Managing Partnerships for Online Learning: An Institutional Work Perspective

A thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Education by

Maria Spies, April 2023

Abstract

Online education is increasingly important to universities with continued pressure for new forms of revenue, ambitions to service more diverse learners and meet the expectations of students. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions have implemented online programs, with a growing number doing so in partnership with an Online Program Management (OPM) provider. However, little is known about how these partnerships operate on the ground, the impact on universities, or how these arrangements might evolve over time.

This exploratory qualitative study examines the day-to-day work of academic leaders with responsibility for university-OPM partnerships. The research sought to develop a clearer understanding of how academic leaders influence the provision of online learning at their institution, and how partnerships might evolve over time. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 academic leaders. Institutional work forms the theoretical basis for this study, offering scope for explanations of the flows of influence between daily practices of academic leaders, organizational change, and field level influences, with consideration for organizational boundaries and new institutional arrangements for online learning.

The study found that academic leaders engage extensively in varied forms of institutional work related to online learning and OPM partnerships, focused on 'creating' and 'maintaining' institutions and identified new forms of institutional work related to *monitoring* the external environment, *enacting* new ways of operating and *corralling* stakeholders toward endorsed models. The research outlines online capabilities being built at universities and offers insights into how university-OPM partnerships are evolving over time. Findings suggest that academic leaders exercise practical and projective agency regarding their institutions' immediate and long-term arrangements for online learning and are central to the development of university partnering capability.

The knowledge gained from this study is expected to further stakeholders' understanding of how organizational change related to online learning and university-OPM partnerships happens over time, using institutional theory to highlight the mechanisms by which new

practices and norms may become embedded and institutionalized, a topic that remains relatively unexplored, but is of increasing importance for universities.

Keywords: online programs, OPM, online program managers, institutional work, academic leadership, higher education, online learning, public private partnerships, agency, proto institutions

Statement of original authorship

The research contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original, and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Date: 17 April 2023

Acknowledgements

"A bend in the road is not the end of the road…Unless you fail to make the turn." ***– Helen Keller***

I completed my master's degree in 2003 and since then have been wanting to continue researching and practicing innovation and change in higher education. My career has enabled the practice, and now with the completion of this doctorate, a long-held ambition in research is finally fulfilled, made all the richer by the last 20 years of practice.

I would like to thank my family, particularly my husband, Matthew for your unending support in everything I've ever wanted to do. To my daughters, Isobel and Ruby, my mum, Judy and my dad, Peter, you are my inspiration and my bedrock, and without your encouragement and practical support I would not have been able to complete this doctorate. To my partner in crime, Patrick, you shouldered the load when I needed to step back. Thank you.

I would like to thank my supervisory panel for their expert advice and support. The strategic guidance, thoughtful questions and calm practicality of Prof. Peter Kahn, my primary supervisor, was invaluable to bringing my research to completion, as was the initial support of Dr. Mariya Ivancheva who helped to shape my research at the beginning. I am grateful to Dr Yota Dimitriadi, my second supervisor for providing alternative perspectives throughout this journey, and to the team at the University of Liverpool who work in the background to support students to meet their goals. Finally, thank you to the research participants who gave up their time to share their insights and experiences.

Contents

CONTENTS **6**

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES **9**

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION **11**

1.1 Introduction 11

1.2 Key Terms 11

1.3 Background 14

1.3.1 Implementing Online Learning in Higher Education *14*

1.3.2 Online Program Managers (OPMs) *15*

1.3.3 University-OPM partnerships *16*

1.3.4 Academic Leadership *17*

1.4 Study Context 18

1.5 About the Researcher 20

1.6 Rationale 21

1.7 Research Aims 23

1.8 Thesis Structure 24

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW **25**

2.1 Introduction 25

2.2. Online Learning in Higher Education 25

2.2.1 Negative Perceptions of Online Learning *26*

2.2.2 Implementing Online Education & the Impact of COVID-19 .... *27*

2.2.3 The OPM model, partnerships, and marketization in HE *28*

2.3 Defining university-OPM partnerships 29

2.4 Perspectives on university-OPM Partnerships 34

2.4.1 OPMs and Field Level Changes in Higher Education *35*

2.4.2 Decision-making related to OPM Partnerships *36*

2.4.3 Experience and Satisfaction with OPM Partnerships *37*

2.5 Institutional Theory & Institutional Work 39

2.5.1 Institutional Work & OPMs *41*
2.5.2 Field Level Drivers for Institutional Change *43*
2.5.3 Organizational Boundaries & Novel Institutional Arrangements *44*
2.5.4 Institutional Work and Agency *45*
2.6 Research Questions 46
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 48
3.1 Introduction 48
3.2 Research Aims and Questions 48
3.3 Researcher Positionality 49
3.4 Theoretical Framework 52
3.5 Choosing a Methodology 53
3.6 Exploratory Qualitative Approach 55
3.7 Study Design 56
3.7.1 Sampling Method *56*
3.7.2 Sample *58*
3.7.3 Recruitment *61*
3.8 Ethical Approval & Considerations 63
3.9 Data Collection 66
3.9.1 Semi-Structured Interviews *66*
3.9.2 Interview Protocol *68*
3.9.3 Field Notes & Memos *69*
3.10 Data Analysis 69
3.11 Summary 71
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION 72
4.1 Introduction 72
4.2 Profile of participants 73
4.3 Developing themes and clustering into subthemes 74
4.4 Field Level Drivers for Change 76
4.4.1 Broader digital change in Higher Education *77*
4.4.2 Responding to the impact of COVID-19 .... *80*
4.4.3 Impact of regulation on the OPM model *81*

4.5 The Work of Academic Leaders 85
4.5.1 Day-to-day work of managing university-OPM partnerships *85*
4.5.2 Approaches to leading university-OPM partnerships *104*
4.6 Institutional Context 122
4.6.1 Building Organizational Capabilities *122*
4.6.2 Evolving Institutional Arrangements for Online *131*
CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION 141
5.1 Introduction 141
5.2 What is the institutional work associated with managing university-OPM partnerships? (RQ1) .. 141
5.3 How do academic leaders exercise agency in effecting change related to University-OPM partnerships? (RQ2) 148
5.4 How might university-OPM partnerships as proto-institutions become institutionalized or legitimated? (RQ3) 151
5.5 Limitations 155
5.6 Contributions to practice 156
5.7 Researcher Reflections 158
5.8 Opportunities for future research 159
REFERENCES 161
APPENDICES 176
Appendix A – VPREC Approval 176
Appendix B – Interview Schedule 178

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 3.1.	Alignment between philosophy, approach, and research strategy	56
Figure 4.1.	Graphical representation of themes, levels and relationships and link to research questions	76
Figure 4.2.	Three forms of market innovation	125
Figure 4.3.	Recursive processes of innovation	135
Figure 5.1.	Academic leaders' institutional work related to managing university-OPM partnerships as a recursive process	148

Tables

Table 2.1.	Summary of literature related to OPM-university partnerships	34
Table 2.2.	Categories and forms of institutional work	42
Table 3.1.	Research Participants	60
Table 3.2.	Invitation to Participate - Response categories	62
Table 4.1.	Summary of participant profile	73
Table 4.2.	Themes and sub-themes arising from analysis	74
Table 4.3.	Sub-themes - Field level Drivers for Change	77
Table 4.4.	Forms of Institutional Work - Field Level Drivers for Change	84
Table 4.5.	Sub-themes and codes - Day-to-day work of managing university-OPM partnerships	86
Table 4.6.	Forms of Institutional Work - Governance Arrangements & Processes	92
Table 4.7.	Forms of Institutional Work - Advocacy & Dialogue	97
Table 4.8.	Forms of Institutional Work - Incentivizing Ownership	102
Table 4.9.	Sub-themes and codes - Approaches to Leading university-OPM Partnerships	105
Table 4.10.	Array of arguments in support of university-OPM partnerships	109
Table 4.11.	Forms of Institutional Work – Maintaining Credibility	112
Table 4.12.	Forms of Institutional Work – Maintaining Relationships	118

Table 4.13. Forms of Institutional Work – Being Flexible & Entrepreneurial 122

Table 4.14. Sub-themes and codes - Building Organizational Capabilities for Online 123

Table 4.15. Institutional capabilities being developed related to online programs 126

Table 4.16. Sub-themes and codes - Evolving Institutional Arrangements for Online 131

Table 4.17. References to the recursive process of innovation for university-OPM partnerships 136

Table 4.18. Anticipating Innovations related to university-OPM partnerships 137

Table 5.1. Summary of forms of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders 144

Table 5.2. Dimensions of Agency and Forms of Institutional Work 149

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is an exploratory study of the work of academic leaders in universities who manage partnerships between their university and private companies 'Online Program Managers' (OPMs) for the delivery of online learning. This chapter sets the background for the research and the research setting. The researcher is introduced, and the rationale and significance of the study is explained, followed by the research aims. The chapter concludes with a definition of terms and an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 Key Terms

The following key terms are used in this study. Definitions help to clarify the concepts behind the terms for the reader.

Academic Leader: The term academic leader is used throughout this study to refer to those in managerial, decision-making roles within university environments whose responsibilities include those which would generally be considered academic functions, and particularly those functions which are administrative in nature rather than in the research domain (Rehbock, 2020). This includes responsibilities such as leadership of academic organizational units such as schools or departments, academic standards such as program-related policy, quality assurance or assessment policy. Smith and Adams (2008) notes that academic leadership roles also often span cross-institutional responsibility for the core academic mission as well as bureaucratic or executive accountabilities.

Agency: The concept of agency refers to individuals' capacity enact change, involves intentionally and is interactive in nature, between the individual and their changing environment (Adler & Lalonde, 2019; Phillips & Lawrence, 2012). Agency is a core concept in institutional theory as it is through the purposeful effort of individual actors that institutional

work occurs. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) emphasize the temporal nature of agency, identifying that intentionality can be geared toward the past, present or future, with Sotarauta and Suvinen (2018) highlighting the path-dependent and path-creative nature of agency. In this study, the agency of academic leaders and their interactive engagement with the contexts in which they operate is central to understanding the work of academic leaders who manage university-OPM programs.

Online Education/Online Programs: In the context of this study, online education/online programs refers to the mode of instruction for an educational degree, such as a bachelors or masters degree program, which is primarily delivered digitally. In online education students engage in learning via the internet, including interaction with their instructors, other learners, and support staff either synchronously or asynchronously using various technology tools. Students in online programs typically don't receive any university services (instruction or administrative) by attending campus.

Online Program Managers (OPMs): Online Program Managers, OPMs or OPM providers are companies that partner with universities to support online education. OPMs offer a range of services, particularly digitally led services, in marketing, enquiry and enrolment management (Schmoyer, 2020). They also provide instructional design and student support offerings to universities. The OPM 'model' is generally understood to be a revenue-sharing partnership for which the OPM provides upfront capital to build and market online programs, and subsequently universities and their OPM partner jointly share in the revenue of these programs, whereby each party agree on the split of services each will provide, determining the proportion of revenue each party receives.

Proto-Institutions: Proto-institutions are "new practices, rules and technologies that transcend a particular collaborative relationship and may become new institutions if they diffuse *sufficiently"* (Lawrence, Hardy & Phillips, 2002: 281). Proto-institutions represent new arrangements at the field level or 'service ecosystem' (Kleinaltenkamp, Corsaro & Sebastiani, 2018), when those new practices, arrangements, or solutions become institutionalized, that is

diffused, accepted and adopted by the actors of the same service ecosystem (Vargo, Wieland & Akaka, 2016).

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) / P3: Public-private partnerships is a model that involves collaboration between a government agency and a private-sector company. Generally, PPPs refer to situations whereby governments finance and contract commercial providers to operate projects, such as public infrastructure. In education, PPPs have been an instrument for governments to contract out private providers to supply specific services to a defined level at an agreed price, typically with incentives, penalties, and a sharing of financial risk embedded into the contract (Patrinos, Osorio & Guáqueta, 2009).

Service Ecosystem: A service ecosystem is a system of different actors, who are connected by their mutual interaction and value exchange. Vargo & Lusch (2016, p. 10) note that service ecosystems are "relatively self-contained, self-adjusting systems". They may comprise of entities in domain specific roles, such as providers and consumers of services, along with entities that enable service delivery. In the higher education service ecosystem for example, entities might include universities and other education institutions, regulators, funding bodies, government departments and quality assurance agencies, technology vendors and other suppliers of goods and services.

