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LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN A TIME OF CRISIS: A CASE STUDY OF
LOGISTICS AND FREIGHT, LLC AND COVID-19

by

Thomas Matthew Meador

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Instruction and Curriculum Leadership

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Dedication/Acknowledgement

To my wife, *Christine*, words cannot express gratitude for the motivation and support on the home front... my love...

To my children: *Aubrey, Addison, Ben, Charli, and Dani*; set a bar and hit it.

To my chair and advisor, *Andrew Tawfik*, much appreciation for dealing with my intensity for the last three years. Your expertise and wisdom can never be repaid; all I can say is thank you.

To my committee, *Craig Shepherd* and *Kurt Kraiger*, thank you very much for your advice and guidance. *Nathan*, you are a true friend and colleague, and I am most appreciative you supported me through this. *Paul*, a LinkedIn question turned into a lifetime of hope. All others that helped me directly or indirectly, I am so grateful to be done here and ready for the next journey.

Abstract

The term learning organization (LO) is a widely used conversation piece in corporate cultures, particularly among managing practitioners and leaders in talent management, learning and development, and leadership development. Given the market upheaval due to COVID-19, this work incorporates current literature on a learning organization's dimensions, known as characteristics, through a qualitative approach. This investigation aims to capture the experiences of managing practitioners as the logistics community revisits learning strategies due to the extremely rapid change of COVID-19. This work evaluates Marsick and Watkins dimensions of a learning organization by shifting from a quantitative instrument linking the application of ideas to practice through a qualitative interview schedule regarding the action imperatives, continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, collaborative learning, embedded systems, empowerment, systems connection, and strategic leadership. This work, a qualitative single case study, discusses the design, data collection, analysis, along with limitations of the proposed dimensions of a learning organization among a group of participants currently serving as managing practitioners at LF, LLC headquartered in the Southeastern U.S. Support for a study as this comes extensively from the body of literature in learning organization theory and is the first of its' kind as we look to bridge the scholar-practitioner gap during a time of crisis.

Key terms: Dimensions of a Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ); Learning Organization (LO); Collaboration, Continuous Learning, Dialogue and Inquiry, Embedded Systems, Empowerment, Strategic Leadership, Systems Connectivity, Managing Practitioners

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly grew into a global threat. Businesses were not prepared for the crisis, which resulted in mass closures, modifications to workplaces that remained opened, layoffs, and funding shortages resulting from closures and decreased budgets (Ferguson et al., 2020). The rapid evolution of COVID-19 and the resulting disruption of business practices led to research interest in significant market upheaval consequences and how organizations respond to change. Addressing catastrophic events is nothing new for organizations; detrimental events occur relatively frequently. These events may be internal or external, and they are caused by physical, social, cultural, political, economic, and technological factors (Mann & Islam, 2015; Mann, 2011). Additionally, due to the rapid spread of COVID-19, scientific and academic research that examines the pandemic through the lens of demographics, economics, and medical limitations has significantly increased (Ferguson et al., 2020). However, there has been no research on perceptions of business practices or actions through the lens of managing practitioners' experiences in response to COVID-19 using a learning organization (LO) framework (Ferguson et al., 2020).

In fast-paced, adaptive, and continually changing environments, the ability to continuously learn is the only sustainable element that keeps organizations functioning (Jacobson and Sowa, 2015; Ehnert et al., 2016). Businesses worldwide have been faced with increasingly complex problems and consistently redefine their purpose and scope and revisit their educational strategies in response to emerging events or situations. Evaluating performance and response to change in a crisis (such as COVID-19) through a LO framework can help identify strengths and weaknesses in an organization's ability to shift in response to a market upheaval (Garvin, 1993; Marquardt et al., 2004; Jacobson and Sowa, 2015; Ehnert et al., 2016; Ferguson et al.,

2020). Many organizations have some initiative or project to internally manage the change process (Jensen, 2017; Lawler and Worley, 2006; Lazar & Robu, 2015).

Bertucci (2006) has asserted that organizations that adopt an LO framework are far better prepared to share knowledge across organizational levels and added that education strategies in a crisis require a more rapid response from businesses (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015; Bertucci, 2006, p.178; Ehnert et al., 2019). Bridging an LO framework as an educational strategy for the business community creates an opportunity to link espoused LO characteristics with a readiness to adapt, change, or transform (Sudharatna & Li, 2004). There are practical reasons to study the phenomenon of LO during the COVID-19 pandemic, as current research suggests that the espoused competencies, continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning, embedded systems, systems connectivity, empowerment, and strategic leadership, are intended to be adapted across the individual, group, and organizational levels, making the workforce in short and long-term operations more resilient, rapidly responsive, and capable of innovation (Ehnert et al., 2016; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 1996, 1999, 2003). The COVID-19 crisis has caused significant market upheaval, which in turn has led to the refinement and re-definition of learning strategies and behaviors for many businesses, including a look at collaboration and strategic leadership, two characteristics of a learning organization (PWC, 2020). Thus, evaluating organizational responses in a crisis through an LO framework can integrate competencies that connect a workforce to short-term initiatives while generating a long-term strategy and building an institutional memory (Bertucci, 2006; Ehnert et al., 2016; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013).

Due to COVID-19, scientific and academic research has significantly increased (Ferguson et al., 2020). However, none of the literature thus far has examined the lived

experiences of organizational management practitioners during the pandemic (Ferguson, 2020). Using COVID-19 to understand market upheaval significantly impacts corporate education and the management literature moving forward, despite growth in scholarly interest in learning in business operations in the past 20 years; many studies aim to identify and diagnose problems within organizations (Garvin, 2008; Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020; Pedler et al., 1997). Thus, a significant gap remains in academic and scientific investigations of management's perceptions of learning organizations and who are involved in processes, attributes, or leadership that comprise the LO during a time of crisis (Lenhart et al., 2014; Marsick, 2013; Song et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2004). Since no organization is immune to market upheaval effects, revisiting the term learning organization by validating a learning organization's characteristics through experiences of managing practitioners during COVID-19 is imperative to understanding LO (Bertucci, 2013; Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

Problem Statement

Many organizations, particularly members at the management level, are familiar with the concept of an LO through the adoption of associated disciplines, which include shared vision, systems thinking, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery (Senge, 2006). Disciplines of LO are often evaluated and communicated as organizations grow, expand, meet client demands, become increasingly diverse, and experience technological advancement, all in a time of rapid change. In today's business world, there is an increasing need to innovate and anticipate change through the adoption of characteristics to sustain a continuous learning culture, thus making LO relevant to any organizational development and strategy (Marquardt, Berger, & Loan, 2004; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pedler et al., 1991; Senge, 1990,1996, 2006). Additionally, educational and management researchers have suggested espousing the disciplines

of an LO for managing practitioners to sustain business initiatives in a time of change and create continuous learning opportunities by targeting specific business interests and needs through actions, such as open dialogue and inquiry, collaborative teaming, embedded systems, empowerment of members, connecting internal systems, and strategic leadership (Goh & Richardson, 1997; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 1996; Tabatabaei & Ghorbi, 2014; Yang, Watkins, & Marsick, 2004).

The concept of LO has also been studied through a structural lens that aims to link LO and its characteristics to their place in a system hierarchy, such as at individual, team, group, or organizational levels (Marsick & Watkins, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2003). As time changes, the hierarchical structure of the organization is impacted by internal and external environmental factors (Goh & Richardson, 1997; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013). Some studies have examined who is responsible for defining LO for the organization and integrating the characteristics through continuous initiatives across the organizational hierarchy. Usually, diversity and inclusion, leadership development, learning and development, and talent management groups in the organization have taken the lead on sustaining LO (Garvin, 1993; Goh & Richardson, 1997; Marquardt, 2004; Marquardt, Berger, & Loan, 2004; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pedler et al., 1991; Senge, 1990, 2006). Despite the foundational work completed thus far to understand LO as a phenomenon, no studies in the literature currently draw on the lived experiences of managing practitioners to provide insight on what an LO is, which characteristics work well, where the characteristics fit into an organization, and which part of the organization should sustain the LO during a crisis.

Thus far, the literature has indicated that learning organizations are being built, developed, and sustained through the leadership's acknowledgment of their existence, support of

characteristics and actions incorporated at different organizational levels, and organizational strategies provided by the organization's leadership (Garvin, 1993; Marquardt, 2004; Senge 1990, 2006). Although research on LO has increased in the past 25 years, the field still lacks a widely agreed-upon and accepted definition of an LO, its components, its structure, and who is responsible for LO sustainability within an organization (Garvin, 1993; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013). This problem alone is cause for further investigation, but at the time of this work, there is a need to understand how businesses shift their learning strategies to survive an extreme market upheaval such as COVID-19. Before the pandemic, few studies described the lived experiences of managing practitioners in organizations to address the abovementioned gaps in the literature on LO. This work attempts to address that gap by examining LO through managing practitioners' lived experiences in a market upheaval (Ferguson et al., 2020; Garvin, 1993; Marquardt, 2011). The aims are to identify what an LO is, its characteristics, where it strategically fits into an organization, and who should sustain an LO within the organization among those responsible for educational or learning strategies.

Purpose Statement

The objective of this qualitative single case study is to validate learning organization characteristics through the experiences of managing practitioners at one Fortune 500 company, Logistics and Freight, LLC, headquartered in the southeast U.S., during a global market upheaval (COVID-19). This case study aims to draw out managing practitioner experiences of learning organization attributes as they have managed their business units for LF during the COVID-19 pandemic. The significance of capturing the experiences of current managing practitioners during a market upheaval is to (1) add significant value to the scholar-practitioner base in education and management, thus filling much-needed gaps in the literature, (2) create a path for

collecting the perceptions of practitioners on systems-level thinking and LO characteristics during COVID-19, and (3) identify who has a significant impact on learning strategies in organizations in a time of crisis.

Theoretical Framework

This work is firmly rooted in learning organization theory, mainly Senge's five disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking (Senge, 1990, 2006). Senge, the author of *The Fifth Discipline* and creator of the learning organization concept, defined LO as the use of learning as a consistent transformation for survival in a rapidly changing world (Senge, 1990, 1999, 2006; Yadav & Agarwal, 2016). Additionally, LO has received considerable attention and interpretation, leading to multiple definitions of the term across a spectrum of academia and industry (Pedler & Burgoyne, 1997; Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 1997, 2003; Ortenwald, 2013; Stothard et al., 2013; Watkins, 2014, Yang, 2003). Ortenwald identified 300 versions of the definition for LO and found it difficult to compare them with any validity (Ortenwald, 2013). This work turned to research by Halmaghi (2012), who wrote the following:

...expresses the organization requires knowledge and innovates quickly enough to survive and develop into a rapidly changing environment. Learning organizations create a culture that encourages and support employees' lifelong learning, critical thinking, and risk-taking from new ideas; allows employee mistakes and appreciates their contributions; learn from experience and experimentation; and spreads and disseminates new knowledge throughout the organization so that they are integrated into everyday activities. (p.100)

Additional support was drawn from theorists who defined LO using a single, conclusive definition; however, they still varied at the conceptual level. As stated by Halmaghi (2012), the term "learning organization" includes, at minimum, the idea of "organization, collective aspirations, personal and professional skills, lifelong learning and together, and achievement of objectives, and development of the organization" (p.100). Similar to Senge's concept of LO, disciplines are examined through a leadership lens; the researcher's rationale was to capture the perceptions of managing practitioners to understand the action imperatives of Marsick and Watkins. Established in 2003, LO dimensions enable documentation of current practitioners' voices, drawing out detail and usage in a time of crisis, thereby validating if the characteristics fit for academic discourse in a COVID-19 world.

Marsick and Watkins (2003) defined seven action imperatives: continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning, systems connectivity, embedded systems, empowerment, and strategic leadership spanning the individual, team or function, and organization. Initially, these dimensions included individual, organizational, and societal levels but later shifted to individual, group, and organization. The organization also encompasses society (Marsick & Watkins 1996, 1999, 2003; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013). As a result, action imperatives used as part of an organization's learning strategy in response to a crisis can be evaluated based on (1) the acquisition, generation, and transfer of knowledge, and (2) the ability to change behavior based on lessons learned, leveraging new knowledge obtained as a result of its response to the crisis (Garvin, 1993; Song et al., 2009).

Dimensions or characteristics of a learning organization

Marsick and Watkins (1993, 1996) framed action imperatives at the individual, team or function, organizational levels, then described them as dimensions of the learning organization in

the process of continuous learning in large organizations; this was an attempt to quantify or establish a form of measurement for LO, creating a platform for practical conversation versus one of the ideals (Hallium, Hiskens, & Ong, 2014; Marsick & Watkins, 1993, 1996). This leadership element is considered to be managing practitioners who have not had their voices collected to date or used an instrument of measurement to determine LO capability. The action imperatives identified as continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, collaborative learning, embedded systems, systems connectivity, empowerment, and strategic leadership are required to achieve consistent and ongoing innovation and sustainability across every level of an organization and are now applicable to getting an organization through a crisis (Ahonen & Kaseorg, 2008; Holton, 2005; Tsang, 1997; Yang et al., 2004).

Research—past and present—has reflected that individual, group, and organizational interactivity are significant aspects of any organization in which learning occurs and, conceptually, where learning remains continuous, along with a host of competencies that link the individual, group, and organization back into itself (Argyris, 1957; Marsick, Watkins, & Yang, 2004; Pedler et al., 1997; Senge, 1990; Watkins, 2014). The term "learning organization" is itself transformative; it increases the rapidity of individual learning while re-defining and arguably re-centering organizational culture at the micro and macro levels (de Villiers, 2006). Diversity and inclusion, leadership development, learning and development, and talent management have a considerable impact on shaping organizational culture and the foundational components in a learning organization.

To craft the dimensions of an LO, Marsick and Watkins (1996, 1999) relied on Senge's use of seminal thought leadership (1990) to develop systems thinking and organizational transformation. They shifted their vision to Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell (1993) for learning

perspectives and microcosms of learning, then adopted Garvin (1993) and Goh (1993) for evaluation of leadership (Song, Joo, & Chermack, 2008). It should be noted that Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell also created a quantitative instrument to measure the characteristics of an LO, but Marsick and Watkins's model was more widely accepted due to its diagnostic capability to measure the dimensions of an LO (Pedler et al., 1991; Marsick & Watkins, 2003). The LO dimensions were adopted for describing each dimension of an LO; descriptions of the constructs are presented in Table 2 (Chapter Two).

To simplify the process of understanding the LO framework's constructs or action imperatives, they are categorically linked to levels. The individual and team levels are where continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, and team/collaboration learning most often occur (Marsick & Watkins, 2003), tapping into the intrinsic value of individual members and management acting or learning in a way that is beneficial to them while sustaining their performance for the organization. At the systems or organizational level, embedded systems, empowerment, system connection, and strategic leadership commonly bridge the extrinsic values of members across the organization (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). As such, action imperatives are designed to be amendable as the organization undergoes transformation processes; due to COVID-19, there is currently a significant transformation occurring within the business community (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Ferguson, 2020).

LO establishing the Individual Level

The literature supports continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, and team and collaborative learning as fundamental action imperatives at the individual level. These dimensions are primarily attributed to workforce competence and congruence through collective vision, collaboration, and systems thinking (Halmaghi, 2012; Marsick & Watkins, 2003). An

attribute of competence is when an individual has a substantial understanding of the tasks to be completed while remaining part of broader organizational problem-solving challenges (Halmaghi, 2012). Crossnan, Lane, and White (1999) have suggested that continuous learning for individuals is a process; it includes the components of intuiting (subconscious) and interpreting (conscious) but requires constant adaptation and transformation to meet demands (p. 525). With regard to intuiting as a process, Crossnan et al. (1999) have suggested that the individual level simply syncs individual responsibility to understanding similarities and differences and identifying patterns and possibilities concerning the completion of a job. These are foundational for each member of the organization across all dimensions associated with the individual level in an organization (p.526).

Aside from intuition, the other fundamental process at the individual level is interpretation. Interpretation is the conscious element at the individual level and frequently aligns with mental mapping at this level (Crossnan et al., 1999). With regard to dialogue and inquiry, Marsick and Watkins (1993) have stated that it "is an open-minded curiosity that enables us to suspend our assumptions and bias in the interest of truth or a better solution" (p. 5). This construct requires communication and a willingness to engage in open conversation and candor while maintaining a balance within an LO (Alimour & Karimi, 2018). Lastly, team/collaborative learning as a construct is collective learning in the organization. It represents a significant portion of organizational success when employees work together to complete individual or team tasks (Alimour & Karimi, 2018). Halmaghi (2012) has suggested that teamwork generates positive results because each member works to find problem-solving solutions together, impacting the overall organization. (p.101). Human resource strategies have changed to benefit all three of these constructs at the individual and group levels (Alimour & Karimi, 2018).

LO establishing the team or group level

The same competencies exist at the team or group level as at the individual level. The first construct is continuous learning, and studies have shown that integrating continuous learning at the team or group level is beneficial (Halmaghi, 2012). Continuous learning creates a vision for individuals and groups; they produce more significant results because they are enabled to perform (Halmaghi, 2012). As at the individual level, Crossnan, Lane, and White (1999) have suggested that an LO is a process that requires integration from personal understanding and behavior to a collective body (p.528). Finally, the last construct at the team level consists of team learning and collaboration. Research has suggested that one's teamwork can determine new paradigms, which has an organizational impact at a systems level (Alimour and Karimi, 2018).

LO establishing the organizational level

The systems-level includes the constructs of embedded systems, empowerment, system connection, and strategic leadership. Embedded systems are described in Table 2. However, Crossnan, Lane, and White (1999) have suggested that LO at the organizational or systems level is a process that begins with institutionalizing learning, and this occurs "through the embedded systems, structures, strategy, routines, prescribed practices of the organization and investments in information systems and infrastructure" (p.529). Additionally, empowerment is based on "stimulating employees to learn alone or in groups, using the theoretical and practical knowledge" (102), according to Marsick and Watkins (1993) as quoted in Halmaghi (2012). Empowerment as a construct leads to a collective shared vision that is easily transferrable between all organizational levels. Research has suggested that empowerment directly links the employee to organizational decision-making processes (Alimour & Karimi, 2018). At the

organizational level, empowerment is a derivative of leadership style, which leads to the third construct in this domain.

System connection is a construct in which the organization expands into the community. For Marsick and Watkins (1996), systems connection is an immersive interaction between individuals and the organizational level in which the connection between individual work and what members do within organization is perceived (Song, Joo, & Chermack, 2009). Halmaghi (2012) indicated that system connection is "valuing the link between the organization and the environment" (p.102). Lastly, strategic leadership is a construct that Song, Joo, and Chermack (2009) have suggested is solely for performance results (p.48). Alimour and Karimi (2018) have contended that leadership is influential in conveying and supporting all elements of learning organization constructs by connecting to the environment both internally and externally (p.8).

Sustaining an LO during a crisis

Pan et al. (2020) explain that five attributes make a learning organization in a business operation; these are, one, training and education, two, rewards and recognition, three, information flow, four, individual and team development, and finally, five, vision and strategy (p. 102). Investigating these attributes during market upheaval starts with an evaluation of the structure, individual, group, systems hierarchy, internal systems, or business units; changes at a systems-level means a changes elsewhere along the hierarchy of connectivity (Mills, 2003). It takes the participation of members in the organization, support from leadership, and innovative systems thinking to sustain the learning organization characteristics within the organizational culture (Lanz et al., 2018).

Based on research, to meet the demands of rapid change, the community challenges with funding and budget constraints, and workforce growth and development, educator groups of

human resources divisions support all levels of continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team/collaborative learning, embedded systems, empowerment, system connection, and strategic leadership (Alimour & Karimi, 2018; Halmaghi, 2012; Marsick & Watkins, 1996, 1999, 2003; Song, Joo, & Chermack, 2009). They do so by providing consistent opportunities through the following measures

- On-the-job learning
- Training (instructor-led and self-directed)
- Learning events
- eLearning
- Coaching and mentoring

All the while, the literature supports that managing practitioners involved in diversity and inclusion, leadership development, learning and development, and talent management meet the needs of an organization by keeping members in all areas of the organization aligned to LO disciplines at the individual, group, and organizational levels through Marsick and Watkins's prescribed action imperatives (Alimour & Karimi, 2018; Halmaghi, 2012; Marsick & Watkins, 1996, 1999, 2003; Senge, 1990). It is through the managing practitioner's that learning transcends an organization's hierarchy and across organizational functions to varying degrees in times of market myopia, which transforms the organization into a new state (Halmaghi, 2012).

