mentioned the university, BU, BU Online, and its synonyms. Word frequency enumeration is common in content analysis (Grbich, 2012). Examining references to the institution could be considered a "designations analysis" when other objects or groups are referenced (Krippendorff, 2004). Word frequency is often used to indicate "the importance of, attention to, or emphasis on that symbol, idea, reference, or topic in the messages" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 59).

**Table 3**

*BU or University Word Frequency Counts*

| Interviewee | DEA4 | DEA3 | DEA7 | DEA1 | DEA2 | DEA6 | DEA5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | High | | Medium-High | | Low | | |
| "BU" or "BU Online" mentions | 8 | 15 | **28** | 6 | **13** | 1 | **9** |
| "University" mentions | **38** | **20** | 1 | **21** | 4 | **10** | 0 |
| Total | 46 | 35 | 28 | 27 | 17 | 11 | 9 |
| Percentage of total words spoken | 0.5% | 0.5% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.2% | 0.2% | 0.2% |

Table 3 reflects the interview data word frequencies and may indicate the strength of importance of the central university and BU Online unit in the program development process. When the DEAs answered questions about developing online programs, they may have considered the university or BU Online as more or less involved. I also supply the total count compared to the percentage of total words spoken. Word frequency tables often show both absolute and relative frequencies (Krippendorff, 2004).

I organized the table left to right by the total number of recurrences. However, with any word frequency count, Krippendorff (2004) warns against using single words without sensitivity to context, and so each participant's counts should be compared to interview data. It makes sense that the DEA4 would have the most mentions to the university as they worked in both the department level and in the central unit of the university. It does not, however, provide any indication of DEA4's department's reliance on BU Online, specifically, since it was not in existence when they developed their online program. It is somewhat surprising that DEA3, the piloter, was in the "high" attention area because their relationship with BU Online was somewhat conflicted. While they appreciated the course release for online developers, DEA3 did not personally rely on BU Online

because they “were really trying to get faculty who had no idea how to use a computer.” DEA3 expected more support and technology to push online programs to the next level of “what else can we do?” rather than, what they felt like, were just the basics.

Although more in the center, DEA7, the central analyzer, had the most robust connection to BU Online if you note the separated word counts of 28 BU’s compared to just referencing the university once. This seems to reflect how much they collaborated with BU Online regarding using institutional data to help start online programs. The second medium-high count participant, DEA1, the outlier, was asked directly if the larger university infrastructure communicated values to help start this degree. They responded, “So yes and no if you know what I'm saying. There was a culture around us that supported - nothing direct. I think everyone was just surprised as we were as all we were all read in [the paper] one day.” However, DEA1 did cite two specific ways the larger university (BU Online) supported their online initiative: through incentivized training and ongoing instructional design support, which I will address separately after discussing those in the lower end of the scale.

The three DEAs on the lower end of the scale reflected less attention to BU Online in their interview. DEA2, the detailer, is an example of mentioning BU Online, but not really in a positive light. Although they relied on BU Online for training and instructional support, DEA2 was somewhat at odds with how they handled the marketing and recruiting aspect of the online program. They felt BU Online could be doing more to help student engagement and subsequent retention instead of the “significant” burden being placed on the faculty to do this. Though second to last, DEA6, the accidental administrator, had the least to say about BU Online or the university. They did not offer up any answers that included BU Online, so then when directly asked if they worked with them, DEA6 briefly answered, “So we work with BU Online on a course by course basis, not for the

program, so I did some work with them." DEA5, the culture builder, was very complimentary about BU Online and stressed the importance of their support in the program development process. DEA5 said:

> We've been very innovative in all this, but we've had the support wrapped around us, and lots of other people haven't got that. So, the institutional knowledge, the institutional capital, it was there before my initiation. So, we were operating in a very comfortable, supportive, very generous environment.

Though DEA5 uses fewer references to BU than the other interviewees, what they said stressed a much stronger emphasis on BU's importance in online program development. Using context, I would slightly shift DEA5's placement regarding infrastructure emphasis to between medium-high and high.

***Training and Support***

The two most often cited infrastructure benefits from BU Online were online teacher training and instructional design support. First, at BU, every teaching faculty member is required to take online teacher training with BU Online. The institutional website confirms that this is a minimum of 80 hours of training before teaching online, covering topics like effective online assessments, designing interactive course activities, and managing your online course. Most DEAs cited faculty taking the training as part of the online program development process. DEA5 reported that 72 full-time faculty were trained to teach online in their college alone. They cited the training helping them to get such positive feedback from the students through best practices like "regular communication" drilled into them. This training helped change the dynamic in their college. As DEA5 explained, "We all had a lot of training…two or three of my colleagues absolutely became excellent… everybody followed them…just see their personalities and their passion for the whole

thing just mushroomed." DEA4, the pioneer, explained that developing and providing training was the impetus to establishing BU Online.

The second most mentioned contribution of the central university infrastructure was direct instructional design support. All of the DEAs except for DEA6 and DEA7 mentioned the support of instructional designers as part of online program development. After faculty complete the online teacher training, they have an instructional designer who will assist them moving forward with any needs, as DEA1 said, "until forever. Until one of you, whichever one of you, resigns, fires, retires, whatever moves on…So you'll always have that person as your instructional designer." It is essential to note the "ready state" of the instructional design support infrastructure whenever a college needs them to move forward with a new program. DEA2 explained, "I want to develop this course, and I need some assistance with this. And that's when their instructional designer will step in and assist." DEA5 also explained how important the instructional design support was:

> I don't know how BU found a resource to do it, but it takes away that apprehension, the nervousness. And you just I just call them, and they're incredible. And so BU have put the resources where it was needed, to be honest.

It is difficult to measure the impact of the BU Online training and support on the development of online programs, but it seems significant. Summing up the reason behind the training and support, DEA4, the pioneer, said:

> And so these online programs, while they're virtual, if you will, we have to have the physical support here in order to make that something that they feel comfortable embarking on, you don't just to launch a ship and find once you get out there that you only have one tank of gas and it's not enough to get across the ocean, you know, or you're not prepared for a storm that comes up.

### *Culture*

The concept of "culture" or "university culture" was mentioned in most interviews. Culture is related to more intangible aspects of the organization, often described as "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 269). In a news story on the BU website, one of the BU Online administrators noted how online teaching was "embedded" at the university. This could be another way to identify culture, as a concept or direction embedded in the institution's activity. Over the years, within their own department, DEA5 said a culture of online developed. This went beyond the learning, beyond creating the program to a sense that people were excited about their online programs. They said:

> Because, you know, Jason, there's a big difference between having one or two courses, going to a program, and a culture of online. Now there's a real culture. And I would say that kicked in about three years ago. People just were talking about it. They were getting excited about it. Everyone's continually learning.

DEA3 believed the online culture of the university helped reduced the number of dissenters when they were developing their online program. There was a feeling that this university culture was unique to BU. DEA4 said:

> I think the way we did things, that you see, is different from anybody else. And that's OK. It fit our institutional culture that enabled us to grow the things that we did and provide the support that we did. And like I said, it wouldn't have happened at some other institutions. Couldn't have…

### Initiate

In keeping with the variety of DEA types and the variety of levels in which they connected with the central infrastructure, there were also various ways the online programs started. For most

programs, the seed started with the faculty member, the subject matter expert who was an instructor in the department. DEA3, the piloter, wrote a grant for the new program, and when it was funded, they said, "it's like, 'Okay, great, you guys start next week,' [and I'm] like, 'Oh, okay!'" DEA5 believed their program should be larger and started to research the potential for six to eight months. They found that students wanted flexibility in learning, so DEA5 decided to start an online option. In a news story found on BU's website, a student from this program confirmed this research and said, "Going back to school for a master's degree was always something that I wanted to do, but I decided to take the leap when BU came out with a flexible program that matched what I was looking for."

Similarly, the seed for the online program started with DEA6, who saw an opportunity and need in coordination with a local company, and so they started to talk with that industry as their first action. DEA4 also responded to an industry need, professionals in their field who were losing their opportunity for education. However, these professionals wanted satellite campuses, and so instead, DEA4 came up with the idea of building an online program to meet their needs. DEA2 was more in a supporting role for other faculty who had the idea for a program, but this again confirmed the idea starting with the instructors. For DEA7, the account is slightly different. The idea was driven by data coming from BU Online, considering which programs already had the most number of classes online already and selecting these as the most likely to be made into a fully online program. However, even in this case, the final decision to start the program was passed to the instructors who would be teaching. So, with the faculty is where the seed mostly germinated and grew.

However, for the outlier, DEA1, the seed for the online program came from a very unlikely place. One day a faculty member walked up to DEA1 and said, "Hey, did you hear about this degree?" DEA1 said, "What do you mean, degree?" The faculty member showed DEA1 the local

city paper, listing out the new online degrees that were coming to BU. It sounded like the degree (by the title) should clearly be part of DEA1's school, but they had never heard anything about it. They asked the interim director, and they had not heard of it either. DEA1 asked around, and no one at the school knew anything about starting this new degree. So, they contacted the provost, who was as surprised as they were. DEA1 immediately went on to claim this "unknown" degree. DEA1 said that this program would have never happened without the unique way it came about because they were so busy. "In ways that saved a great deal of time because of that piece, so we didn't expend so much psychological energy in that effort." I wonder how that newspaper story began and if the writer knew they were helping to plant the seed for a new online program.

***Motivation***

While there were several motivations for starting online programs, including faculty topic interests, responding to a need in the community, and increasing the quality of the programs, the main motivation for many DEAs was to increase student enrollment. The most extreme of these cases were faculty members concerned that they would lose their whole programs if they did not act to reach new markets. DEA4 explained, "Well, our motivation was pretty self-serving initially that we didn't want to get fired. We didn't want our program closed." It was not that any of the DEAs were that interested in online learning on their own; rather, it was a vehicle for enrollment growth.

For the larger university, and BU Online specifically, we see both access and enrollment dominate the motivations. Regarding access, DEA3 said, "You know, it's a young, aggressive university. So they aggressively jumped on to online learning…They value same the same as I do this idea of making sure everybody has access to something in our community. They really do." DEA7, however, admits there is an enrollment and money motivation as well. They explain, "I mean, I think blatantly honestly, it's definitely the student enrollment motivation…this will be a

virtual butt-in-seat, more butts-in-seat the better, the more tuition-paying students." It seems that the university access, enrollment, and tuition are all blended together. However, the official word points to access. On the BU news website, an administrator said, "Online education is an innovation that allows us to meet students' life needs at a price point they can afford, with the quality that matches some of the most elite institutions." As well, in a private conversation, BU's president said to DEA4, "I want people to be able to come here if they can. I want access." It seems this idea of access permeates from the highest administrative level in the university down through BU Online to the faculty.

***Decision Point***

For the typical DEA, it seemed that the point of decision to launch the online program and administrative approval, like with the department chair or dean, were indistinguishable. It seems this approval point was closer to immediately before the implementation stage after most of the curricular approval was accomplished. DEA3, the piloter, was an outlier who gave the answer that they were too involved in the work itself to go looking for approval or permission. They said, "So I never tried. I never even tried. I just said, here's what I'm working on, you guys. If it works, I'll loop you in." DEA1 was another outlier who did not know if any approval was necessary as part of the process. In a way, DEA1 had a fast track when their program appeared in the paper, and the upper administration was quickly compliant to let it move forward.