University/Higher Education Institution: These terms are used interchangeably to describe government endorsed and regulated educational institutions of higher learning that are approved to confer degree qualifications of varying levels across a range of discipline areas. These include publicly and privately funded institutions, specialized or general in their disciplines and focused on research, teaching or a combination of both.

University-OPM partnership: The term University-OPM partnership refers to a commercial arrangement in place between a university and a private, for-profit company for the purposes of the design, delivery and/or management of the university's online degree programs, and increasingly, the university's non-degree online offerings (Morris, Ivancheva, Coop, Mogliacci & Swinnerton, 2020). The commercial arrangements and services provided can take various

forms, from 'bundled' to specific, whereby the university contracts the OPM provider to deliver services on their behalf, in exchange for a fee paid to the OPM provider. Fee arrangements are generally either a 'revenue-share' model whereby the university and the OPM provider share in the revenue generated from the tuition from online programs, or a 'fee-for-service' model where the university pays the OPM provider in exchange for a specific set of services. The range of services/functions offered by OPM providers typically includes program marketing and student enquiry management, admissions processes, market research/demand forecasting, instructional design, learner support and other 'wrap around' student services (Hoffman, 2012).

1.3 Background

1.3.1 Implementing Online Learning in Higher Education

Online learning in higher education has become widespread over the last twenty years with improved internet connectivity and advances in interactive technologies providing opportunities for universities to reach new groups of learners, source alternative revenue streams, and to satisfy the changing demands of existing students seeking more flexible study arrangements (Palvia, Aeron, Gupta P., Mahapatra, D., Parida, R., Rosner, R. & Sindhi., 2018; Seaman, Allen & Seaman, 2018). Online learning is of increasing importance to universities (Allen & Seaman, 2013) and the COVID-19 pandemic has been an accelerating force for the implementation of online programs. However, key stakeholders remain skeptical about the effectiveness of online learning (Shreaves, 2019; Wingo, Ivankova & Moss, 2017), and many institutions find the process of implementing fully online degree programs difficult (Englund, Olofsson & Price, 2017), as both the teaching and learning component as well as the 'wrap around' services and administration, which are typically delivered on campus for face-to-face programs, must also be delivered online. Managing change associated with large scale online program delivery is a complex task with potentially significant ramifications at all levels of the institution, from new approaches to pedagogy (Hardy & Bower, 2004; Ramani, 2020), the role and skills of faculty (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Wells & Ingley, 2019), changes to the education 'product' (Lewis & Shore, 2019; Lyons, 2017), through to impacts on university business models

(Burd, Smith & Reisman, 2015). Building online learning capability requires more than just translating on campus teaching into digital forms, with Rhodes (2007) suggesting that deeper institutional change is required, as processes to attract, enroll, support, assess and engage students all need to be re-thought for online delivery. This type of transformational change requires significant organizational effort and can challenge long held institutional practices, structures, and capabilities (Krishnamurthy, 2020; Russell, 2009).

Moreover, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be underestimated as a catalyst for the rapid acceleration of online learning in higher education, with most universities globally needing to move very quickly to delivering their programs to online modes of delivery from the 2020 academic year to maintain continuance of learning for their existing student base. Due to COVID-19, the imperative for delivering programs online increased significantly for universities.

1.3.2 Online Program Managers (OPMs)

Online Program Managers (OPMs) are private companies, generally run for-profit, that partner with universities to support the design, development, marketing, and delivery of online degree programs. There are two dominant partnership models, revenue sharing, where the OPM partner generally provides a bundle of services in exchange for a share of program revenue, or fee-for-service arrangements, with payment for a defined set of services. Revenue share arrangements, many up to 10-year contracts, dominate (Hall & Dudley, 2019) although there is a newer trend towards a fee-for-service model (HolonIQ, 2022). It is estimated that, as of mid-2022 there have been 1688 university-OPM partnerships established since 2010, with approximately half of those in the USA and the remaining in other countries around the world, with a mix of public and private universities entering into partnerships (HolonIQ, 2021; HolonIQ, 2022). One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent sudden requirement for online program delivery has been the significant increase in university-OPM partnerships formed, with HolonIQ (2022) identifying 342 new university-OPM partnerships formed in 2021, representing a 38% increase on the prior year, indicating that, what once may have been a longer and perhaps a more consultative decision-making process about forming an OPM partnership, was shortened to deal with the urgency of the situation.

Industry journals and periodicals provide contemporary coverage of issues and market events in higher education related to university-OPM partnerships. With respected journalists and analysts, and a large readership, these industry journals also have some influence in the higher education sector and as such, it is worth noting that sentiment toward the OPM model by many industry commentators is negative. Carey (2019), for example, blames OPMs for adding to the significant student debt crisis in the US and fueling inequality in higher education while others such as Kim (2020) call for more transparency from the OPM industry. Newton (2021) notes that the OPM revenue sharing model places profit incentives on enrolments, creating pressure to drop standards and for 'syphoning' money away from public institutions. Also related to external context, there has been recent regulatory scrutiny in the US, with some Senators openly raising concerns about the business practices of OPM companies and demanding increased transparency (Sherrod Brown, 2022). A recently concluded federal investigation into OPMs from the Government Accountability Office (US Government Accountability Office, 2022) focused on compliance with financial aid integrity rules. Palthe (2014) notes that organizations are influenced by their external environment and, accumulated negative sentiment that for example, links OPM models with profit motives, low standards and regulatory scrutiny may influence university stakeholder perceptions and possibly influence decision-making related to university-OPM partnerships.

1.3.3 University-OPM partnerships

Entering into partnership arrangements with Online Program Management (OPM) companies for the design and delivery of online programs is growing among universities globally as a way to accelerate their entry into delivering online programs, to increase enrolment numbers (Garrett, 2018), develop internal capability in online education (Hall, 2019), to secure the upfront capital to cover the investment required to mount online courses (Morris et al., 2020) or a combination of these objectives. Such arrangements are generally based on long term commercial agreements whereby universities contract their OPM partner to deliver aspects of online programs in return for a fee, sometimes taking the form of a revenue-share arrangement. University-OPM partnerships may help to alleviate various organizational change

issues described above, by ‘outsourcing’ some of the functions required for online program management, however, they also deliver a new set of organizational challenges for universities (Schmoyer, 2020). Operationally, the implementation, management, and integration of university-OPM partnership arrangements can represent significant changes to existing university processes, structures, and decision-making (Schmoyer, 2020; Springer, 2018) requiring substantial change efforts from those charged with their oversight and yet there is very little known about the work of those responsible for university-OPM partnerships.

Ultimately, these partnerships can succeed, they can fail, or they can exist uncomfortably for long periods of time (Farakish, Jaggar & Fay, 2020), the point being that partnerships are not static, but evolve over time (Schmoyer, 2020). How they might evolve, what and who contributes to their evolution is a key area of interest for this study. Swinnerton et al. (2020) suggests that there may be longer term impacts for universities, and for higher education, resulting from these types of partnership arrangements, an assertion supported by Sperka (2020) who notes that these new forms of organizational arrangements can be path creative, resulting in changes within the organization itself and potentially changing the organization and its direction. However, major organizational change or long-term transitions rarely occur all at once but result from the cumulative actions and decisions that are made daily over a period of time, by a range of actors (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), requiring attention to these daily processes, actions and decisions that contribute to this evolution.

1.3.4 Academic Leadership

Leadership in academia has been described as more complex than in commercial settings with much less clarity about leadership practices, including what leaders in academia ‘say and do’ (Ekman, Lindgren & Packendorff, 2018), with Smith and Adams (2008) suggesting that academic leaders build and balance a complex academic-corporate ‘web’, noting that better understanding the contours of their practice is paramount to gaining fuller knowledge of their work. Analysis by Rehbock (2020) also identifies the multi-faceted nature of academic leadership and similarly, Bolden et al. (2012, p.9) suggest considering academic leadership a “blend of vertical, horizontal, and emergent influence and direction”. Academic leaders within

universities who manage university-OPM partnerships are no exception, with responsibilities that span the 'academic-corporate' and who are charged with associated organizational change, a set of leadership practices that remains largely unexplored.

Pertinent to understanding how university-OPM partnerships are led includes attention to the people and roles that are responsible for leading these arrangements. Flavell, Roberts, Fyfe & Broughton (2018) suggest that shifting contexts for universities can impact and re-shape academic roles. Smith and Adams (2008) note the mounting pressure on traditional leadership positions in academia and Thompson & Miller (2018) state that new capabilities are required of university leadership in an age of disruption. However, there seems to be very little research focusing on the people and positions responsible for leading university-OPM partnerships (Dalal, 2021).

1.4 Study Context

The setting for this study is universities in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia who have partnership arrangements in place with OPM providers for online education. While the purpose of the study is not to compare results between these contexts, incorporating the experiences of academic leaders from institutions in multiple geographies offers the potential for an in-depth understanding of academic leaders' work managing university-OPM partnerships. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen academic leaders and data was collected over a period of seven months in 2021.

The geographic setting for this study is the USA, the UK and Australia. Each of these countries are high participation systems for higher education and market-oriented systems, with semi-deregulated contexts that include private providers, market competition and student payment (or part-payment) of tuition fees (Dill, 2003; Marginson, 2016; Morris et al., 2020). The market-like attributes of these higher education systems put pressure on universities to deliver employment and value for money outcomes, and to generate income for universities, with increasing demand for, and uptake of online programs over the past decades (Morris et al.,

2020; Seaman et al., 2018; Zawacki-Richter, 2021). In these contexts, partnerships between universities and OPM providers have been in place for several years (Hoffman, 2012; HolonIQ, 2022) offering the opportunity for academic leaders to reflect on their experiences of partnerships over time, in different university contexts and with different partners.

Online learning can take many forms, including formal and informal settings, individual and group, self-paced or time bound learning, with or without an instructor (Singh & Thurman, 2019). For this study, fully online degree programs, offered by accredited institutions of higher education form part of the context study as degree programs represent the most common educational 'product' of universities and degree programs delivered fully online is the connection point between universities and their OPM partner. The ability to hold degree-conferring powers is granted to institutions through legislature in each country and comes with specific requirements and responsibilities relating to the volume, quality and academic oversight of learning and assessment, per the relevant local, state or federal regulatory requirements in each country. Unlike short courses or other non-accredited programs offered by universities, degree programs are regulated and therefore require academic and quality oversight, which generally occurs through the academic governance processes inside universities. The involvement of an external party, such as an OPM partner, into degree program delivery may disrupt existing governance arrangements and the work associated with these disruptions' forms part of the context for the work of academic leaders in this study.

The OPM industry is also a part of the context of this study. Online Program Management companies are private entities, generally for operating as for-profit companies. It is estimated that there are more than eighty OPM providers globally and over sixty in the United States that have established almost 1700 partnerships with universities since 2010 (HolonIQ, 2019; HolonIQ, 2022; US Government Accountability Office, 2022). Large OPM providers include publishers, such as Pearson and Wiley, and those who are specifically formed as OPM companies such as Academic Partnerships, 2U and Keypath Education (Hill, 2021). Large education publishing firms such as Wiley and Pearson are global conglomerates which have many business units offering services in education including textbooks and other learning

resources, research services, career services and a range of products in higher education (Pearson, n.d.; Wiley, 2023). The reality for these organizations is that their 'OPM businesses' can be bought and sold as separate entities, with Wiley purchasing an OPM provider from a private equity firm in 2018 to grow their online services business, and Pearson recently announcing that it will sell its OPM business to a private equity firm (Dempsey, 2018; Hill, 2023). Other large OPM providers are companies listed on public stock exchanges, such as 2U and Keypath Education. For these OPM providers and the tail of other smaller providers, their motivations are focused on returns to their stakeholders, including financial returns. These motivations impact across aspects of their operations including the business model e.g., 'revenue-share' arrangements, how they structure their services, e.g., focus on student retention services, and their choices of which universities to partner with, e.g., highly ranked institutions (Swinnerton et al., 2020).

Finally, this study takes place in the context of the day-to-day practice of academic leaders, whose work managing university-OPM partnerships is located at the intersection of these varying contexts and provides the focus of examination

1.5 About the Researcher

My own journey with online higher education started at the very beginning of online learning itself. In 1996 I was part of the team that designed and delivered the first online graduate program at the Australian university business school where I was working. I recall the controversy and fierce opposition to this new concept within the school, with many senior academics believing that online delivery could never be of appropriate quality and would surely diminish the reputation of the school. The strength of opposition to the proposed new program and resulting internal discord was a shock to me as an early career manager and, while the new program ended up being approved by a single vote at academic board, this early exposure to the organizational dynamics and conflicts involved in change related to online learning has driven my continued interest in and, I recognize, influences my position on this topic. Merriam (2009) recommends that researcher positionality should be reflected upon as it shapes the

work of researchers, from their choices of what to investigate, their ideas about which topics are important, through to their research methods and strategies, as well as influencing their interpretation, understanding and, ultimately, their belief in the truthfulness and validity of other research that they encounter.