Research Questions

This study used three overarching research questions to guide the research:

1. RQ1: How does the logistics organization, LF, LLC, identify and align individual learning (continuous learning, empowerment) with their strategy during COVID-19?

2. RQ2: How does the logistics organization, LF, LLC, identify and align group learning (dialogue and inquiry; collaboration and team learning) with their strategy during COVID-19?
3. RQ3: How does the logistics organization, LF, LLC, identify and align organizational learning (embedded systems, systems connection, strategic leadership) with their strategy during COVID-19?

Definitions

The following terms are defined to help readers understand their use in this study.

Learning organization is defined as an organization that continuously transforms itself to collect, manage, and use knowledge while empowering people within and outside the workforce (Marquardt, 1996).

Logistics is defined as a subset of processes under supply chain management responsible for the coordination, execution, movement, planning, and reporting of goods within a network (LaGore, 2019).

Managing practitioner is defined as a member of management who is actively engaged in a profession (Oxford, 2020).

The dimensions of a learning organization are individually defined in Table 2 and consist of continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning, embedded systems, empowerment, systems connectivity, and strategic leadership.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter One, disasters, pandemics, and crises are not new phenomena for business organizations. Examining the current situation— the COVID-19 pandemic—and managing practitioners' responses to it creates an opportunity to investigate organizational entities as learning organizations, enabling the further understanding of LO attributes in a time of crisis. The current chapter is divided into four parts: a literature review of LO theory, the components and attributes of an LO, where LO fits into an organization, and an examination of managing practitioners who are more likely to use characteristics of an LO.

A Learning Organization

Today, learning within an organization is strategic for competence and congruence, and steps have been taken to ensure that this happens through leadership decisions and actions (Said, Tahmir, & Nawawi, 2016). To exist or compete in the market, competitive advantage is sought by business leaders, which makes the ability to change the significant strategic factor for organizations; the current claim is that the start of LO is the capability to learn, which, essentially, equates to the ability to change (Alipour & Karimi, 2018; DiBella, 1997; DiBella & Nevis, 1998; Edmonson, 2004; Goh & Richards, 1997; Marquardt, 2004; Marsick & Watkins, 1996, 1999; Pedler et al., 1991; Senge, 1990, 2006; Siy, 2011; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013; Yang, Marsick, & Watkins, 2004). Understanding an LO on a conceptual level begins with evaluating the theoretical pieces as a framework. Senge (2006) defined an LO as an organization in which "people expand their capacity to create results continually, new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, empowerment is fostered and promoted, and people continuously learn to see the big picture together" (p. 3). Senge established five disciplines or characteristics; many

critics have explained that they serve as an idea for leaders and educators to communicate and reinforce their cultures to remain ahead of change on the principle that organizations must learn to compete (Suhartatna, 2004).

These five disciplines or characteristics, as defined by Senge (1990), are as follows:

1. **Personal Mastery** is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our vision, focusing our energies, developing patience, and seeing reality objectively.
2. **Mental Models** are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures of images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.
3. **Shared Vision** is a practice of unearthing shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance.
4. **Team Learning** begins with dialogue, team members' capacity to suspend assumptions and enter into positive thinking together.
5. **Systems Thinking** needs to build a shared vision, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery to realize its potential. Building a shared vision fosters a commitment to the long term. Mental models focus on the openness needed to unearth shortcomings in our present ways of seeing the world. Team learning develops the skills of groups of people to look for the larger picture beyond individual perspectives. Moreover, personal mastery fosters a personal motivation to learn how our actions affect our world continually. (p. 7-12)

Jensen (2017) has suggested that these five disciplines are at the center of the LO (p.56). Critics, however, have argued that Senge's theoretical discipline is far too abstract for practical purposes, further supporting the need for a set of measurable behaviors that can be adopted by organizations (Kim et al., 2015). Skuncikiene, Balvocilac, and Balcinus (2009) concluded that

building an LO is difficult due to the actors, relationships, and environmental elements present in the organization (p. 70). Transformation of an LO occurs through support for LO theory by way of other practitioners, researchers, scholars, and theorists. Pedler et al. (1991) have asserted that the LO is a "vision of possibilities" but only occurs if learning opportunities are created across the organization as a whole; making the LO the central feature of organizational existence; the LO itself as a construct "facilitates learning to all members, therefore is a critical component in the transformation and change process" (p.1).

Given the COVID-19 situation and its impact on organizational operations as a whole, the LO as a phenomenon is cause for the current literature's re-examination. It supports a broader conversation that links all abstract concepts to organizational strategy during this time of change. Significant thought went into framing the LO in the 1990s, though the idea has been around since the mid-20th century (Adzic, 2018). In addition to Senge's resurgence in support of LO ideals in current literature, an approach to studying the LO as a practical application from within the organization has become prevalent among some researchers (Marsick and Watkins, 1993). Garvin (1993), as quoted in Siy (2011), suggested that an LO is the "creation, acquisition, and transfer of knowledge, and it also creates a change in behavior" across the individual, group, and organization levels (p.3). Given the disagreement within the academic community about a standard definition for LO, Senge can be viewed as the seminal thought leader on LO, with the entirety of the modern LO literature mentioning his work as the main supporter of LO; his concepts serve as the basis for the phenomenology. Since Senge, others have developed their characteristics in an attempt to shift from theory to practice making LO a viable organizational strategy. Table 1 presents some commonly used definitions of the LO (Pedler et al., 1991; Garvin, 1993; Marquardt, 2004).

Table 1. Commonly Used Definitions of Learning Organization (LO)

Author	Definition
Senge (1990)	Learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole world together.
Marquardt (1996)	Learning organization is an organization that leans collectively and is continuously transforming itself to better collect, manage, and use knowledge for corporate success.
Handy (1992a)	In an uncertain world, where we all know for sure is that nothing is sure, we will need organizations that are continually renewing themselves, reinventing themselves, and reinvigorating themselves. These are the learning organizations, the ones with learning habits.
Garvin (1998)	The learning organization is the one that can create, acquire and transfer knowledge, and, at the same time, it manages to modify its behavior reflecting new knowledge and perspectives.
Geppert (2000)	Learning organization is not the new “one best way,” but a new metaphor for old problems and the search for practical solutions for how an organization and its members balance the requirements of adaptation with the necessity to improve adaptability.
Jackson and Hawke (2000)	Learning organization is often a shorthand to refer to organizations that try to make a working reality of such attributes as flexibility, teamwork, continuous learning, and employee participation and development.

Table adapted from Ahonen and Kaseorg (2008)

Characteristics of LO studies currently available in the literature body either support or critique. Studies have significantly contributed to LO by quantitatively formulating attributes and prescriptive action imperatives to become learning organizations through prescribed steps or processes. Goh and Richard (1997), Marsick and Watkins (2003), and Edmondson (2004) identified where characteristics fit into organizations, while Senge (1990, 1996) and Goh, Elliot, and Quon (2012) investigated who is responsible for sustaining the LO. Furthermore, Marsick, Watkins, and Yang (2003) and Ortenbald (2013) aimed to measure the LO (Senge, 1990, 1996, 2006; Goh & Richards, 1997; Edmonson, 2004; Edmonson, Bohmar, & Pisano, 2001; Yang, Marsick, & Watkins, 2004; Goh, Elliot, & Quon, 2012; Ortenblad, 2013; Watkins & O’Neil, 2013; Stothard et al., 2013).

To create a clear perspective of the competencies that feed into LO, research by Goh and Richards drew on managerial perspectives from multiple studies in the 1990s to provide more context and suggest current actions, which set a precedent for determining action imperatives for "building," then sustaining learning organizations (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). As such, building, declaring, or developing an LO requires leadership buy-in to support the transformation process—a level of support described only as “deliberate and concise” (Goh & Richards, 1997; Goh, Elliot, & Quon, 2012; Edmonson, 2004; Edmonson, Bohmar, & Pisano, 2001; Yang, Marsick, & Watkins, 2004).

It has been argued that opportunities should consistently remain in place for learning to occur at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Edmonson, 2004; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Yang, Marsick, & Watkins, 2004). Research conducted by Kumar et al. (2016) suggested that there is "improvement of strategic leadership through intentionally capturing and transforming learned experiences in an Indian context," which is then evaluated throughout the organization (p. 175). Using historically founded work to build LOs establishes a point of entry for investigating whether organizations can adapt, change, and transform, or act, in the face of current challenges by using the uniqueness of a flexible structure such as LO (Senge, 1990; Pedler et al., 1991; Marsick and Watkins, 1993, 1996, 1999; Ahonen and Kaseorg, 2008).

Another segment of LO literature is where LO finds its voice or is strategized for business continuance. At present, learning in the organization is a process owned by two groups. First, leadership must buy into LO and its characteristics for support. Second, HRD is causal for adaptability, change management, and transformation (Tseng & McLean, 2008; Morris Dissertation, 2019). Additionally, research supports this population's investigation to bridge the

gap in educational strategies for organizations in times of crisis (Ahonen & Keorg, 2008). For example, Donahue, Seldon, and Ingraham (2000) explored the gaps between public management and human resources management and determined five criteria for organizational success: planning, hiring, sustaining, motivating, and structuring from within (Donahue, Seldon, & Ingraham, 2000, p.395).

Considerable research has addressed organizational devotion to bridging management perceptions to organizational action through a group in the organization. In their benchmarking of organizational learning capability, Goh and Richards (1997) selected a series of studies to frame a managerial or leadership perspective, while Shaw and Perkins (1991) concluded that organizations should "create special funds and allow time for employees to experiment in the creation, extraction, and dissemination of learning from within," which is synonymous with the action imperative of continuous learning (p. 576).

Some studies have found that a numeration system was needed to examine LO characteristics. Leonard-Barton (1992) determined in the Chapparral Steel study that a reward system encouraged learning behavior enhancing problem-solving, yet integrated continuous learning, churned constant innovation strategies, and used daily external information inputs, all found to be characteristics of success for this one organization. Goh and Richards (1997) also use Dixon (1993) to discuss learning levels within the organization in a classification system. (i.e., individual, group, function, or organization). Also, McGill and Slocum (1993) studied organizational learning to determine strategies that shift from theory towards action imperatives. Slocum, McGill, and Lei (1994) decided that additional strategic management steps were needed to capture internal learning, suggesting tools and techniques such as analysis methods (p.576).

Supporting research conducted by Goh and Richards synthesized the findings of Nevis, DiBella, and Gould (1995), explaining that addressing and identifying the current perceptions of learning in the organization should occur before taking on any initiative to improve it; this suggests that drawing on current perceptions is not only needed but required to address shifts in the learning culture (p.576). Additionally, the literature review revealed that even the literature on LO is subject to change and adaptation.

Characteristics of a Learning Organization

Current research has suggested that learning organizations are constructed, recognized, and transformed using characteristics, or dimensions, that are considered action imperatives. Siy (2011) confirmed this in the University of Perpetual Help Systems study, finding that the action imperatives of an LO specifically relate to organizational success through intentional action (Siy, 2011, p.7). Despite evidence from academic communities and scholars, who have suggested that an organization "becomes" an LO, some experts have asserted that learning organizations already exist but in different ways; one size does not fit all, which requires deliberate decisions to integrate actions that serve as action imperatives (Marsick and Watkins, 2003). Watkins and Marsick take an approach that sets up a practical path for evaluating LO for managing practitioners by investigating the action imperatives they determined existed through expert judgment; they connected individual, group or function, and organizational levels to competencies such as collaboration, accountability, shared values, and virtues (Marsick & Watkins, 1996, 1999, 2003). It was determined that action imperatives specifically bridged dialogue and inquiry and organizational change and adaptability in a time of market upheaval.

Studies of LO characteristics as action imperatives is causal for narrowing LO abstractness of thought and creating a way to understand, process, and replicate (Donahue et al.,

2000; Marsick & Watkins, 1996, 1999, 2003). Marsick and Watkins have suggested seven action imperatives that exist internally in organizations. In many organizations, action imperatives were already present before COVID-19; several have received empirical studies' attention (Edmundson & Gino, 2008; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Skuncikiene, 2009; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013). For the current study, however, action imperatives are interpreted as lived by managing practitioners. All definitions currently in use are intended for use as a guide for context and understanding.

Table 2. Watkins and Marsick's model (1997) of the seven dimensions of a learning organization

Dimension	Description
Continuous learning	Opportunities for ongoing education and growth are provided; learning is designed to work to learn on the job.
Inquiry and dialogue	The organizational culture supports questioning, feedback, and experimentation; people gain productive reasoning skills to express their views and the capacity to listen and inquire into others' perspectives.
Team learning	Work is designed to use teams to access different modes of thinking; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded; teams are expected to learn by working together.
Embedded systems	Critical systems to share learning are created, maintained, and integrated with work; employees have access to these high-and-low technology systems.
Empowerment	People are involved in setting and implementing a shared vision; responsibility is distributed so that people are motivated to learn what they are held accountable to do.
System connection	The organization is linked to its communities; people understand the overall environment and use the information to adjust work practices.
Strategic leadership	Leadership uses learning strategically for performance results; leaders model, champion, and support learning.

Table adapted from Song, J., Joo, B., & Chermack, T. (2009). The Dimensions of Learning Organization: A Validation Study in a Korean Context. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 20(1), p. 43-63.

Additional studies have explored LO characteristics by matching ex post facto actions. For example, Skuncikiene et al. (2009) sought to identify an LO's characteristics and found that

certain activities already existed within the organization (p. 70). Respondents indicated the following about the learning organization:

- Teamwork and team learning take place.
- Employees are informed about corporate strategy and shared aims.
- The vision for the future of the organization is considered and discussed.
- Free information flows between different levels of the organization (vertical), and information sharing among employees (horizontal) exists.
- Learning opportunities are made available for everyone.
- Employees are loyal to the organization
- An employee learning evaluation system is in place.
- Continuous improvement at work exists.
- Employees link and match their plans to the organization's plans and strategy.
- Employees are informally given an opportunity to participate in the formation and management of corporate strategy.
- Employees are given material incentives to improve.
- A flexible reward system is in place.
- A collective learning culture is maintained.
- Discussions take place.
- Gained experience is shared and analyzed.
- Employees are honest, straightforward, and trust each other.
- Employees respect and are tolerant of each other.
- Employees feel responsible for each other and the organization. (p. 70)

By asking closed-ended and semi-closed questions to 237 respondents, Skuncikiene et al. (2009) found that “learning [was] understood as an inseparable factor of development of the organization, where learning is maintained and encouraged across the individual, team, and organizational levels” (p. 72). LO characteristics and components require constant re-evaluation to remain sustainable for managing practitioners. Skuncikliene's study provides a visual basis of characteristics to adapt learning strategies for sustaining LO (Skuncikiene, 2009).

Other studies, such as Ranta's (2018), aimed to determine whether an organization can recognize itself as an LO. Marsick and Watkins's (2003) questionnaire on the dimensions of an LO was used (Ranta, 2018, p.9). For example, Ranta (2018) suggests Kim et al. (2016) determined that the dimensions of an LO were significantly limited, yet encouraged that measuring LO characteristics was valid and reliable based on a thorough literature review analysis (Ranta, 2018, p.13). To reach this conclusion, Ranta (2018) used 330 participants in the study; half provided insight on two of the four research questions used, revealing that the dimensions of an LO broadened researchers' conceptual understanding of an LO and identifying areas to strengthen within an organization (p. 13).

Based on the above research, it can be concluded that LO characteristics, or action imperatives, are worthy of investigation since the literature suggests that current LO characteristics are available to managing practitioners in organizational settings and deserve considerable re-evaluation during COVID-19, at a time when LO is characteristically and categorically useful within an organizational structure (Donahue et al., 2000; Edmundson & Gino, 2008; Kim et al., 2016; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Ranta, 2018; Skuncikiene, 2009; Song et al., 2009; Watkins, 2014).

Organizational Structure: Individual and Team/Group Domains

Characteristics of LO are applicable to organizational success during the market upheaval. However, rapid change and adaptation can inundate leadership thought processes, particularly where the LO characteristics fit into the organization's structure (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Additionally, due to the complexity of industry shifts and current market upheaval, conversations on continuous learning have been reduced to prescriptive actions, without time nor energy invested by leadership to understand LO; yet, implementing an LO requires their support (Ferguson et al., 2020; Ranta, 2018). Literature supports a breadth of opportunities for individuals employed by the organization to engage in continuous learning (Garvin, 1993; Schuchmann and Seufert, 2015). Organizations committed to future success create opportunities for individual members to perform, thus seeding the growth of a learning culture (Pradmujmono, 2015). It is important to note that it is impossible to “become” an LO if the individual level in organizational structure is absent; therefore, characteristics of an LO centrally position continuous learning opportunities within the individual dimension of the organizational structure (Said et al., 2016).

Continuous learning is recognized as transformational, adaptable, or innovative in many organizational settings (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Marquardt, 2011). To determine the feasibility of an LO as a solution, Schuchmann and Seufert (2015) investigated three banking organizations in Germany during a time of digital transformation; the organizations were targeted in order to acquire empirical evidence for continuous learning and transformation as it related to their reality, which was based on the premise that "the banking organization should possess innovative approaches to promote a development-oriented organization" (p.3). Each bank had a topic of interest for research purposes. For example, banks participating in the study

centrally focused on managing continuous changes through employee involvement and quality-oriented processes using 35 locations; participants, n = 420. For bank two, the central focus was the digital transformation of the banking organization using 28 locations; participants, n = 307, and in bank three, the research topic was value-oriented leadership to achieve high performers in 11 locations, participants, n = 150-160 (Schuchmann & Seufert, 2015, p.6-7).

Schuchmann and Seufert found that that four areas—professional development as an executive management task, development work with individuals/teams, a transformation of the organization, and development of learning/innovation-oriented management systems—required additional inquiry and investigation (Schuchmann & Seufert, 2015). The study isolated leadership and management as the focal point for continued dialogue and inquiry in the German banking industry. Furthermore, Schuchmann and Seufert's work demonstrated that innovation and transformation were required for the sustainability of the organizations but that leadership connected individuals/teams to the organization and the LO (Schuchmann & Seufert, 2015). According to the perceptions of individuals employed by the banks, leaders were responsible for strategically bridging the organizational vision at the systems level through the action imperatives for the dimensions of an LO (Schuchmann & Seufert, 2015, p.7).

Marsick (1996) explained, "team learning and collaboration reflect the spirit of collaboration and the collaborative skills that undergird the effective use of teams" (p.6). Team learning is an action imperative supported by Lave and Wenger (1991), who suggested that learning occurs as a social participation process. In businesses, individuals participate in functional teams and business units, eluding that continuous learning is a consistent transition from the individual to the team or group level and on to the organizational level (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Team learning and collaboration are conceptually founded in communities of

practice relevant to LOs during a crisis since linking team learning and collaboration suggests that businesses have adapted (Tvenge et al., 2018). Advocates define groups and social participation at a team learning level as the curation of experience to learn, which is not the only feature of gathering members of a group but is instead intended to encourage robust interaction across the organization's systems (Engestrom, 2007).

The literature review suggests that individual and group/systems domains are theoretically and practically significant to the LO because these form the foundation of a larger organizational/systems-level structure (Engestrom, 2007; Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003). The literature shows that each unit of the organizational structure starts the continuous learning process at the individual level and transcends to the team/collaborative level, each embracing the other until LO encompasses the entire organization (Engestrom, 2007; Ferguson et al., 2020; Garvin, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Marquardt, 2011; Pradmujmono, 2015; Ranta, 2018; Schuchmann & Seufert, 2015; Tvenge et al., 2018). Thus, it would appear that the individual and team levels are instrumental for managing practitioners, who must navigate the COVID-19 situation in their business capacities. As mentioned, it could be argued that, without the individual and team or function groups, the systems/organizational level would not exist.

Organizational Structure: Systems or Organization Level

Rasheed et al. (2014) have suggested that "organizations are learning from their motivations and scan the whole environment" (p.5). Within a hierarchical structure, the organization level encompasses the individual and team or function levels; these two structural levels can become rather complex as they increase in size and expand in location. In today's business operations, organizations can span the globe and have an international workforce;

action imperatives are used to sync LO all together. Marsick and Watkins (2004) have suggested that organizations make "efforts to establish systems to capture and share learning," which fundamentally creates embedding systems (p.7). Siy's (2011) study found that embedded systems "measure gaps, make lessons learned available on a larger scale, where it measures the results of the time, and the resources spent on training" (p.1). In a COVID-19 world, linking Siy's findings on embedded systems with practitioners' experiences can impact leadership conversations by evaluating how information can be shared more efficiently and effectively (Ranta, 2018; Siy, 2011).