***Resistance***

Some DEAs reframed the question about "dissenters" to those who were "resistant." No programs had significant opposition, but when there was resistance, it came from faculty or, in one case, a dean. There were three main arguments against online programs. First, some faculty were against the overall approach and preferred traditional face-to-face classes. DEA1 summed this up as

general resistance to change and said, “I think part of that is just it's the C word. It's change. People don't like change, and they're scared about it.” DEA mimicked resistant faculty reactions with, “This is not what we do. Oh, my God, this is terrible. How can you teach this program online? This is just shameful.” A second resistant argument was a concern that there would be enough faculty to carry the teaching and administrative load. This could have some legitimacy, especially in the small programs where they may lack adequate instructors. Also, at BU, the faculty can not be forced to teach online, also potentially leading to limited teachers. Online programs can grow quickly, and it is important to have the necessary teaching and administrative staff to manage this growth. A third resistance was over specific classes that faculty believed could not be taught in the online modality because of their subject matter or pedagogical approach. Even one of the DEAs agreed that resistance could be justifiable. They said that sometimes, “that there should be dissent to that because it's not the right thing to do pedagogically.” One difficulty came in an online program launch that relied on another department for a needed class. The other faculty were resistant to put the class online because of the subject matter. In the end, DEA3, the piloter, circumvented the need for the other class and created a new class to fill its place. While this caused some conflict, it solved the immediate problem.

There were three approaches that were common for overcoming the resistance. First, when faculty were trained for online teaching, it tended to overcome “can we do it?” concerns about the online programs and courses. Second, several DEAs did not spend time trying to change the mind of the resistors, except for the case of the dean. Instead, the DEAs took more of an approach of inviting people to get on board or asking them to move out of the way. As DEA5 said, “you can either be on the bus or not.” Similarly, from an administrative standpoint, when it came to a question of what to do with faculty who refused to teach online, DEA7 said:

> The goal is quality instruction. And if I've got a faculty who is offended by teaching online, why in the world would I put that person in a classroom, in an online classroom? They'll do a bad job. I'll keep them in the traditional setting.

A final approach by one DEA was to offer classes in the summer only online. This gave faculty a financial incentive for teaching online since summer was an overload, and it helped them to test the market and expand the faculty experience.

In one situation, when the resistance to the online program came from the dean, this caused an issue for DEA5, the culture builder. DEA5 was convinced after many months of research and reflection that starting an online program was the way to expand their college and increase enrollment. Additionally, DEA5 knew that students wanted a flexible option for their classes. DEA5 worked on convincing the faculty of this by literally going door to door through their offices, talking about the new initiative. The dean took a while to come around. Through persistence, the dean was finally convinced through DEA5 comparing the enrollment to other places, including the smaller geographic area that DEA5 lived previously to BU, and building the dean's trust. The dean finally gave their blessing on the program. Now, since the COVID pandemic of 2020 forced all institutions online, their college is one of the online leaders at BU. DEA5 said with a chuckle, "So I just let them think it's their idea. That's fine, as long as you give me what I need. I'm of an age, Jason, I don't need the praises or whatever."

***Collaborate***

The most common type of collaboration that DEAs developed was a small group of faculty involved in teaching the courses. These groups were not formalized committees but worked together on more of an "add needed" basis to understand how courses overlap and take care of any major issues. In one case, the small group met around the DEA3's kitchen table and talked about the

program in what they called “family style” development. This administrator, the piloter, who referred to themselves as a “grassroots one-man show,” found a group of both colleagues and students with which to fly. In another case, DEA6 seemed almost surprised at leading the effort and said, “it seems like I'm heading the thing for some reason… I kind of call for meetings, and people show up. (haha).” DEA2 more directly helped make these meetings happen in what they called “conversations at multiple levels,” especially to facilitate removing any barriers to the program launch. With two other programs, the DEAs strategically partnered with people on the university level to get the support they needed to start the online program. In all cases, after the idea stage, the DEAs did not initiate the online program alone and often needed collaboration across various levels of the institution.

**Implement**

The DEAs reported that the time for the program to go from the idea stage to enrolling students ranged from 6-8 months to 2 years. On the low end of this scale, DEA7 was mostly combining courses that were already being taught online and grouping them as an online program, making it “official.” DEA1, the outlier, and DEA3, the piloter, were mid-range at 9-12 months from idea to launch. They also either did not need lengthy approval for the program (in the situation of DEA1, who read about it in the paper) or did not think they needed approval (in the situation of DEA3, who said, “So I am not a top-down, go to my superior and ask for this…”). However, these were programs from “scratch” and took time both in curriculum and course development. On the higher end of the scale, DEA2, the detailer, DEA5, the culture builder, and DEA6, the accidental administrator, were all in the range of 18-24 months. These DEAs were also were building the programs from scratch, which included some significant bureaucratic challenges, and all also had connections to outside industry, which may have slowed the initiate phase. All three of these DEAs

with longer timelines spoke of much communication and discussion across various college and university levels versus some other DEAs who seemed to take more of the solo approach.

***Actions***

Three main actions expressed by the DEAs during this stage were course scheduling, faculty instructional support, and marketing. The DEAs were, first, to make sure that courses were scheduled as needed and that students could take their classes to complete their degrees. Part of this, for some, was recruiting and scheduling teachers who wanted to teach online for the courses.

Though involved in oversight, faculty instructional support was mainly handled by BU Online. Those faculty teaching the classes were typically the ones also developing them, working side by side with their assigned instructional designer during the implement stage. DEA4 believed that the only way faculty could be successful was through this strong support from BU Online. DEA4 describes:

> But what I found was that during this implementation stage is when faculty members really work, they got into our training program… we have the instructional designer working with them side by side as well and meeting during the week. So they saw the support, and they saw value.

Marketing should have worked similarly. However, DEA6 mentioned some challenges working directly with BU Online creating advertising fliers for their program. They expressed frustration dealing with the marketing process. DEA6 said, “And I don't think it should be this way, that you have to reach out to the marketing people and literally you have to write the flier for them. They make it nice, but you do everything! Right?” Marketing was just one of many roles that DEA6 did not expect they would need to do. However, the other DEAs did not mention working with marketing, and so perhaps DEA6 had more involvement than needed. It also seemed strange that

DEA6 was creating, what I pictured as paper fliers to advertise an online class. DEA6 admitted not knowing anything about marketing, so perhaps they were just doing what they thought they should do.

***Flex***

Most of the DEAs had some level of flexibility in their plan to change and adapt after implementation. DEA1 epitomized the flexible approach to online program implementation. They said:

> If you've ever been through launching a new degree, it's no matter what the degree is, it's oh, that didn't go as we planned. We had to modify this. You know, we tried something new. Maybe we should try that kind of thing. So there were tweaks along the way to make sure that students can matriculate successfully.

For DEA6, they expected their program would have a formal relationship with a local company, but it didn't turn out that way. So, the program just launched as a general program instead. DEA7 recognized flexing as part of any program launch and said, "There are always revisions to the program after the first year. So, you just kind of have to pay attention to those signals, whatever they are." DEA3 had a very flexible group they were working with on the ongoing development of the program. They said it was "all interpersonal. I mean, again, it was so collaborative." They were building the program as they went, shoulder to shoulder around the dining room table, so they were able to flex and adjust as people were getting feedback about how their courses were going. On the opposite side, DEA2's approach was "If it's planned well, it should run smoothly." There was little thought or experience in flexing, just executing the plan that was put in place. With the exception of DEA2, the other DEAs experienced the need to flex their plans during the implementation stage.

**Institute**

While a few of the programs did not institute any new policies after the online program launch, some did. One common policy was to limit student enrollment in the online classes so that their face-to-face versions of the same class would not become unbalanced. In one case, this was so students who needed certain state requirements of the face-to-face class would not miss out by taking the online class that was designed for those located anywhere. One DEA also cited instituting an equitable load policy for faculty so that their work would be based on student enrollment in their classes. In one other program, a traditional face-to-face event for the students called "Major Days" was redesigned to serve online students online as well.

**Challenges**

The most cited challenge for the DEAs launching online programs was the institutional bureaucracy, particularly as it pertained to the process of getting courses approved. Sometimes courses that were needed to complete an online program were located in other departments. This could be an obstacle over which the DEA does not have control. Since programs are interdependent and the process of approving courses is democratic, as DEA3 said, "It's not a nimble system." DEA3 listed these bureaucratic issues as their "only and largest frustration in teaching online for 20 years." Similarly, DEA6 said:

> the process itself is not streamlined… I think that was the major thing in this whole process, that this idea of dealing with the bureaucracy over the steps and that you have to do a lot of functions that you either don't have the training for or, to be honest, you're not interested in doing at all (haha).

DEA6 also related a story of coordinating with another department that was supplying a course to fulfill their online program. DEA6 explained, "And then I get emails from students like "I cannot

see that course that should be offered by the [other] department (haha). I was like: Come on, man!" It was frustrating for DEA6 when they worked so diligently on the bureaucratic aspects of program and course approval for the other department not to follow through, affecting their program launch.

DEA2 suggested that overcoming the challenge of bureaucracy takes transparent communication and "escalating" conversations as needed. Transparent conversation means having all stakeholders able to give feedback and talk openly about any obstacles and how to overcome them. A conflict arose because of a needed course that another department would not let go online. To resolve the issues, a faculty person decided to recreate the course, which caused conflict. This was a situation where the conversation needed to be "escalated" in order to directly talk about the conflict and resolve it on a higher administrative level.

The second most talked-about challenge for the DEAs was technology limitations. This related to ways their LMS (learning management system software) constricted the DEAs to take the visual design further and make it more of a commercial product. It also relates to how the DEAs wanted to push the technology further than the IT department or BU Online was willing to go.

In one such instance, DEA4 was having difficulty getting technology innovations implemented, particularly through the school website. There was an IT person who was a gatekeeper for the website and would not allow them to make changes. DEA4 ended up going to the supervisor above the IT person to get the access they needed, "Much to the chagrin of the webmaster," they added. In another case, a DEA provided a link in their LMS to a separate website presenting material in a way that they could not do in their LMS. Sometimes overcoming challenges meant circumvention.

Another related challenge listed was having an adequate budget available to innovate. DEA3 complained that though BU charged the students a tech fee, it was difficult to access and use

these funds to push the technology in the online classroom. They felt this money should have been available to instructors quickly and as-needed.

To overcome the budget constraints, DEA3 often provided their own funds through grants that included technology. They gave specific examples of having a strong enough computer to do what they wanted and some software for a specific purpose. Finding the budget money also takes persistence and knowing where to ask. DEA4 tells one story about how they (DEA4 and an assistant who was proficient at obtaining funds) were taking an overnight Eurail ride from a conference with a university administrator. DEA4 says:

> The assistant and the university administrator were sitting in the seat next to me. Going at it the whole time, as the assistant was arguing for increased funding for a new initiative that we wanted to do, and I mean, that was the fight all the time. And it happened wherever the two of them were.