In my case, I have been an 'insider' to the processes of organizational change related to online learning, with responsibility for the design and implementation of online programs in university contexts over the past 20 years. I have experienced the difficulties in transforming whole sets of academic, business and administrative processes in order to successfully deliver online programs. Now having been 'out' of working at a university or a university partner for the last five years, my perspective on higher education is as analyst of the education market, including mapping and tracking university-OPM arrangements. I write and commentate on the topic, and have close links with many universities, OPM providers and academic leaders in my professional network. In other words, I am part of the world that I am researching and therefore cannot be neutral (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). At the same time, I am not an academic and I have not held academic leadership positions, so I am also an 'outsider' to the nuances of these responsibilities, relationships and approaches, prompting questions for me about how academic leaders might manage commercial arrangements and organizational change processes differently *because* of their academic background and its implied underpinning ethos.

1.6 Rationale

Online education is an area of increasing importance in higher education and entering into partnership with OPM providers is an option that more universities are choosing in order to achieve their goals related to online learning. However, partnerships don't just 'work' and delivering online learning doesn't just 'happen' but are the result of a complex set of activities, decisions, and interactions by many actors in the university, in the OPM partner and in joint contexts, over periods of time. The focus of this study is academic leaders who are responsible for the oversight and leadership of university-OPM partnerships, as their work is critical to how university-OPM partnerships, and therefore universities' objectives for online learning, develop and succeed. Academic leaders know their university, understand its systems, policies and ways

of operating. They can navigate decision-making processes, allocate resources, know when to push forward and what boundaries should not be crossed. In other words, academic leaders make decisions, undertake tasks, and use their knowledge and embeddedness in the organization to help make online programs, via OPM partnerships, ‘work’ for the university.

Smets & Jarzabkowski (2013) suggest that taking a practice approach allows researchers to focus on the actions and interactions of individuals in their everyday work, allowing connections to be made between mundane activities and organizational change. However, almost nothing is known about the day-to-day work of these key actors or the details about *how* their work might shape outcomes for their university. It is hoped that this study can provide insights for university stakeholders into the work involved in managing partnerships, revealing details about how organizational change happens and what it takes to make partnerships work. This information can provide university leadership with a greater understanding of what might currently be ‘invisible’ work, helping to support future planning, policy or resourcing for organizational change. Deeper insights into the work of academic leaders can be informative for other stakeholders involved, such as OPM providers, university administrators or faculty, illuminating another ‘component’ of the change process of which they are a part, potentially supporting more effective management of change. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this study can support academic leaders themselves, as an added perspective to their work in managing university-OPM partnerships and leading change in their institution.

University-OPM partnership arrangements might be viewed as just one other change that concomitant requires changes within university structures and ways of working, a pattern of adaptation that Finkelstein (2003) suggests has been ongoing for the past 50 years. However, this phenomena merits further investigation given it is likely to continue growing as an option for universities and, for the first time, commercial/external providers may be working deep within the core academic enterprise. Recent research suggests that these new types of organizational arrangements may be mechanisms for re-shaping of organizations and

potentially their direction (Morris et al., 2020; Sperka, 2020; Swinnerton et al., 2020) and, given their work, academic leaders who lead university-OPM partnerships are likely to be significant influencers of any evolution in partnership models and knowledgeable about consequential impacts on the university. Knowledge about how academic leaders approach these arrangements, their awareness of impacts to the university, including how and where their work seeks to shape, direct or minimize these impacts can be helpful to institutions and other academic leaders who are navigating these partnership arrangements.

This research can also contribute to knowledge about how academic leadership roles are changing and the reality of what is now required of these positions. Moreover, engaging with academic leaders as they experience this work offers enhanced understanding of the demands of the role for those involved, and the experiences and capabilities required to be effective. This knowledge can help university leaders to identify academic leaders who are best equipped to succeed in these positions and to develop mechanisms to support those already in place.

1.7 Research Aims

This thesis examines the work of academic leaders in managing university-OPM partnerships. The study aims to understand what is involved in such work and how it might shape and be shaped by organizational and field level influences. This research hopes to paint a rich picture of the day-to-day activities, experiences, challenges, and realities of those who are leading, negotiating, and decision-making in this space, and identify their perceptions of how these partnership arrangements work and how they might evolve. The research also aims to provide a better understanding of the leadership practices and approaches held by academics in these roles.

1.8 Thesis Structure

This research investigates what is involved in managing university-OPM partnerships by academic leaders and the relationship between their day-to-day work, organizational arrangements for online learning and broader field-level drivers in higher education. This first chapter states the research problem, outlines the context of the study, its aims, and objectives, and discusses the significance of the research. Chapter Two situates this study within the wider literature on issues related to university-OPM partnerships, starting with online learning in higher education and the OPM model. Chapter Three describes and justifies the overall methodological approach and methods and addresses researcher positionality. Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings. Chapter Five focuses on conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and future research.

CHAPTER 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter set the context for this study, presented the aims of the research and its significance, and outlined my positionality as a researcher. The purpose of this chapter is to establish what is known about the topic of managing university-OPM partnerships, how the literature addresses the topic and where potential gaps may lie as well as providing a summary of the theoretical framework employed in this study. This chapter synthesizes and critiques the literature to identify the concepts, definitions and themes regarded as important to managing university-OPM partnerships, starting with an overview of how the literature addresses online education, followed by an examination of outsourcing, privatization, and partnerships in higher education. The chapter then summarizes the literature associated more directly with university-OPM partnerships, identifying three key themes, namely - the marketisation of higher education, decision-making, and the experience and satisfaction with OPM partners. The chapter then focuses on institutional theory and its offshoot, institutional work, which form the theoretical basis for this study, describing how institutional theory can help to explain the university-OPM partnership phenomenon and offer theoretical explanations for the "top down-bottom up" flow of influence (Lewis, Cardy & Huang, 2019, pp. 317) at the micro, meso and macro level, thus connecting the daily practices of academic leaders, including their agency when working with university-OPM partnerships with institutional level change, with particular consideration for organizational boundaries and new institutional arrangements, to the potential for field-level developments. The chapter concludes by outlining the research questions that guide this study.

2.2. Online Learning in Higher Education

How the literature addresses online in higher education is germane, providing context for the OPM phenomenon and offering insights into the ways in which OPMs are understood, accepted

and experienced by universities. The literature tackles online from many perspectives, there are three broad themes pertinent to the university-OPM relationship which are covered in this review and provide connections between individual, organizational and field perspectives. At the individual level, faculty perceptions of online learning, and what shapes those perceptions, particularly the role of academic leaders is covered. The literature about implementing online learning at universities considers organizational-level issues including the impact of COVID-19, and field level considerations of online learning related to the literature about marketization and unbundling in higher education is explored. Institutional theory can help to illuminate the interconnections between the micro, meso and macro of online related change, by providing a strong theoretical foundation for systematic analysis of innovation (Carvalho, da Cunha, de Lima & Carstens, 2017) across these different dimensions and the dynamic relationship between these contexts.

2.2.1 Negative Perceptions of Online Learning

How online learning is perceived by stakeholders in higher education, particularly those within universities, is key to understanding approaches to managing university-OPM partnerships, given that the implementation of online programs is the central purpose of the partnership. A meta-analysis by Wingo et al. (2017) identifies that faculty aren't convinced about student success in online classes, are uncertain about their identity in online classes and worry about technical support needs for online learning. These results concur with Shreaves (2019) who found that faculty perceptions of online learning were seen as contrary to their teaching values, and Seaman et al. (2018) who showed that faculty acceptance for distance education (includes online learning in their definition) has been at 30% for the previous five years, sentiment also echoed in other literature (Ruth, 2018). A study by Shreaves (2019) showed that subjective norms, which are influenced by 'peers' (faculty), 'superiors' (institutional leaders) and 'subordinates' (students) contribute to faculty perceptions of online learning, concluding that factors associated with students, such as providing wider access and retaining more students, was more influential on faculty perceptions of online than those associated with peers or superiors. The study also showed that faculty perceptions about online were influenced by

"online learning's alignment to institutional identity" (Shreaves, 2019 p.99). As key actors in the design and delivery of education in university and influencers in the institution, faculty perceptions of online learning, and what shapes those perceptions, is pertinent to the study of how university-OPM partnerships are managed within the institution.

2.2.2 Implementing Online Education & the Impact of COVID-19

Research that investigates the implementation of technology and online learning within universities is a long-established topic in the literature. Transitioning to 'digital' is not an easy process for any organization and for higher education, Rhodes (2007) suggests that transitioning to online delivery requires re-thinking many aspects of the learner experience, both in and out of the classroom. Research by Englund et al. (2017) and Russell (2009) show that this type of transformational change impacts longstanding academic practices, governance and decision-making structures, administrative workflow, resource allocation, and technology infrastructure, demanding significant time, effort and cost. Guerra-López & Dallal (2021) discuss the high rate of failed change management attempts and provide a framework for managing technology change in higher education. Glenn (2008) identifies high cost, insufficient resources, faculty disinclination to change and inadequate involvement of technology staff as key challenges for institutions when considering technology change. This set of literature provides insights into the challenges for technology transitions in higher education and acknowledges the complexity of implementation. However, research is limited by the focus on a single dimension, such as technology implementation (Guerra-López & Dallal, 2021) or learning and teaching strategies (Russell, 2009), missing the interconnections between different aspects of organizational change that serve to influence each other in change processes.

Since early 2020, researchers have investigated a range of topics related to the sudden switch to online teaching and learning resulting from a global pandemic that resulted in the closure of almost every university campus. Bond, Bedenlier, Marín & Händel (2021) who mapped the literature, identified 256 studies published in 2020 with top areas of focus being student and teacher experiences and perceptions of online learning, course design, the impact of the shift to online learning, and students' technical equipment. New terms have been added to the

literature that reflect this moment in history, such as ‘emergency remote teaching’ (ERT) which returns over ten thousand article results since 2021 in a google scholar search, with topics ranging from faculty perspectives, risks for students, challenges, adapting pedagogy and university professors’ mental health. For the most part, literature related to online learning and the impact of the pandemic is, to date, extant in nature, reflecting the immediacy of issues at hand. Although we have not yet seen research that takes a longer-term perspective, some scholars are reflecting on the longer-term implications of a pandemic-induced move to online learning with Krishnamurthy (2020, pp1) noting that “going beyond the short-term will require a massive institutional shift to bridge the imperative for online learning with the objections from the professoriate”. As universities begin to return to campus-based learning, there are clearly decisions to be made about how online will be integrated, if at all, into future offerings, providing an opportunity to extend on the ERT literature and examine these decision-making processes and how the experiences of remote learning and structures put into place during the pandemic, such as OPM partnerships, might influence future approaches to online learning at universities.

2.2.3 The OPM model, partnerships, and marketization in HE

In addition to organization-level considerations, there is a set of literature which locates online education within the broader field of ‘marketisation’, and positions technology as one of the enabling mechanisms for the unbundling of higher education (Czerniewicz, Mogliacci, Walji, Cliff, Swinnerton & Morris, 2021; Ivancheva et al, 2020; Swinnerton et al., 2020). Lewis & Shore (2019) identify unbundling as a ‘neoliberalising’ process, with the objective of breaking-up universities and marketizing their services in order to monetize any trapped value, thus allowing the entrance of new financially driven providers such as OPM providers. Czerniewicz et al. (2021) argue that, although digitization and unbundling are not intrinsically market related, this is how it is unfolding, in part due to the involvement of private providers such as OPM companies and their role in the disaggregation of educational processes. Morris et al. (2020) examine the competing drivers that university managers face in making decisions about growing online education, including decisions to partner with OPM providers, concluding that

universities will need to ‘guard against’ further disaggregation at the risk of diminishing the inherent benefits of a bundled experience, and Komljenovic & Robertson (2016) explain that microwork within institutions enables market-making in higher education through daily decisions, activities, recalibrations and framings, which taken together can reconstitute the university and the higher education sector. This literature provides insights into the dynamics of change related to online education at the field-level, linking policy and market initiatives with possible structural change to universities. It acknowledges the contribution that daily work and decisions can have on long term change, however there is limited in-depth examination of the “messy details of practice” Lewis & Shore (2019, p. 22) and how these might combine to effect such change.