In another study, Madalina, Lorin, Iuliana-Raluca, and Ovidiu (2018) used a cross-sectional design to assess the relevance and efficiency of LO dimensions in a private ophthalmology organization in Bucharest, Romania. The questionnaire was translated from English to Romanian, then administered to 113 nurses and physicians. Data was collected, and SPSS software was used to perform descriptive analysis and factor analysis. The study found that LO dimensions were suitable for use in a Romanian healthcare context; however, strategic leadership was removed due to cultural and socio-demographic factors in the population (Madalina et al., 2018). Additionally, the study found no significant variances across the dimensions of an LO, but participants scored lower in the embedded systems characteristic. It can be presumed that organizations already know and understand what "action imperatives" refer to. For example, Marsick and Watkins (2006) stated that organizations "understand embedded systems, to involve technical systems that are used to process and share learning in daily tasks along with access to ensure that the systems are appropriately managed" (p.23).

In a study by Madalina et al. (2018), it was found that "physician's perspectives were such that everyone was equipped with the appropriate tools and knowledge. To navigate the

variance between physicians and nurses, Madalina et al. (2018) determined that results related to embedded systems could be explained by revisiting the definition and then re-testing for accuracy (p.294). Additionally, the researchers found it essential to combine dimensions of an LO with other ways to assess employee feedback. Doing so can contribute to the transformation of learning organizations (p.294). The Romanian study had its limitations due to translation and subsequent back translation, which meant that some "semantic meaning had been lost" (p.294). Furthermore, the study's scope was only a small organization; it was not completed on a large scale, as Marsick and Watkins have suggested is ideal. Finally, socio-cultural limitations may have also been a factor in participant responses. The dimensions of an LO were developed in a western, high-income context. This may serve as a barrier for low or middle-income countries' adoption (Madalina et al., 2018; Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

As an LO characteristic, empowerment signifies an organization's process of creating and sharing a collective vision and obtaining feedback on gaps between the organization's current status and its new vision (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Siy (2011) has explained that "empowerment is recognition for people for taking initiatives, giving control over resources they need to do their job and supporting employees for taking calculated risks" (p.6-7). Bhaskar and Mishra (2014) explored the link between organizational learning and work engagement in a multinational information technology organization in Delhi, India, known for innovation and transformative human resources services. The dimensions of an LO were used to investigate the relationship between learning and work engagement. The participants (N = 157) were all full-time employees, and their responses were collected via a linked structured questionnaire in an email; information was also emailed to the sample group. Bhaskar and Mishra discovered a link

between empowered employees feeling connected to the organization and their work (Bhaskar & Mishra, 2014).

Learning organizations require connectivity between the individual and team levels to construct the organizational level; an LO would not exist in the absence of these (Marquardt, 2004, 2011; Marsick & Watkins). Several studies have suggested that members "feeling connected" to the organization is a starting point for the LO's journey in bridging connectivity (Bhaskar & Mishra, 2014; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). As such, HR research conducted by Biscak and Bencina (2019) determined that action imperatives that connect the individual and team or group levels to the organization were empowerment-, motivation-, and skill-enhancing (Biscak & Bencina, 2019; Subramony, 2009). The action imperatives provided by Marsick and Watkins (2003) signify the link to organizational connectivity (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Watkins, 2013).

System connection reflects global thinking and actions that connect the organization to its internal and external environment (Marsick & Watkins, 2004). Siy (2011) has explained that "systems connection is organizational thinking from a global perspective; it works with the community outside the organization itself" (p.6-7). This is the final level in an LO and shifts from individual performance to organizational performance. However, there has been little significant research on this topic (Biscak & Biscina, 2019).

Lastly, the final action imperative is strategic leadership. According to Marsick and Watkins (2004), "strategic leadership shows the extent to which leaders think strategically about how to use learning to create change to move the organization in new directions or new markets" (p.7). Siy (2011) has explained that "strategic leadership is organizational leaders mentoring and

coaching those they lead, continuously look for learning opportunities, and ensuring that organization is consistent with its values" (p. 6-7).

Alimour and Karimi (2018) explored the theoretical understanding of Watkins and Marsick's (2003) LO dimensions in an HRD context. They produced recommendations for management in leadership and systems connectivity to use internally (Alimour & Karimi, 2018). They concluded that "managers must think of ways to promote a higher level of power relationships among employees at the organization to engage in exploration and exploitation activities simultaneously" (Chang, 2015).

With this in mind, an organization's leadership and management address the individual, group, and organizational hierarchy to envision a future while helping generate the required motivation among employees (Alimour & Karimi, 2018; Davenport & Davenport, 2015). Stothard, Talbot, Drobnjak, & Fischer (2013) explored the relationship between learning and culture by examining and comparing learning culture in two divisions of an Australian military branch (p.194). Through a review of cultural conditions in LOs and military institutions, the researchers produced their version of LO dimensions by adopting the major components presented by Marsick and Watkins. The resulting Army Learning Organization Questionnaire measures 11 dimensions based on the dimensions of an LO and the Organizational Learning Survey (Watkins & Marsick, 1997; Goh & Richards, 1997 in Stothard et al., 2013). Stothard et al, (2013) argue that army leadership actions and decision-making formed the learning organization. However, the study found a disconnection at the function level, in leadership style, and among ranks of non-commissioned troops (Stothard et al., 2013). Stothard et al. (2013) examined differences between groups in the army using the research question, "What, if any, are the differences between headquarter and brigade learning cultures?"

Participants (N = 1061) belonged to the brigade (N = 862) and headquarters (N = 199); rank structure, time in service, gender, and unit were researched. The study found that there was a direct link between headquarters and brigades in terms of patterns of learning cultures. Through quantitative measurements, the researchers found significant differences in nine out of 11 dimensions (Stothard et al., 2013). The two dimensions in which no significant differences were found were continuous learning and transfer of knowledge. The data analysis found significant interactions between rank, unit type, and perceptions of a learning culture within and across the military units (p.203).

Participant ranks were the control variable; they were used to examine relationships through a quantitative one-way MANOVA, which revealed a significant difference in perception at the rank level. For Stothard et al. (2013), leadership rank was statistically significant based on data involving perceptions of LO practices, further demonstrating the impact of hierarchy within the Australian Army. Rank accounted for most differences in Army Learning Organization Questionnaire, ALOQ, dimensions at the brigade and headquarters levels (p.203). Lastly, differences in leadership perceptions between the organizations appeared to be mediated by other learning culture measures such as "innovation and experimentation" (p.201). As such, significant interactions were found between rank, unit type, and perceptions of an LO within and across army units. Stothard et al. (2013) found an "interplay between learning and expressions of power, empowerment, autonomy, and agency within the workplace" (p.204). Studies used to support the problem are strategically chosen to demonstrate that continuous learning and transformation are dimensional. Furthermore, there are groups in the organization that serve as the educational arm of the organization, and these studies confirm that education and lifelong learning are integral to LO.

Siy (2011) explored the seven dimensions of an LO in Philippine universities and colleges and their applicability to one campus, the University of Perpetual Help Systems (UPHS). The study evaluated four research questions that focused on the responses of "groups" of university personnel classified as managers or faculty. Siy (2011) investigated the following:

- What is the profile of respondents classified as managerial employees and faculty members and managerial employees grouped according to (a) position held; (b) gender; (c) length of service?
- To what extent do employees apply the seven learning organization dimensions in the management of work-related responsibilities in both individual and team levels, as perceived by faculty members and managerial employees in the dimensions of (a) continuous learning, (b) dialogue and inquiry, (c) team learning and collaboration?
- To what extent is UPHS operating as a learning organization university as perceived by its managerial employees and faculty in the dimensions of (a) embedded systems, (b) empowerment, (c) system connection, and (d) strategic leadership?
- What framework for learning organizational development can be designed and applied? (p.1)

To determine there was a variance between perceptions of LO characteristics at the individual and group levels, Siy (2011) measured the dimensions of an LO across the individual and functional levels of the organization. Respondents (N = 100) were randomly sampled, then divided by their role or group, such as faculty or management groups. There were two significant findings. First, Siy (2011) found that "there is a need to increase and strengthen LO practices to sustain the development of becoming a learning organization" (p. 15). Second, Siy (2011) suggested that a formal body be founded or an existing office be assigned to ensure that LO

practices are "institutionalized towards instilling a culture of learning imbued with the passion and commitment of all employees in all levels to continue to grow, develop, and be transformed" (p.15). However, a formal body that is responsible for LO initiatives and characteristics already exists in the corporate world: the HR department (Marquardt 2004; 2011). Additionally, Siy's study confirmed that continuous learning and transformation are integral to an organization, even at single locations. However, there is a need to monitor continuous learning to transform, which is where managing practitioners and educational strategy play a vital role (Goh & Richards, 1997; Marquardt, 2004, 2011).

Research on LO has suggested that the characteristics of an LO align with the organizational structure, beginning at the individual level, transcending to the team or function level and ultimately the organizational level (Alimour & Karimi, 2018; Bhaskar & Mishra, 2014; Biscak & Biscina, 2019; Chang, 2015; Davenport & Davenport, 2015; Goh & Richards, 1997; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Siy, 2011). At the same time, the need for a consistent group to ensure that LO characteristics become part of the organizational culture means that there is no better time to re-visit LO than during a crisis (Siy, 2011; Stothard et al., 2013; Watkins, 2014). Thus, the levels researched in the literature are essential to investigating LO. Since LO characteristics indicate an alignment across all levels of an organization, it can be argued that a group within the organization can sustain the characteristics of an LO through initiatives.

Crisis and the Learning Organization

Learning during times of crisis has transitioned into a continuous state of problem-solving, reflection, learning from errors, and transcending boundaries across the organizational hierarchy (Lanz et al., 2018). Before COVID-19, the acceleration of crises for organizations around the globe was causal for some preparation for a situation to occur; most crisis events are

operational crisis events (Herrara et al., 2018; PwC, 2019;). Hedberg (1981) suggests organizations adjust themselves defensively to reality, and knowledge is used offensively to improve the fit between orgs and their environment. There are many studies available that aim to identify or diagnose problems within organizations to determine successes or failures, but the literature available on learning and times of crisis or market upheaval are post-situational, or post-event, and occurs in the form of policy changes (Chebbi & Pindrich, 2015; Marquardt, 2011). Identifying and adopting Learning organization characteristics thus bridges opportunities for continuous learning during times of crisis for individuals, groups, and the organization itself as a way of sustaining itself and emerging stronger in post-crisis situations by changing behavior (Dekoulou & Trvellas, 2014; Siy,2011). Vardarher (2017) suggests evaluating the characteristics of a learning organization during market upheaval captures effectiveness at hand, meaning that organizations looking to reduce potential loss from large-scale natural disasters, financial crises, bankruptcies, catastrophic failure, and wars should have attributes in place, making them learning organizations (p. 162).

Evaluating if the characteristics of learning organizations are present during the COVID-19 pandemic or market upheaval is not available, thus ensuring that LO is relevant in academic and research, is a starting point. Since COVID-19 has impacted business operations, very little data has produced management, preparedness, or learning due to the on-going closures and restrictions. However, a crisis preparedness survey was done in 2019 by Price-Waterhouse Cooper (PwC, 2019) involving 4500 crises in 43 countries, providing some empirical data on crisis management and preparedness.

PwC defines a crisis is a situation that,

- Is triggered by significant internal and/or external factors or escalation of smaller incidents.
- Has an enterprise-wide, multi-functional impact
- Disrupts everyday business operations
- Has the potential for reputational harm/damage (PwC, 2019)

Two thousand eighty-four respondents in a PwC Survey indicate having experienced a crisis within the last five years; 70% of the sample population. 100% of the sample population also expected to be impacted by a problem in the future. COVID-19 hit a global scale in February of 2020 and still has yet to subside. Additionally, 53% of the PwC survey respondents indicate that their experience with a crisis was an operational crisis, which is characterized as a disruption in operations, supply chain failure, or other forms of product failure (PwC, 2019).

Arthur D Little (ADL, Egar et al., 2020) Prism published a special report on leading businesses through the COVID-19 crisis in Hong Kong, Italy, and Singapore (Egar et al., 2020). ADL has held several virtual conferences drawing in CEOs and business leaders to address COVID-19 and market upheaval. One area researched was the logistics industry. Egar et al., (2020) suggest that company leadership not only impacts the drive of their organization, but they are also responsible for helping the world get through a crisis (p. 2). These conferences produced that some companies had underlying frameworks already in the event that catastrophe was to occur. For example, one transport organization in Italy initiated the safeguard of its employees and customers, followed by a cash management strategy. It then defined and agreed with stakeholders the plan for pulling out of the pandemic crisis (Egar et al., 2020). With this information available, the process of connecting the attributes of a learning organization, one, training and education, two, rewards and recognition, three, information flow, four, individual

and team development, and finally, five, vision and strategy are relevant to this case, and requires specific action imperatives or characteristics to set these processes in motion (Herrera et al., 2018; Egar et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2020; PwC, 2019).

The dimensions of an LO have been internationally studied and tested for goodness of fit, reliability, and viability in various languages. However, there is no substantial empirical evidence to confirm that LO dimensions answer during a crisis. Since COVID-19 has led nations to shut down businesses, it is imperative to evaluate the ability to change through learning while sustaining organizational knowledge management, performance, and learning strategy (Ferguson et al., 2020; Sari et al., 2019). Human resources development and managing practitioners can sustain the LO through their actions and behaviors (Marquardt, 2004, Watkins & O'Neil, 2013). A study by Zirak (2015) investigated the implementation of LO dimensions in a healthcare setting in Iran. The study found that organizations need an environment embracing continual change all the while transforming the organization into an LO in which individuals, groups, and the organization are always engaged in new learning systems (Marquardt, 2002; Zirak, 2015). Study participants (N = 234) all worked for the Ardabil Social Security Hospitals in Iran. Zirak (2015) found that "we can implement the characteristics of an LO dimensions in Ardabil Social Security Hospital by providing appropriate ground for improving these subsystems which guide this company to achieve these characteristics" (p. 210). Given that disasters will occur, it is suitable for sustaining an organization during a time of crisis (Sari et al, 2019). Additionally, Zirak (2015) argued that LOs were knowledge-based organizations:

...knowledge management plays a vital role in supporting learning through sharing the effectiveness of knowledge in the organization; the most valuable asset of any organization is its human resources, and if the organization is a learning organization, all

its employees need to commit themselves to the organizational targets and fully develop their learning potentials in required time. (p.210)

Furthermore, Zirak found that knowledge management benefits from Marsick and Watkins's dimensions of an LO. As seen in recent studies, there is positive feedback regarding the use of LO dimensions in research and determining the connection between individual, team, and organizational classifications by which HR and its sub-communities of educators play a critical role (p. 210).

Mbassna and Marvin's study (2014) validated the dimensions of an LO in a Rwandan context. Their research used a quantitative method (i.e., a survey) supplemented with a qualitative study consisting of a self-report questionnaire. It was distributed to 545 participants; 430 questionnaires were completed (p.6). However, some researchers have advocated for the dimensions of an LO to be used as a performance measurement, since it was demonstrated that LO concepts and financial performance are linked (Ellinger, 2002). Some studies have begun to adjust how they study LO. For example, Shafique (2013) blended Senge's LO disciplines and the action imperatives of the dimensions of an LO, demonstrating that the abstract concepts of an LO align with a business learning strategy. Shafique (2013) combined personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, systems thinking with learning facilitators, learning culture, organizational structure, management information systems, and leadership in the context of the banking sector in Pakistan (p.17). Additionally, another study by Pradmajuno (2015) validates that:

...a learning organization is an organization of trained human resources in creating, achieving, and converting knowledge or information, building knowledge and attitudes of

individuals, teams, and reinforces management tenets of pushing the organization forward. (p.267)

As such, the perceptions of managing practitioners can form an LO through the establishment of three stages. According to Pradmajuno (2015), the first stage is identifying challenges and creating solutions for continuous process improvement. Second, integrating a strategy is required to meet any organizational goal, particularly for an organization in the information age. The final stage is the "full adoption and implementation of a learning culture" (p. 267). Diversity and inclusion, leadership development, learning and development, and talent management contend that LO is behavior is an internal initiative starting with structuring individual, group, and organization levels with a critical component being the organization's leadership domain (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). Identifying an organization as an LO in times of crisis can benefit research by revisiting and creating an identity.

Organizations have shifted to studying their own performance and effectiveness to support their identity as an LO (Marquardt, 2004). Not all studies on LOs have quantified data for the purpose of measurement. In a qualitative study, Newcomer and Connelly (2018) collected data from 30 officers in the United States Air Force on unit capability elements. The collected data explored seven themes aligned with the dimensions of an LO: leadership, training, customer service, performance improvement, change management, communication, and employee relations. These were further deconstructed to support the construct. Newcomer and Connelly (2018) found that award programs directly impact performance, set high standards, and effectively manage talent, enhancing overall performance improvement (p. 73).

Additionally, inter-unit relationships mattered, according to officer responses; this linked collaboration across the individual and team levels to connecting systems at the organizational

level. Imperatives established early included regular communication, which was transparent and aimed to help members understand their roles in the overall context of the organization. This helps make a case for the validity of capturing the lived experiences of managing practitioners during COVID-19 (Newcomer & Connelly, 2018).

According to previous research, there is strong quantitative support for the idea that the HRD should be the organizational group responsible for integrating and sustaining the LO through action imperatives at all levels (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marquardt, 2002, 2004, 2011; Mbassna & Marvin, 2014; Zirak, 2015). Others have supported the need for the group to investigate continuous improvement techniques to continue the connection at the individual, team or function, and organizational levels (Donahue et al., 2000; Ferguson, 2020; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marquardt, 2002, 2004, 2011; Mbassna & Marvin, 2014; Newcomer & Connelly, 2018; Pradmajuno, 2015; Sari et al. 2019; Shafique, 2013; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013; Zirak, 2015). Thus, it would appear that diversity and inclusion, leadership development, learning and development, and talent management are uniquely qualified to address adaptation, change, and transformation within an organization. It could also be argued that managing practitioners in these groups are the only individuals in an organization responsible for an LO strategy through action imperatives in a time of market upheaval.

Summary

Researchers have documented the importance of the LO by attempting to define it, despite disagreements on a single definition for the term (Senge, 1990, 1996, 2006; Goh & Richards, 1997; Edmonson, 2004; Edmonson, Bohmar, & Pisano, 2001; Yang, Marsick, & Watkins, 2004; Goh, Elliot, & Quon, 2012; Ortenblad, 2013; Watkins, 2014; Stothard et al., 2013). Research has also shown that identifying characteristics and action imperatives and

aligning them with organizational levels comprise the foundation of an LO (Alimour & Karimi, 2018; Bhaskar & Mishra, 2014; Biscak & Biscina, 2019; Chang, 2015; Davenport and Davenport, 2015; Donahue et al., 2000; Edmundson & Gino, 2008; Goh & Richards, 1997; Kim et al., 2016; Marsick and Watkins, 2003; Ranta, 2018; Siy, 2011; Skuncikiene, 2009; Song et al., 2009; Watkins, 2014). According to the literature, there should also be an entity within an organization responsible for building, maintaining, and sustaining an LO, which firmly sets the parameters for a strategy to continuously improve and learn, particularly during a crisis (Donahue et al., 2000; Ferguson, 2020; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015; Marquardt, 2002, 2004, 2011; Mbassna & Marvin, 2014; Newcomer & Connelly, 2018; Pradmajuno, 2015; Sari et al. 2019; Shafique, 2013; Watkins & O'Neil, 2013; Zirak, 2015).

A central theme that emerged during the literature review was a call to continue researching LO theory, action imperatives or characteristics, continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning and collaboration, embedded systems, empowerment, systems connection, strategic leadership, and consistent re-evaluations of how business should be conducted and change in the face of crises societal events, since the change and the rapidity of change are common occurrences that impact organizational structures (Alipour & Karimi, 2018; Leuven, 2015; Mbassna, 2014; Schuchmann & Seufert, 2015; Stothard, 2013; Siy, 2011). Additionally, it should be mentioned that a learning strategy should be sustained by a group that is internally responsible for guiding the learning process within the organization during transformation processes caused by rapid change such as COVID-19 (Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Tvenge, 2018). Finally, the literature sets the stage for further investigation on how the dimensions of an LO can address the current strengths and weaknesses of logistics organizations

during a market upheaval (Alipour & Karimi, 2018; Leuven, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 1996, 1999, 2003; Siy, 2011).