The DEAs had many ideas regarding potential future challenges in the next five years. These challenges could be organized into two categories: More tangible challenges around enrollment and more philosophical challenges regarding online pedagogy and mission. Regarding the tangible challenges, DEA1 imagined continued online competition as a major challenge in the next five years. So many other schools, both non-profit and for-profit, were going online, and it seemed that the trend would continue. DEA1 was concerned that they could not keep up without it being a significant drain on the faculty. Another tangible challenge was marketing through BU Online. As the school and programs scaled, many of the first impressions that students had of the school was through the marketing face, which did not necessarily have the program knowledge base to best serve the students. There is a challenge in continuing to meet the student demand and growth while giving students the best information to make their

decisions. Related, DEA7, was concerned about losing students from the programs. They said, “I think attrition program attrition is always - students are starting and not completing - that's always a challenge.”

The DEAs also listed three more philosophical challenges to online learning over the next five years. First is the challenge of rethinking and updating their online classes, many of which looked the same as they did 20 years ago. One of the downsides to being early adopters of online education is that BU now has more traditional online courses, as they were conceived near the start of online education. It is a challenge to reconsider how to distribute the best of what they have in the faculty and allow the disruptive process to happen in those classes. Faculty have become complacent with what they have. As DEA3 put into a word picture, “People are still trying to tread water instead of trying to swim out to sea. I'm just trying to get to the beautiful island…Swimming to that island, Jason!” Second, on the other end of the concern, for those who are really pushing online education in new ways into new markets, DEA5 wonders, “Are we going to reach a point where we overdo it?” They wonder how far they can push it before the balance tips, especially after the 2020 COVID epidemic. This creates an element of caution as they continue to innovate, watching and listening closely to their students and their industry. The third more philosophical challenge relates to the entire university and perhaps many universities facing unprecedented online growth: Where is the balance between face-to-face and online enrollment, and how does that impact the mission of the university? BU started as a traditional school, serving the local and state population with affordable, high-quality, face-to-face education. If they find their exclusive online enrollment grows to more than half, will their mission shift and grow as well?

**Composite Case Report Summary**

This case study of DEAs followed the processes of starting online programs at BU and their corresponding tasks and challenges. DEAs were faculty and staff working at the college level, who were key actors in starting online programs. DEAs represented various types of people who approached the process in a range of ways. The process generally started before any idea or action occurred by the DEA through the ongoing infrastructure support of BU Online. This support mostly came in the tangible forms of instructor training and instructional design support, but also in the less tangible form of creating a culture of online at BU. Though this support seemed to be a foundation for online program starts, the DEAs had varying levels of dependency on BU Online for the actual work.

The process for DEAs starting online programs generally followed the stages of initiate, implement, and institute. During the initiate stage, how the idea for an online program began was varied: from a grant proposal to a request because of analytics to market or industry demand to a program announcement in a local paper. However, the idea always took root with subject-matter experts who could carry it forward. For DEAs, their main motivation was to increase student enrollment and expand their program. It was during this initiate stage that their greatest challenge of overcoming administrative bureaucracy was faced. Most DEAs were challenged to get approval for the online program and to schedule the required classes, especially if it took coordinating with other departments.

The process continued during the implement stage, where DEAs oversaw faculty working with instructional designers to develop the courses and collaborated in groups to overcome any obstacles. It was also typically during this stage when the DEA needed to flex their plan to see the full implementation of the program. After the program was implemented, some policies and

procedures, like student enrollment caps or offering more online student opportunities, were put in place as part of the institute stage.

In addition to overcoming institutional bureaucracy, other challenges for the DEAs throughout the process included dealing with technology limitations and having an adequate budget for innovations. When looking into the next five years, future challenges for DEAs included more tangible challenges like increased online competition and working with BU Online with marketing. Other noted challenges were more philosophically oriented, like updating older approaches to online classes, concern about overdoing online education, and how increasing online enrollment impacts the mission of the university. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the DEA is balancing all the tasks, challenges, and processes in the context of online innovation with an educational mission at the core. As DEA2 describes it:

> We're really trying to create space for our faculty to imagine and recreate in a way that has best outcomes for everybody and best serves the individual students and not mandated expectations of who they should become. But help nurture them in who they already are naturally - innately can become.

## Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings from the interview data. Grounded by a conceptual model of change presented in Chapter 3, data were collected through seven semi-structured interviews and analyzed. I presented the data per interviewee (DEA1 to DEA7), organized by updated thematic headings. Finally, I closed this chapter with a composite case report, summarizing the interviews together into one narrative.

A discussion of the findings presented in this chapter will continue in Chapter 6 as I revisit the research questions and the literature review, along with a critical comparison to the conceptual

change model from chapter 3. Based on the findings related to the research questions, Chapter 6 will also contain a revised form of the conceptual model. In addition, I will present implications for practice and research and some researcher reflections.

# CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the tasks, processes, and challenges of distance education administrators starting online programs at a public university. This final chapter of the dissertation first restates the research problem and, second, reviews my methodology. Following, I will discuss the findings organized by the research questions, reveal a revised conceptual framework, consider implications for practice and research. Finally, I will conclude by stating some study limitations and my own researcher reflections.

In keeping with my constructivist approach, case study research is an excellent way to present original data and lived experiences without slipping into positivist cause-and-effect conclusions. At the same time, I also lean towards pragmatism and critical theory, and so I believe we can know, to an extent, what works, and ideally, this knowledge would help build a better educational future. My hope is that those reading would come to their own conclusions but find some insight, comfort, strategies, and support for their online educational endeavors as they read my final thoughts in this chapter.

## Study Summary

Distance education (DE) is proliferating in higher education. Almost 3.3 million students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses at Title IV institutions in the fall of 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), with online students represent 16 percent of total enrollment. With this growth in distance education comes change. Not long ago, DE had limited diffusion in universities and was considered a tertiary, experimental "add-on" to education (Burnette, 2015). Now, DE is becoming a transformative power that is striking profound influence and change on all aspects of higher education (Otte & Benke, 2006). Beaudoin (2015) claims this may be the most crucial change impacting education since the printing press. This study explores

the tasks, processes, and challenges for distance education administrators (DEAs) developing online programs at public universities. DEAs implement distance education programs by directing tasks and orchestrating people from every level of higher educational institutions (Otte & Benke, 2006). First and foremost, a DEA's main task is to lead and manage institutional change (Beaudoin, 2016; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Otte & Benke, 2006). The overarching research question for this study is: What are the tasks, processes, and challenges of DEAs starting online programs at public universities? The supporting questions are:

1. What motivates DEAs to launch online programs?
2. How do DEAs overcome their stated challenges?
3. How does the typical DEA process of starting online programs compare to established change frameworks?

Chapter 2 of this study first introduced working definitions for distance education, administrators, managers, and leaders. The literature review outlined three major themes of program and course development, instructor support, and quality assurance. Major tasks and challenges were also explored. In this, I asserted that the main task for distance education administrators is leading change. In addition, this chapter included significant leadership themes related to distance education.

In Chapter 3, a much-needed conceptual model of change was created by critiquing and combining four established change models with a concern to starting online programs. This new conceptual change model was introduced to be used to guide and organize data collection and compare to the final data.

In Chapter 4, I described the methodology for this dissertation, a qualitative, explanatory case study approach (Yin, 2012, 2018). While all case studies are descriptive, an explanatory case

study is useful when "how or why" questions are researched in addition to the "what" of descriptive studies (Yin, 2012, p. 4). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with seven DEAs at a public university in the southern United States. The conceptual change model from Chapter 3 was used as a theoretical position to guide the data collection, the analysis, and the overall case study process.

In Chapter 5, I first explained the method of organization for the interview data, and then salient, coded data were presented, organized by question headings. A new heading was added that was found in the data, and another distinct heading was removed that was not found. Chapter 5 closed with a composite case study report, blending the data into a more concise narrative.

## Discussion of the Findings

This section is organized to answer the research question stated above and throughout this study. I will start with defining the distance education administrator and then proceed with the DEA motivations, tasks, and challenges. I will conclude this section with a discussion of the processes compared to the conceptual change framework, propose a revised framework, and then explore other connections to the extant literature.

### Defining DEAs

Within five minutes of the very first interview, I knew this study would be interesting. After the quick phase of preliminary pleasantries and questions passed, I asked the first question about the online program development process. DEA1 declared, "So this will screw up your research a little bit. So, I'm sorry…" When I first conceptualized the final results of this study, I expected one, more or less, cohesive DEA experience of starting online programs. I expected this to be particularly true at a university well known for a strong, centralized online development team. However, instead, I found seven very different administrators with varying experiences who shared a few

commonalities. One strength of a qualitative case study report is the ability to provide room for variations. Instead of a quantitative approach that might aim for measures of central tendency, this qualitative study can revel in the distinctiveness of each DEA while at the same time addressing similarities.

Each DEA did share this important similarity: All DEAs were successful in launching at least one online program. Each had firsthand knowledge of all stages of the online program start process, from idea to the first student to instituting policies. Of course, this similarity was part of the sample selection process, requesting and filtering for those who claimed this accomplishment. Despite these major commonalities, the DEAs cannot be accurately described singularly. So that DEAs could share their lived experiences freely, I used pseudonyms, DEA1 to DEA7, to replace their real names. As I analyzed their experiences, I gave them each nick-names or labels to help identify them:  DEA1, the outlier; DEA2, the detailer; DEA3, the piloter; DEA4, the pioneer; DEA5, the culture builder; DEA6, the accidental administrator; and DEA7, the central analyzer.

The literature indicated that the distance education administrator (DEA) is tasked with implementing DE programs through the orchestration of people and tasks from every level of the organization (Otte & Benke, 2006). This definition mostly resonated in this study. DEAs worked with people at every level of the organization, from faculty to department chairs to the dean and into the central workings of BU Online. DEA2 called the process “conversations at multiple levels.” While tasks happened in multiple levels of this study, the responsibility for tasks was concentrated with the DEA. Many of the administrative tasks felt overwhelming in number and complexity to some. DEA6, the accidental administrator, expressed, “you feel like you're wearing too many hats, and some of these hats do not fit.” DEA tasks will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

The literature also stated that administrators working with distance education might hold established position titles like dean or vice-president, or newer titles like chief learning officer, vice-provost of online education, or director of distance education (Nworie et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2018). All of the DEAs interviewed had established positions like assistant professor, associate dean, or academic administrator. None of the DEAs had "online" or "distance" education in their title, or seemingly, in their job descriptions. The DEAs were not caught up in formal positions or titles. Like DEA6, the accidental administrator, who said, "I get invited to weird meetings…I guess I have a title now somewhere."

The DEAs were not charged by higher administration to start an online program. No one gave them the task as part of a new "top-down initiative," strategic plan, or redistribution of administrative duties. It seems all were "accidental DEAs," if not accidental administrators. Perhaps it was this sense of self-efficacy that prompted DEA4 to say, "I think the way we did things that you see is different from anybody else." DEAs seemed self-directed to start these online programs, which I will discuss more thoroughly under the heading of motivations later in this section.