Organizational change management lies at the heart of either a long-term transition, or a sudden shift to online learning in universities, whether managed internally or with an OPM partner. Thus, implementing online programs can be seen as an organizational issue. Cai & Mehari (2015) suggest that institutional theory is a powerful, but underutilized tool to explain organizational issues in higher education. Consistent with this suggestion, no previous research appears to have investigated the university-OPM partnership phenomenon using institutional theory, offering the opportunity for this study to make a unique contribution to the literature.

2.3 Defining university-OPM partnerships

The literature uses several terms to frame the relationship between universities and OPM providers, the most common being outsourcing, privatization and public-private-partnership (PPP). Biesta (2005) argues that the use of specific terms to define relationships between parties is of importance as it imbues meaning and can place boundaries on actions, conversations, and practice. For example, when framed as outsourcing, university-OPM arrangements might be construed as focused on cost-savings given that economic efficiencies are one of the primary reasons for outsourcing in business (Palm, 2001). However, this concept does not necessarily acknowledge the purpose or scope of the university-OPM arrangement where, for example Czerniewicz & Walji (2019) note that a lack of internal capability to mount

online courses, rather than a drive for cost savings, is a common reason for OPM partnerships. Similarly, the term privatization is used in the literature frame university-OPM partnerships, although research by Mattes (2017) shows no evidence of privatization, as defined by the sale of public assets, in university-OPM arrangements. The varied concepts and interchangeable terms used in the literature to frame university-OPM partnerships doesn't provide a detailed picture of how these relationships work in practice, instead offering an overly simplified characterization via the terminology used to define such arrangements. Sperka (2020) argues that a contextualized definition is needed in education to better reflect the nature of its practice, hence the importance of further research to gain a deeper understanding of practice related to these partnership arrangements.

The term outsourcing is the most common characterization of university-OPM arrangements in the literature (Dalal, 2021; Schmoyer, 2020; Silberman, 2020; Springer, 2018). There is nothing new about 'outsourcing' in higher education, with institutions outsourcing many aspects of their operations for decades. Academic studies of the OPM model in the 'outsourcing' literature began emerging around 2015, with Wekullo (2017) providing an overview of outsourcing practices in HE and Marks & Sparkman (2019) noting the progression from outsourcing administration and ancillary services to academic services such as curriculum, teaching and online program delivery. Graham (2021) describes university partnerships with OPM providers as a form of outsourcing, where outsourcing refers to an institution's decision to acquire goods and services from external sources rather than using institutional resources to perform these tasks internally. Other literature which characterizes university-OPM partnerships in an outsourcing frame, identifying the concerns of university stakeholders about these arrangements including transparency, loss of control, reputational risk, changes in process, lack of trust and accountability (Schmoyer, 2020; Silberman, 2020; Springer, 2018) and surface organizational issues for consideration when making decisions about online provision and OPM partnerships. Although expressed as outsourcing, these studies' central focus relates to institutional change and the dynamics of relationships between and within organizational groups at universities and their OPM partners, however there is no use of institutional theory to help understand organizational dynamics, limiting the explanatory power of the research.

Sperka (2020) identifies the evolution of outsourcing practices in other areas of education shows a progression from the 'changing employment' model where institutions contract out some services, to 'changing the school' where outsourcing arrangements decrease complete independence, cause organizational boundaries to blur and have the potential to influence institutional practices. There is an absence of literature that examines how university-OPM relationships might change institutional practices and structures to the extent that the boundary of the university is altered. Institutional theory, particularly the concept of proto institutions, which Lawrence, Hardy & Phillips (2002) states can be formed with adequate diffusion of new technologies, practices or rules that operate through close collaborative relationships, could help to explain the formation and evolution of partnership arrangements between universities and OPM providers over time.

Moneta and Dillon (2001) offer a more nuanced definition of outsourcing that may help to illuminate the attributes and working arrangements of university OPM partnerships, by organizing higher education outsourcing arrangements into three categories, complete outsourcing, collaboration, and co-branding. Complete outsourcing occurs when full managerial control of an administrative or educational unit is conveyed by an institution to a private entity and in higher education is used often in ancillary services, such as security, cleaning or food services. Collaborative outsourcing is defined as instances whereby an institution and partner ''jointly engage in an enterprise or activity designed to support and serve institutional interests'' (Moneta & Dillon, 2001, p. 34). In these partnerships, risk is shared between institution and contractor. University-OPM partnerships, particularly those that operate a revenue-share arrangement, could be classified as collaborative outsourcing arrangements under this definition. Co-branding is a more contemporary form of partnership where institutions join forces with outside companies to market products and services. University co-branding of short courses with MOOC partners is an example of an outsourced co-branding partnership. In their assessment of criteria for successful outsourcing partnerships in education, Moneta & Dillon (2001, p.36) note that "substantial interactivity between the provider and

institutional representatives is critical” however there is little interrogation of the forms of this substantial interaction, or who is involved.

The literature identifies trust and control as relevant factors for success in outsourcing arrangements. Davis-Blake and Broschak (2009), note that outsourcing arrangements vary depending on the degree of control exercised by an outsourcer over a supplier, the embeddedness between the organizations, and how much an outsourcing agreement is governed by written rules. Mohammed (2020) and Silberman (2020) highlight the role that trust plays in university outsourcing relationships and Grossman and Helpman’s (2005) definition of outsourcing focuses on the relationship aspect of the practice and the long-term nature of such relationships, involving high levels of trust, sophisticated forms of communication and a sharing of risks and rewards. Although research has illuminated the factors associated with success of outsourcing relationships, no study to date has examined how these relationships and levels of trust are formed on a day-to-day basis and over time, through what organizational mechanisms it occurs, and how these mechanisms are put into place.

Public-private-partnerships, PPP or ‘P3’ is a term used to define the university-OPM relationship. PPP a broad umbrella term for a myriad of arrangements between governments or public entities (such as a public university) and a private for-profit organization. Jomo & Chowdhury (2009) identify the objective of PPPs is to exploit the relative strengths of each partner to achieve optimal outcomes and this aligns with results from Walji & Czerniewicz (2018) who identified that the potential benefit of combined expertise was a key reason for universities to partner with an OPM provider. Similarly, the Chronicle of Higher Education & P3 EDU’s (2019) public-private-partnership survey showed 66% of university respondents chose ‘unique competencies’ as the top reason that their institution had partnered with or would partner with a private company. As such, many university-OPM arrangements could be considered public-private partnerships under this definition, particularly those which involve shared risk, responsibility, and reward (Jomo, Chowdhury, Sharma & Platz, 2016) through long-term contracts in revenue-sharing arrangements.

Literature that characterizes university-OPM arrangements as public-private-partnerships typically seeks to understand how differences in underlying interests and practices between the parties, identified by Beck, Gregory & Marschollek (2015) as a major area of tension in PPPs, might impact the operation and outcomes of the partnership, and higher education more broadly. Ivancheva et al. (2020) discuss OPM-university partnerships in the context of the marketization of higher education, exploring how the conflicting logic of capital and logic of social relevance influences decision-making about partnerships, concluding that unbundling (via OPM partnerships) doesn't necessarily take place within a dominant marketisation framework, finding that the concerns of university decision-makers encapsulate both market and civic logics, making it difficult to ascertain which logic was leading decision-making. What's not covered in Ivancheva et al's (2020) study, but which might help explain the ultimate outcomes of these types of partnerships, is analysis of the ongoing processes of decision-making that occurs throughout the life of a partnership, how that might change over time and which decision-makers are involved.

Prior research on PPPs highlights the importance of shared goals for successful partnerships (Scharle, 2002; van Marrewijk, Clegg, Pitsis & Veenswijk, 2008) and, like conclusions in the outsourcing literature, scholars such as Pongsiri (2002) suggest that successful PPPs are characterized by mutual respect, trust, openness, and fairness. It is clear from the literature that outsourcing and PPPs in higher education are neither static nor a 'one size fits all' model. Scholars identify the importance of the relationship aspects of the partnership, such as trust, mutual respect, openness, and communication, with Davis-Blake & Broschak (2009), Grossman & Helpman (2005), Moneta & Dillon (2001) and Welluko (2017) suggesting that more sophisticated analysis of these relationships can shed light on what makes these partnerships work. Schmoyer (2020 pp10) notes that university-OPM partnerships go far beyond contractual agreements, and "seem to operate best when they are thought of as true relationships with work and commitment from both parties". These observations prompt questions about what constitutes 'work' and 'commitment' in university-OPM relationships, and who undertakes this work. Similarly, scholars point out that trust, control, and levels of organizational 'embeddedness' are important factors in such partnerships, yet there is still very little research

in this emerging area of scholarly inquiry, particularly questions that address how these partnerships actually work in practice, including a better understanding of who has control (both written and unwritten), how control is exercised in daily work, and how 'embeddedness' is operationalized.

2.4 Perspectives on university-OPM Partnerships

Due to the recency of widespread OPM adoption in higher education (Hill, 2021) and a general lack of visibility into university-OPM arrangements, there are relatively few academic studies examining the arrangements between Universities and OPM companies (Dalal, 2021; Graham, 2021; Schmoyer, 2020). A search of the literature identified three primary areas of focus in research related to OPM partnerships, summarized in Table 2.1. The categories were identified where multiple researchers had addressed a similar topic related to university-OPM partnerships. The first category focuses on OPMs as part of broad industry change, second is research related to university decision-making and OPMs, including reasons and rationales to partner with an OPM and who is involved in decision-making. Third are studies that consider literature related to the experience, perceptions and satisfaction of university stakeholders who work with OPMs including one paper that sought to understand the impact of university-OPM partnerships on student satisfaction. The next section discusses and critiques the literature from the three main categories of university-OPM partnership literature noted above.

Table 2.1 - Summary of literature related to university-OPM partnerships.

Area of Focus related to OPMs	Summary	Researchers
Field Level Change in Higher Education	OPMs as a product of marketization and unbundling of HE; Conflicting logics of higher education decision making in the context of OPM and university partnerships;	Czerniewicz (2019) Ivancheva et al. (2020) Swinnerton et al. (2020) Williamson (2021)
Decision Making	Factors influencing leaders' decisions about partnering with OPM; Explore decision-making about insourcing or outsourcing to scale online learning	Dalal (2021) Hoffman (2012) Morris et al. (2020) Walji & Czerniewicz (2019)

Area of Focus related to OPMs	Summary	Researchers
Experience & Satisfaction	Perceptions and experiences of university-OPM partnerships, including student satisfaction of services provided by OPMs; Institutional satisfaction with OPM providers.	Farakish et al. (2020) Graham (2021) Kowalewski & Hortman (2019) Schmoyer (2020) Silberman (2020) Springer (2018)

2.4.1 OPMs and Field Level Changes in Higher Education

This group of literature examines university-OPM partnerships as part of field-level change in higher education. Morris et al. (2020) frames the OPM phenomenon as both enabler and consequence of marketisation and Swinnerton et al. (2020) examine university-OPM partnerships as a new form of higher education provision potentially offering the opportunity to serve increasing numbers of learners. Ivancheva et al. (2020) used the frame of conflicting logics to illustrate how university and OPM managers justify their involvement in university-OPM partnerships and Williamson (2021) examines the broader implications of higher education marketization and the role of OPMs. A second set of literature is concerned with the operating arrangements between universities and OPMs, how these are evolving and the implications for universities. Hall & Dudley (2019), Schmoyer (2020), Springer (2018) and others provide critique on the two dominant models - revenue sharing or fee-for-service arrangements, with Schmoyer (2020) noting that there is a broader call for greater use of flexible contracts, whereby universities have more negotiating power over the services provided over the contract life. Morris et al. (2020) and Walji & Czerniewicz (2019) note that the OPM 'model' continues to evolve with new types of organizations with new types of services and specializations servicing universities, and Hill (2021) highlights the growing overlap in partnership arrangements for short-form workforce focused courses and traditional degree provision, a trend also captured by Ivancheva et al. (2020), who warns of the potential consequences for higher education of unbundling education, where decision making is vested in public-private partnerships. While the possible implications of these evolving arrangements

are highlighted in the literature, there is little by way of mapping how these evolved models interact or are embedded into university operations, offering limited insight into how these arrangements are managed, including the power dynamics between the parties and how that plays out in daily negotiations and interactions.