Calls for additional research are abundant in both the quantitative and qualitative literature. There is a consistent call for further studies on the action imperatives of an LO concerning their contexts (Watkins & O'Neil, 2013; Mbassna, 2014; Leuven, 2015; Alipour & Karimi, 2018; Newcomer & Connelly, 2018). The proposed study will not address individual, team, or organizational learning behaviors (Watkins & O'Neil, 2013); instead, it is imperative to understand the dimensions of an LO by obtaining the lived experiences of managing practitioners as a unit of analysis. The dimensions of LO concern patterns and differences across an organization; in this work, these patterns and differences are sought during a crisis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapter presented a literature review that showed that LO is a current phenomenon with action imperatives or characteristics to build, frame, and sustain itself; fits into organizations at the individual, group, or organizational levels; and addresses who is responsible for supporting LO initiatives in organizations. However, no studies thus far have put practitioners in a position to validate or provide insight on LO through a qualitative lens. Given the gravity and complexity of the current market upheaval caused by COVID-19, it was determined that a quantitative approach would not capture the richness of managing practitioners' perspectives employed by a logistics organization and lived and led their teams and business units during the crisis. The scope of participation was limited only to those members of the management at Logistics and Freight, LLC. LF is headquartered in the Southeastern U.S. Additionally, the study accesses managing practitioners who may, or may not, have experienced LO characteristics as they have led their teams and business units through the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on findings from the literature, this study aimed to answer the following three research questions:

1. RQ1: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align individual learning (continuous learning, empowerment) with their strategy during COVID-19?
2. RQ2: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align group learning (dialogue and inquiry; collaboration and team learning) with their strategy during COVID-19?

3. RQ3: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align organizational learning (embedded systems, systems connection, strategic leadership) with their strategy during COVID-19?

This chapter describes the process of understanding LO during market upheaval by linking the characteristics of LO to the behaviors of managing practitioners employed by a single logistics companies', during COVID-19. This chapter includes the investigation plan, participant characteristics, setting, data collection methods, data collection procedures, and analysis.

Investigation Plan

First, a planning process to address data collection, analysis, and interpretation was used to narrow down the most appropriate qualitative approaches for understanding LO, its characteristics, where it fits in an organization, and who sustains an LO through the perspectives of managing practitioners in a time of crisis (Creswell, 2014). This study seeks to understand whether characteristics, continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, collaboration, embedded systems, systems connectivity, empowerment, and strategic leadership across the individual, functional, and organizational hierarchical levels are relevant for organizational survival in a significant market upheaval. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative method examines the meaning of social or human problems. Therefore, a qualitative methodological approach was selected as appropriate because it aims to understand people's world experiences. (Creswell, 2014; Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013).

This study employed a qualitative case study approach. A case study is an "in-depth study of a bounded system(s)" (Merriam, 2009, p.38). A bounded system is an entity with limits; it can be a process, a unit, a group of units, a group of people in an organization, or an individual

(Merriam, 2009). However, there are limits to be considered in a case study because the overall purpose is illuminating the phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

Savin-Baden and Howell-Majors (2014) suggest that case studies investigate and describe six vital attributes (p. 153):

1. Nature of the case(s)
2. Historical background
3. The physical setting where the case is bounded
4. Economic, political, and legal influence on cases
5. Other instances in which the identified issue is recognized
6. Informants that may know the case

The purpose of case study research is to capture an understanding of a case's boundaries and patterns of behavior. In this case, it would be LF, LLC and the use of LO characteristics by managing practitioner's leading teams and business units through the COVID-19 pandemic (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). Yin (2018) recognized case studies are bounded by time, space, and activity and used for specific kinds of investigations; factors may involve the types of questions that need answering, control over behavioral events, and attention to contemporary issues over historical events.

The contemporary nature of LO, the uniqueness of the pandemic, and boundary awareness along with specific behaviors of organizations to survive during a market upheaval formed the foundation of the research questions, thus guided the researcher to select case study design (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009, 2018, p. 10-11). This case study is based on Logistics and Freight, LLC, a Fortune 500 Logistics company, headquartered in the Southeastern U.S. LF, LLC employs more than 200,000 people across the globe and operates year-round freight

transportation and delivery with speed and reliability serving as the foundational components for the customer experience. LF, LLC was impacted by COVID-19 across every business unit due to government shutdowns across the globe. Logistics and Freight, LLC reinvented themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic and positively used the crisis as a platform of opportunity. As a result of the pandemic, LF's strategic vision shifted to a three-part strategy, maintaining that the company competes as one organization, enhances collaborative communication, and magnifies digital innovation. Because of the market upheaval, LF, LLC adapted by aligning its independent groups or business units under one vision to solve new regulations and market shifts due to disruption. Taking this approach enhanced customers' experiences and opened up the opportunity for innovative ideas from individuals and groups within the organizations and served as the LO discipline of shared vision and systems thinking (Senge, 1990).

Collaboration between business units has grown stronger during COVID-19 and has found a place among LF, LLC's strategic values. For example, LF increased initiatives on package awareness technology in one business unit and then made the information available across different business units for efficiency across the distribution process. A collaborative strategy is a significant attribute for an LO to exist (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Senge, 1990). Shifting to a collaborative approach during the pandemic has built a support system that ensures each delivery is accurate for the customer and cost-efficient for the organization while also allowing LF, LLC to learn about itself. Digital innovation is another strategic piece of the new strategic vision. For Logistics and Freight, LLC, this is the future. During the COVID-19 pandemic, LF, LLC has adopted automation and new technological advancements to enhance supply chain technology in the delivery space.

In response to COVID-19, non-essential employees were afforded the opportunity to work from home, shifting face-to-face operations to an all-virtual environment. Business units that required on-site personnel shifted operational standards to benefit employees' health while also changing delivery protocols to ensure the safety of customers. For members of the LF that worked in office spaces, safety protocols were also shifted to adopt social distancing and meeting, or gathering, spaces protocols changed to limit the number of people together in a room at the same time. Given that COVID-19 has had a substantial impact in other parts of the world and its' operational capability, LF, LLC has a substantial role in ensuring that medical supplies are connected to their destinations. Because of the continuation of LF, LLC during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased in its financial performance and strengthened its position in the logistics community, and demonstrates characteristics of a learning organization are apparent in the shift in the behavior of the organizational level.

Participant/Learner Characteristics

Participants in this study were from different operating areas, or business units, of LF, LLC , although they may be HR, IT, Accounting functions. For example, one participant is in one business unit that is more customer-oriented. Another participant is in a different business unit that is solely accounting. Each participant is separated by business units and do not work directly together, thus adding to the richness of experiences.

Sampling

As mentioned, participants are drawn from a population of managing practitioners across Logistics and Freight, LLC to obtain rich data collection at the business unit levels. To answer the research questions, non-probability selection of participants was most advantageous since sampling was not random, but a process of strategic selection based on a LinkedIn search and

then turning to snowball sampling, which is a logical form of participant selection when attempting to solve, discover, determine implications, or identify relationships (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). This work aims to understand LO through managing practitioners' experiences at LF, LLC and drawing out data on characteristics, where it fits in an organization during the market upheaval and understanding who is responsible for sustaining an LO during times of crisis, thus non-probability selection is best suited for this study.

More specifically, by using this form of sampling (also known as purposeful sampling), the researcher intends to obtain rich insights from leaders through in-depth analysis (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the researcher conducted a criteria-based selection process where ten participants, all over the age of 18, were chosen based on specific criteria, such as rank, which is limited to only managers, employment with LF, LLC during COVID-19, have at least one year of management experience and have at least one individual reporting to them (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) also explains purposeful selection offers glimpses into particular experiences with LO and, in this work, LF, LLC (Merriam, 2009).

Due to the number of questions asked (24) in the semi-structured interview, how the case is defined, credibility was built using valid and reliable instruments, such as prior case studies on organizations around the number of participants used (Demarse; 2015; Love, 2017; Margadella, 2016; Vann, 2020), and seminal qualitative research guidance on acceptable participant pools, the researcher decided that eight participants were needed to achieve saturation of experiences of LO characteristics during COVID-10 at LF, LLC (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1898).

As mentioned, the population was limited to just managing practitioners and then purposefully selected based on the types of questions in the Interview Schedule. Creswell (2008)

suggests participant ranges for case studies range between 5 and 25, or until saturated (Creswell, 2008). Using this as a baseline and reviewing other case studies with similarity (Love, 2017), ten participants were selected.

LinkedIn served as the platform to start the search process for participants. Since LF, LLC employs each participant, one managing practitioner recruited for participation through LinkedIn was then asked if they could recommend any other participants based on the mentioned criteria to participate, a technique known as snowball sampling (Yin, 2018). Participant selection was completed after verifying roles and ranks via phone calls with the participants or through electronic communication. Once the participant base was formed, an informed consent form was sent to participants individually via email for official acknowledgment of the study. The reason for sending emails and communication to participants individually was to eliminate participants from finding out who else was involved with this study. The informed consent form provides detailed information on the nature of the study, the researcher's role, what the participant role is in the study, the processes of getting data, duration of data collection, how data is to be stored, a communication plan, and how their privacy is dealt with. Participants are informed that the interview is recorded. Participants only agree to the recording by acknowledging the consent form by signing it and sending it back to the researcher. Participants are also made aware through the consent form that they are empowered to stop at any point or ask questions about the process should the questions cause discomfort, emotional, or physical distress. Participants are also advised again at the beginning of the interview about discontinuing should they become distressed or feel uncomfortable at any time.

Setting

The size and scale of Logistics and Freight, LLC and spans the Southeastern U.S. This global freight organization is headquartered in Southeastern U.S. and owns and operates a multitude of business units to sustain its mission. LF, LLC prides itself on a continuous flow business model, which sets the stage for understanding it as a continuous learning organization in times where globalization, rapid-change, organizational diversity, and technology advancement are centerpiece items that impact the organization's ability to adapt, excel, elevate, and learn continuously.

The day-to-day setting for all participants before COVID-19 was in administrative facilities in the Southeastern U.S. Since COVID-19, 85% are working remotely from home while others, 15%, still operate from their office locations inundated with safety protocols and social distancing methods. Since all the selected participants are managers in the different function areas, they find themselves in cube farms in large office buildings. Some may have large window offices, and some are no larger than a cube. Additionally, their locations and workloads all vary based on business unit need. That statement is worthy of mention in the context of learning organizations as the system itself is now categorically set up to run based on organizational needs.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection is the process of “questioning, observing and reviewing” (Merriam, 1998). The researcher adhered to two instruments, the data collection phase, and this includes the interview. The interview is discussed in detail in this section.

Interviews

It was determined that the interview format would be advantageous for obtaining raw data from individual managing practitioners. According to Yin (2018), the interview process is an "engaged practice" (p.8). Yin (2018) has suggested two forms of interviews in case study methodology: the prolonged interview, which can be hours long, and the shorter case study interview, which usually lasts for no more than an hour (p.119). The interview interaction shows that this form of data collection bridges theory and practice, forming a fundamentally sound basis for narrowing the scholar-practitioner gap (Yin, 2018). The methodological literature was examined to ensure what Morgan (2011) called "fundamental congruence and relevance between the phenomenon investigated and procedures used for the study" (Morgan, in Yin, 2018). Marsick and Watkins' (2003) Dimensions of a Learning Organization Questionnaire served as a guide throughout the interview process. The DLOQ was adapted, with permission, see Appendix D, into a qualitative tool for use in interviews by the researcher to have a question pool to ask participants; it also served as a way for the researcher to code participant responses manually (see Figure 1).

While developing the interview schedule, the researcher uses a matrix of question styles to formulate participants' questions. The matrix included examples of descriptive, narrative, structural, contrasting, evaluative, circular, comparative, prompting, and probing styles to draw out productive responses. Table 3 illustrates the semi-structured interview schedule developed for participants to explore the experience of managing practitioners employed by Logistics and Freight, LLC.

The first questions were created to build a comfort zone for participants as they describe their daily experiences in their business unit at LF, LLC during the COVID-19 pandemic. The

questions are categorically framed according to Marsick and Watkins (2003) DLOQ as this instrument already formats continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, collaborative learning, embedded systems, systems connectivity, empowerment, and strategic leadership across the individual, group, and systems level. (See Appendix C) The creators of the DLOQ were sought out to obtain permission for modifying the original version and bounding the questions to a time of COVID-19, and adding the business unit of LF, LLC. (See Appendix C) Subsequent questions address LO specifically as they have managed their business units during COVID-19

Interviews, approximately 60 minutes, were conducted using Zoom, the online conferencing platform, to record sessions between the researcher and participants. A virtual medium was selected for three reasons. First, performing and recording Zoom interviews enabled the researcher to focus on the participant and the interview process without having to flip through notes or worry about missing any of the participants' experiences. While the interview is recorded, the researcher had tools available to write brief notes at the moment. Secondly, Zoom offers a video feature, which means the researcher could interact and engage with the participant on a human level to establish a rapport and build on their personal experiences. Third, virtual features compatible with Zoom enabled recordings to be securely saved and data analysis tasks such as thematic coding evaluation, and NVivo transcription began. It should be noted that safety precautions were taken in reference to privacy, so each participant received a password-protected Zoom invite.

An added benefit of conducting the interviews in an online setting was that this allowed participants to remain comfortable. Following the interviews, the audio recordings are played again, and additional notes are added. The audio files are saved to a password-protected computer in a databased filing system for this case study using the Pseudonym and file name.

(I.E., AA_AudioFile_Interview) From this point, the audio files of the Zoom videos are uploaded to Nvivo. This service transcribes the Zoom audio file verbatim. Once the transcript is created, the audio file is deleted from the database. The transcript is saved in the place of the audio file for data analysis.

Table 3. Interview schedule used to collect data

Interview Schedule- DLOQ
<p>Descriptive Questions: What is your rank in your business unit? How long have you been in your position within your business unit? How many years of experience do you have in your business unit? How long have you been employed with Logistics and Freight, LLC? Describe a typical day in your role in your business unit during COVID-19 at LF, LLC.</p>
Dimension 1. Continuous learning
<p>Q1. As a managing practitioner in your business unit, how do you define Continuous Learning? Q2. Had you heard of this term before this interview? Q3. During COVID-19, how has continuous learning been impacted at LF, LLC, if at all in your business unit? Q4. During the pandemic, which levels, individual, functional, or organizational, have been the focus of Continuous Learning in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 2. Dialogue and inquiry
<p>Q5. How do you define Dialogue and Inquiry in your business unit? Q6. Had you heard of this term before this interview? Q7. During COVID-19, how has dialogue and inquiry been impacted among members of your business unit, if at all? Q8. During the pandemic, which levels, individual, functional, or organizational, have been the focus of Dialogue and Inquiry in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 3. Team learning and collaboration
<p>Q9. How do you define Team learning and collaboration within your business unit? Q10. Had you heard of this term before this interview? Q11. How has team learning and collaboration increased or decreased due to COVID-19 in your business unit? Q12. During the pandemic, which levels, individual, functional, or organizational, have been the focus of Team Learning and Collaboration in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 4. Embedded Systems
<p>Q13. How do you define Embedded Systems in your business unit? Q14. Had you ever heard of this term before this interview? Q15. During the pandemic, how has measuring performance across individual, group, or organizational levels changed, if at all in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 5. Empowerment
<p>Q16. How do you define Empowerment in your business unit? Q17. Had you heard of this term before this interview?</p>

Q18. During COVID-19, how has Empowerment impacted the individual, functional, and organizational levels in your business unit?
Dimension 6. Systems Connections
Q19. How do you define Systems Connection in your business unit?
Q20. Had you heard of this term before this interview?
Q21. How have you encouraged members within the organization to think from a global perspective at the organizational level during COVID-19 in your business unit?
Dimension 7. Strategic leadership
Q22. How do you define Strategic Leadership in your business unit?
Q23. Describe how your leading, mentoring, and coaching has been impacted in your business unit at Logistics and Freight, LLC.during COVID-19 in your business unit.
Q24. As a result of using the dimensions of a learning organization in response to COVID-19 how would you answer, is your organization, Logistics and Freight, LLC, a learning organization in your business unit?

Adapted from Marsick and Watkins's (2003) DLOQ survey, Survey was modified with the permission of instrument creators (See Appendix A).

Analysis

Yin (2018) has suggested that case studies can stall during the analysis phase if the researcher does not carefully plan them. Due to the lack of guidelines available on the analysis phase, even experienced case study researchers have at times been perplexed (Yin, 2018, p. 165). Therefore, data analysis and data collection should coincide; for this work, data was organized based on what was seen, heard, and read for understanding while making sense of experiences (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2011; Love, 2017; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018).

Creswell (2014) listed six steps for the data analysis phase (p. 190-191):

1. Data organization: the researcher creates and organizes data files.
2. Reading and Notes the researcher reads through text, uses notes in the margin, and forms initial codes.
3. Describing the data as codes and themes: the researcher describes the case and context.
4. Classifying the data into codes and themes: the researcher uses categorical aggregation to establish themes or patterns.

5. Interpreting the data: the researcher uses direct interpretation and develops naturalistic generalizations of what was learned.
6. Representing and visualizing the data: the researcher presents a rich picture of the case using narrative, tables, and figures.

Adopting the above-mentioned steps for this work led to all information retrieved during data collection and processed during analysis being much more streamlined for organizational and management purposes as the researcher navigated through the research process (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018).

Bazeley (2013) asserts coding is the process of making meaning of data collected (in Adu, 2019). To understand the richness of the case study, NVivo is used for the transcription of each interview. NVivo captures the interviews verbatim. In a staged data coding process, Kraiger et al. (2016) used transcriptions in NVivo, created their categories, referred to as nodes, and checked them through member-checking for validity (p.406). For this case study, the audio of the Zoom interview sessions was uploaded to NVivo for transcription. After this was done, the transcript was then authenticated for authenticity by member checking..

Excel Workbook and Codes

At the start of data analysis, open coding was used when each transcript was produced. This was to identify common and unique themes that may emerge. Categories were already established across the individual, group, and organizational or system levels in the DLOQ; those categories are used in this work. Adu (2019) suggests that this coding method is referred to as a description-focused coding strategy (p. 23). This strategy is frequently used in describing events, settings, or behaviors. Description-focused coding has three characteristics worthy of note, and all align with describing this unique case. For example, Adu (2019) suggests, one, there is no interpretation or intervention in data; two, it is NVivo adaptable; and three, codes are concrete,

and data is not complex (p.28). Axial coding is used in the analysis; the researcher aligned codes to the individual, group, and organizational categories to identify new themes (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). Once the dialogue and inquiry code was operationalized, subthemes emerged.

Coding is done in an Excel workbook consisting of eight individual sheets labeled with the participants' initials. Each separate sheet consists of two tables. For example, one table is the participant's interview split line by line or row by row. The second table on each sheet is the code table, along with the definition of each code. The interview table consists of three columns. The first column is the individual quote from the interview. The second column is the researcher's codes, and the third column is the second coder's. For this study, the second coder, or inter-rater coder, is an outside business consultant with 25 years of working experience in training and development and has a terminal doctoral degree in education. This individual is also familiar with learning characteristics, thus (s)he was there to provide an alternate perspective to the interviewing process. The Excel workbook is shared with the second coder in a secured folder from the researcher's home office computer. There is no personally identifiable information in the workbook; thus, IRB approval was not needed for the second coder to participate in the coding process.

The Excel workbook was constantly under collaborative review throughout the data analysis phase. The researcher and the second coder reviewed and coded each sheet (interview) independently. To sustain the authenticity of coding, the researcher hid their column after coding so the second coder would code without seeing the researcher's codes. The researcher and second coder coordinated a schedule of when coding would happen to prevent the second coder from coding before the researcher. If the second coder coded before the researcher, the second coder was to hide their code column to prevent the researcher from seeing it before interval

discussions. Once the researcher and second coder completed coding, the researcher opened their column (the second column) to discuss agreements and differences among coding. The researcher and second coder met on four occasions to discuss coding. For example, after the second interview (sheet) was coded, a meeting occurred between the researcher and second coder to discuss agreements and disagreements, after the fourth, and then the sixth, and so on, until all interviews were coded. While the second coder did not have to code all of the interviews independently, as Hobson (1999) posits that appropriateness of involvement is only 10% of the sample, the second coder was there, as mentioned, for perspective. Disagreements in coding were resolved in discussions based on intervals as discussed above.