Some of the literature around change management identified a change agent as an important actor in an organization (Cummings & Worley, 2008; Rogers, 2003). A change agent is a catalytic person who influences how others adopt an innovation (Rogers, 2003). Change agents must actively build their own power base by developing new coalitions and working with established connections to help them see the need for change (Cummings & Worley, 2008). While some of the DEAs' actions represented a kind of change agency, others did not. The outlier, the piloter, the pioneer, and especially the culture builder, all actively built a power base once they committed to pursuing an online program. The outlier immediately worked up through administrative ranks and then out to faculty. The piloter was more influential at the peer level with other faculty. The pioneer helped

online adoption happen both laterally and vertically. The culture builder actively walked and talked through the office, gaining supporters for the movement to online development. However, both the detailer and the central analyzer had more of a supportive role in contrast to an active catalyzing role. According to the interviewees, BU Online seemed to be less of a change agent and more of one who helped to manage and support change as it happened. These actors in the change process, in consideration of the change literature, could be organized like Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Change Agent or Change Manager?*

| Change Agent | Change Manager |
|---|---|
| The Outlier | The Detailer |
| The Piloter | The Central Analyzer |
| The Pioneer | BU Online |
| The Culture Builder | |

One might consider a change agent as someone who swings quickly in and out of town like the character Harold Hill, played by Robert Preston, in the film *The Music Man* (DaCosta, 1962). However, in this study, each DEA had longer tenures at their jobs than what the literature suggested. The minimum time at their position was four years, the maximum 20, with an average of 11 years. This is unlike one study that suggested the majority of university online learning leaders had held their positions for less than four years (Fredericksen, 2017). This same study, however, stated that 75 percent of those identified as online learning leaders reported directly to the provost, chief academic officer, or another senior academic position. So, it seems the positions in this study were more in the central university rather than a department level. The DEAs in this study were internal

and connected to the subject matter and seemed like stable members in their department, school, or college. These were not career administrators who moved from discipline to discipline, making changes where they went. These DEAs were invested members of their smaller academic unit. Further research should delineate more clearly if DEAs being studied are part of a central or a departmental unit. There is much that was learned about the DEAs in this study, but much more still to research. Next, I will continue the discussion of DEA motivations for starting online programs.

**Motivations**

The literature indicated that the most common response in terms of administration motivation for launching new distance education programs was increased revenue (Alstete, 2014; Betts et al., 2009; Miller, 2014; Nash, 2015). This makes sense, as budget concerns loom in higher education, distance education sometimes is viewed as a strategic choice to boost income. "The capitalization of education" theory (Bowles & Gintis, 1977, 2002; Braverman, 1998) criticizes institutions for their financial motivations and for commodifying courses and degrees. This "retail model" of education (Shugart, 2013) was more recently applied to distance education as well (Chau, 2010; Zacharakis et al., 2014). However, in this study, the DEAs never listed revenue or increasing the budget as a motivation. Perhaps it was because these administrators were serving on the college, department, or school level, not in the central university. Even within their departmental unit, these DEA were not at the top level of a dean, and so perhaps would never see a budget or be concerned about revenue for the next fiscal year.

The only mention of tuition dollars was when talking about the central university by DEA7 when they first mentioned "access" as the motivation for BU Online and then said: "I mean, I think blatantly honestly, it's definitely the student enrollment motivation. I mean…the more butts-in-seat

the better, the more tuition-paying students." Although, DEA7 subsequently backtracked a bit and qualified:

> But, I mean, our BU online programs, the student learning office that supports them, know they are such a quality group of individuals. They are really. So, I think their motivation first, honestly, is really about student success and meeting with students where they are and providing the opportunities.

In addition to the above account, the data from the interviews indicates "access" as the perceived motivation of BU Online and the central university. In the review of the literature, this was the second most common administrative motivation, to increase access for students to attend school and earn a degree (Moloney & Oakley, 2010; Stocker, 2018). At the end of the first decade of computer distance education, around the time that BU started its online programs, some educators believed that it could serve as a more affordable route to education through economies of scale as it spread the cost of development over a large enrollment (Inglis, 1999; Whalen & Wright, 1999). DEA3 said this about BU:

> They value the same as I do this idea of making sure everybody has access to something in our community. They really do. So, I didn't…I never felt like it was a recruiting game. Obviously, we have lots of students. You know what I mean? …So, I'm sure there's a mission statement somewhere. I'm sure they have a lot of written information on all of that.

Access also refers to students enrolling from rural areas or those who are location-bound because of family, finances, or work (Harris & Martin, 2012; Moore et al., 2015). DEA4 had a conversation with the president of BU, who did not admit to enrollment goals. Instead, the president said, "I want people to be able to come here if they can. I want access." In some cases, students may be more bound by time than location and may enroll in what they perceived as a more flexible educational

experience (Layne et al., 2013; Southard et al., 2015; Xu & Xu, 2019). On the BU news website, an administrator summed up the institutional motivation by saying that online education is an innovation that allows them to meet students' life needs at an affordable price. So, at least for this study at this particular public, non-profit university, perhaps access rather than increased revenue is the top motivation on the university level.

The interview data, however, did not generally support either tuition or access as the DEA's own personal, primary motivation for starting online education. While there were several DEA motivations for starting online programs, including faculty topic interests, responding to a need in the community, and increasing the quality of the programs, the main motivation for many DEAs was to increase student enrollment. It may be that enrollment is just the flipside of the coin to tuition, and perhaps both enrollment and tuition are wrapped up in the more palatable (and marketable) package of "access." However, for the DEAs, it did seem to be about student numbers and not dollars or reach. DEA4 explained, "Well, our motivation was pretty self-serving initially that we didn't want to get fired. We didn't want our program closed." It seems somewhat self-serving when stated in that way. In other words, they started online programs so they could remain employed. Similarly, DEA3 felt like they needed to get "in front of the wave" by starting an online program. DEA3 "didn't want to become obsolete."

DEA2 was also concerned that they would lose their program if they did not act to reach new markets. The threat of canceling a program was real. DEA7, the central analyzer, suggested that a program might be stopped if the numbers went too low. When speaking of one such program that was dangerously close, they said, "It should be canceled. Discussions went differently, and it's still active today." I wonder if DEA7 talked with their colleagues in BU Online about not only what programs would start but also which ones would end? DEA5 stated that their top motivation for

launching an online program was to "build the quantity and quality of a program" that they felt should have been larger and better years ago. It was not that the DEAs were that interested in online learning on their own; rather, it was primarily a vehicle for enrollment growth. In good fashion, however, the outlier screwed with my research again. DEA1's stated motivation was because of "disciplinary integrity." This serves as another caution against generalizing DEAs.

## Tasks

The literature suggests that, first and foremost, the DEA's main task is to lead and manage change (Beaudoin, 2016; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Otte & Benke, 2006). Change in higher education institutions is a complex endeavor, consisting of a variety of actions. Management and leadership actions can happen concurrently with the same administrator. Leadership can be described by certain characteristics, but it is not to be confined to leadership trait theory, where characteristics are held uniquely by certain people (Cleveland-Innes, 2010). The focus on traits in special leaders was made popular in the 1800s as what is called "the great man theory" (Carlyle, 1869). This leadership theory continues in popularity just with different packaging, despite the name being anti-feminist and it being widely debunked (Rost, 1991). In some ways, even I, the researcher, expected all DEAs to be more like "the piloter." In some ways, the piloter is a person with exceptional traits, a headstrong leader for change who pursues the vision for online learning with unapologetic tenacity. However, in this study, as the different DEA characteristics were explored, it became clear that no one "type" of leader or manager was a DEA starting online programs at BU. Though each acted uniquely, the experience of DEAs in this study seems to support this overarching task of leading and managing change, especially as the tasks are divided between those tasks associated with management and those with leadership.

### *Management Tasks*

Management is a subset of administration and one way to identify and organize administrative tasks. The literature states that management is the process of coordinating the efficient activities of subordinates (Rost, 1991; Rumble, 1992) to achieve institutional objectives and orderly results (Kotter, 2008; Powar, 2003). Management of online program development contains the activities one might think of as "task-oriented" or "administratively heavy." The concept of "orderly results" relates to the multitude of tasks that must be accomplished systematically and in a timely manner.

One administrative task that occurred multiple times in this study was the management of the curriculum. Curricular administration or leadership was found in the literature as a task (Otte & Benke, 2006). This study and the literature posit that DEAs oversee course development as an important task (McNeal, 2015; Rumble, 1992), however curricular planning helps guide the entire program. In this study, a significant task for the DEA was gaining approval for the curriculum. If courses were going to be taught online, they needed to enter it into the "Curriculog" computerized system, much to the consternation of DEA6, who called it a "monster." Approval typically was needed from departmental authorities, as DEA4 explained needing the "blessing" from the department chair and dean "before I just launched out there into outer space." Other DEAs, like DEA3, the piloter, did not receive expressed approval but just launched it and asked people to either get on board or move out of the way. They said, "I just informally said, hey, here's what I'm doing. Who wants to teach?" There was some confusion and variety around the course and program approval process among DEAs. DEA7 was not sure if approval was needed but assumed it was taken to a faculty vote. DEA1, the outlier, went straight to the provost's office as the first stop for approval.

Timely approval for the curriculum also seemed to add some work and stress for the DEAs. DEA1 mentioned that getting the curriculum through the correct channels needed to be accomplished quickly to meet deadlines on the academic calendar. DEA6 also explained the cyclical nature and danger of the academic calendar when it came to deadlines:

> There were sometimes that I always had this fight, like when things don't go as fast as you hope and you kind of like, "OK, so are we going to wait another year for this damn thing to take place?" (haha) And there's a cyclical nature to academia, as you probably know. If we don't catch the fall, we won't probably do it until next fall or something like this…

It may have been the challenge of bureaucracy that delayed the process of launching an online program, typically taking between 1-2 years. Only DEA7, the central analyzer, said it took as little as 6-8 months. This could be because their process came from BU Online down, rather than the faculty up, cutting through the administrative red tape. Also, DEA7's data-driven process strategically focused on potential programs with a number of courses that were already approved and running online.

Another task found in the literature was providing or managing professional development and ongoing technical support for instructors and faculty (Barnett, 2018; Beaudoin, 2003; Dooley, 2005; Floyd, 2003; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Nodine & Johnstone, 2015; Terosky & Heasley, 2015). Professional development takes a systematic approach to learning gaps (Bergquist & Phillips, 1975), whereas technical support is ongoing help and advice. In my study, this was not much of a task or concern for the DEAs since BU Online handled both training and support of all the faculty. For the most part, the DEAs held this training in high regard, but it was a task they delegated to the larger institution. It could be a difficult undertaking for individual departments to provide the training and support needed to launch online programs on their own. In one study, a survey of

10,700 faculty members from 69 colleges and universities, the faculty rated their institutions below average in online teaching support and incentives (Herman, 2012; Seaman, 2009). In another study, 58 percent of postsecondary online administrators cite faculty instructional design support as lacking in online program development because of insufficient resources (Encoura Eduventures Research, 2019, p. 24). These studies do not reflect what the DEAs were saying about BU Online. Vaill and Testori (2012) suggested a three-part strategy of initial orientation training, mentoring from an experienced online instructor, and ongoing support services. This is exactly how BU Online operated. First, they provided training that included hearing from experienced peers they called "Web Vets," and then afterward, faculty were assigned ongoing instructional design support. DEA5 was the most complementary of BU and spoke of how other institutions did not have this kind of support. DEA5 partially attributed their online success to how "we were operating in a very comfortable, supportive, very generous environment." Though the DEAs at BU had tasks regarding curriculum planning and management, they did not have to manage faculty development and technical support among their management duties.