2.4.2 Decision-making related to OPM Partnerships

One area of investigation in the literature examines decision-making related to university-OPM partnerships including reasons for pursuing a partnership, factors influencing leaders' decisions about partnering and the daily 'micro' decisions made through the partnership process. The literature identifies five main reasons for universities to partner with OPM companies. The first three, enrolment/revenue growth, capital availability, and speed to market are driven by market logics as outlined by Ivancheva et al. (2020), whereby an OPM partnership is a route to increasing enrolment and university revenue (Garrett, 2018) or provide the upfront capital required to mount online courses (Morris et al., 2020; Schmoyer, 2020; Springer, 2018). Hall and Dudley (2019) and Hoffman (2012) identified that lack of in-house capability in the design, delivery and/or support for online programs is also a major factor in OPM partnership decision-making. A fifth reason for considering OPM partnerships relates to the imperative to meet students' expectations for flexibility and access to digital learning and services, as well as perceived by stakeholders to be up to date and innovative in approaches to educational programs and the student experience. This theme 'wraps together' other considerations (e.g. speed to market, internal capability) into a broader narrative related to mission (servicing current and future student needs), rather than a sole focus on protecting or growing revenue, although most research identifies that a combination of objectives is likely to be involved (Menard, 2022). changing view of positioning online delivery and services as a strategic imperative and necessary capability in contemporary higher education, a trend also observed by Menard (2022) who noted that, post-pandemic, universities are reflecting on the quality of their services and embarking on widespread efforts to enhance the student experience in online environments.

While this research goes some way to illustrate the high-level reasons for choosing an OPM partnership, there is still relatively little research that investigates the perspectives and work of university leaders particularly in ongoing decision-making activities throughout the partnership. Studies by Morris et al. (2020) and Dalal (2021) are two exceptions, both focusing on university leaders' part in OPM partnerships and factors associated with their decision-making. Dalal (2021) identifies that navigating institutional factors which hinder, or support implementation is critical work for university leaders responsible for online program implementation, but their study doesn't examine what that work entails. Morris et al. (2020) also emphasized the importance of examining the 'micro-level' of strategic decision-making of senior university managers with respect to OPM partnerships, noting that university managers are negotiating the tensions that arise between economic and mission objectives on a daily basis in their work. These studies identify the importance of daily work and decisions related to OPM arrangements and its cumulative impact of university-OPM partnership arrangements, however there is a gap in the literature that attends to what constitutes work associated with managing these partnerships, the nature of daily micro-level decisions and who is making them.

2.4.3 Experience and Satisfaction with OPM Partnerships

One of the largest groups of academic research related to university-OPM partnerships is that which reports on the experience and satisfaction of university stakeholders with OPM partnerships, with most in this category using case study methodology within a single institutional context to examine the phenomenon. One notable exception is Graham (2021), who undertook a large-scale survey to understand institutional satisfaction with OPMs, returning several findings echoed in other literature, including that OPMs 'do well' in marketing and enrolment, and that lack of transparency is an issue. This study also quantifies what other research has alluded to, identifying that satisfaction with OPM partners was greater for those at higher levels of the institution, compared with those in administrative or academic leadership positions, also identified by Farakish (2019). A unique take on satisfaction with OPMs comes from Kowalewski & Hortman (2019) who investigated student satisfaction of services where OPMs were involved with program services and concluded that students were neither positively nor negatively impacted where an OPM is involved. However, like many studies (Schmoyer,

2020; Silberman, 2020; Springer, 2018), feedback from faculty and staff about the OPM partnership was unfavorable, with concerns raised about academic freedom, copyright of course materials, time required, compensation for course development, who was going to teach courses and lack of communication. These studies clearly point to organizational processes and change, however they generally remain definitional rather than explanatory in that they identify and define factors related to satisfaction and experiences with OPMs, but don't examine or explain how this occurs in practice.

Change and innovation is a theme identified in a number of these studies, with Farakish et al. (2019), Graham (2021), Schmoyer (2020) and Springer (2018) noting that the OPM partnership was a catalyst for innovation in the development of online learning as well as driving institutional improvement via revamped university processes that are put in place as part of the partnership process. Schmoyer (2020) also notes that the OPM relationship enabled a faster transition to online delivery, including the building of internal capability, than would otherwise have been possible. These studies support Sperka's (2020) assertion that partnerships of this type are not benign, but can be path creative initiatives, causing organizational changes within the institution itself, thus potentially changing the organization and its direction, a point made by Ivancheva et al. (2020) and Swinnerton et al. (2020) in their focus on unbundling. This literature alludes to, but does not examine in detail, those processes, actions, interactions, and decisions which, in aggregate may lead to alter organizational forms and direction. Further investigation of this type of work and who undertakes it, can help to explain and make the connections between practices and outcomes.

Studies in this area highlight the personal responses to university-OPM partnerships expressed by university stakeholders, where the experiences of working in university-OPM partnerships are intertwined with perceptions about the efficacy of online learning, attitudes to 'for-profit' models in higher education and concerns about what this might mean for the traditional university model. Many of the studies mapping the experience and satisfaction with OPM partnerships speak directly to organizational issues associated with managing partnerships and negotiating internal change. For example Schmoyer (2020) recounts the 'internal strife' related

to the process of developing a new program within a partnership arrangement and poor communication about the partnership, Silberman (2020) identifies organizational change and innovation, including governance and organizational culture as key themes associated with university stakeholder experiences of OPM partnerships, while Graham (2021) highlights that OPMs are a process change catalyst for universities, and many studies describe the negative perceptions of, and resistance to OPM partnerships. As such, the literature makes it clear that organizational issues, including navigating change related to university-OPM partnerships are an important aspect of understanding the university-OPM relationship, however to date there appears to be little if any research which has tackled this phenomenon from the perspective of organizational theory, which Palthe (2014) suggests can be a useful explanatory framework for organizational change.

2.5 Institutional Theory & Institutional Work

Institutional Theory and its variant, institutional work, provide the theoretical frame for this study. Lewis & Shaw (2019, pp. 317) identify that institutional theory is multilevel, operating at the field, organizational, intraorganizational, and individual levels, providing the opportunity to "explore the top-down and bottom-up flows of influence between an organization's social environment and the individual within the organization". Hence institutional theory provides a lens through which to examine the interplay between academic leaders' actions related to OPM partnerships, organizational implications for universities, and field level changes in higher education that are subsequently impacting at the institutional and individual level, thus connecting the micro, meso and macro environments in which the university-OPM model sits. Institutional theory has been widely adopted to aid the study of organizations and organizational change and attempts to explain the adoption of structures, practices and beliefs that conform to normative expectations for legitimacy. Scott (2004) suggests that organizations are not purely rational structures, but social and cultural systems embedded within an "institutional" context of social expectations and prescriptions about what constitutes "legitimate" behavior, identifying that all organizations comprise 'cognitive, normative and regulative' elements, which guide and regulate the behavior, actions and interactions of people

within those institutional arrangements. This theory speaks to how socio-cultural beliefs impact the adoption of innovation and subsequently, organizational change and how, over time, organizations in similar fields become to look similar, a state described as isomorphism (Scott, 2014). Examples in higher education include how universities organize themselves and make decisions through collegiate, rather than corporate processes, which is seen as 'appropriate' or 'legitimate' for institutions of higher education and how, over time, what a university ‘is’ and ‘does’, including structure, governance, products, regulatory endorsement and funding have come to look similar across the world.

Meyer & Rowan (1977) proposed that organizational decision-makers, rather than being motivated by efficiency, seek legitimacy in their actions and DiMaggio & Powell (1983) extend on this work by suggesting three mechanisms by which isomorphism occurs. Coercive isomorphism occurs as a result of formal and informal expectations, such as laws and regulations and the formal and informal sanctions (e.g. fines, loss of licence) that occur when those expectations are not met. Normative isomorphism describes routines, norms, and ‘ways of work’ which get codified and diffused over time as work becomes professionalized. Mimetic isomorphism occurs as practices become so diffused, they are adopted by default and become the taken-for-granted ways of doing things. For universities, a campus-based education model enjoys regulative, normative, and cognitive legitimacy. It is generally accepted as the appropriate, if not superior, professional standard for higher education delivery (Seaman et al. 2016). Additionally, regulatory standards in most countries endorse, encourage and in some cases, mandate face to face teaching and learning processes, thus providing coercive legitimacy to on-campus delivery. For example, ‘contact hours’, built around face-to-face class time, is the underpinning concept of Carnegie Unit and the Student Hour are a cornerstone to the administration of higher education institutions. These units continue as the basis for determining student completion of course work and degrees, with faculty workload, efficiency, and evaluation rooted in these units and budgets also tied to these values. At the field level in higher education, the notion of ‘for-profit’ education is also at odds with accepted norms, with questions about the motives and outcomes of for-profit higher education and a long history of

‘scandals’ and formal sanctions against for-profit higher education in a number of countries (McKenzie, 2019). Cheslock, Kinser & Zipf (2021, pp. 37) identify the norm in higher education as “a mostly non-profit educational model” and point to the OPM model as being at odds with this norm. Given that both online education and for-profit models are at odds with these norms, and if academic leaders seek legitimacy in their actions, ensuring their actions remain “desirable, proper, or appropriate” (Suchman, 1995, p.574) how academic leaders shape and navigate change related to online programs and OPM partnerships, while maintaining legitimacy, is a key consideration for this study.

2.5.1 Institutional Work & OPMs

The OPM model sits at the nexus of three areas of change within higher education - changes to delivery mode through online learning, the marketisation and unbundling of education provision. However, these areas of change don’t occur at arms-length for universities but are at play in their everyday work and decisions. The process of ‘how’ organizations undergo such change is of increased scholarly interest and linked to theories of institutional work, defined by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 215) as “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” and follows a practice, rather than process tradition, which focuses what happens inside process - that is, the work of actors as as they “attempt to shape those processes”. Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009 identify that institutional work focuses on actors’ actions as the center of institutional dynamics and Beunen, Patterson & Van Assche (2017) note that institutional work brings attention to both the strategic and day- to-day ways in which actors seek to influence the institutional structures in which they operate, and acknowledging that their actions are also shaped and constrained by these structures, an area of scholarly focus that Lewis et al. (2019) identifies as needing more attention.

Based on their review of institutional research, Lawrence & Suddaby (2006 p.209) identified three broad categories of institutional work - creating, maintaining, and disrupting, which roughly align the stages of institutionalization. These stages were identified following detailed exploration of literature that provided descriptions of the situated practice of individuals as

they carry out their work. Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) stages and the forms of institutional work that sit within each, as summarized in Table 2.2, provide a framework for connections to be made between the daily work of individual actors and the organizational impacts of their work, offering a framework to capture the interrelationship between structure and agency, which is a main aspect of institutional work (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009).

Table 1.2 Categories and forms of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006)

Stage	Forms of Institutional Work Identified by Lawrence & Suddaby (2006)
Creating Institutions	Advocacy; Defining; Vesting; Constructing identities; Changing normative associations; Mimicry; Theorizing; Educating.
Maintaining Institutions	Enabling work; Policing; Deterring; Valorizing and demonizing; Mythologizing; Embedding and routinizing.
Disrupting Institutions	Disconnecting sanctions; Disassociating moral foundations; Undermining assumptions and beliefs.

Scholars have subsequently identified new forms of institutional work (Dorado, 2005; Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016; Helfen & Sydow, 2013; Lehmann, Graf-Vlachy & König, 2019; Lohr, Chlebna & Mattes, 2022; Tracey, Phillips & Jarvis, 2011; Wahid & Sein, 2014) and institutional work theory has also been used to examine industry transitions such as by Lohr et al. (2022) who identified forms of institutional work related to industry transition due to technology change, such as phasing out technologies, removing support and dissolving or replacing networks. Lehmann et al. (2019, p. 5) propose an additional stage of institutional work, preventing institutions, defined as those "actions by field actors aimed at delegitimizing new practices, roles or technologies" and challenge the mutually exclusive categorization proposed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) arguing that some forms of institutional work can be equally applied at different stages.

Institutional work is a frame by which to explore the actions of academic leaders in their work associated with OPM partnerships by providing an opportunity for theoretical explanations of their daily practices and decisions, the institutional context and broader higher education field environment within which they operate and the interplay between these elements. As

proposed by Komljenovic & Robertson (2016) and Morris et al. (2020) the daily actions, interactions, and decisions within university-OPM partnerships may, when taken together, shape directions and outcomes for universities. Moreover, engaging with academic leaders as they experience this work can help to gain a better understanding of the demands of institutional work on those involved including how external pressures influence their actions and decisions, which Lawrence et al. (2013) identify as an overlooked area of investigation. While there are a handful of studies related to university-OPM partnerships that incorporate analysis of individuals' experiences and perceptions as they engage within this context, very few offer institutional theory as a foundation for their analysis, illustrating an obvious gap in the literature and an opportunity to contribute new perspectives. One study that does draw on the broad field of organizational theory is Ivancheva et al. (2020) uses institutional logics to analyze the perspectives of senior managers in public universities and OPM companies and discuss two conflicting logics in higher education. While this analysis touches on the institutional work involved it is not the focus of the study.