Inter-rater reliability

McDonald, Schroenenbeck, Forte (2019) posit inter-rater reliability is a statistical measurement establishing an agreement with two or more coders; in this case, the researcher coded, and then there was the second coder (p.4). To assess reliability, a percent agreement is used. Mile's and Huberman's (1994) formula was adopted to determine rater agreement;

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$$

McDonald et al. (2019) support the use of this formula, and the researcher decided to proceed with this for the purpose of this case study.

As mentioned, the codes of this case study are already established. Therefore, the seven learning characteristic constructs and the organizational hierarchy formed ten codes. As mentioned, the researcher and the second coder established meetings to discuss coding in intervals, for this case it was after coding every two interviews. The first interview rating had lower agreements between the researcher and second coder, 50-60% agreement. Yet, after discussions and reconciliation with the second coder around definitions, other interview coding discussions/reviews were at 80% or more in agreement. It should be mentioned that at no time

did the researcher and the second coder ever meet 100% agreement. As mentioned, disagreements in codes were level-set in interval meetings by reviewing the codes and their definitions. After a discussion, many disputes, and even some agreements on codes changed after reviewing codes and definitions with the second coder. For example, the first discussion went from 50-60% agreement to 80% just by re-orienting ourselves with the codes and definitions together as a team. In the second, third, and fourth discussion, the agreement went up as high as 90% agreement on all coded sections. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that inter-rater reliability consists of 80% agreement between coders on 95% of the code sections for satisfactory agreement. Using seminal literature to guide the agreement percentage, the researcher determined the results obtained between the researcher and the coder were valid.

This study sought out 10 participants based on norms in these types of case studies (Creswell, 2013). Eight participated; thus, the researcher decided this was a reasonable number for obtaining experiences of LO characteristics in LF, LLC, based on interview questions, case studies previously done that provide guidance, and qualitative research support (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1898). However, the researcher looked at a smaller unit, data saturation, which adopted a narrower, individual (participant) look. Legard et al. (2003) support this approach, as “probing needs to continue until the researcher felt they had reached saturation, a full understanding of the participant’s perspective (p.152).” In this case, data saturation came at points in the interview. For example, if a participant answers a question prior to a question being asked, it is the researcher's discretion to prevent redundancy by skipping interview questions as seen fit. Additionally, when the participant begins repeating themselves during questioning, the researcher moves on to the next question/section. For example, a strong description/definition of a characteristic determines whether or not participants are asked if they were aware of the

characteristic prior to the interview, eliminating repeating themselves and focusing on new information.

The researcher moved on with the interview questions and when there were no new themes that emerged during data collection. It should also be noted that data collection saturation is “distinct from formal data analysis (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1898). Participants received a copy of the transcript to verify interview transcription results for accuracy. All participants received post-interview transcription, yet only one returned an acknowledgment receipt. To get a solid grasp on the direction of moving the process along, an activity log was designed to organize the process for the researcher (See Table 4).

Table 4 Activity Log

Activity	Researcher	Participant
<p>The researcher looked for managing practitioners meeting the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must be a Manager 2. Has one person reporting to them. 3. A Manager during the COVID-19 Pandemic. 4. A Manager employed in a business unit by Logistics and Freight, LLC. via LinkedIn <p>Begin the snowball sampling process by emailing participants offered as potential sources.</p> <p>Once participants are verified, send a formal solicitation detailing the case study and the informed consent form for signature collection.</p> <p>Send out the calendar for Zoom interview scheduling.</p>	<p>Vett participant base (Criterion)</p> <p>Electronically sends solicitations to participants</p> <p>Electronically sends consent forms to participants.</p> <p>Researcher emails out calendar to participants for Interview scheduling.</p> <p>Send out an email explaining what to expect next to the participants.</p>	<p>Participants opt to participate in the study or not to participate by verifying through email.</p> <p>Participants sign and scan the consent form back to the researcher</p> <p>Participants book interview time to conduct the interview</p>

<p>Interviews</p> <p>The researcher conducts 60-minute sessions with individual participants</p>	<p>The researcher conducts Interviews via Zoom and uploads audio files to NVivo.</p> <p>Individual transcripts are saved to a password-protected computer, uploaded to NVivo for transcription.</p> <p>Begin reading transcripts and noting.</p> <p>Transcripts are sent to a peer coder for interrater reliability coding. Codes are checked via codebook with peer-reviewer to validate codes.</p> <p>Verification and tallying of agreements and disagreements occurred and then measured.</p>	<p>Participants interviewed via Zoom</p> <p>Participants are then sent a copy of their transcript immediately after uploading to database to authenticate their interview transcript.</p> <p>Another reason for participant verification is to address any identifying information that may have been uttered in the interview session is redacted for participant privacy.</p>
<p>Interviews Complete/Analysis</p>	<p>Complete the interview analysis and begin write-up of findings</p>	
<p>Close Data Collection and Analysis</p>	<p>Send out thank you letters to thank participants.</p>	

Trustworthiness and Reliability

Accuracy in data measuring and logic in data interpretation are significant parts of the research process. Creswell (2014) has suggested that trustworthiness in a case study is developed through the checking and re-checking of findings for accuracy. The current study did this by using methods to check for trustworthiness and reliability:

- Participants validate findings of Interview: participants were sent the final report to validate findings.
- A detailed description of context and setting: a thorough description creates a context for readers..
- Addressing and clarifying researcher bias: the researcher checked their bias through reflection and bracketing.
- Use of member-checking and debrief to provide unbiased feedback to the researcher (Love, 2017)

Yin (2018) suggests that a study's replicability is a crucial indicator of its reliability (p.46-47).

Additionally, Creswell (2008) mentioned reliability can be achieved by following simple ethical guidelines for conducting research; as previously mentioned, this includes checking for errors in the transcript, ensuring that code definitions are coherent, and checking and cross-checking codes from different researchers for the results (Creswell, 2008; Love, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher is to monitor for bias actively and reduce it through bracketing. To address these areas with fluidity and competence, Savin-Baden and Howell-Major (2013) posited areas most commonly associated with competence-building for qualitative researchers and this work incorporates them as a guide to check for credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013, p. 120):

1. Explain the study without biasing the potential participants.
2. Conduct interviews properly, according to the design.
3. Select appropriate artifacts.
4. Handle data per design.

5. Analyze and interpret data per the design.

In qualitative research, the researcher follows a path to access participants' thoughts and feelings and interacts with them. The researcher is responsible for the safety and security of data collected from participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The researcher has to consistently bracket their perspective, ideas or beliefs, or hypotheses formed after being immersed in the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1376). By using the steps mentioned above as a checklist, the critical pieces of the study can be accessed: the thoughts and feelings of the participants interviewed. To develop competence around issues of credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness, the researcher conducted continuous self-assessments and sought mentorship from academic experts and practitioners by requesting consistent critique and feedback throughout the qualitative process. Using the framework served as a constant reminder during the data collection process.

Delimitations

Logistics and Freight, LLC was the targeted case in this study, thus not everyone was involved. There are three delimitations to note in this case. Delimitations are defined as the boundaries that the researcher sets for the study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). First, the geographic scope of the study was limited to the Southeastern United States, excluding a larger logistics body overall. Second, only managing practitioners were selected, excluding those who do not play a management role. Third, the chosen managing practitioners were all managers during the COVID-19 instance, had at least one direct report, and were in management for at least one year. These delimitations also serve as potential limitations. Those working in these areas tend to be biased in favor of an organization's learning strategy; managers in these areas are regularly identified in the literature as parties responsible for implementing LO initiatives.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology used to complete this study. It covered the purpose of the study, the investigation plan, data collection, and data analysis. The next chapter addresses the findings from the participant interviews and survey data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

Previous chapters have addressed that learning organization is widely used, yet there is a wider gap on the characteristics of a learning organization, where they fit into an organization. The literature review in Chapter Two provided the necessary background on learning organization, the characteristics of the learning organization, where it fits into the organization, and who is to sustain the dimensions of a learning organization. Chapter Three laid out the investigation plan, methodology, data analysis, and the researcher's role.

Ten participants were selected for the case study. Only 8 of 10 agreed to interview; see Table 3 for participant description. As mentioned in Chapter 3, LF, LLC is large organization, and the participants are from various business units around LF, LLC. The participants do not work directly with each other and are separated by role and business function. For example, participant NG is in one business unit that oversees customer-oriented services, and participant AA is in one business unit that is solely modernizing accounting. Participant EK is in another business unit that focuses on road-haul delivery services, MM is in one business unit that is solely training on critical delivery operation, and BK is in another business unit that addresses learning and development in process improvement for safety and operations. ML is one business unit to support the advancement of technical/software learning, and AE and JM are in two business units that support IT transformation and the other leadership for the future of LF, LLC. Each participant is separated by business units and does not work directly, thus adding to the richness of experiences. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to provide rich responses on how they defined each learning organization dimension, whether they had heard of the dimension before the interview, which level of the organization is associated with

each dimension, and whether COVID-19 has impacted that dimension. Lastly, each participant their perception of Logistics and Freight, LLC was a learning organization before COVID-19 and what their perception of the organization is now as a result of COVID-19.

Table 5 Interview Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	YRS with LF, LLC	Rank
AA	Female	25 yrs	Manager, Accounting
AE	Female	11 yrs	Manager, Accounting
BK	Male	25 yrs	Manager, Training
EK	Female	3 yrs	Manager, Diversity and Inclusion
JM	Male	2.5 yrs	Manager, Human Resources
ML	Male	33 yrs	VP, Human Resources
MM	Male	13 yrs	Senior Manager, Training
NG	Male	25 yrs	VP, Human Resources

The purpose of Chapter Four describes the evaluation of the case 'studies' eight participants. This chapter describes the facts discovered through the participants' lived experiences at Logistics and Freight, LLC, during COVID-19. The results of data analysis conducted on the semi-structured participant interviews are indicated by section, Results and then Summary.

Results

This portion is divided into seven sections that each correspond with each category of Marsick and Watkins (DLOQ, 2003). Findings are supported with excerpts of 'participant's responses to support the case study (Yin, 2018). Data is represented in the form of narrative,

tables, or statistics. It is most logical to present this study’s data in the order in which the primary research questions are asked. An interview schedule asked secondary questions modified from a learning organization's dimensions to answer the primary research questions (Appendix D). Those questions are,

- RQ1: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align individual learning (continuous learning, empowerment) with their strategy during COVID-19?
- RQ2: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align group learning (dialogue and inquiry; collaboration and team learning) with their strategy during COVID-19?
- RQ3: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align organizational learning (embedded systems, systems connection, strategic leadership) with their strategy during COVID-19?

RQ1: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align individual learning with their strategy during COVID-19?

Table 6 Individual Level Subthemes

LO Construct	New Subthemes	Definition
Continuous Learning	1. Adaption 2. Situational Learning	1. Sustain operations or performance in response to environmental factors. (IE, COVID-19) 2. Learning is participatory and consists of a community.
Empowerment	1. Decision Making	1. Active participation in decision-making of day-to-day assignments and tasks.

Continuous Learning

When asked to describe their workday at Logistics and Freight, LLC during COVID-19, two themes emerged from continuous learning, one being *adaptation* as an action, and the other suggests that continuous learning is now *situational* at LF, LLC. As COVID-19 began to impact organizations, continuous learning became a central characteristic for LF, LLC. As one individual noted, continuous learning is essential for learning during the COVID-19 pandemic because

"...the word for the year has been pivot, so I say continuous learning ties in very well with how we've had to pivot as relates to COVID-19." (EK)

Such a description provides additional support that this dimension is synonymous with adaptation in that the problem facing LF, LLC is COVID-19; therefore, to circumvent the problem LF, LLC pivoted from established Pre-COVID-19 strategies, thus making continuous learning essential in this case to navigate crisis successfully.

One of the principal *adaptations* of LF, LLC during COVID-19 involved the health and safety of personnel in the workforce. Specific adaptation is addressed by MM., a senior manager in a training capacity, who explains that the roles in their business unit have transformed to benefit LF, LLC's needs of continuing operations during COVID-19. Adaptation MM refers to is the steps taken, by LF, LLC, to ensure personnel was safer in COVID-19 workspaces by adapting to federal, state and local guidelines by modifying pre-COVID-19 workspaces based on recommended medical and safety guidelines for those essential to in-person operations (e.g., personal protective equipment, limiting amounts of people in workspaces, social distancing), in addition to making modifications to non-essential personnel and shifting them to remote operations..

Before COVID-19, LF, LLC complied with federal laws regarding health and safety in the workplace for compliance; thus, the organization was committed to sustaining a safe environment. A description of what commitment to continuous learning as an action by managing practitioners within LF, LLC during COVID-19 was provided by MM, whereby he asserts,

"...we have complied with both state and local laws as well as corporate policy or code of restrictions, and conducted strength assessments as part of continual learning of participants."

When asked about how these adaptations have impacted continuous learning during COVID-19, and what is different from pre-COVID-19, MM expanded on this by stating,

"in person for curriculum development has remained. However, we have taken precautions where it makes sense and push them to a remote status so that we could use them while protecting people in the current environment. We do not bring them together unless it is needed to be for the actual development of an event in a simulator. So it's just another positive impact."

The above-mentioned quote suggests that critical tasks, like curriculum development, have retained its' pre-COVID-19 work operation and has not been impacted due to COVID-19. However, LF, LLC has shifted to remote working conditions for many back-office support functions, thus many pre-COVID-19 operations are now conducted with adapted protocols for the purpose of organizational survival. As a result of adaptations, managing practitioners now intentionally prioritize tasks, projects, or work by addressing what constitutes a priority for members to meet in face-to-face situations given current state and local restrictions. MM's response confirms what literature claims in that continuous learning is the capability to adapt to

environmental factors (Marsick and Watkins, 2003); thus, it is essential for his business unit at LF, LLC around safety measures, while also strategically accommodating more agile responses during the COVID-19 crisis through prioritization and modernization of work.

Before Covid-19, mandatory courses/training was required of everyone (e.g. Sexual Assault, workplace violence training) and managing practitioners assigned this learning to their employees based on mandated organizational need. Additionally, employees could attend in-person instruction for specialty role-based courses (I.E. IT based training). Another key pre-COVID 19 strategy was LF,LLC brought in outside vendors for learning opportunities to “enhance people’s skills”, as MM suggests (I.E. Software training and demos), and the only true antagonist is balancing time to learn with work tempo. Some participants recognized that their business units adapted processes and policies to sustain employee and customer health during COVID-19, and these participants contribute this to continuous learning in terms of *situational learning*. Specifically, other 'participants' descriptions suggest that LF, LLC, adapted learning opportunities to be open and free for all individuals within the business units. For example, AA explains,

"...I think it's more generalized. There is required training that everyone in the company has to take, and they've always had to before the COVID-19 situation anyway. I think the ad hoc training, you know, that you might have brought in for your specific group clearly has changed. Now it's more online, and in some cases, it might be an individual who has to seek it out. It is there if they want to pursue it; opportunities are available through the company." (Situational)

Opportunities for continuous learning increased during COVID-19 at LF, LLC, by offering availability to all members, even across business units, as opposed to pre-COVID 19

strategies where managers assigned or approved learning opportunities for members of their teams within the business units. (I.E. Business Analyst can learn project management skills to assist in task management working from home) Yet, in some instances, it takes an individual initiative to go and find the opportunity, as AA indicates in her experiences during COVID-19. The participant suggested that business units have adapted to complete virtual environments in most instances during COVID-19; therefore, increasing the opportunities to learn at LF, LLC across multiple business units, not just a single entity. As a result of COVID-19, working virtually from home, provided by LF, LLC, connected individual responsibility with a commitment to continuous learning virtually. When questioned about his personal view of continuous learning, BK stated,

"...as a person, there is a commitment to continuous learning in terms of learning from mistakes, learning from others, and learning from research and development that either affect or tangentially touch what we do in terms of adult education."

Additionally, this quote describes where the continuous learning attribute is found according to 'BK's "commitment to continuous learning" in his strategy of leading individuals and teams in his business unit. Specifically, the rapid response to COVID-19 consisted of learning from mistakes, others and researching to sustain a state of adaptation.

Analyzing responses of continuous learning began to display a pattern among participant descriptions. As each participant was asked to describe continuous learning in the context of COVID-19, varying degrees of depth and experience were depicted with this dimension, as noted in the participants' responses. Those whose roles were involved with training or education in their business unit provided elaborate responses while those in other fields, for example, accounting, or IT, were not as detailed in regard to continuous learning. Adaptation was the

central theme emerging as a result of continuous learning. This leads to the next dimension at the individual level, empowerment.

Empowerment

This theme's findings revealed that empowerment is widely embraced throughout the organizational culture at LF, LLC before COVID-19. According to MM, before COVID-19, empowerment was there but “defined via policy process and expectation.” Additionally, difficulty with decision-making around work-life balance often consumed members as they completed projects and tasks in the office. MM also stated people “knew what they were empowered to do when it came to solving problems and completed their work as expectations were set by policy and guided from their manager.”

During COVID-19, empowerment resulted in different participants' descriptions of the characteristic, and it was met with positive responses when prompted. For JM, during COVID-19, empowerment was about opportunities to progress; as he explains,

"But then, you know, empowerment is also about empowering them by way of giving them the time to learn during their work hours and not just expecting them to do it in their own time. And there's a balance that, as you know, in terms of delivering results and productivity and the impact to that look required to have any organization. But then if people do deliver, you invest in their future and the future of the organization by ensuring that development is happening as opposed to, OK, now that you've finished that project, then start the next project and no time for evaluation or celebration, just go from one project to the next as quickly as possible and a race for results. "

In this quote, the individual is highlighting how learners must be empowered. That said, the reason that empowerment leads to results lies in its orientation and alignment with organizational deliverables. Furthermore, the participant is suggesting leaders are faced with making quicker decisions. In some cases, tough decisions are made at LF, LLC, bounded with the COVID-19 pandemic and the tension of decision-making; a balance is sought in the short-term yet sustainability long-term.

Members across business units at LF, LLC have been a central component of LF, LLC, even before COVID-19; however, when prompted to describe how COVID-19 has impacted empowerment within his business unit, JM, suggested,

"I think that's where the test of the empowerment comes, is our people. We've been given that opportunity to exercise the empowerment that comes with giving them the resources and the access."

As the above quotes suggest, access to learning resources was an important element in empowerment, especially adapting virtual platforms for JM at LF, LLC during COVID-19, but he is suggesting that the test is how people in business units at LF, LLC, will be empowered while being on their own away from the experiences of day to day human interaction.

As stated previously, empowerment is a learning characteristic already observed in organizational, business units, teams and individual management practice at LF, LLC prior to COVID-19. Before COVID-19 caused the adaptation to virtual spaces, business units and teams used empowerment strategies such as celebrations of success and inspiration of people to work harder through a reward system (Skuncikiene, 2009). For BK, however, empowerment

during COVID-19 rests in increased decision-making capability of members of LF, LLC, as he explains,

"...empowerment really is to enable the people that are actually doing the work on the team to make decisions. They have to ask themselves, what would I do in this situation? And they could answer that because really they are closest to the information needed to make a good decision and that trust is really there based on how we've worked together before and what they've told me about what they do. And so that's really the key to push the decision-making power to the people that are in the best position can make that decision."

Additional data also emphasized the alignment with empowerment and decision-making when AE said:

"I define empowerment [in COVID-19] as allowing other individuals to make decisions, no matter what their level is, to make decisions based on their research or their findings or maybe even their discretion and not relying on leadership to make all the decisions."

The data suggests members are encouraged to research problems and solutions. Additionally, this managing practitioner is suggesting that decision-making at the member level is supported at "their discretion" also because it prevents them from "relying on leadership to make decisions." As such, what the above quote suggests is that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the member is empowered to make a decision carrying significant weight from a managing practitioner perspective. Rather than a centralized learning strategy, whereby members rely on managers possession of information they need to do their jobs as done in years past, the COVID-19 pandemic is requiring individuals in this case study to (1) consider "what would I do in this

situation?" (2) as BK suggests, direct-line management cannot be responsible for having all the answers, thus members' decision-making is encouraged and supported because they "are closest to the information." Additionally, BK expands on this by stating,

"... they do not depend on me to do the work. So they're operating at a very high level of efficiency. Even during this time where they're working."