***Leadership Tasks***

In contrast, another subset of administration is leadership, which relies on influence in followers to achieve a shared vision and real change (Irlbeck & Pucel, 2000; Rost, 1991). Some, but not all, of the DEAs in this study reflected this "influence in followers" relationship. DEA5, the culture builder, reflected this type of leadership. DEA5 not only had to gain the trust of and influence their dean to allow online programs, but they also literally walked the hallways of their offices, talking up the program and gaining support. However, so many of the other DEAs seemed to act more independently and did not reflect this type of leadership among their department. For instance, the piloter had more of the "get on board if you want" attitude as they pushed ahead. They

described it as their "field of dreams" approach of "build it, and they will come." While this approach shows initiative and a vision for innovation, it does not necessarily reflect leadership for real change. Similarly, DEA1, DEA4, and DEA6 seemed to follow their own path toward the goal without necessarily achieving followership from others.

One reason why this leadership influence relationship might not be as apparent is that at BU, the DEAs could potentially achieve the task of launching an online program without any followers needed. Much of the work to approve the online program was more tasks to be managed rather than people to be led. However, there were still people to be influenced to achieve the goal. Often one thinks of subordinates when considering the identity of a "follower." In this study, it was almost always supervisors (deans and chairs) who were being led to the new innovation by the influence of subordinates (the faculty or sub-administrators). This also agrees with the literature that asserts academic leadership power is more distributed and demands more collaboration than it necessarily does in the private sector (Fredericksen, 2017). Some distance education researchers say that managing the shift to online education is more like running a business than leading academe (Beaudoin, 2002; Powar, 2003). In this way, one might picture a typical CEO type at the top of the pyramid, casting vision and directing actions. However, this picture might be more applicable to the project management of tasks and timeline than the way change happens in higher education.

Beaudoin (2015) defined distance education leadership, specifically, as "creating the conditions for innovative change" (p. 43). Perhaps another way to consider the "conditions for innovative change" is to call it a "culture of change." In the case of this study, it was not just a culture for any change, but as DEA5 called it, a "culture of online." They said:

> Because, you know, Jason, there's a big difference between having one or two courses, going to a program, and a culture of online. Now there's a real culture. And I would say that

kicked in about three years ago. People just were talking about it. They were getting excited about it. Everyone's continually learning.

Above, DEA5 described the progression between one or two online courses, to having a program, to having a change in culture. This is one of the reasons why DEA5 was labeled "the culture builder." Culture is related to more intangible aspects of the organization, often described as "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 269). DEA5 created an atmosphere of excitement around online education. For other DEAs, however, they were simply part of what DEA4 called "the institutional culture" that already existed. It was this larger culture that DEA3 believed helped reduced the number of resistant faculty when they were developing their online program. This institutional culture of online was in place long before most of the DEAs were starting their program, and so they participated in a larger university culture that provided the right conditions for new online programs.

**Challenges**

The most cited challenge for the DEAs launching online programs was the institutional bureaucracy, particularly the process of getting online courses approved and scheduled. DEA3 listed these bureaucratic issues as their "only and largest frustration in teaching online for 20 years." This was not a challenge or concern that was present in the literature. One might think that it was, then, a challenge unique to BU, but I know this is a challenge at my own university. Perhaps this is more of a challenge because of the particular roles of these DEAs, who were not in upper administration and so needed to lead more from the middle. Consider DEA7, the central analyzer, who did not have this frustration but acted with BU Online in more of a top-down leadership approach.

To overcome this challenge of bureaucracy, DEA2 suggested focusing on transparent conversations among stakeholders and "escalating" conversations upward to administration (in a

positive way) when needed. It seemed helpful to have an administrator like DEA2, the detailer, who understood how to work with both the faculty and administration and did not fear the details of bureaucracy. DEA6 found that being part of different committees helped to "close the loop" on program approval. DEA6 was part of the department's graduate committee and also the university graduate committee, which gave them some say in progressing courses forward and some inside understanding of the timelines involved. The actions of both DEA2 and DEA6 reflect Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation model presented in the literature regarding organizational change. Rogers (2003) wrote that diffusion is a four-part process in which "(1) an *innovation* (2) is *communicated* through certain *channels* (3) *over time* (4) among the members of a *social system*" (p. 25). 19th-century sociologist Gabriel Tarde's guiding thought was that the more people interact, the more likely a novel invention will diffuse (Kinnunen, 1996). It seems reasonable that the DEAs who successfully diffused the online program did so partly on the strength of their people interactions, on multiple administrative levels, through conversations and committees. Aside from working across administrative levels, the DEAs in this study also used their personnel network to complete the DE task (Chow, 2013; Murgatroyd & Woudstra, 1989). For instance, implementing a new type of online assignment might demand feedback from a colleague who also teaches the class, implementation help from an instructional designer, and troubleshooting from technical support. It seems that implementing online programs at least partially depends on the network of people around the DEA and their communication and collaboration with them.

In the literature, the most highly cited challenge to implementing distance education was resistance from faculty (Beaudoin, 2016; Broskoske & Harvey, 2000; Fredericksen, 2017; Howell et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2011; Markova, 2014; Oblinger et al., 2001; Vasser, 2010). This was not recognized as a major issue in the interview data. When asked about any dissenters or resistant

people, the DEA's responses were modest. More "hemming and hawing," said DEA1. DEA6 did not think there was a "big push back" against the idea. DEA7 called dissenters "the exception." For DEA5, it was not really the faculty as much as the industry leaders in the area (though their employees wanted online education). The few faculty resistors that existed were explained as those who did not think a particular subject or course could be taught online. DEA3 suggested that the lack of resistance was because online programs were "already a culture of the university." So, though the literature represented faculty resistance as a top challenge, this was not evident in the interview data.

There may be a few reasons for the absence of the "faculty resistance" challenge from the literature. First, perhaps BU is really a special university. As DEA4 said, "I think the way we did things that you see is different from anybody else…it wouldn't have happened at some other institutions. Couldn't have…" It may be set apart on account of the exceptional BU Online support, and particularly the teacher training, that both removes or lowers the technology hurdles and disabuses the faculty of bias against online education. This would be supported in a number of studies suggesting that faculty education and support are key when transitioning to online education (Brewer & Brewer, 2015; Mohr & Shelton, 2017). A second possible option is that, though some of this literature is only a few years old at this writing, maybe the research is already outdated. As online education becomes ubiquitous, we are seeing students continue to learn through it, and, generally, faculty are able to teach. Perhaps faculty opinion has changed, and research has not kept up with this change. A final option, which may be why the idea of faculty resistance persists, is that perhaps the bias lies in those who are researching or writing about such topics. Maybe the stories of faculty resistance are old tales and too few and far between to be considered relevant challenges in today's more technology-savvy world. One might consider that when computer-based education

was first being introduced in the 1980s, the public internet did not exist, and home computing power and functionality were minuscule. Technological capabilities and ease of use have changed exponentially, and people grow, adapt, and change as well (though perhaps not as quickly). Faculty may become "easy prey" as stereotypical, hardened Luddites, held up in their ivory tower resisting change. Keep in mind that about half of the interviewees for this study were in faculty positions, and they certainly were not resisting change. These faculty DEAs were helping change happen.

Perhaps the lack of faculty resistance shown in the data is the result of all three of these above ideas in combination: 1. BU is a special school that supports its faculty in a "wrap around" way exceptionally well; 2. Times are changing, especially recently, as most formal education was "forced online" because of the 2020 COVID-19 epidemic. We must continue to keep the research current in this rapidly changing landscape; 3. Faculty are not who they were when online education began decades ago. We must not assume what we know regarding current faculty attitudes and how or if they continue to resist change. Not only are faculty who first encountered distance education almost forty years ago retiring and moving on, but attitudes toward computer-based education are changing too. We must be careful not to hold on to old, potentially outdated, ideas about faculty resistance to technology.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the DEA is balancing all the tasks, challenges, and processes in the context of online innovation with the core of the educational mission. All participants in the process are involved in this balancing act, as pressure builds for colleges to innovate their programs online. DEA2 describes the challenge of finding the balance:

> We're really trying to create space for our faculty to imagine and recreate in a way that has best outcomes for everybody and best serves the individual students and not mandated expectations of who they should become. But help nurture them in who they already are

naturally - innately can become. So, I feel like that's the future of education. But, you know, when you get bogged down with all these administrative things, rules that you need to do, it's really hard to create space for that. And that's what we're trying to do right now and the challenge. So how do you find a balance with everything? And that includes online versus face to face. Where is the balance, and where is the best balance?

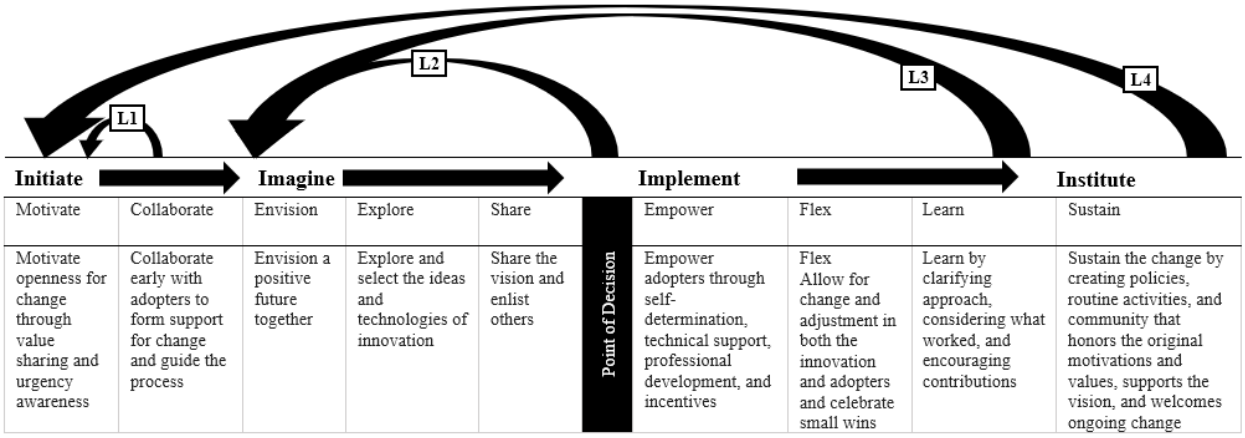
Now that I have discussed defining DEAs and their tasks and challenges, I will continue by discussing DEA processes in relation to the conceptual framework.