2.5.2 Field Level Drivers for Institutional Change

Institutional theory posits that external developments are drivers for actors' intentions to change the institutional setting (Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002) and that such changes in the external environment can be shaped by megatrends, or "large social, economic, political, and technological changes" (Naisbitt, 1982, p. 23) that are present in the macro environments of specific service ecosystems such as, for example the higher education industry. Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2018) identify that these megatrends can initiate change across service ecosystems by threatening existing arrangements between institutions within the ecosystem, how resources are integrated and how value is co-created. In the higher education ecosystem as an example, the imperative for faster development of digital skills to fulfil industry demand is a key trend that is influencing how institutions in the industry (including universities, private providers, technology companies, service providers, regulatory bodies, and even employers), are engaging with each other and the business models through which they - separately or together - operate. This is apparent in the evolving relationships between, for example MOOC platforms, employers, technology companies and universities where, as Mollenkamp (2022)

points out, MOOC providers are working with technology companies to package and repackage educational products to both employers and to universities for integration into their program offerings, allowing for academic degrees and industry-endorsed technology qualifications to be delivered within the one program experience and, at the same time, changing the relationship between participating organizations through such ‘shared’ product.

Broad adoption of technology and the integration, acceptance and expectation of digital services are another ‘mega trend’ that has exerted change pressure on higher education over the past decades, with the COVID-19 pandemic precipitating rapid acceleration of digital transformation and online education. Digital innovations can be conceptualized at multiple levels including within an institutional context, for example Nambisan, Lyytinen, Majchrzak & Song (2017) describes digital innovation as the orchestration of new products, processes, services, platforms in a given context, or Hinings et al. (2018) who suggest that digital innovation involves novel forms of organizing, institutional infrastructure and institutional building blocks which interact with their pre-existing counterparts to form and re-form in new arrangements, thus conceptualizing organizations as a process, or what Vargo, Akaka & Wieland (2020, pp. 531) identify as “broad restructuration processes of institutional arrangements''. This more ‘dynamic’ take on organizations prompts yet to be answered questions about how new arrangements, such as university-OPM partnerships emerge and diffuse, both within an institution and at the broader ecosystem level, pointing to the need for examination of the day-to-day practices and decisions that contribute to their diffusion (Komljenovic & Robertson, 2016).

2.5.3 Organizational Boundaries & Novel Institutional Arrangements

Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2018) identify that newer adaptations of organizational theory re-consider the boundaries of the organization, conceptualizing them as more ‘porous’, allowing for new institutional arrangements that may breach traditional organizational borders. Hinings et al. (2018) suggest that research to unpack novel institutional arrangements, including how they emerge and gain legitimacy is needed and Garud, Schildt & Lant (2014) identify that perceptions of legitimacy was a key area of difficulty for innovation to progress. University-

OPM partnerships might be seen as a novel configuration of institutional arrangements, representing what Vargo et al. (2016, pp.4) describe as the process by which new "solutions (imperfectly) stabilize, at least for a period of time". The institutional theory literature identifies 'proto-institutions', as one such novel institutional arrangement, defined by Helfen & Sydow (2013) as new practices or institutional elements that result from collaborative negotiation processes and competitive alignment. Lawrence et al. (2002, p. 282) describes them as "institutions in the making", only to become full-fledged if the social processes occurring in the service ecosystem support their development and adoption by the actors of the same service ecosystem, who in the case of OPMs would be faculty, schools, regulators, the broader higher education market, including other universities. Lawrence et al. (2002, pp.283) describes proto institutions as "narrowly diffused and only weakly entrenched, but that have the potential to become institutionalized". Perkmann and Spicer (2008) suggest that permanent diffusion results from many actors undertaking a wide range of institutional work in the political, technical, and cultural domains. University-OPM partnership activities could be considered proto institutions, representing a new organizational element, operating at the edge of the institutional boundary, in some cases becoming further embedded and other cases remaining quasi-external or fully external. However, there is little known about through what processes, actions and interactions might OPMs, as proto institutions, become institutionalized or legitimated (or conversely rejected) within an individual university, and relatedly across the field of higher education more broadly.

2.5.4 Institutional Work and Agency

Lawrence & Suddaby (2006) note that research on the topic of institutional work generally covers the 'how, who and what', suggesting that retrospective analysis does not progress an understanding of 'messy day-to-day practices of institutional work', proposing that research needs to attend to the experience of individuals as they engage in, and are subjected to, institutional work. Focusing on those who undertake institutional work ('the who') necessitates attending to people, as actors situated in their institutional context, a role which Hwang, Colyvas & Drori (2019) and Maier & Simsa (2021) identify as needing more attention within the institutional theory literature. Raviola & Norbäck (2013), Phillips & Lawrence (2012) and others

propose that institutional work recognizes the agency of those principal actors who affect change, emphasizing intentionality and the 'purposeful effort' of such actors, with Maier & Simsa (2021, pp 556) drawing a distinction between primary agency, whereby an individual reacts to their situation while trying to survive in it, and institutional agency, which "involves an elevated level of reflexivity, requiring actors to have articulate understanding of their institutions, of their positions towards and within them, and of how they would like to change or maintain them". Thus, the concept of 'agency' is key to institutional work and has the potential to provide important contributions to our understanding of the work and approaches of academic leaders in university-OPM partnership contexts. This also presents a gap in the current literature as there are several studies whose analysis alludes to the agency of actors in university-OPM partnerships, such as Springer (2018) whose study surfaced clearly expressed understandings of issues and the will to shape specific outcomes from university leaders, none have expressly used institutional work or the concept of agency to frame their research.

2.6 Research Questions

The literature review identified an increasing interest in the phenomenon of university-OPM partnerships in the context of a changing higher education landscape and growth of online learning. However, how these partnerships operate 'on the ground' particularly the role and influence of academic leaders on the shape and evolution of partnerships, is not well understood and represents an under theorized area of practice. This gap, along with my professional background working in public-private-partnerships and in the field of educational technology, prompted me to explore this issue. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What is the institutional work associated with managing University-OPM partnerships?
2. How do academic leaders exercise agency in effecting change related to University-OPM partnerships?
3. How might university-OPM partnerships as proto-institutions become institutionalized or legitimated?

These questions provide the opportunity to contribute to answering the call for further research into, and a better understanding of university-OPM arrangements and to add new insights to the emerging body of knowledge in the field, particularly related to the work of academic leaders. University-OPM partnership arrangements are an under-theorized area of practice, with Institutional Theory providing a flexible theoretical foundation for addressing the phenomenon, allowing examination at the field, institution, and individual level, while recognizing their interconnections. The next chapter explains the methodological approach taken for this investigation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and justifies the overall methodological approach and design for this research and outlines the methods employed to generate and analyze the data. It explains the rationale for, and provides a description of participant sampling methods, data collection procedures, and my approach to data analysis. I have outlined my positionality as a researcher and reported on ethical considerations of this research. Throughout the chapter I have provided reflections on the research process to assist readers' understanding of my experiences and support any further research in this area.

3.2 Research Aims and Questions

This thesis sought to understand what is involved in managing university-OPM partnerships and moreover the "flows of influence" (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 317) between that day-to-day work, and the meso (organizational) and macro (field level) contexts related to university-OPM partnerships, organizational arrangements for online learning and broader field-level drivers in higher education.

My professional experience implementing online learning at universities has given me a first-hand view of the complexity of change in this area, and the work of academic leaders who have responsibility for managing these partnerships seems central to exploring this topic. In selecting academic leaders who have some responsibility for university-OPM partnerships, as opposed to others involved or impacted by these arrangements, such as faculty members, administrative staff or OPM staff, I was steering the research away from areas associated with the on the ground delivery of OPM managed online programs, and toward the question of 'how' arrangements come to be what they are and through what processes, actions or decisions this occurs and how it might change over time. This focus necessitates attention to the work of influencers, decision-makers and those in formal and informal positions of power, particularly whose roles 'bridge' both decision-making and implementation. By virtue of their position in

the university, academic leaders have a view to the strategic decision-making processes in their university and are also responsible for the operationalization of such strategic decisions, thus potentially offering a unique perspective and experiences across multiple dimensions of the organization. Institutional work recognizes the agency of principal actors who effect organizational change and offers a theory to explain the relationship between the actions of individuals, organizational change, and field level influences. The focus of this research, therefore, was the investigation of the work of academic leaders in managing university-OPM partnerships and how that work shapes, and is in turn shaped by context, both at the organizational and field-level.

Research Questions

This research seeks to explore what is involved in managing university-OPM partnerships and specifically:

1. What is the institutional work associated with managing University-OPM partnerships?
2. How do academic leaders exercise agency in effecting change related to University-OPM partnerships?
3. How might university-OPM partnerships as proto-institutions become institutionalized or legitimated?

3.3 Researcher Positionality

This research project seeks to explore the experiences, perspectives and capabilities of academic leaders involved in the management of university-OPM partnerships, which itself is situated within the context of growth in online learning, increased marketization, and unbundling of higher education (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Marginson, 2016; Swinnerton et al., 2020). I recognize that my background experiences related to this topic, my active participation in the industry as a researcher-practitioner, my proximity to the subject matter, my beliefs about online learning, and my position on public-private-partnerships have

all influenced the research topic, choice of question, assumptions about why this is a worthy topic for investigation and research methods chosen (Yates, 2004).

Having worked at higher education institutions for over 20 years, in both public institutions and in commercial partner contexts, I have been 'on both sides of the fence' when it comes to public-private partnerships in higher education and have been involved in the 'realities' of these relationships on the ground. Most of my career has been in roles at the intersection of academic and commercial aspects of online higher education delivery, providing me with a particular perspective and positioning on this topic (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). On the one hand, I believe strongly in the role of academic staff in the design and delivery of online learning programs, the iterative relationship between design and delivery and that online learning can be as rich, engaging, and high quality as on-campus learning. Indeed, I feel there is still much unrealized potential in online learning and am therefore keen to explore models that might advance its quality and outcomes.

This standpoint might position me in conflict with the concept of 'outsourcing' and 'disaggregating' academic work, however, unlike what many understand to be the opposing forces of the market, the state and the academic oligarchy (Clark, 1983), I see the potential benefits of coordination and collaboration between these actors for the ultimate improvement of online learning pedagogy and outcomes for learners. In my current role, which sits outside the HE institutional context, I undertake analysis of the education market, including mapping and tracking university-OPM arrangements. I write and commentate on the topic, and have close links with many universities, OPM providers and academic leaders in my professional network. In other words, I am part of the world that I am researching and therefore cannot be neutral (Cohen et al., 2007). My background and experiences have driven my interest in the topic, and more particularly my interest in surfacing the 'voices' and revealing the experiences of those charged with operations and decision-making about university-OPM partnerships.

I am empathetic towards those in these academic leadership positions and have my own experiences of the complexities and difficulties involved. As such, I needed to be aware and careful to not to impose my own experiences onto theirs, or to assume I knew what their experiences were, but to actively listen to what they were saying during the interview and analysis. Reflexivity, or my ability to reflect on and acknowledge how my personal biases and assumptions may impact research design, conduct and conclusions, is an important element to promote trustworthiness, clarity and accountability of my research (Cohen et al., 2007). During interviews, for example, I was consciously aware that the interviews were interviews, rather than a 'conversation on a topic', and very deliberately tried to adopt a neutral position, being careful about the phrasing of clarification questions so as not to be 'leading' and being silent as much as possible while remaining engaged, to allow the participant responses to flow freely. These strategies were important to minimize bias in the data collection phase of the research.