What the above quote suggests is that empowerment, particularly from a managing practitioners experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, is the decision-making capability of members of teams in business units.

COVID-19 impacted empowerment in a way that individuals are intentionally encouraged in decision-making by managing practitioners to link their individual goals by matching their plans to LF, LLC's, thus increasing the feeling of responsibility for each other and LF, LLC, and people have been recognized and rewarded for those contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit it virtually (Skuncikiene, 2009). Additionally, free and open communication throughout business units of LF, LLC creates opportunities to enhance empowered members to take ownership of their tasks, even in a work-from-home environment, relying less on managers for information, which shifts decision-making to the individual learner.

RQ2: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align group learning with their strategy during COVID-19?

Table 7 Business Unit/Group Level Subthemes

LO Construct	New Subthemes	Definition
Dialogue and Inquiry	1. Team Alignment	1. An open line of communication with leaders for alignment and target performance.
	2. Organizational Strategy	

Collaboration/ Team Learning	1. Role-based Collaboration	2. Organizational focus on value-added activities to drive outcomes connected to strategy.
	2. Implicit Learning	1. Integration of computer-supported cooperative work to support collaboration among members/teams of the organization. 2. A lack of learning outside structured or formal learning environments.

Dialogue and Inquiry

Similar to continuous learning, participants provided evidence that dialogue and inquiry have changed to meet the needs of LF, LLC during COVID-19, especially in terms of team alignment and organizational strategy. Before COVID-19, managers could step out into their office spaces and have a conversation with members of their teams. A feedback system between members and their management was accepted and promoted with the business units. In terms of the former, dialogue and inquiry during COVID-19 adapted an intentional use to support the efficiency and effectiveness of communication at the team and business unit and require commitment from all to ensure continued success and improvement. While dialogue and inquiry are often related to tolerance for candor from individuals to leadership in LO literature, the prevalence of dialogue and inquiry during COVID-19 at LF, LLC, has been a leadership effort to keep individuals at the team level aligned (*team alignment*) and business unit levels connected to *organizational strategy*.

In terms of maintaining the aforementioned connection, in a COVID-19 world at LF, LLC, the frequency of communication has increased while also becoming, as MM suggests, "*much more intentional*" in nature with ever-shifting adaptations to the emerging pandemic. Additionally, BK states that day to day, dialogue,

"... is one of the biggest changes having happened since COVID-19. I think the most noticeable is in terms of individuals; we've really always been very committed to that."

He went on to further suggest that, *"...I've noticed mostly that at the team and corporate level,"* when prompted to describe where dialogue and inquiry were most impacted during COVID-19. Participants acknowledged that what was in-person communication before COVID-19 is now an e-mail, telephone call, electronic chat, or web-conference across business units at LF, LLC as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Along the lines of intentionality, participant responses regarding dialogue and inquiry addressed each term independently, suggesting that inquiry may be seen as a construct and shift emphasis to communication during a time of crisis. For example, BK expanded on this in his remarks here,

"I think the difference being that dialogue, not so much the inquiry, but as we talk to each other. It's become more intentional that we have agenda-driven meetings rather than some sort of wandering brainstorming types of interaction. So we're coming into meetings better prepared and with some of that research already in place. It's really, really driven us still much more efficient way of interacting with each other."

The issue of intentionality suggests that dialogue and inquiry were more focused on company directives than informal and more ill-structured verbiage. Moreover, the above quote also describes the participants' experiences during COVID-19 and the intentionality of dialogue driving meetings over the process of inquiry. Specifically, the data suggesting that meetings including "wandering brainstorming interaction" before COVID-19 have been replaced with

"intentional... agenda-driven meetings." BK is explaining that members are "better prepared" because they are equipped with "that research" before entering the sessions.

Another interesting theme emerged about dialogue and inquiry from a leadership level on *organizational strategy*. Another participant continued to expand on the impact COVID-19 had on dialogue and inquiry within their business unit at LF, LLC. As mentioned, communication and information are free-flowing throughout the organization, including communication from leadership levels in and around business units. During the COVID-19 pandemic, communication from leadership is more intentional, precisely timed, and disciplined in conveying accurate information, but also positive in informing individuals, teams, and business units across LF, LLC; however, communication also depends on leadership, and, for some, COVID-19 is seen as a time to demonstrate this specific leadership quality. For example, when asked how dialogue and inquiry was impacted in their business unit by COVID-19, JM, a manager in leadership development in human resources, explained,

"I've seen more of an emphasis on delivery, and I attribute that to leadership style or preference from leaders that want to present themselves as excelling at a time of crisis. So if they want to be able to boast they're producing more, delivering more, or less impacted by COVID-19 than their peers, they see it as an opportunity to make themselves look good as opposed to taking an organizational view, and they're being more circumspect about what impact they're having on the organization through their own behavior of driving for results."

This quote suggests that communication from senior leadership in JM's business unit is calculated and precise, adding to the free-flowing information available to business units, teams, and individuals at LF, LLC. JM suggests that leadership communication has increased using

COVID-19 as leverage to demonstrate the capability of communicating for the organization by presenting their "excelling at a time of crisis." Some leaders use communication for self-service, as they "boast they're producing more, delivering more, or they're less impacted by COVID-19 than their peers." This participant's remark suggests that COVID-19 has influenced the need for intentional and decisive communication across business units, whether it be internal motivation or ambition of being visible or for the survival of the organization through free and open information flow.

During interviews, responses of participants associated methods of communication during COVID-19 (ex. e-mails, telephone calls, virtual meetings) with dialogue and inquiry. Additionally, AA went on to explain that "*...it does require more detail, and maybe even meetings rather than an email.*" This participant is describing that COVID-19 has influenced the adaptation of communication to be detailed, intentional and may result in individuals or teams coming together to understand the communication. Additionally, this participant's remark indicates the tension created with hearing, understanding, and acknowledging electronic communication at an individual level in a business world absent human interaction. Before COVID-19, many misconceptions in communication were avoided, as AA suggests by "*finding members of the team or business unit and directly speaking with them.*"

In summary, data suggest that communication is the more appropriate characteristic by managing practitioners at LF, LLC. However, more importantly, communication today is more intentionally detailed from sender to receiver. Additionally, communication at LF, LLC during COVID-19, particularly at the business unit level, supports sustaining free and open communication yet ensuring information was accurate and on time to business unit members.

Collaboration and Team Learning

Findings within this theme suggest that collaboration is a component to a larger organizational strategy during COVID-19. During interviews participants differentiated between past and present collaboration at LF, LLC. A difference in collaboration and team learning before COVID-19 and now is that it is now *role-based collaboration* and *implicit learning* emerged as groups/teams work together virtually. While responses were positive, based on participant responses measuring, monitoring and tracking effectiveness provide a perfect touch to collaboration.

Before COVID-19, teams were in-person, with a small percentage working from alternate sites. If issues occurred within a team that was not entirely “together”, travel arrangements could be made so members could come together for the purpose of level-setting and problem-solving. During COVID-19, this area shifted to how systems could adapt to policy and procedure changes. The shift from long-term planning became a short-term reality of system survival. As mentioned, all of the participants interviewed acknowledge that COVID-19 impacted collaboration at LF, LLC, which now occurs with an increased frequency across their teams and business unit and modified or adapted to a virtual format. When participants were asked how COVID-19 impacted it in their business unit at LF, LLC, a variety of responses were conveyed. For example, BK explained

"...I'd like to think of what we do, like an athletic team or a military organization. There are very specific roles to be played within that organization, all of which have to work together to make the whole organization work better."

The above quote suggests that collaboration for LF, LLC is increasingly role-based collaboration as individuals work remotely due to the pandemic. As members of a team, people are working

together to make their business unit function, or more importantly, function efficiently during COVID-19. BK uses "*athletic team*" to address specific individual roles of working together to fulfill an objective, which then impacts the functionality of the larger business units. One of the key impacts of collaboration between teams and business units is the increase in silos within LF, LLC. While this participant did not allude to whether each individual understood what their role was nor how that role fits into the larger picture of the business unit or organizational level of LF, LLC, the remarks indicated that changed to now emphasize what specific roles and skillsets are needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked about the impact on collaboration at LF, LLC during COVID-19, one manager (AA) described how the different roles impacted the perceptions of information and the subsequent challenges:

"No two people learn the same. Communication is difficult because, again, people read into whatever..."

"you are a communicator, and I am an accounting type. We don't necessarily read the same communication and get the same information out of it. So I think that's tricky. I think you have to, as a person that may be doing the communicating understand that not everyone will get what you think" (AA)

The quotes above not only suggest individual positions are increasingly role-based, but they filter information through these roles. This, in turn, can make collaboration and teamwork more difficult.

Data further suggests this is exacerbated due to COVID-19. LF, LLC's adaptation to a virtual environment due to the loss of informal collaborative learning once in-person collaborative sessions within business units are now virtual experiences with adopted

communication platforms, and challenges are starting to present themselves. When asked to describe how COVID-19 has impacted collaboration and team learning, JM explained,

"People complain now I've been on more calls, and so even though they may be on a call, it doesn't mean that they're having something important be heard. And so people tend to be more collaborative when they're in a room because they will sit me near each other or they will huddle, and they will break out. When there is a need for collaboration, there's a more agile collaboration in an in-person setting than you have in a virtual setting because the virtual setting, it's a controlled conversation in the sense that the host is driving the meeting. And it's not as easy for people then to indulge each other inside conversations, which would happen in a room. That's been my experience. Especially the way the department tends to work. People will recognize this, their respective strengths and weaknesses, and they will call it out.."

The above quote suggests only the virtual environment significantly lacks the human experience of being present and is noticed by managing practitioners. The participant is implying there is more effective collaboration during in-person sessions, which occurred before COVID-19, and in the shift to all virtual settings, conversations are now controlled, which can be an area of tension for collaboration to occur. Another participant, MM, confirms that complete virtual environments were short-term solutions to sustain LF, LLC during COVID-19, yet, these environments experience a lack of *"innovative impacts because you're not in-person..."* Despite this participant acknowledging the challenges of virtual collaboration in the short-term, it was positively perceived that LF, LLC, *"will discover or learn a better way of doing it."* This quote suggests that discovery is culturally accepted at LF, LLC.

RQ3: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align organizational learning with their strategy during COVID-19?

Table 8 Organizational Level Subthemes

LO Construct	New Subthemes	Definition
Embedded Systems	1 Adapting systems in terms of policies and procedures	1. Systems (Individuals, Teams, Business Units, Technology) in terms of policies and procedures are adapted to reinforce strategies across the organization.
Systems Connectivity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise systems to support community connection. Community Connection 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Members see the effect of their work on the entire system. Organizations are connected with the communities that they are in and adapt to the community.
Strategic Leadership	1. Shared Vision	1. Sustaining commitment of members across the enterprise

Embedded Systems

Embedded systems are used to capture and share learning resources (Marsick and Watkins, 2003). Before COVID-19, software and technology was purchased to use to collect information and then share that information across business units and guide organizational leaders in long-term enterprise decision-making. In the case study presented for this research case, embedded systems are not high on the priority list for LF, LLC, during COVID-19, based on participant responses. However, participants especially seemed to highlight *adapting systems in terms of policies and procedures*. For example, MM explained that during COVID-19,

"...we were going to lose an employee due to her moving to the East Coast, and we proved that she could do a job in our remote status very effectively and established a plan where she would come back once a month, and we're able to retain her because we already established different protocols for meetings or coordination of virtual meetings.

So we were able to keep her. Now, once a month, she just comes back in person for a different type of work, if you will, to level set with her team and with her manager."

This suggests that LF, LLC is not only revisiting current policies to sustain short-term operational continuance as it has been impacted by COVID-19, but leadership is leveraging systems to overcome challenges brought on by the pandemic (IE, Members are no longer limited by geographic region to be part of the team.). While LF, LLC rapidly adapted to the external situation it faced, the data also suggests that organizational leadership displayed a readiness to adapt to sustain operations, thus confirming Marsick and Watkins (2003) continuous learning attribute is action-based, not solely tacit knowledge (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

COVID-19 has impacted this attribute "positively and negatively," according to MM, which suggests that during COVID-19,

"...of my most effective interactions with, say, a vice president or a senior vice president is always based on a shared understanding of those embedded systems of those policies, procedures and moving packages around our system."

This suggests that the leadership of the business units at LF, LLC are involved in the process of the embedded system's characteristic based on MM's experience during COVID-19. MM suggests his "effective" experiences with business unit leaders and higher is based on "shared understanding of those embedded systems," which is also awareness of types of information, such as "policies, procedures, and moving packages around the system." Another participant, JM, offered an alternative perspective about what his business unit is doing when asked to describe embedded systems during COVID-19,

"...in terms of embedding the technology resource and capabilities, it's about leveraging the latest advances in technology from a learning development perspective to build those into programs and build progress around them so that we have a much greater ability to reach the audience. So the democratization of learning make it available widely, easily accessible, anytime, anywhere, mobile or desktop, and meet people where they're at so that they are learning during commutes or they're waiting in a doctor's office or waiting for a flight or whatever, and that we make the learning as you pick because as is possible. And so they can engage whenever they have the opportunity and compare what would have been redundant time for them into more productive attendees time and make it easy for them to do so."

The thoughts from this quote suggest the importance of moving towards a mobile and on-demand form of learning specifically. The data indicates a state of 'democratized learning' across multiple platforms for knowledge sharing and shared understanding that is culturally adopted within their business units at LF, LLC, and an important attribute that LF, LLC was improving on during the COVID-19 pandemic. MM also mentions when prompted to describe embedded systems within his business unit,

"Instead of working in a silo, we've learned that cross-connectivity, and knowing where other systems affect each other, brings about better business decisions and more efficiency. I think that we're kind of growing into that. We tend to be a siloed organization even within our system, multiple silos."

This quote suggests embedded systems as a learning organization characteristic is the intentional use of cross-connectivity, and knowing how different systems affect each other impacts business decisions at LF, LLC, during COVID-19; that is, identifying areas where different systems

intersect. MM expanded on an example, mentioning that prior to COVID-19, *"we bought some equipment looking at man-hours spent and where they are spent for decision making, but this is from a systems level."* MM does not allude to how that is being used during COVID-19 because the attention during the crisis is based on short-term adaptation, not measurement, but systems record information for the purpose of sharing it across the "systems level." Another participant supports that the development of embedded systems as an attribute at LF, LLC is underway but alludes it is not a central theme in the short-term strategy of sustaining operations during COVID-19 but carries significant value for long-term planning and preparation. When prompted, for example, JM states, his business unit adopted

"...learning journeys that use blended learning with OnDemand, virtual content curators on these platforms coupled with psychometric assessment, or knowledge quizzes, or practical applications of that learning that requires evidencing and sign-off on the platforms themselves so that there's a record of the activity occurring."

JM's quote suggests that LF, LLC is committed to modernizing learning opportunities through capturing learning, in the case of *"psychometric assessment, or knowledge quizzes, or practical applications"* to share information as a form of *"evidence, sign-off... there's a record of activity."*

Systems Connection

Systems connection is a construct associated with linking *enterprise systems to support community connection* and how the organization connects with communities or *community connection* (Marsick and Watkins, 2003). Before COVID-19, people could actively see the effects of their work across the organization by in-person organizational events by managers, business unit leaders, and enterprise leadership. Recognition for employee work was in-person

and celebrated members for going above and beyond their duties' normal expectations. During COVID-19, that process continues yet has adapted to a virtual platform.

Participants interviewed acknowledged this dimension is found at the functional or organizational levels of LF, LLC. For example, when prompted, MM explained,

"Our strategic goals are over the next six to 12 months. What the values are, what the goals are, and where you can improve. We're struggling to do this, but every year we go, and we define strategic goals. Those goals are usually derived from our executive vice president or our CEO. And then we take those high level one or two goals according to our values."

In contrast to system connections designed for a long-term strategy, goals were relatively short-term in nature (six months and 12 months); however, the quote above underscores the challenge as managers and organizational leaders redefined strategic goals and planned for them in light of the ever-changing COVID-19 pandemic. Because the pandemic was increasingly changing, they struggled to identify "*values...goals...and where you can improve*" as a business unit. MM, did not discuss why the business unit was "struggling to do this." However, it was indicated that "*those goals are usually derived from our executive vice president, or our CEO.*"; that is, the connectivity of their systems was reframed as the top-level management prioritized their strategy to deal with the pandemic. This suggests that the vision and goals are hierarchical and driven from the upper levels LF, LLC where the reality of linking to each business unit, each team, and each member could be the struggle.

Findings revealed a variety of responses from participants interviewed, but all were positive. The data suggests that the external world impacts each internal component of LF, LLC, therefore embodying systems connection. This aligns with literature about organizations

connecting with communities and then using it to modify work practices germane to an individual business unit (Marsick and Watkins, 2003).

Strategic Leadership

This theme's findings reveal that participants experienced a top-down strategic approach during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before COVID-19, town halls and in-person events allowed a more comprehensive scope into the future of company strategy. During COVID-19, townhalls shifted from in-person events to increased inter-organization communication to enhance a shared vision during the COVID-19 crisis. This dimension also generated a wide variety of interview responses regarding strategic leadership. In this case, top-down leadership around a *shared vision*.

The COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity to model a unique top-down approach that fits LF, LLC around a shared vision that emphasized values and culture, for example, NG confirms, "*...I model the way, challenge the process, enable others to act, inspire a shared vision, and encourage the heart.*" NG's quote suggests that strategic leadership is action-based for him during the COVID-19 pandemic as he "models the way" for members of his business unit but also encourages others to be part of the process. Additionally, the participant suggests that leaders are the starting point for strategic leadership, and this stems from the organizational level. This is supported by other managing practitioners. For example, when AA was asked about the impact of strategic leadership, she immediately mentioned, "*It definitely starts from the top-down, it's a vision, and it's got to be disseminated downward, absolutely, because trying to push uphill is impossible.*" This participant's suggestion demonstrates that the company's vision is top-down directed, and a bottom-up approach is not the norm.

The most consistent element of strategic leadership was *shared vision*. It emerged as a theme that strategically bonded business units, teams, and individuals at LF, LLC through intentional and frequent communication, informing members across the organization of direction and newsworthy items also consistently communicating organizational goals and strategies. One participant, EK, indicated that strategic leadership in their business unit due to COVID-19 shows, “...it is about looking at what the overall goals are for the company in the end, and what ways we work together to carry out those goals.” EK is suggesting in their business unit that managing practitioners addressed how their goals aligned with the larger organization, LF, LLC by “looking at that the overall goals” and matched that with how members of the business unit could “work together to carry out the goals.”

Other participants expanded on the role of the leader. For example, AE suggests that strategic leadership was “...leading others to think of the big picture instead of silos; Providing leadership in how you or your small task impacts the whole organization.” AE suggests that during COVID-19, managing practitioners in her business unit used the pandemic to “lead others to think of the big picture,” thus suggesting that aligning shared vision is an important theme in this case. Some responses indicated that this dimension requires constant analysis and development or acknowledgment as an area for improvement at LF, LLC. Each of the previous attributes feeds into strategic leadership, and strategic leadership guides the learning organization through planning, preparation, guidance through a shared vision.

Once a shared vision had been adopted, AA stated the importance of consistency of the message:

“Once you have that, then as long as it's a message or a strategy, people can understand, and you're not deviating from it, it's the same message. There are no issues with that, and we understand we can all go for a common goal.”

AA’s quote suggests a shared vision allows members of LF, LLC to link their own goals to the organizations' goals, creating a sense of responsibility and even a sense of loyalty (Skuncikiene, 2009). The participant suggests that a *shared vision* starts with a clear and understandable message that spans all members across business units. Additionally, AA’s quote suggests that this message should be consistent by stating, “you’re not deviating from it; it’s that same message.” This is a noteworthy and challenging aspect, especially in light of the ever-changing pandemic.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present interview results on the categories of Marsick and Watkins (2003) DLOQ through the lens of managing practitioners at Logistics and Freight, LLC during the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary research questions asked, “How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align individual learning (continuous learning, empowerment) with their strategy during COVID-19? How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align group learning (dialogue and inquiry; collaboration and team learning) with their strategy during COVID-19? How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align organizational learning (embedded systems, systems connection, strategic leadership) with their strategy during COVID-19?”