**Processes Compared to the Conceptual Change Framework**

In Chapter 3, I proposed a new conceptual change model to use as a theoretical position to guide the study and, as such, provide a priori themes for analysis. This conceptual model was a composite based on four established change models with "loopbacks" added to create a more equitable system. (See Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

*The Distance Education Equitable Change Model from Chapter 3*



### *Chapter 5 Revisions to the Conceptual Framework*

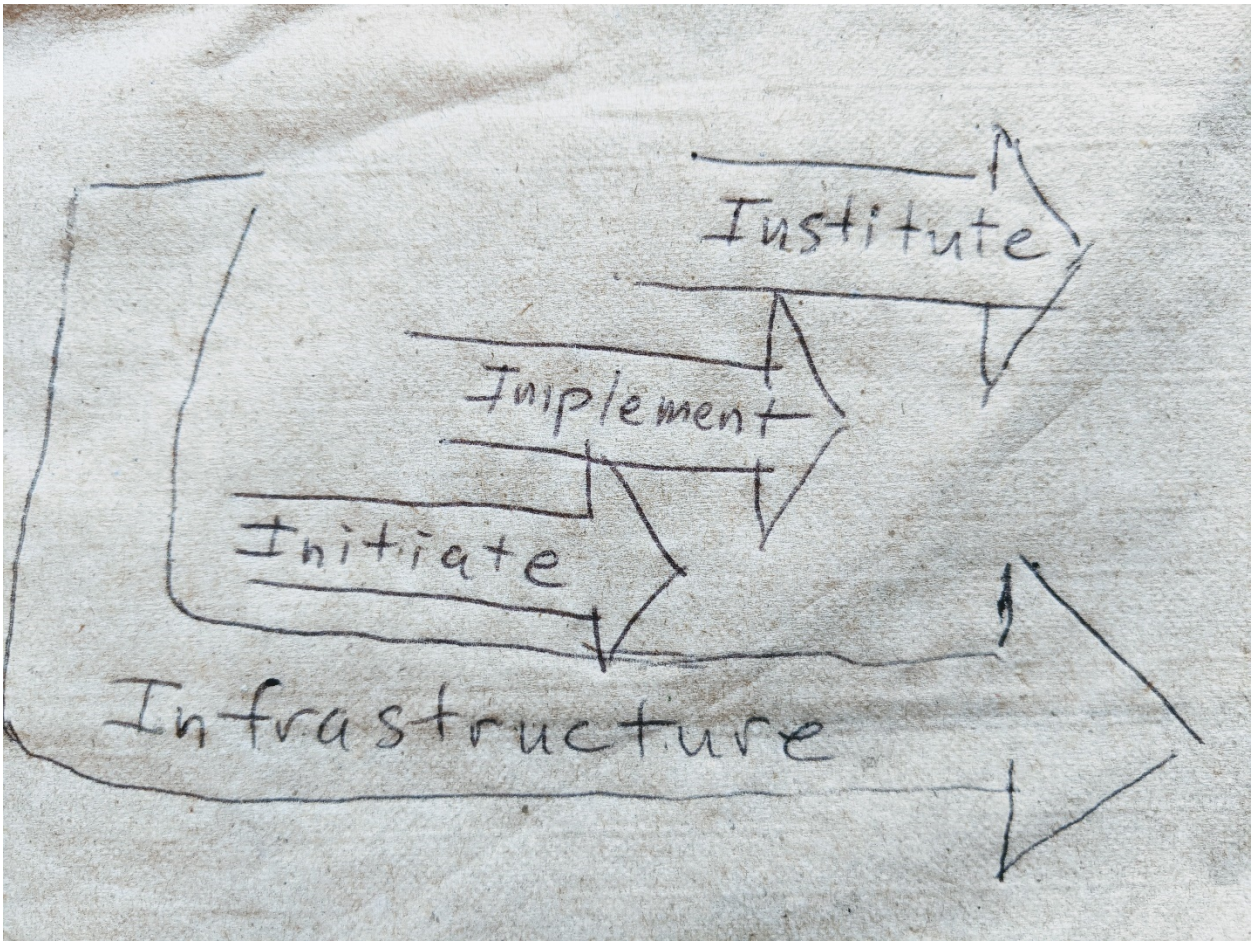
In Chapter 5, after I started coding and analysis, I reconfigured the conceptual framework as a "napkin sketch" based on the data to better reflect and help organize the interview data. In summary, the interviewees provided feedback, both direct and indirect, regarding the fit of this model with the DEA real experiences. Overall, the model seemed logical to the participants. For example, DEA7 said:

> But I think as an onset, I mean, totally logically makes sense for me as a model. I mean, you have to have your idea phase, and then you think about the logistics of it, and then you do it, and then it becomes institutionalized, so it makes sense.

However, through analyzing the data, I found that some adjustments to the model better reflected the DEAs lived experiences starting online programs. In Chapter 5, I made four significant changes based on participant feedback when comparing to my original conceptual change model. First, I blended the initiate and imagine stages. These stages did not seem distinct in the data, and participants seemed particularly confused by the imagine stage, which contained actions that were not as present in their experiences. Second, it seemed that the stages overlapped and were more flexible while still progressing sequentially. DEA3 conceptualized that that layout should be more of a decision tree than a blueprint. Third, a clear point of decision between imagine and implement was not evident. It seemed the decision point could happen before anyone knew the program was happening (DEA1) to after the courses were fully envisioned (DEA2) or somewhere along the way. The fourth and most significant change to the conceptual model was the addition of an "infrastructure" category. This came through a direct critique of the Chapter 3 conceptual model as well as the predominance of infrastructure in the interview data. My "napkin sketch" of the first revision of the conceptual change model is included again below (Figure 9).

**Figure 9**

*A Napkin Sketch of the Potential Change to the DEA Change Conceptual Model*




Infrastructure relates to services and policies that were part of the central university and available to colleges and departments. Examples include how BU offered central online teacher training, technical support, instructional design, data analysis, and marketing. DEA5 offered some excellent descriptors of infrastructure using the phrases "institutional ecosystem," "institutional knowledge," "institutional capital," and what DEA5 called "wrap-around support." Infrastructure may also refer, at times, to the general "culture of online" at BU, as a number of interviews included the "university culture" in their responses.

***Additional Changes to the Conceptual Framework***

As I reflect and consider the full volume of data from this study, there are a few more adjustments to help the conceptual model more accurately reflect the experiences of the DEAs. First, remove the feedback loops. In my conceptual model, I added four curved process arrows (see Figure 8) moving from right to left. These were to represent ways the model could be more equitable and just. Overall these feedback loops were not present in the data, except perhaps, in a small way, during the implementation phase. Even then, the only way a program would be stopped was due to low enrollment, which was not the kind of equity-sensitive feedback I was envisioning. These feedback loops in the conceptual model perhaps represented an idealistic "how I would want things to be" rather than how they are. This does not diminish the need to research and promote how organizational change "should be" and work towards lofty goals of equitable, sustainable, and just leadership.

Second, I would also increase the weight of infrastructure in the conceptual figure and make it feel more "wrap-around," as DEA5 suggested. After reviewing the data, I found that infrastructure was not only present but had a significant influence on the process and the potential for change to occur. I have included training and support as the two most mentioned aspects of infrastructure.

Third, some removal of subcategories in response to the data is also necessary. The first is to remove all the categories under imagine: Envision, explore, and share. Not to suggest these did not occur at all, but they were scarcely present in the data. I included these aspects because, in the literature used to create the composite conceptual model, three out of four of the main change models included visioning as part of the change process (Cummings & Worley, 2008; Kotter, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). These change models would have predicted more actions attributed to sharing the vision in order to accomplish the goal of change. Instead, DEAs had more of a "get on board or get out of the way" attitude when it came to change, and the change still happened. It is

possible that in this context, the need for vision-casting leadership was not needed as much because of faculty autonomy. Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation model more closely aligned to the experience of the DEAs as it did not include visioning, casting the vision, sharing the vision, and so forth. The literature regarding distance education administration also asserted that being goal or vision-oriented should be first in importance (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005; Zhu, 2015). However, these researchers may have assumed a top-down leadership structure and also pictured DEAs acting in more of a centralized university position rather than the role of faculty or sub-administrator in a department. Reflecting on the data, I also decided to remove the "empower" subcategory, as I found little data to support this in the interviews.

Fourth, I would also add three additional subcategories as potential DEA actions, as reflected in the data. First, an "approval" task instead of a point of decision. Most DEAs went through an approval process, and this was, for some, a significant task. Again, a more top-down approach to leadership might not seek approval but, as Rost (1991) calls it, take more of a "do the leaders' wishes" approach (p. 70). Connected with this approval, I will also add a "plan" action step. Curricular planning was present and important for most DEAs. A third subcategory that was not time-consuming, but was present, was developing the courses for online delivery. Development typically happened during the implementation stage and with the support of BU Online instructional design. DEA2 talked about faculty not having to have the courses all developed before approval and implementation. They said, regarding the faculty response, "there's a sigh of relief and then a reimagining of, 'oh, I can do that!' as opposed to, 'whoa, I don't think I can do that since there's no way we can have this all developed and ready to go prior to approval from the committee."

One final shift from my original conceptual model is towards a less sequential nature of the subcategories that remain. I appreciated DEA3's concept of the "decision tree," where people could

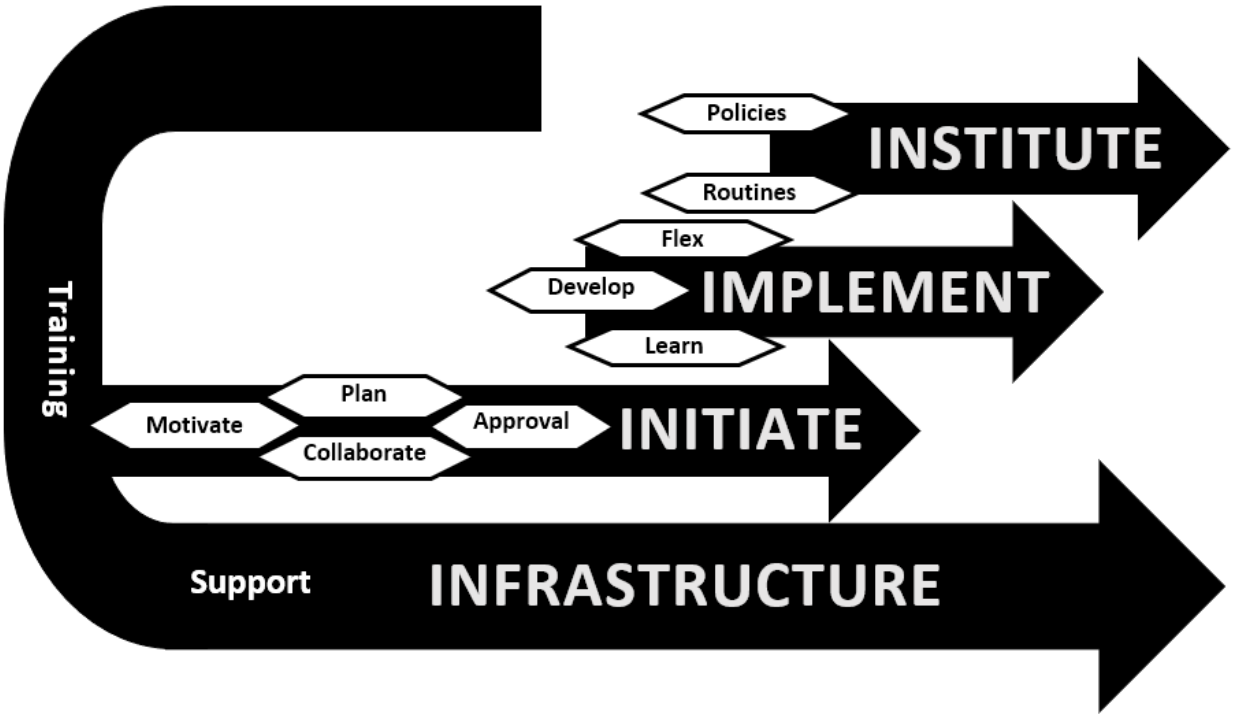
branch in different directions within each category and still get to the next phase. For a better fit, I have conceptualized a circular "action carrousel" as part of each major category where DEAs could choose actions in any order. That being said, I placed motivate first during the initiate stage and "approval" last because this was a common sequence. As well, in the implement stage, I placed develop to the left so that it would overlap with approval, as development happened before and after. This better reflects the interview data and the non-sequential nature inside of each stage while keeping to a general, sequential pattern overall.