Context is an important concept for me, having seen identical strategies succeed and fail in different contexts through my professional life (particularly related to learning design and teaching strategies) I have always been interested in better understanding of context as a way to explain what's happening/ happened. Similarly, I believe in the ability of people, through their actions and decisions, to shape context and to 'make a difference'. These two beliefs have certainly influenced the design of this study and my orientation to 'people' and 'context' 'fits' with the situated, qualitative approach adopted. Flick (1998) suggests there are four roles of the researcher - stranger and visitor (who maintain the outsider's perspective), insider and initiate (who adopt an insider's position). Given I am external to each institution's context, I would normally be considered an 'outsider-researcher', however through my knowledge of the topic, my experiences in the field and current work in the industry, I could also be considered an 'insider-researcher', not to each institutional context, but to the academic leader role in this study. This presents me as the researcher with opportunities and challenges throughout the project - on the one hand to draw on my professional knowledge and experience to surface data, concepts or connections that someone with less familiarity may not pick up, but at the same time to be very careful not to overlay my own experiences, interpretations and

knowledge on the top of others, jeopardizing validity of the research. Engaging in constant reflection and analysis of my own positionality and assumptions, continual questioning of self throughout the research process, or what Cohen (2019) refers to as epistemic reflexivity through my memos and notes for example, helped to keep my assumptions visible through the stages of research and address bias.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

An interpretivist epistemology underpins this research as I seek to understand the experiences of academic leaders, and their interpretation of those experiences. This approach assumes that reality is socially constructed, is a composite of multiple perspectives and continues to evolve, meaning that knowledge is subjective and relative, rather than fixed (Myers, 2019). This approach is suited to my research as it is a subjective study, focusing on academic leaders' accounts and perceptions of reality and valuing the importance of context in which they are located. My research is interested in human endeavor, which is inherently unique, personal and subjective in nature (Cohen et al., 2007). The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is an approach that assumes people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world via their experience and reflections on those experiences (Chowdhurry, 2014) and in this study, I assumed that academic leaders have different experiences in managing university-OPM partnerships and have different realities based on their unique situation, thus, this perspective allows me to examine what is specific and unique about academic leaders' experiences in managing OPM partnerships and might enable further exploration of the variation in ways of managing these partnerships, facilitate better understanding of what's involved, and the impacts of this work on the university.

The interpretivist paradigm also holds that the researcher, by their involvement, actions and interpretations shapes the research, bringing their own subjective view to the phenomena, which is also based on their personal experience (Rogers, Patton, Harmon, Lex & Meyer 2020), rather than acting as the detached, objective observer as is the general stance in positivism

(Cohen et al., 2007). Thus as the researcher, I am connected to and part of this research, my experience as both practitioner in the industry and as researcher mean that I hold assumptions and a 'stance' on university-OPM partnerships and academic leadership, which cannot be uncoupled from my interpretations and how that is voiced in my research.

Other approaches could have been used to understand the management of university-OPM partnerships, both from quantitative and qualitative methodological perspectives. Quantitative methods, such as a survey, might have offered insights across a broader population of academic leaders. These methods are designed to produce a measurable outcome, based on the assumption of a single reality, made for the purpose of generalizability. Graham (2021) for example, used a quantitative survey methodology to determine if OPM satisfaction is related to position within the institution. However, for my research, I sought a comprehensive understanding of what's involved in managing university-OPM partnerships and how that plays out in the everyday work and decisions of academic leaders. As there is little known about this phenomenon, academic leaders' descriptions and interpretations of their practice was critical to gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon. To achieve this, I needed to access the individuals involved and their descriptions and interpretations of their experiences, potentially offering greater insight into the management of university-OPM partnerships, the approach of academic leaders in this work, and how it might shape these arrangements in the future. As this research was not attempting to predict an outcome or determine causal relationships between factors associated with academic leaders or their management practices, a positivist methodology was not appropriate for this research.

3.5 Choosing a Methodology

Within the constructivist-interpretivist frame, there were several methodological options to consider, each aligned with the belief that multiple realities exist, and that knowledge and facts are relative, subjective, and evolving. Cohen et al. (2007, p183) notes that there are many options for qualitative data collection and advises researchers to "use what is appropriate". As my research was focused on understanding the phenomenon of university-OPM partnership

and how they're managed, I sought a methodology that offered access to individuals who could provide both descriptions of their work, and interpretations of their experiences. This led me to consider several options including case study, action research, grounded research, and ethnography, phenomenology, or a combination of approaches through mixed methods.

I discarded action research as an option, given that its focus is on allowing individuals to explore the nature of their own practice as it unfolds for the purposes of change (Cohen et al., 2007) whereas my research is interested in exploring a relatively unknown phenomenon, not to change it, but to understand it. Thus, action research was not considered appropriate. Grounded research was also discarded, as the purpose of my research at the outset was not to generate theory from data, but to explore a relatively unknown phenomenon. Yin (2014) proposes that case study methodology can be helpful in describing and exploring and was another option that I considered but subsequently discounted. While a case study would provide for the possibility of a holistic and context-based understanding of how University-OPM partnerships are managed, this methodology would be limited to one institution and my research is interested in exploring a phenomenon not well known, hence gaining a view from multiple standpoints and experiences was important to helping answer the research questions.

Finally on a practical level, as I am not working in a university, access to a research site, particularly through the COVID-19 period when data collection was planned, would not have been feasible. For similar reasons an ethnographic approach, which generally occurs 'in-situ' and studies social groups in their real-life contexts (Gay, Mills & Airasian 2011), was discarded not only for practical reasons of access, but also as academic leaders who manage OPM partnerships are generally neither co-located nor considered as forming a particular social or community group. Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) could provide for a rich understanding of the experiences of academic leaders in this study, however, IPA is "best suited to understanding the innermost deliberation of the 'lived experiences' of research participants" (Alase, 2017, p.9) and my research, while it seeks to understand experiences as related by participants, it is also focused on knowing about the practical day to day activities of academic leaders, as well as how they feeling about managing university-OPM partnerships.

Another possibility was to deploy mixed methods, which Creswell (2013) suggests can offer a more detailed understanding than one method alone. The relationship between the methods, sequence and weighting needs to be considered when adopting mixed methods research (Bryman, Becker & Sempik, 2008) and in my case, a survey to sample a broader range of individuals to identify general patterns of response about experiences leading university-OPM partnerships might have identified themes that could have been explored more deeply in interviews. Mixed methods don't present methodological misalignment for my research, however on a practical level, the length of time to organize, implement and analyze both questionnaires and interviews would be prohibitive. These considerations led me to adopt an exploratory-qualitative approach to investigate the work of academic leaders in managing university-OPM partnerships.

3.6 Exploratory Qualitative Approach

Given there is little known about how university-OPM partnerships are managed 'on the ground', the types of efforts involved, details about how arrangements come to be or how they evolve over time, an exploratory approach is appropriate for this research. Exploratory research does not involve existing assumptions or models that are to be 'tested' as is used in confirmatory approaches but is appropriate when trying to become familiar with an existing phenomenon, to gain insight into that phenomenon, or to form more precise problems to be generated. Swedberg (2020, p.28) identifies two purposes for exploratory research, one related to generating hypotheses about topics already known and the other to "increase the knowledge of a topic that is little known but needs to be better known". My research is primarily relevant to the latter definition in that it seeks to explore the details of how university-OPM partnerships are managed and the effects of partnership arrangements on universities, which is a little-known phenomenon, but an increasingly common arrangement. Additionally, knowledge gained from this study *may* serve to inform future examinations of the topic, however my purpose in this study is not to generate hypotheses.

Exploratory research does not have a standard set of procedures to follow as in other methods, providing flexibility to account for the purpose and context of research, however given its main purpose to increase knowledge about a topic rather than test existing hypotheses, qualitative approaches are often used in exploratory research (Swedberg, 2020). Guest et al. (2013) suggest that researchers conducting exploratory research look for individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic and Wimmer & Dominick (2015) note that interviews with experts are a typical example of exploratory research design, such as in my research, which focused on the work of academic leaders involved in managing university-OPM partnerships and sought to understand the phenomenon through exploring their experiences of that work.

3.7 Study Design

This study used an exploratory-qualitative research design. A purposive sample of academic leaders who have experience related to the management of university-OPM partnerships was used, offering a small, relatively homogeneous sample. The study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data, which were audio recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed. Figure 3.1. below provides a graphical representation of the methodology, approach and strategy used in the design of this research study.

Figure 3.1 Alignment between philosophy, approach and research strategy

3.7.1 Sampling Method

Individual research participants for this study were identified using purposive sampling techniques, which Creswell (2013) suggests can help ensure that participants are able to

provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation. To the extent possible given practical considerations of accessing participants in these roles, I sought to build a sample that could produce a deep, contextualized articulation of what is involved in managing university-OPM partnerships, offering believable descriptions and explanations, offered by Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2013) as an important aspect to enhancing trustworthiness in qualitative research. This technique also enables an homogeneous sample group, in this case those who share the similar characteristic of being currently or previously in academic roles and who have experience in decision-making related to university-OPM partnerships. Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood (2015) suggests that purposive sampling is also an efficient method where resources are limited, as in my case being a lone researcher with a full-time job and family commitments. Cohen et al. (2007) notes that for research which is exploratory in nature, non-probability sampling approaches are appropriate as in this research, where the goal is not about randomly selecting units from a population with the intention of generalizing, but rather to target a specific group to learn more about the phenomena being researched.

Rai & Thapa (2015) note that purposive sampling draws on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to decisions about who or what will be included in the sample, and for this research, I used a combination of purposive approaches, including convenience sampling, to identify academic leaders in my professional network who I knew to be involved with OPM partnerships, along with expert purposive sampling, which enabled me to build a sample that fitted the requirements of my research by finding individuals who have knowledge and experience about this particular issue and to align with my aim of increasing the depth (rather than the breadth) of understanding (Cohen et al., 2007; Palinkas et al., 2015; Silverman, 2013). I also used a variation of a 'Snowball' sampling method where a participant in the study refers another to be the next participant, and so on (Cohen et al., 2002). In the case of this study, several people who I approached declined to participate, but referred me to another person who they identified as fitting the criteria. Petersen & Valdez (2005) suggest that the Snowball technique is also used to find participants who are in 'hard to find' populations and, while my

sample is not so hidden, academic leaders who manage university-OPM relationships do so from several different positions (such as Provost, Dean, Deputy Vice Chancellor etc.) and this referral method helped to identify participants who I might not have otherwise found. Recruiting and interviewing participants took place over several months. As I received confirmation from those I approached, I sought to conduct the interviews as soon as practicable and convenient for the participants, especially given their busy schedules. Hence the process was iterative, in that I had interviewed some participants before recruiting others.

3.7.2 Sample

The sample sought to identify those in academic roles who have experience in management or decision-making related to university-OPM partnerships. However, universities are not identically structured, roles are not identically named, and the composition of 'academic leadership' roles can vary, due to many context-based factors. Therefore, responsibility for managing aspects of university-OPM partnerships may fall to one or a number of different departments and roles in a university and manifest differently across institutions. In other words, context plays an important role when it comes to who is involved and 'who does what' in managing university-OPM partnerships. When seeking participants for this study, I didn't limit to a particular department, level of leadership or role type, but rather wanted to include a range of different leadership positions and perspectives related to experiences of managing university-OPM partnerships, in part to surface which types of roles are involved and in part to achieve a sample of role categories that might be considered 'typical' in other university contexts. Yin (2013) suggests that this 'cross-role' approach can offer the possibility of generating insights that may be relevant across perspectives and enhancing analytic generalizability by identifying ideas that might be applied to similar cases.

Table 3.1 below summarizes the makeup of the participants in this study. Some position titles were very specific and have been abbreviated to minimize the risk of identifying individual participants via unique job titles, while maintaining the general thrust of the role. One third (5) of the sample are in the position of Provost or equivalent, which is typically the 'chief academic officer' or senior academic administrator of a university. One participant was in the role of

University President and two participants straddled academic leadership (for example Vice Provost or Vice Principal) with responsibility for Online Learning or Technology Innovation. A further two were responsible for 'innovation' that encompassed digital innovation, but not exclusively so. Two other participants led the university partnership function, which is typically responsible for academic partnerships of all types (e.g., university-university partnering, university-employer/industry partnerships and university-OPM partnerships). One participant was in the role of Dean and held responsibility for online programs at the university. Two participants in the sample were in the role of President of university membership/accreditation organizations, who work alongside universities in their constituency on regulatory, quality assurance, policy, and professional development matters. These two participants operate at the 'field' level and have a unique perspective about university-OPM partnerships and online learning from across their university members, as well as being in positions of influence and decision-making related to partnership arrangements and online learning from a policy and regulatory standpoint.

The focus for the sample was related to individuals who fit the selection criteria for the study, however the context of the institution in which participants work/ed is important as it provides the unique environment and location of the experiences described by participants. Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs (2014) suggests that an understanding of context helps to fill in the 'picture' for participant experiences, which can add to the trustworthiness of the research by providing the reader with additional information for them to assess the results presented. Based on enrolment numbers, participants come from universities of varying sizes - 6 from small institutions (below 5,000 students), 1 medium (between 10-20,000 students), 4 large (20-50,000 students) and 2 extra-large (over 50,000 students). The gender mix of participants was 60% male, 40% female. Two thirds of participants come from a 'traditional' academic background in that they were trained as academics and have held faculty positions, and around half the sample have some experience working in commercial operations. 40% of participants have only ever worked in one university (their current institution) and 27% have worked in 5 or more universities.