In this case study, eight participants provided their viewpoints and experiences with the dimensions of a learning organization, continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning and collaboration, embedded systems, empowerment, systems connection, and strategic

leadership. Most of the participants indicated the relevance of studying learning organization attributes in a time of crisis by affirming steps taken during COVID-19 in business units at LF, LLC. As mentioned, several participants encouraged that these attributes were already in place before COVID-19 and only demonstrated “*what areas need to be polished.*” Additionally, participants expressed the importance of identifying where dimensions it through remarks to the researcher. For example, one participant (NG) indicated, “*I think a phrase that you often hear even outside about organization is the need to say curious.*”

Participants did not elude to one distinct group in the organization responsible for sustaining LO attributes. However, the depth of responses from some of the participants was indicative of where these attributes are more likely to be a topic of conversation. One participant, ML, indicated that “*it cannot be one group to sustain LO.*” Their perception, all eight, was based on experience with organizational initiatives and human resources' current role at LF, LLC.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

COVID-19 has had an incredibly disruptive focus in multiple respects on learning, operations, and business continuance. While many industries underwent uncharted changes, logistics was a critical domain as commerce and shipping were increasingly adopted by consumers. To understand this issue, this study adapted the dimensions of a learning organization questionnaire, developed by Marsick & Watkins (2003), and then modifying the instrument into a qualitative interview to draw out the experiences of managing practitioners during COVID-19 for Logistics and Freight, LLC. The dimensions of a learning organization comprise seven dimensions, continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning/collaboration, embedded systems, empowerment, systems connection, and strategic leadership, and are action imperatives, meaning these attributes have to be present, otherwise, to be a learning organization (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

Findings conveyed in Chapter Four present managing practitioners' experiences with the LO action imperatives through the lens of a single logistics organization headquartered in the southeast US, Logistics and Freight, LLC, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter Five, findings are addressed as they are related to the primary research questions and referenced by current literature. See Table 7.

Table 9

LO constructs and the themes found in data analysis

Level	LO Construct	Sub-themes
Individual/Member	Continuous Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adaptation is dominant at the individual level in business units to adapt to working conditions due to COVID-19.• Situational learning is dominant at the individual level in business units

		as members opt to participate in learning communities for the purpose of problem-solving and task completion during the COVID-19 pandemic.
	Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision Making is dominant at the individual level in business units as members own their role and lift the burden off of relying on management. • Progress is dominant at the individual level of the business unit as role modernization now reflects more responsibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Team/Group/Business Unit	Dialogue and Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is dominant at the team/group/business unit level because communication shifted to communicate to learn and work during the COVID-19 pandemic. • Team Alignment is dominant at the business unit level. Managers ensure that individual members communicate their tasks and roles for team transparency but also for alignment to organizational need/strategy. • Organizational Strategy is dominant at the business unit level as managers use communication to connect their teams to corporate initiatives and strategies.
	Collaboration/ Team Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-based collaboration is dominant at the business unit levels as individual roles are working together for the purpose of bridging components of the business unit, members, and technology. • Implicit Learning is dominant at the business unit level; managers began to see gaps in virtual learning and working and in-person contact prior to COVID-19.

Enterprise/Organization/Systems	Embedded System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapting systems in terms of policies and procedures to maintain units
	Systems Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise connection is dominant at the systems (organizational) level as leaders of the organization aim to demonstrate how an individual's work in the business unit connects across the organization as a community. Community Connection is dominant at the systems (organizational) level as leaders of the organization aim to scan the environment and make workplace changes based on community interaction.
	Strategic Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared Vision is dominant at the systems (organizational) level as leaders of the organization sustain employee commitment and loyalty by including the whole organization in the shared vision.

This chapter is divided into three sections beginning with a summary and discussion of findings, also broken down to incorporate the three primary research questions,

1. RQ1: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align individual learning (continuous learning, empowerment) with their strategy during COVID-19?
2. RQ2: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align group learning (dialogue and inquiry; collaboration and team learning) with their strategy during COVID-19?
3. RQ3: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align organizational learning (embedded systems, systems connection, strategic leadership) with their strategy during COVID-19?

Second, the manuscript will explore suggestions to improve practice and then limitations and recommendations, and finally, concludes the work.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

RQ1: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align individual learning (continuous learning, empowerment) with their strategy during COVID-19?

This section discusses the discoveries regarding the managing practitioner experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic at LF, LLC. Continuous learning and empowerment were the dominant constructs at the individual level of LF, LLC. Two themes emerged from data analysis for continuous learning: first, *adaptation*, and second, *situational learning*. For the empowerment construct, *decision-making* emerged.

Continuous learning. Continuous learning was dominant at the individual level within business units at LF, LLC prior to COVID-19 disrupting LF, LLC. The purpose of this characteristic is for members of business units to sustain individual learning and growth related to their jobs during the *adaptation* of working environments from in-person before COVID-19 to a larger virtual workforce during COVID-19. Literature on continuous learning historically links this characteristic to innovation and adapting to emerging markets (Marsick & Watkins, 1992, 1993), yet in a COVID-19 pandemic, continuous learning at LF, LLC is affixed to *adaptation*. In this case, adaptation is towards education regarding workplace safety and protocols at the individual level to sustain operations (Leufven, 2015; Pan et al., 2020; Pedler & Hsu, 2019). Literature suggests two things here; first, rapid change can negatively impact organizations, and second, only those organizations able to adapt efficiently and effectively have a competitive advantage (Ignatove & Stoney, 2020; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Marquardt, 2011; Pan et al., 2020; Skuncikiene, 2009).

The first form of adaptation was around working conditions. As mentioned in Chapter Four, before COVID-19, continuous learning was largely for compliance and assigned by management, particularly around mandated education/training, and in-person. However during COVID-19 restrictions caused leaders at LF, LLC to adapt to virtual workspaces in some business units, thus opening learning opportunities to everyone across LF, LLC, and members in the business units were able to decide what they wanted to learn in addition to maintaining their mandatory training. A significant adaptation for many individuals with only traditional in-person work experience. Due to COVID-19, work for some business units has adapted to work from alternate locations due to governmental restrictions, thus causing LF, LLC to revisit and adapt existing policies around safety to ensure adherence to federal, state, and local health guidelines for members across all business units, but also responsibly adapting and enhancing interaction policies with customers.

Another significant finding indicated that *adaptation* of LF, LLC's workplaces increased learning opportunities around health and safety protocols. As mentioned, before COVID-19 health and safety protocols were primarily based on compliance for on the job situations. In line with other researchers, adaptation, or the pivot, to informing employees about the health and safety protocols regularly for individual members in business units during a crisis highlights the importance of how free and open information flows across all levels of LF, LLC, particularly during a rapidly changing crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhatnager, 2014; Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020; Pedler, 1997; Skuncikiene, 2009). During the COVID-19 pandemic, LF, LLC sustained free information flow and learning opportunities spanning all business units because COVID-19 was causal for the removal of hierarchical conditions for learning, found in a Pre-COVID-19 LF, LLC, at the immense level of the

company: the individual level (de Villiers, 2005; DiBella, 1995; Giesecke & McNeil, 2004; Fenwick, 1996; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020; Pedler, 1997; Senge, 1990; Skuncikiene, 2009). That said, others found that the constant flow of information around the adapting protocols was overwhelming as the adaption towards COVID rapidly changed.

Also emerging from the continuous learning characteristic at the individual level within business units is *situational learning*; learners continued to learn about specific scenarios that emerged due to COVID. Before COVID-19, learning for individuals was in-person. Depending on the type of learning, leaders may have brought in outside vendors to conduct training. During the COVID-19, individuals now seek solutions to problems/tasks and share/participate in a broader community of members within the business unit or multiple business units virtually due to modified workspaces (Lave & Wenger, 2001). As business units and teams complete virtual workloads, situational learning becomes important as individuals participate in education, project/task completion, and role survival based on interests. Now, the workforce is working from home. As one participant indicated, "*if they want to pursue it (learning opportunities), it is available through the company.*" Thus affirming current LO literature suggesting organizations are responsible for intentionally creating opportunities for their members to learn, but individuals have to participate in the process (Lave & Wenger, 2001; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020; Pedler, 1997; Pedler & Hsu, 2019; Skuncikiene, 2009). The results of this study suggest that the learning should be increasingly contextual during times of a crisis.

Empowerment A second characteristic found at the individual (member) level within business units at LF, LLC during COVID-19 was empowerment. Prior LO literature suggests that this characteristic is at the organizational level as individuals connect with their business units and the organization overall via joint vision (Marsick & Watkins, 2003); however, in this

case, empowerment was found at the individual level within business units of LF, LLF, thus causation for re-visiting where this characteristic should be located in an organizational hierarchy, at the individual level, or the organizational level.

Empowerment, as a characteristic, was already present before COVID-19 caused a majority of the organization to pivot to an online workspace. The difference was before COVID-19 in-person mandates from policy and guidance from managers were prevalent. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants nuanced the construct of empowerment around decision-making. *Decision-making* in learning organization literature, for example, Bhaskar & Mishra (2014) asserts a link exists between the member (individual), the business unit or organization, and their decision-making in terms of career advancement (Bhaskar & Mishra, 2014). In this case, for example, due to limited in-person contact and a constant stream of communication via virtual systems, individuals' *decision-making* ability for themselves increased, and was widely encouraged by managing practitioners as individuals "do not rely on management all the time for decisions." Additionally, data suggests "decision-making is an indication of individuals owning one's role" in business units for LF, LLC, and COVID-19 served as an opportunity to link decision-making with individual commitment; thus, this study advances Skuncikiene's (2009) assertion that empowerment then contributes to member commitment and loyalty as a result of involvement in the decision-making process in their tasks/performance in business units (Skuncikiene, 2009).

As indicated by the participant responses, an essential element of decision-making also includes time and opportunity. Members of the business units were exposed to the wide availability of learning opportunities offered through LF, LLC in-person before the pandemic caused the disruption. Literature from Marquardt (2011) and Marsick & Watkins (2003) asserts

members of the organization must support allotted time to pursue learning opportunities (Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pedler et al., 1997; Pedler & Hsu, 2019; Senge, 1990). Data analyzed in this case study reveals members at LF, LLC during COVID-19 the environment is empowered to decide what they need to learn as members in a larger business unit to complete their tasks and assignments associated with their jobs. In doing so, it connects empowerment and decision-making directly to progress since roles are modernizing as members are getting work done, projects completed, and LF, LLC initiatives are carried out in light of the ever-changing pandemic. Addressing the dimension of empowerment around decision-making, time, and the opportunity thus advances the literature on member and organizational performance through the lens of the individual in business units modernizing in crisis times (Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pedler et al., 1997; Pedler & Hsu, 2019).

RQ2: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align group learning (dialogue and inquiry; collaboration and team learning) with their strategy during COVID-19?

This section discusses the discoveries regarding the managing practitioner experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic at LF, LLC. Dialogue and inquiry and collaboration, and team learning are the primary constructs at the group/team level of LF, LLC organizational hierarchy. Like the previously identified themes emerging from the continuous learning and empowerment constructs, dialogue and inquiry and collaboration/team learning also had themes emerge during data analysis. For example, *team alignment* and *organizational strategy* appeared significant for this characteristic. For the Collaboration/Team Learning characteristic, role-based collaboration emerged as a theme, and *implicit learning* emerged as the second dominant theme.

Dialogue and inquiry, in this case study, were not at the organizational hierarchy posited by current LO literature (Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020; Stothard

et al., 2013). Participant data suggests dialogue and inquiry as a characteristic during the COVID-19 pandemic at LF, LLC was more evident at the team and business unit (Group level) as managing practitioners adapted their communication strategies to sustain their organizations. It is causal for re-interpreting Marsick and Waktins's (2003) version of the dialogue and inquiry characteristic, attributed to individual reasoning (p.3). According to findings, COVID-19, dialogue and inquiry, or communication, increased significantly compared to communication prior to COVID-19. Yet, results suggest communication during COVID-19 was top-down driven for *team alignment* and *organizational strategy*. Both of which are subthemes found in the dialogue and inquiry characteristic.

As mentioned, the first theme is *team alignment*. Communication between managers and members at the business unit level is primarily left to manager discretion, much like it was before the COVID-19 pandemic shifted personnel from office spaces to work from home spaces; to compensate for the lack of in-person communication, whole team calls increased in keeping teams within business units aware of their projects. Thus, unlike before the COVID-19 pandemic, during the pandemic one on one communication varied between managers checking in or "touching base" with members and managers inquiring how they were handling the COVID-19 pandemic on a more personal level while also aligning their workloads to what the team is doing at a given time. In line with prior literature, this case study underscored how active and frequent leadership communication is a vital link in sustaining an organization (Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2004; Pedler, 1997; Santa & Nuncan, 2016). That said, findings in this case study advance literature on member mental health checks with their management teams during crisis events. Leadership dialogue at the business unit level during the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened individual members' connection to organizational strategy as

a communication technique. Literature suggests open communication, enhances corporate culture, removes barriers, thus connecting individual members to their environment, to their leadership, and their business units' strategy (Egar et al., 2020; Marquardt, 2011; Marsick, 1999; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020; Pedler, 1997; Senge, 1990; Santa & Nuncan, 2016; Watkins, 2014). Participant data affirm that this was the case at LF, LLC. For example, communication from organizational, business unit, and team level management increased in frequency during the crisis. Communication was intentional during COVID-19 to inform and engage business unit members, thus connecting members to *organizational strategy*. Additionally, current COVID-19 literature found in a study of several European and Asian businesses that constant communication from organizational leadership levels did two things; first, leadership communication bridged members' compliance (Egar et al., 2020). Secondly, leadership communication provided members understanding of why decisions are made (Egar et al., 2020). Before the pandemic, communication was in-person for the majority of LF, LLC, and loosely informal depending on the purpose of communicating. As mentioned, communication was for the purpose of informing. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, online meetings between managers and team members occurred in a shorter duration; however, the frequency of communication on projects and tasks to align the team increased, affirming both LO and crisis literature in this regard.

Collaboration and team learning Data analysis suggest LF, LLC, has embraced a collaborative strategy among business units and team manager levels, even having the term added to LF, LLC's overall vision as mentioned in Chapter 3. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, two themes were especially emerging in this construct throughout this case study; during data analysis, it was discovered that LF, LLC saw an increase in practice but was mostly

role-based collaboration (RBC). Secondly, *implicit learning* was another theme found in this characteristic during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant responses yielded LF, LLC business unit collaboration was increasingly *role-based collaboration (RBC)* as the company adapted to a digital remote working strategy, which stems from computer supported cooperative work (CSCW). Zhu (2015) suggests that role-based collaboration addresses task distribution among teams and business units, thus preceding coordination complexity (Zhu, 2015, pg. 1); however, this case study found that this led to diminished collaboration. Indeed, data yielded that some business units, before COVID-19 already experienced situations as some managing practitioners mention the business units “tend to be siloed” and “multiple silos” can be found inside a business unit. As business units adapted to the pandemic's virtual working conditions, roles are then aligned with organizational strategy and ensure that they meet organizational benchmarks and sustain information flow at all organization levels. In line with CSCW literature, leaders face much more complex situations in that they must navigate problems using remote teams of members (IE Accountants, IT Developers, Trainers) as they share knowledge across business units (IE Accounting, IT, HR), and in the case of LF, LLC, it requires a degree of coordination and commitment of team members to be successful (Ley et al., 2014).

COVID-19 was causal for managing practitioners to conduct a situational assessment on current workflow and then coordinate with members on their teams on work priorities and workflow. The collaboration currently completed among members and groups during this pandemic highlights the importance of contemporary LO literature that leadership should support collaboration (Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Watkins, 2014). The current case study advances prior study to support collaboration in light of changing protocols, company

responses, and market needs (Stothard et al., 2013). Indeed, organizational cultures must adapt and embrace collaborative environments, particularly in today's business climate (Edmundson, 2008; Garvin et al., 2008; Marquardt, 2011; Pan et al., 2020; Pedler, 1997; Stothard et al., 2013; Watkins, 2014). As a result of COVID-19, data analysis is indicative that collaboration as a dimension is now fostered and promoted by the executive leadership of LF, LLC as a critical attribute to current organizational strategy as the company navigates the pandemic.

Data yielded *implicit learning* as another related theme for collaboration learning. By definition, implicit learning is learning without recognizing people have learned (Lave and Wenger, 2001). Data suggests that team/group communication and meetings are intentionally agenda-driven to inform participants of what is going on with increased frequency; however, a lack of in-person meetings has left room for a loss in brainstorming-style sessions. In a COVID-19 world, managers intently focus on meetings and conversations to capitalize on members' time as they work on their projects and tasks. Meetings are "moderated" or structured by a managing practitioner, thus suggesting a lack of participant interaction occurs in virtual meetings; therefore, implicit learning arises. Data analysis acknowledges that being in a virtual session with peers during COVID-19 is a stark contrast to the exposure of implicit learning around culture and procedures, which was more prevalent before COVID-19. One might argue that more research is needed about technology communication means that share information and allow culture and implicit forms of learning to emerge.

RQ3: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align organizational learning (embedded systems, systems connection, strategic leadership) with their strategy during COVID-19?

Embedded systems are a dominant characteristic at the enterprise level, including all business units at LF, LLC during the COVID-19 pandemic. Marsick and Watkins (2003) define embedded systems as both high and low technology systems to share learning created and integrated with work; access is provided; systems are maintained (Marsick & Watkins, 2003, p. 14). As mentioned in chapter four, embedded systems are not a widely recognized characteristic among managers at the business unit level in this case study; however, this was especially noted in the policy and procedural level. Data indicates the leadership level identifies this characteristic is a work in progress at the organizational level, remarkably since some leaders aim to adapt the technology to reinforce learning across the enterprise consisting of all business units.

Adapting systems in terms of policies and procedures of LF, LLC is a dominant theme emerging from participant data in the embedded system's characteristic. The enterprise is actively evolving systems using assessments to capture data from business units for leadership at LF, LLC to support their decision-making capability. LF, LLC leadership adapted methods to sustain the collaborative company during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, one managing practitioner took established protocols and communication standards, already in policy, to influence business unit leaders to expand their employees' work area by presenting how current systems can adapt and supporting evidence of a detailed plan.

An essential finding during data analysis suggests embedded systems support the free and open distribution of information around these policies and procedures (Santa & Nuncan, 2014). Thus, adapting techniques to prevent "*silos*" and the removal of "*silos*" emerged as a particular source of frustration in the case study. In response, they saw embedded systems that support the

free and open distribution of information at the enterprise level of LF, LLC as an essential element towards adopting these new policies and procedures. Marsick & Watkins (2003) associate silos with "pockets of information" stored with individuals, teams, and business units having access to it; however, not all parts of the organization have access to it. Findings suggest organizational leaders are looking to software and technology to bridge this gap.

Systems connection is dominant at the enterprise level, including all business units at LF, LLC during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially around *enterprise systems to support community connection*. In terms of the former, LO literature suggests that members must see how their work impacts the enterprise (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Additionally, LO literature aligns systems connection with systems thinking (Senge, 1990). Like embedded systems previously mentioned, systems connection is an evolving construct for LF, LLC, and was evolving before COVID-19; however, COVID-19 literature suggests that systems connection understands how pieces of a system, or the system dynamics, work together over time. Furthermore, organizational leaders need to recognize "leverage areas" to balance corporate systems (Hassan et al., 2020). Despite COVID-19 impacting the organization, people (individual, teams, and business units) are recognized and rewarded for their contributions and support for LF, LLC initiatives. In turn, members are then encouraged to adapt work practices affirming LO literature that individual connection to the organization is heightened to a partnership between the member and the enterprise (Bhatnager, 2014; Marquart, 2011; Marsick, 1999; Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

A second theme emerging from this characteristic is *community connection*. LO literature suggests companies learn from communities around them by way of members they employ (Marsick & Watkins, 2003); LO literature also suggests companies improve themselves as they

adapt their practices based on the community connection (Bhatnager, 2014; Marquart, 2011; Marsick, 1999; Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Through this connection to the community, LF, LLC as an organization is synonymous with an ecosystem, as literature is beginning to show (Eager et al., 2020); LF, LLC goes beyond just the employees and interacts with vendors suppliers, and partners (p. 25). To date, LF, LLC is faced with multiple crisis events that impact communities of those employed by the organization (IE COVID-19, Social Unrest, Financial Crisis, Natural Disasters). Data yields LF, LLC's exposure to rapid change can affect workplace harmony, performance, and productivity due to added stress from the community (Egar et al., 2020). Much like the embedded characteristic, systems connection is a work in progress due to the rapidness of change across the enterprise and the community.