### *Revised Conceptual Change Model*

The rest of what remains in the conceptual framework was reflected in the interview data. Motivations for developing the online programs were established, and all DEAs had some collaboration with faculty, peers, students, administration, and BU online. As part of implement, flex and learn were sometimes blended, but both present. Most DEAs could reference some example of a policy or routine that was instituted after the program was launched. Removing the equitable part of the framework and making other adjustments as noted above, the new conceptual framework is titled the Distance Education Change Administration Model (DECAM).

**Figure 10**

*Distance Education Change Administration Model (DECAM)*




***Further Framework Connections to the Extant Literature***

The interview data suggests a stronger influence of institutional infrastructure than originally conceived, not as the catalyst for change but creating an environment more conducive for catalyzing actions to work. It may be that change literature like the McKinsey 7-S Model (Waterman & Peters, 1982), which focuses less on the process and more on developing a positive organizational culture for change, could help expand the understanding of this process. In this study, the culture that came to light as part of the process was the influence of the larger university or BU Online, particularly the online teacher training and instructional design support.

**Overall Connections to Extant Literature**

One major theme found in the literature but not expressed as a task or process by the DEAs was "Quality Assurance," at least not in a formalized way. This theme pertained to administrative

tasks that focused on assessing or increasing quality in distance education or focused on evaluating and improving teaching methods. There were some general "institutional effectiveness" surveys but nothing specific to online programs. Articles evaluating the quality of online courses looked at general quality indicators (Miranda et al., 2017; Sun & Chen, 2016), the quality control process (Merillat & Scheibmeir, 2016), and implementing various evaluation tools like iNacol (Heller, 2018) and Quality Matters (Adair & Shattuck, 2015; Legon, 2015). There are three potential reasons why quality assurance was not found as part of the online program launch process. First, it may be that concern over quality comes later in the process, not during the launch phase. It may be a time and capacity issue for DEAs since, during the early stages of the process, they are already consumed by the time-sensitive administrative and bureaucratic tasks demanding their attention. Second, it may have been assumed that since their instructors had training to teach online, that a formal quality assurance process was not necessary. Third, it may have been part of BU Online's operations without the DEAs knowing it was, or maybe they assumed that was the case. Whatever the reason, the lack of any mention of "Quality Assurance" in the interviews was surprising.

## Implications for Practice and Research

### Practice Implications

Overall, this explanatory case study provided a deeper understanding of the DEA experience, who they are, their tasks, and their challenges. This study also suggests that the experience of DEAs launching online programs at BU reflects the process in the final Distance Education Change Administration Model (Figure 10). However, additional research is needed to explore if BU is a rare case or if this model would resonate in other institutions and contexts. In light of the nature of this research, Yin (2012) suggests that analytical generalization is appropriate for a case study. However, these practice implications below are stated tentatively with an eye to

future research and exploration. Readers should keep in mind the limited scope of this study and that all findings are provisional. Readers should also consider the composite case report in Chapter 5 as another source of drawing personal conclusions regarding their own experiences and contexts with fewer of my own arguments. However, Yin (2004) also writes that case studies should include the researcher's discussion and interpretation, asserting that "Data do not speak for themselves" (p. 219).

One significant finding from this study was the strong positive perception of university infrastructure and its role in creating a culture of online education. The opinion was especially positive regarding the online teacher training and instructional design, at least for those DEAs who needed this support. Though infrastructure was not originally part of my change conceptual framework, the strength of the infrastructure factor could not be ignored. My recommendation is that universities who want to see change and encourage the development of new online programs consider putting investment into "wrap-around" support for faculty innovation. Even small increases in infrastructure could be monitored to see if they have residual payoffs for the institution.

The findings from this study suggest that DEAs are varied in terms of personality type, ways in which online programs are conceived, and approaches to program launch. Only one of the DEAs fit the more "business" leadership persona of someone who casts vision recruiting followers as they go, and yet all DEAs succeeded in their task. My recommendation is to dispose of one-size-fits-all approaches to launching online programs, focus instead on creating a culture of change, and support a variety of strategies and diversity of people for innovation initiatives.

The findings from this study suggest that there is a motivational disconnect between the DEAs on the departmental level and the larger university administration. DEAs seem more concerned about enrollment, while broader administrators appear motivated by student access. It is

possible that enrollment might be a hidden concern of the larger university and "access" a more acceptable answer for the general public. However, DEAs could still increase enrollment by shifting focus to the idea of access, doing it in more of a value-based orientation. In the change literature, early in the change process for organizations is the necessity for sharing value and motivating others (Cummings & Worley, 2008; Kotter, 1995). Kouzes and Posner (2012) clarify that foundational values are essential to guide the change process. Many public universities started as land-grant institutions with a mission to serve and educate the working class in their state (Association of Public and Land-Grant Institutions, 2012), and it is common for other public institutions to communicate that access is central to their mission. Since the idea of access goes deep into the history and mission of education, my recommendation is that DEAs shift their focus to student access allowing it to serve as a powerful motivator for change and concurrently expand online education. Student access can ask the important question, "who is not being served?" even if some tuition happens to follow the answer.

The findings from this study suggest that a significant challenge for DEAs who work on the department or college level was persisting through institutional bureaucracy to get their online courses and programs approved. DEA3 said it was their "only and largest frustration in teaching online for 20 years." While regulatory considerations may exist out of the prevue of the DEA, as well as other restrictions on the university level, if these administrative roadblocks were either removed or managed for the faculty, perhaps innovation for online programs could be increased. This time and effort savings for faculty could be redirected to neglected aspects of development like quality assurance. My recommendation is for departments and universities to consider the systems in place and talk with faculty to determine which processes could be streamlined or removed to help increase innovation.

The findings from this study suggest that the final Distance Education Change Administration Model (see Figure 10) is reflective of DEAs who successfully launched online programs. One should be careful not to generalize the model beyond this context without further research or use this model as a blueprint for other situations. However, my recommendation is that administrators utilize this model as a starting point to consider what model of change might work in their context and to increase purposeful and effectual dialog on all levels of personnel. DEA2's suggestion for overcoming institutional bureaucracy and roadblocks is having "conversations at multiple levels." Perhaps this new change model could be considered a conversation starter with interested faculty and administrators who want to bring new change and growth to their universities. Freire (1970) wrote, "Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (pp. 73-74). While often applied directly in the classroom, perhaps this quote rings true for organizing online programs as well and an encouragement to increase communication for DEA seeking to launch new programs.

**Future Research**

First, more empirical studies that better define DEAs, their roles, and placement in the university are needed. It seemed, even in the sparse literature I could find, DEAs were grouped together no matter where their job role primarily resided. In this study, differences from the literature were apparent in motivations, tasks, types of people, challenges, and length of job tenures. These are significant discrepancies that should be explored and controlled for in the research.

Second, deeper research into the challenge of higher education bureaucracy and leading change could be helpful for DEAs attempting similar innovations. This sample of participants was selected because they were successful in launching online programs at their university. How many other DEAs exist that were not successful and perhaps lacked the support or institutional online

culture to persist? What unique stories would they tell? I think there are ways we could better understand this specific institutional dynamic around launching online programs that may be more common than the literature suggests.

Third, the final conceptual change model could, and should, be tested using a similar method at other universities. In this way, the theoretical propositions I have laid out in this model could be strengthened or disproved in other contexts. Now that I have explored this topic qualitatively, there may also be ways these particular research questions could be used quantitatively in surveys across multiple institutions. Perhaps a mixed methods approach would allow for a wider view of the process that still recognized the individual nature of the DEAs through semi-structured interviews. My hope is that the research using this conceptual change model has only started with this study.

## Limitations

There are at least three limitations of this explanatory case study that should be considered for the reader. First, I bring my own limitations as a student researcher with limited qualitative experience. Though I believe in the value of qualitative inquiry, there are many ways that this dissertation represents some of the first significant qualitative research that I have put into writing. Second, this study was limited in the number of sources of data. Patton (2002) suggests that triangulating with a variety of qualitative data sources increases rigor. While I used some publicly available document data, it was difficult to find relevant material. However, using my theoretical proposition is another type of triangulation that I used throughout this study. The third limitation of this study was the lack of negative cases. A negative case is when the researcher tests a case with an alternative outcome or construct to explore if it also fits the same pattern (Patton, 2002). An example would be using the same methodology with DEAs who had tried but did not successfully

launch an online program. Adding this additional interview data could have shed light on the similarities and differences in how they experienced the process.

## Researcher Reflection

As I started this dissertation process, I selected BU because of its long history and national reputation of advancing quality online education. I expected to find a stronger hand from BU Online starting or catalyzing online programs. Instead, I found a strong infrastructure that created the conditions for online program germination. The idea for starting online programs came in a variety of ways: From industry need and connection, from a sense of survival, a desire to grow enrollment and access, and even from a local newspaper that wrote about a program that did not exist. The variety among a small number of participants surprised me.

The results of this study were also messier than I expected. There were fewer straight lines and clear stages, as my evolving conceptual model reflected. As I, personally, work in higher education helping to start online programs, I think I wanted, in part, a blueprint for change - something more defined to help clean up what often feels like a clumsy, confusing process. I, like most people, would prefer a system that we can fit into a linear path, a set of rules we can follow to get to the end goal. As DEA5, the culture builder, said, "Everyone always wants to, not you, *people* want to - they want to put together a blueprint, and some people can't see it as a blueprint. They see it as a this is how you *have* to do it, you know?" Organizations are messier than this. Leadership is not as easy as following a blueprint. As I continue to work in this ever-changing field, this study has helped me understand better the variety of ways in which online programs can start. It helped me better accept the messiness of successful program launches. It also helped me consider that we can always do better.