Strategic leadership is defined as the leadership level of an organization that models, rewards, and supports learning, more so to learn for strategic business growth (Bhatnager, 2014, Marquardt, 2011; Marsick, 1999; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020, Pedler, 1997; Santa & Nuncan, 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, strategic leadership fostered and promoted communication, collaboration, and coordination (Mills, 2003) as discussed previously, yet leadership was characterized by "modeling the way" (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Santa & Nuncan, 2016) across business units in the organization during a crisis for business continuity (Eager et al., 2020), yet the dominant theme emerging from this construct is *shared-vision*.

As mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic was causal for several adaptations at LF, LLC. Data analysis found that leaders at LF, LLC "model the way" while also encouraging members across business units to, as mentioned in chapter four, challenge the process, enable others to act, inspire *shared vision*, and encourage the heart. This extends prior literature by highlighting the importance of a shared vision, especially in light of the ever-changing pandemic and company

response (Bhatnager, 2014, Marquardt, 2011; Marsick, 1999; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pan et al., 2020, Pedler, 1997; Santa & Nuncan, 2016). At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership at LF, LLC adapted to a "top-down" organizational initiative to stabilize strategically (Santa & Nuncan, 2016) by syncing business units, teams, and members to a shared vision (Marquardt, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Pedler, 1997; Santa & Nuncan, 2016) by informing members across business units through increased communication and by way of strategic goals established by leaders of the company, which syncs with system connectivity (Hassan et al., 2020). Data further suggests that during adaptation to a virtual workspace for some business units, failure of collaboration and communication led to siloed members and business units, making the construction of a learning organization more challenging to adapt by LF, LLC.

Practical Implications

The purpose of this case study aimed to validate the dimensions of a learning organization by collecting experiences of managing practitioners at a single logistics company, LF, LLC, headquartered in the southeast US during the COVID-19. Findings of this case study support that learning organization characteristics are not "one size fits all." Additionally, the elements are active across all organization levels for stability and coherence (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Rerup, 2009). For LO characteristics to remain relevant to organizational survival during a crisis, the following three recommendations to improve the practice at the individual, group, and organizational levels, are provided.

Individual-level. For this study, continuous learning in a crisis is adaptation. *Adaptation* is reliant on individual members learning as business units adapt to dynamic situations. Management at the business unit level must design a framework encouraging and promoting an adaptive culture beginning at the individual level by maintaining personal learning opportunities

to ease the organizational change. For LF, LLC communication enhanced the speed of adaption at the individual level because members are informed, most specifically of new safety and security protocols within business units. For adaptation to take full effect, members must be aware of what the organization is doing in terms of goals and strategy from the business unit and organizational leadership. That is, informed members guided by supportive leadership increase adaptation. Additionally, remaining informed allows members to respond, enhancing their understanding of how their role impacts the team and the business unit.

Data also suggested continuous learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is also situational as members are now working from their homes. Given the just-in-time learning nature, opportunities must include allotted time and availability for individuals to learn around various situations, contexts, and scenarios as the pandemic changed. Findings indicate that offering communities of practice based on personal interests may also enhance continuous learning in a virtual capacity around these emerging situations. As such, the implications are that managers should evolve current learning opportunities for members. To accomplish this, managers and organizational leaders should increase communication between members, teams, and business units to determine what their members would benefit from through their skills, their workload understanding (IE, Project Managers have access to project management learning opportunities), and their interests. Managers should also make their learning opportunities connect across the organization, so learners have access to relevant materials.

Empowerment at the individual level is significant due to manager-practitioner points around *decision-making* in data analysis. In a virtual world, *decision-making* is deciding what one needs to learn for their role at an individual level. A way to strengthen this theme is management level encouragement of individual contributors' involvement in determining their

workload, goals, and strategy of their role-based work within business units. Managers and business unit leaders should continue their support for the unique exploration of problem-solving and solution-centered work. Specifically, learners can be empowered by learning resources that allow them autonomy towards their learning and support the bigger mission /vision of the organization.

Team/Group/Business Unit Level. During the COVID-19 pandemic, dialogue and inquiry, or communication, from the team/group's leadership component, business unit level, increased drastically as the crisis continued. Data suggests communication was management-driven for *team alignment* and *organizational strategy* purposes. In this case, team meeting protocol changed significantly from informal brainstorming sessions before the COVID-19 pandemic to shorter, intentionally leadership-driven, information-oriented occurrences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data supports, one-on-one meetings between managers and their team members are agenda-driven and objective for alignment purposes. Managers should have both formal and informal communication strategies with members of their team, even in a post-COVID-19 business setting, since it is a method of keeping information flowing while checking on employees' mental health while working from home and getting updates on timelines and milestones of project-based work. Managers can also seek out digital tools (e.g., Microsoft Teams) that allow for more informal learning to emerge in remote workplace settings.

Collaboration/team learning experience increased awareness from business unit leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. As personnel went entirely virtual at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizational leadership adopted a collaborative strategy for competing as one entity and communicated this to the organization. Business unit leaders and managers need to consider disruptions to collaboration as teams and business units are working from home.

To that end, data supports collaboration is specifically *role-based collaboration* as work moved to a digital format, which aligns with the computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) literature (Mills, 2003). The COVID-19 pandemic shifted LF, LLC's workforce structure to include its components with technical systems and people. Managers should be cognizant of the tendency to embrace silos and intentionally help individuals make connections to catalyze collaboration.

An area meaningful for future research is *implicit learning* which forms a theme due to the changes from in-person to virtual communications and meetings. For example, participants discussed that informal learning opportunities were not as prevalent working from home; side-bar conversations and water-cooler talks are no longer there in a virtual format. Managers must support behaviors by ensuring their workplace sessions remain objective-driven while including team members in each meeting's construction and delivery process. Additionally, managers must intentionally ask members questions while offering constructive feedback in the group meeting to ensure all team members actively participate in the learning process while staying aligned to their team and connected to the organizational strategy. In addition, a more explicit strategy around mentors and mentees may help minimize the loss of implicit learning due to the migration towards a digital format.

Enterprise/Organizational level. Multiple practical implications also emerged at the enterprise/organizational level. As mentioned in Chapter Four, embedded systems were not widely recognized by managing practitioners during the COVID-19 pandemic in this case study. Data suggests organizational leaders at the top levels of LF, LLC were inundated with strategies for business continuance and employee safety; however, a significant theme emerged about *adapting systems in terms of policies and procedures*. Because protocols and procedures are

meant to be company-wide and adapted to the crisis, managers should develop ‘touch points’ from employees to ensure that the protocols are meaningful and understandable at the individual and business unit level, especially in light of the safety considerations. To accomplish this, organizational leaders should establish a review cycle of policies and procedures with managing practitioners, who are obtaining feedback on policies and input on the impact of team members—involving members of teams in the review policies/procedures enhances commitment and interest, thus leading to the next area, systems connectivity.

While systems connectivity was not the most important characteristic from an organizational level, there were implications to ensure that this characteristic would be represented at the organizational level. For example, managers should identify clear learning goals for an organization to manage the immediate crisis. In turn, managers can proactively identify what systems have that information. For example, suppose Accounting, IT, and the Sales Business units have adopted company-owned content management services functionality for storing and sharing data and information among members of their teams. To effectively share information needed to address the crisis, leaders should adopt a single source for content management instead of maintaining several websites with information. Doing so ensures that systems connect, preventing silos while also supporting collaboration as business units have access to a data and information structure that connects employees across the enterprise.

The final characteristic, Strategic Leadership, was also at the enterprise level of LF, LLC. Data suggests strategic leadership is modeled, which, in turn, is used strategically to drive business results during the COVID-19 pandemic (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). A *shared vision* emerged as the significant theme among those interviewed. Leaders at LF, LLC aimed to set out to bridge individual values with organizational goals and involved members throughout the

process. Modeling for members and junior leaders is necessary for those to adopt the same behavioral tendencies, thus adding value to the organizational culture. Leadership should use shared vision as a strategy to strengthen the connection and consistency between individuals and teams/groups. In doing so, the organization forms a unified body whereby goals and initiatives are supported, and commitment is unquestionable.

Limitations and Future Studies

As mentioned, the aim of this case study set out to validate the learning characteristics of the DLOQ during a time of crisis, in this case, COVID-19. There were multiple limitations regarding time, scope, and scale related to this work's findings. Thus, opportunities exist to build on this research. First, this case study was also limited to just one time period for LF, LLC, the COVID-19 period. For example, data suggests some of the LO characteristics are similar to what was already culturally adopted by LF, LLC and supported by organizational leadership. An alternative study conducted in a non-COVID-19 pandemic could have obtained alternative snapshots of the learning organization framework, especially around continuous learning, strategic leadership, and embedded systems.

Second, while this study was limited to one organization, LF, LLC, in one industry, logistics, one organization is limited in depicting the use or existence of LO characteristics in a broader community; comparing LO characteristics between organizations may produce concrete terms and themes for a wider audience and not a single organization. A potential future study could include multiple organizations to compare LO characteristics in several industries. For example, a study including various organizations across different sectors in one geographic region (e.g., healthcare) could yield different results. Comparing these organizational structures could have unintended benefits in the planning and preparation for organizational readiness when

disaster strikes. Additionally, doing so would add to the literature body while also creating opportunities to determine variation and potentially new LO characteristics as organizations and communities adapt to the world around them.

Third, this study was limited to a small number of managers in the Southeast U.S. As mentioned in Chapter 3, eight managing practitioners were used in this case study based on the bounds of the case to represent LF, LLC. Such a small number serves as a limitation because a larger managing practitioner group participating in the study could reveal additional themes, alternate themes, and sub-themes, adding value to the literature body's richness for the learning organization framework. A future study could involve a variation of managing practitioners. For example, HR and Accounting management could be participants in a study involving learning characteristics regarding embedded systems and systems connectivity. The two business units look to better their communication. Increasing the scale of a study would also increase the amount of perspective into learning characteristics. Another population worthy of consideration in studying is the member population, by far considerably larger in an organization. A future study could significantly address learning organization perspectives on continuous learning and empowerment trends.

Conclusion

This study found that LO characteristics for a single logistics company during the COVID-19 pandemic were active and practiced across the organizational hierarchy. The work set to answer three research questions;

1. RQ1: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align individual learning (continuous learning, empowerment) with their strategy during COVID-19?

2. RQ2: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align group learning (dialogue and inquiry; collaboration and team learning) with their strategy during COVID-19?
3. RQ3: How does the logistics organization in this case study identify and align organizational learning (embedded systems, systems connection, strategic leadership) with their strategy during COVID-19?

The literature suggests that learning organizations struggle to identify characteristics, locate where they fit in with the organization, and sustain learning organization attributes. This case study addresses each of these gaps by communicating with managing practitioners and using a time where learning characteristics were vital for survival. According to findings, organizations incorporating learning organization characteristics into an organizational hierarchy (IE Individual, Group, and Organizational levels) increase adaptability, get members to participate in learning processes, empower individuals, support collaborative and team learning environments, use technology to adapt units through embedded systems to share information, connect enterprises with communities, openly sustain a shared vision. As such, it creates optimal environments ready to change in any situation.

Learning organization characteristics create a path for organizational adaptation, establishing coherence for organizational levels while establishing responsible for sustaining LO characteristics. Additionally, this study's findings can be used to inform human resource development and corporate development practices while enabling and empowering managing practitioners to think and address how they lead, why they lead, and what it takes to enhance the learning process of their organizations.

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APPENDIX A CONSENT FORM and PROTOCOL

Date _____

Dear (Individual Participant)

Study: Starting fresh- re-visiting learning organizations in the COVID-19 world through managing practitioners' lived experiences.

Introduction

- You are being asked to take part in this research study by Matt Meador, an EdD student at The University of Memphis. The information provided on this form is to assist you in coming to a decision to voluntarily participate. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you determine that you should not want to participate there is nothing else you need to do.
- It is requested that you read this document in its entirety and ask questions prior to agreeing to participate.

Purpose of the study

- The purpose of this study is to capture the lived experiences of managing practitioners in the time of crisis for businesses due to COVID-19.
- The research may be published as a dissertation study.

Description of the study procedures

- There will be a Zoom meeting that participants should expect to last approximately 60 minutes. This session will be recorded and then transcribed for data collection.
- If you agree to be a participant, you are agreeing to being asked descriptive and narrative based- open-ended questions.

Risks of being involved in this study

- Risks are minimized considerably by referring to the rule of confidentiality. Participants are given a pseudonym of their choice.

Payments

- You will not be compensated for participation

Right to refuse or withdraw

- You may refuse to take part in the study at any time without affecting the relationship between the researcher of the study or The University of Memphis.

- You have the right to refuse to answer any single question, in addition to choosing to withdrawn from interview process; you also have the right to request the researcher not use pieces or segments of the interview.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about the research study and an answer to those questions at any point during the research process. If participants should have a question at any time, they should contact the research, Matt Meador, Researcher, tmmeador@memphis.edu, Andrew Tawfik, Dissertation Chair and Advisor, at aatawfik@memphis.edu, or by phone at 901-210-3130.
- Alternatively, if you have questions about your rights as a participant or would like more information on the research process during this research period, you may call The University of Memphis IRB office by phone at 901-678-####, or by email at irb@memphis.edu.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have read and now decided to volunteer as a research participant. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the research.

Participant Name: (Print) _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Interview Protocol and Questions

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin, I would like to address why this interview is being conducted. I am an EdD student at The University of Memphis in Instructional and Curriculum Leadership with emphasis placed on instructional design and technology. I am working on my dissertation which is based on capturing the lived experiences of dimensions of a learning organization action imperatives by managing practitioners in the business community during this COVID-19 crisis.

The work is firmly rooted in learning organization theory and in a time of crisis, such as COVID-19, has many organizations re-evaluating their current positions for a post-COVID-19 world. Since leadership roles in business organizations are attuned to deciding and deterring the direction of their respective organizations, it was determined that learning was the avenue for adaptability, change, and transformation moving forward. Due to the wealth of literature on LO as a phenomenon and a validated instrument dedicated to behavioral attributes to becoming

LO's, this work seeks to blend the scholar-practitioner gap by matching research with lived experiences through the lens of crisis.

To understand the experiences of the managing practitioners, I will ask twenty-four questions along with room for probing and/or clarifying questions. I am very interested in the experiences you have had during COVID-19 in your managing practitioner role in the business community. I estimate that the session will not exceed an hour, if in the event we are close to our 60-minute mark, you may be asked if you would like to continue. Again, I want to capture the richness of your experiences. Your identity will be protected, pseudonyms are used, and you get to pick the pseudonym name as a perk to agree to participate in the study. You will receive a consent form to review and sign the interview protocol, study process, and what to expect.

Interview Schedule- DLOQ
<p>Descriptive Questions:</p> <p>What is your rank in your business unit?</p> <p>How long have you been in your position within your business unit?</p> <p>How many years of experience do you have in your business unit?</p> <p>How long have you been employed with Logistics and Freight, LLC?</p> <p>Describe a typical day in your role in your business unit during COVID-19 at LF, LLC.</p>
Dimension 1. Continuous learning
<p>Q1. As a managing practitioner in your business unit, how do you define Continuous Learning?</p> <p>Q2. Had you heard of this term prior to this interview?</p> <p>Q3. During COVID-19, how has continuous learning been impacted at LF, LLC, if at all in your business unit?</p> <p>Q4. During the pandemic, which levels, individual, functional, or organizational, have been the focus of Continuous Learning in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 2. Dialogue and inquiry
<p>Q5. How do you define Dialogue and Inquiry in your business unit?</p> <p>Q6. Had you heard of this term prior to this interview?</p> <p>Q7. During COVID-19, how has dialogue and inquiry been impacted among members of your business unit, if at all?</p> <p>Q8. During the pandemic, which levels, individual, functional, or organizational, have been the focus of Dialogue and Inquiry in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 3. Team learning and collaboration
<p>Q9. How do you define Team learning and collaboration within your business unit?</p> <p>Q10. Had you heard of this term prior to this interview?</p> <p>Q11. How has team learning and collaboration increased or decreased due to COVID-19 in your business unit?</p> <p>Q12. During the pandemic, which levels, individual, functional, or organizational, have been the focus of Team Learning and Collaboration in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 4. Embedded Systems
<p>Q13. How do you define Embedded Systems in your business unit?</p> <p>Q14. Had you ever heard of this term prior to this interview?</p> <p>Q15. During the pandemic, how has measuring performance across individual, group, or organizational levels changed, if at all in your business unit?</p>
Dimension 5. Empowerment

<p>Q16. How do you define Empowerment in your business unit?</p> <p>Q17. Had you heard of this term prior to this interview?</p> <p>Q18. During COVID-19, how has Empowerment impacted the individual, functional, and organizational levels in your business unit?</p>
<p>Dimension 6. Systems Connections</p>
<p>Q19. How do you define Systems Connection in your business unit?</p> <p>Q20. Had you heard of this term prior to this interview?</p> <p>Q21. How have you encouraged members within the organization to think from a global perspective at the organizational level during COVID-19 in your business unit?</p>
<p>Dimension 7. Strategic leadership</p>
<p>Q22. How do you define Strategic Leadership in your business unit?</p> <p>Q23. Describe how your leading, mentoring and coaching has been impacted your business unit at Logistics and Freight, LLC.during COVID-19 in your business unit.</p> <p>Q24. As a result of the using the dimensions of a learning organization in response to COVID-19 how would you answer, is your organization, Logistics and Freight, LLC, a learning organization in your business unit?</p>

If you agree to the above schedule and submit the consent form we can now begin.

APPENDIX B
IRB APPROVAL FORMs

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

November 2, 2020

PI Name: Matt Meador

Co-Investigators:

Advisor and/or Co-PI: Andrew Tawfik

Submission Type: Initial

Title: Learning Organization in a Time of Crisis: A Case Study of Logistics and COVID-19

IRB ID: #PRO-FY2021-111

Exempt Approval: November 2, 2020

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished, a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol require board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary, submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For any additional questions or concerns, please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.678.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.

APPENDIX C

Letter Requesting Permission for DLOQ Modification

Dr. K. Watkins,

My name is Matthew Meador, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in Instruction and Curriculum Leadership, Instructional Design and Technology concentration, at the University of Memphis. I have chosen the Dimensions of a Learning Organization Questionnaire as an instrument to use in my qualitative research study. COVID-19 has impacted business communities across the globe. I am writing a case study on a logistics company, Logistics and Freight, LLC, headquartered in the Southeast U.S. The participants in this study are all managing practitioners, having led their teams and business units through the COVID-19 pandemic. To bound the DLOQ to the case of Logistics and Freight, LLC, modifications were made to the 21-item instrument to complete this task.

First, time and scope have been added to each item to bound each item to COVID-19 and the business unit of each managing practitioner. Nothing has changed otherwise from the DLOQ. Second, time (COVID-19) and scope (Business Unit) bounded DLOQ questions are also put into Survey Monkey and intended to be used for empirical data points through a post-interview survey. The above-mentioned survey is attached.

The purpose of this case study dissertation aims to do several things. One, validate the DLOQ and continued scholarly research, with a particular interest in times of crisis, such as COVID-19. Two, add value to crisis management by linking learning organization behaviors and attributes, and three, add to the scholarly pool of literature on learning organizations and organizational development.

I hope that with this letter you will bless the DLOQ modification for use in my dissertation journey.

With much respect and appreciation,

T. Matt Meador
Doctoral Candidate
University of Memphis
College of Education
Instruction and Curriculum Leadership
Instructional Design and Technology
Email: tmmeador@memphis.edu
Phone: (901) [REDACTED]

APPENDIX D

Approval from Dr. K. Watkins and V. Marsick

Hi Matt,

Very interesting study! We hereby grant permission to make the modification for your dissertation purposes as stated.

Let us know what you learn!

Take care,

Karen

Karen E. Watkins, Ph.D.

Professor, Learning, Leadership & Organization Development

Department of Lifelong Education, Administration & Policy

The University of Georgia

850 College Station Road [REDACTED]

Athens, GA 30602 USA

Work ([REDACTED]) [to leave a message]

Cell ([REDACTED])