Finally, and frankly, I was disappointed to find little in the data of what I would consider equitable change practices or loopbacks in the change process model. I had hoped that as part of a successful program launch, it would model and highlight how success can happen equitably. Instead, I removed any loopbacks in the final change model to better reflect what was happening in real life as described by the interviewees. Transformational leadership seeks to positively change both followers and culture, not just act in a transactional manner. Nevertheless, there were few actions reported by the DEAs that would be considered transformational in nature. However, the absence in the data does not mean we should not teach, research, and pursue these ideals of equity and liberation in distance administration. Perhaps the absence should foster a greater compulsion to pursue a more equitable online launch process and how critical education theories might inform administrative values and actions towards higher e-learning.

## Conclusion

This study explored the real experiences of DEAs who launched online programs in their departments. There is no one type of person or process to launch an online program, even at one university. However, commonalities exist, including the importance of infrastructure training and support, the difficulty of working with bureaucracy, and the importance of communication and collaboration. The strategic importance of DEAs in modern higher education should not be underestimated. The power of distance education to bring change is transforming universities right now. Nworie (2012) names DEAs the "custodians of a new vision of learning" (p. 5). Beaudoin (2003) describes their responsibility as "stewardship." These are both excellent terms, as they correctly imply that this shared vision of a new future is bestowed like a mantle to the DEAs to carry forward the hope of online education into a changing future.

## Appendix A

Advertising Study Announcement

Greetings!

My name is Jason Johnston, and I am a PhD candidate in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky.

I am seeking 8-10 qualified volunteers for my dissertation research study about distance education administrators' tasks, processes, and challenges. The ideal candidate is an online learning or distance education leader at BU. This person does not need an official distance education title, but someone who has provided some administrative oversight in starting online program(s) at your institution, in any discipline or degree level. I am looking for administrators who have been actively involved in managing and leading online programs from the idea to launch stage. If this fits your experience, please read on.

All interested people will be considered as long as they administered or were part of administering at least one online program. If more than ten people respond, I will select the first ten people in the order in which they contacted me. If selected, your participation in the study would consist of one 60-minute Zoom interview at your convenience in the next few weeks. The interview will be recorded for later transcription, but it will be your choice to have the video on or off. Actual names will not be used in the analysis or dissertation. No data, either identifiable or deidentified, will be provided directly to your employer. However, de-identified findings from this study will be published publicly. Your employer or other employees will not know who did or did not participate, and it will not affect your job in any way.

As a thank you, I will send interview participants a $25 Amazon electronic gift certificate within one week after the interview. If you decline to answer questions in the interview, it will have no

effect on receiving the gift certificate. In addition to this benefit, you may experience satisfaction from knowing you have contributed to research that may possibly benefit others in the future.

If interested, or if you have any further questions, please contact me at the e-mail address below, including the online programs you administer(ed). Please pass this announcement to other colleagues that might also be a good fit. I am really interested to learn more about the work at BU, so I appreciate your consideration!

Sincerely,

Jason Johnston

PhD Candidate College of Education, Educational Leadership, University of Kentucky

(Contact information redacted)

## Appendix B

Interview Questions

Opening Script

Thank you for choosing to participate in this interview. Please confirm that you have the cover letter and take this opportunity to look over it once again. Do you have any questions about the cover letter, this study, or the interview process? Do you consent to proceed with the interview?

Part A: Administrative Role Information

1. What is your official title?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. Are you part of a department, a college, or work across the institution?
4. What online program(s) have you been part of starting?

Part B: I'm interested in The Change Process of developing online programs

As part of my studies, using a number of established change models, I have conceptualized the change process of developing online programs as a timeline of four sequential stages:

1. Initiate (making first contact with people and communicating the idea),
2. Imagine (creating a clear vision of how the program will start),
3. Implement (the actual work of starting the program), and
4. Institute (setting in place policies and culture).

The bulk of my questions will walk through these four stages as guides

1. **Initiate** – this is the stage where the idea starts to be communicated, people are first contacted about the idea, where the motivation for change begins

a. Describe for me the very beginning of launching the online program (the infancy/idea stage)
    i. What were the first actions?
    ii. How collaborative was the effort?
b. Was it a push from yourself or another leader?
c. What motivated you to start an online program?
d. What institutional values were shared during the inception period?
e. Was a team or group pulled together to help or guide the process?

2. **Imagine** – This is the stage where ideas are explored, a clear vision of how the program will start is created, and the vision is shared with people who are enlisted in the initiative
    a. What actions were taken during this time?
    b. How did you move the department/college toward the decision to go online? (Or did you? Was there someone else?)
    c. How was the vision communicated?
    d. How were others enlisted in following the vision for starting the program?
    e. Tell me about the point of decision to start the actions of starting the online program – (was it your decision in the end? Or another person's decision? Or a collaborative decision?)
        i. Were there dissenters? How were they handled?
3. **Implement** – this is the stage where the implementation work is started and completed, stakeholders are empowered to do the work, there may be an adjustment to the plan through feedback, and contributions and wins are celebrated.
    a. What were your first actions after the decision was made to go online?

b. Did you change anything during the implementation? (Why? How? Who made this decision? Who called for the change?)
c. Did you celebrate any wins during this time?
d. Did you evaluate what was working and not working during this time? (What did you do about things not working?)
e. Was there a way for participants to give feedback during the implementation stage (faculty, developers, designers, etc.)? Follow: How did they?
f. As you were implementing the plan, was there ever a time that could have potentially been stopped or called off? (How? By whom?)

4. **Institute** – this is the fourth and final stage, where the work is sustained through policies, creating, routine activities, and supporting an ongoing culture of change (and potentially talk of future initiative)
   a. What policies (if any) were put in place after launch?
   b. What routine / scheduled activities were instituted? Why?
   c. Was there any talk of other online programs starting during this time?
5. Challenges
   a. How long was the process from initiate to implement (the idea to the program start)
   b. What was the most pressing challenge during this process? (NOTE: If "challenge" does not work, use "resistance" or "barrier.")
      i. Can you describe it in a few words?
      ii. What people (roles) were involved?
   c. Tell me about one of the interactions that you can think of regarding this challenge (e-mail, phone, or face to face)

i. Do you think that you overcame the challenge?

d. How was it overcome? What factors were involved?

e. How was it not overcome? Why?

i. Can you identify an example of how this challenge slowed or stopped your work as a DEA?

f. The above was considering the past challenges you faced as you developed new programs. What do you think the biggest challenge for continuing your online program will be in the next five years?

6. Wrap-up

a. I would like feedback on my proposed change process:

i. Is there anything missing for me to understand the timeline of events starting this online program?

ii. Are there any actions that you can think of that fit outside of this change process?

Closing

Thank you for your participation! I will send the Amazon certificate in the next week, and you have my deepest thanks for your time.

Jason

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VITA

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## Education

**Apr 2014** **Masters of Education in Educational Technology**
American College of Education, Indianapolis, IN

**May 1998** **Masters of Divinity**
Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY

**May 1993** **Bachelor of Arts in Humanities (Music & English)**
Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, NY

## Educational Work Experience

**2017-Present** **Director of Teaching and Learning**
University of Kentucky, College of Social Work

**2016-2017** **Instructional Designer**
University of Kentucky, College of Social Work

**2012-2016** **Director of Educational Technology**
Oakdale Christian Academy, Jackson, **KY**

**2010-2016** **Teacher**
Oakdale Christian Academy, Jackson, KY

**2004-2010** **Adjunct Professor**
University of Toronto / Sheridan College, Oakville, ON, Canada

**2003-2010** **Adult Education Instructor**
Revolution Audio, Mississauga, ON, Canada

**1998-1999** **Teaching Assistant**
Rosenwald-Dunbar Elementary School, Nicholasville, KY

**1995-1998** **Media Center Instructor**
Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY

## Peer-Reviewed Publications

Johnston, J. P. (in review). Higher E-Learning: Guiding Values for Online Education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration.*

Johnston, J. P. (2021). Freedom for the (distance education) people: Ten practical ways to bring liberatory pedagogy to your online class. *Pedagogicon Conference Proceedings.*

Johnston, J. P. (2020). Creating better definitions of distance education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 23*(2).

Johnston, J. P., Loeffler, D. N., & Jones, B. L. (2018). Podcasts for (inter)active teaching and learning. *The Journal of Faculty Development*, *32*(3), 31-36.

## Conference Presentations

| | |
|---|---|
| **July 2021** (Accepted) | **Paper Presentation**<br>**Distance Learning Administration Conference, Jekyll Island, GA**<br>Accepted proposal titled "Higher E-Learning: Guiding Values for Online Education" |
| **July 2021** (Accepted) | **Round-table Presentation**<br>**Distance Learning Administration Conference, Jekyll Island, GA**<br>Accepted proposal titled "Next Directions for Distance Learning Administration (DLA) Research" |
| **May 2021** | **Paper Presentation**<br>**Pedagogicon 2021, Richmond, KY**<br>White Profs Can Jump: How To Make Your Classroom More Agile and Inclusive" |
| **Nov 2020** | **Paper Presentation**<br>**KY Convergence 2020**<br>Addressing Accessibility in Online Classes: What Must, Should, and Can Be Done? |
| **June 2020** (Accepted, Conference Canceled) | **Paper Presentation**<br>**Distance Learning Administration Conference, Jekyll Island, GA**<br>Creating Better Definitions of Distance Learning |
| **May 2020** | **Paper Presentation**<br>**Pedagogicon 2020, Richmond, KY**<br>Freedom for the (Online) People: 10 Practical Ways to Bring Liberatory Pedagogy to Your Online Class |
| **Nov 2019** | **Session Presentation**<br>**UCEA, New Orleans, LA** |

Online Education Is Still Costly: What Can Higher Education Leaders Do?

**May 2019** **Paper Presentation**
**Pedagogicon 2019, Richmond, KY**
Fostering Classroom Transparency and Improvement in Higher Education through Mid-Semester Student Surveys

**Mar 2019** **Paper Presentation**
**UK Spring Research Conference, Lexington, KY**
Identifying Values Driving Online Program Leaders at Land Grant, Research One Universities

**Oct 2018** **Session Presentation**
**Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Accelerate Conference, Orlando, FL**
Leadership Factors Associated With eLearning Adoption In Higher Education: What Do We Know So Far? Where Should The Research Go From Here?

**May 2018** **Session Presentation**
**Pedagogicon 2018, Richmond, KY**
Using Podcasts for Student Assignments, Multiple Means of Course Content, and Program Development

**Apr 2018** **Session Presentation**
**Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Innovate Conference, Nashville, TN**
Best Practices in the Online Synchronous Video Classroom"

**Apr 2018** **Session Presentation**
**Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Innovate Conference, Nashville, TN**
How Do We Encourage Civil Online Dialogue in a Web of Cyberbullies, Trolls. Bots and Flames?

**Oct 2017** **Session Presentation**
**E-Learn – AACE World Conference on E-Learning, Vancouver, Canada**
Podcasting for Assignments, Content, and Program Development"

**Feb 2017** **Session Presentation**
**Lilly Conference on Evidence-Based Teaching, Anaheim, CA**
The Three Energies of E-Learning – Developing the Community of Inquiry Model Online