Participant codes (P1-P15) were used to assure anonymity and confidentiality and to connect individual narratives and relate them to the key categories and overarching themes that evolved from the data. This sample illustrates that there are multiple academic stakeholders involved in managing university-OPM partnerships, however it does not claim to be an exhaustive list or a representative sample, nor does it seek to make generalized statements about participant experiences (Patton, 2002), but through in-depth examination, explores what might be typical about the experiences of academic leaders managing university-OPM partnerships.

Table 3.1 Research Participants

Participant number	Position Title	Gender	Country	Institution Size	Institution Type	Institution Focus
1	PVC (Partnerships)	M	UK	Small	Public	Research
2	Provost	F	Australia	Extra Large	Public	Research
3	Vice Chancellor	M	Australia	Extra Large	Public	Research
4	Dean, Faculty & Online	F	USA	Small	Public	Teaching
5	Registrar	F	UK	Large	Public	Research
6	Director, Partnerships	F	UK	Large	Public	Research
7	Provost	M	UK	Large	Public	Research
8	Head, Innovation	F	UK	Small	Public	Teaching
9	SVP, Innovation	F	USA	Small	Public	Teaching
10	President	M	USA	Small	Public	Regulatory
11	President	M	USA	Small	Public	Regulatory
12	Provost	M	USA	Small	Private	Research
13	VP (Academic & Tech)	M	UK	Large	Public	Research
14	Chief Online Officer	M	USA	Medium	Private	Research
15	Provost	M	USA	Small	Private	Research

3.7.3 Recruitment

To recruit participants, I initially made an open call for voluntary participation via a post on the social media platform, LinkedIn, outlining the criteria for participation and asking for expressions of interest. Chambers, Bliss & Rambur (2020) suggest that social media platforms are a quick and cost-effective method of recruiting research participants and, through my professional work in the higher education industry, I hoped would be an expedited strategy to recruit participants.

Gelinas, Pierce, Winkler, Cohen, Lynch & Bierer (2017) point out several potential ethical issues related to recruiting research participants via social media noting the importance of transparency and proactive disclosure of a researcher's presence. Therefore, it was important to be explicit in that the research was associated with my role as an EdD candidate and not part of, associated with, or to the direct benefit of, my role as a practitioner. To that end, in correspondence with potential participants, I made a point of explicitly recognizing my 'dual role' in the industry and as a student researcher and being clear that this research project and its output was limited to my role as a research student. In addition to recruitment by social media, I built a short list of possible participants via a thorough process of investigation and nomination. The following section provides a description of the process undertaken to identify and select the sample for this study.

There were two parts to the process. First, to identify individuals who were experienced with the phenomenon I was investigating (Palinkas et al., 2015) I targeted those who had presented or spoken publicly about their experience of managing university-OPM arrangements by using my knowledge of the sector to identify conferences that included related topics. I looked through the conference agenda on the website, noted possible candidates and consulted their public profile on their university website, as well as searching for press releases and other information in the public domain related to information about university-OPM partnerships where, in some cases, academic leaders were quoted or referenced as a person involved in the partnership.

Second, I built a list of universities who are known to have OPM arrangements in place, by consulting a database of such information from my workplace, which I received permission to use for the purposes of the research project. This information provided a starting point by identifying universities with possible OPM partnerships in place, and I then used my knowledge of university structures to identify possible participants by consulting their universities' public web pages. I also consulted the websites of OPM providers which often promote university partnerships. This checking process helped to confirm partnership arrangements were in place and gave me a better feel for the details, such as what type of programs or faculties were involved and which portfolio in the university held overall responsibility for partnership arrangements. The staff profile pages on universities' public web pages provided contact details.

This two-part process yielded a target short list of 36 potential participants, their university, role and contact details. I emailed each of these potential participants, introducing myself, summarizing the research and inviting them to participate in the study or to suggest someone in the university who might fit the criteria I had provided. Table 3.2 below summarizes the outcome of this process, with nine who were emailed directly willing to participate in the study and subsequently interviewed, three participants came from the initial LinkedIn post/direct message strategy, and three participants came by way of referral from a colleague/ ex-colleague who received one of my direct emails. Of the remaining population who were emailed directly, nineteen did not respond to the initial email and follow-up. Four individuals responded by referring me to another person in their university (or in one case their previous university), two declined to participate, one citing a heavy workload and the other didn't feel they fit the criteria for participation.

Table 3.2. Invitation to participate – response categories

No.	Response	Method
9	Yes	Direct email with invitation to participate

3	Yes	Responded to LinkedIn post/direct message
3	Referral	Participated in the study after being referred by a colleague/ex-colleague
4	Refer	Referred researcher to others in their university
2	Yes/lost touch	Responded to direct email with willingness to participate, but subsequently unable to reconnect for interview.
19	No response	Did not respond to direct email request and 1 follow up
2	Declined	Declined to participate due to lack of availability and not fitting the criteria

For this research I completed fifteen interviews, which provided adequate data to the point where I felt I had obtained a good understanding of the phenomenon I was researching. Elo et al. (2014) recommends that preliminary coding begins almost immediately after data collection starts making it easier to recognize when saturation is achieved and for this research, I started analysis after the first interview, allowing me to begin categorization and concept creation straight away, which continued throughout the data collection process. As the interviews and their analysis proceeded, I did observe a decline in the number of new codes and themes arising or as described by Guest et al. (2020) I was moving toward a 'new information threshold'. The iterative recruitment and analysis approach used allowed me to incorporate new 'types' of participants (e.g., Dean role, leadership of university member organizations, an additional participant with a hybrid-type role) as data collection continued, to check if new information or themes were apparent. After fifteen interviews and analysis across the period of collection, I determined that there were no further themes or concepts being drawn from the data, thus saturation had been reached and sampling ceased.

3.8 Ethical Approval & Considerations

In keeping with accepted ethical standards and university guidelines, I sought and gained approval from the University of Liverpool through the VPREC (Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee) prior to commencing the study (refer to Appendix A). All participation in this study was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were made aware of their rights, particularly that they were able to withdraw from the study at

any time and for any reason, or for no reason, prior to participation and again during the interview. A detailed Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was provided to each participant, which outlined details about the purpose of the study, why they had been invited, risks and benefits, as well as outlining details about my dual role and potential professional-researcher conflict. The PIS also provided my contact information, those of my thesis supervisors and ethics personnel in case participants had further questions or encountered a problem.

Confidentiality and anonymity were assured by removing personal and university information from transcripts, replacing names with when reporting results. Each interview was recorded and electronically stored in a password protected file and uploaded to a server that was also password protected. The transcription of each interview was anonymized using conventions of 'Participant 1', 'Participant 2' etc. and once the interviews were transcribed and data analysis was complete, the original recorded interview file was permanently destroyed. The data collected will be kept for five years after which they will be permanently destroyed.

One of the ethical considerations for this research was the potential confusion between my position as a student researcher and my professional role in the industry, where I sometimes interact with universities and OPM providers. I was careful to use my university email account, and private zoom account throughout the research to ensure and reinforce separation and followed ethics approval guidelines regarding security of data. Even though participants in the study were experienced academics and most likely aware of, and comfortable with research processes, it was still important for me to state clearly at the beginning of each interview that the uses of the data were limited to my doctoral research and not associated with my professional work. Early in the interview process, there was one occasion where an interviewee wanted reassurance that the recording would be kept absolutely private and double checked that the data would only be used for my research associated with study. Edwards and Holland (2013, p.83) suggest that researchers can be "subject to subtle probing about their agenda and intentions for use of the interview data" such as in this example. This question reinforced to me the need to be very explicit in all documents and correspondence and at the beginning of each

interview about my ‘dual-role’ as practitioner- researcher and I made a point to reinforce this at the commencement of each interview.

Confidence of confidentiality and anonymity was particularly important for this study as the topic under investigation is related to new models and arrangements, which are often part of a broader strategic plan within the university, which may be confidential. Discussions with academic leaders related to their experiences in this context might also become politically sensitive, especially if the interviewee’s experiences are negative or in disagreement with the overall strategy of the institution. In addition to the measures described above related to data security and systems, I have taken efforts to ensure that there is no way of linking responses to individuals or identification of institutions. For example, I have used categories, rather than data points for institution size, and where position titles are very specific, I have simplified or used abridged wording, as there is a possibility of identification given unique combinations of data.

Kvale (1996) suggests that interviews inherently involve asymmetries of power. On the one hand, as the researcher I have defined the situation, frame the topic and questions, and thus could be considered in a position of power. On the other hand, I am a student-researcher and the participants in this study are experienced academics, who are familiar with research processes and techniques. Mikecz (2012) emphasizes the need for researchers who interview ‘elites’ to prepare well for each interview, and I did ensure to check each interviewee’s background in terms of experience including the types of roles they had occupied, the universities/ organizations they’d worked with and their academic discipline area. Knowledge of this context is a way to decrease the status imbalance (Edwards & Holland, 2013) and in my case did provide more confidence going into each interview.

For the most part during interviews, I feel there was an open approach from interviewees, who accepted my exploratory framing of the research and were forthcoming in relating their experiences and work. I did feel a slight power imbalance on occasion where, for example, a few interviewees put forward suggestions about the sorts of questions that *would* be interesting in the topic (as opposed/in addition to the ones I was asking) and two who

suggested areas ‘where I might like to focus’ the research / analysis. This might be seen as an exercise of power on the part of the interviewee, and I used the flexibility of a semi-structured interview technique to probe a little further toward their obvious interest in these adjacent topics without going off track of the interview structure.

3.9 Data Collection

Data collection for this study took the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, conducted online. Interview methodology aligns with the exploratory-qualitative approach of this research as it seeks to understand a relatively little-known phenomenon. In this case, one of the key questions for this research was to explore what is involved in managing University-OPM partnerships. This research question has not been asked before and very little is known about what is involved, what impacts the work of academic leaders as they make decisions in this arena, or how this work of academic leaders influences the partnership arrangements over time. Given the gap in the literature on this topic, the research will be exploratory, in that I am not seeking to prove a specific hypothesis, establish a ‘truth’ about what’s involved in managing university-OPM partnerships or indeed to compare results with each other or previous studies, but to undertake an initial exploration of what’s involved in this work, as experienced and interpreted by those undertaking it (Hays & Singh, 2011). Interview methods allow this deeper engagement, enabling participants to “discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard those situations” (Cohen et al., 2007 p.349). This type of interpretive, personal, and rich information is harder to access through other methods such as observations or surveys (Blaxter et al., 2006).

3.9.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

For this research I chose a semi-structured interview format as it is suitable when specific information is sought but allows for flexibility to pursue lines of discussion that are brought up by the participant (Vos et al., 2011). A semi-structured interview method also enables thick descriptions to assist readers in determining the transferability of the results (Merriam, 2009) while increasing completeness of data and a level of systematic data collection across participants, thus increasing validity of the research (Coghlan, 2019; Cohen et al., 2007). As

relatively little is known about the topic of managing university-OPM partnerships, and approaches to managing partnerships might differ substantially, this format meant that participants could bring up and discuss topics of importance, which might not have been possible if the interview format was too structured.

Video interviews were a practical solution for this research given that most participants were not in the same country as the researcher, and notwithstanding that interviews were undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people were isolating or working from home. Through email exchange, I agreed a date and time for each interview that was mutually convenient for each participant, and I sent through a calendar invitation, noting the Zoom link and attaching the interview questions if requested ahead of time. Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel & Cook (2020) suggests that use of synchronous video technology is both convenient and practical, and in this study, it enabled both me and the participants to 'control' their environment, but still allowed for meaningful connection between us and the observation of non-verbal communication. Additionally, Zoom technology does not require any software to be loaded onto the computer, making it easier to connect with people who are using a variety of systems, although a stable internet connection is required. At the beginning of each interview, I asked permission to record the session to aid analysis, and all participants consented to recording. I used an interview guide (Appendix B) to help structure the conversation.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim into a word document using a speech to text translation software application (Otter.ai), which generated the initial written transcriptions. To check the quality of the initial computer-generated transcription, eliminate extraneous words while not distorting meaning (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018), remove identifiers and replaced with pseudonyms (Participant 1 - 15), and to re-familiarize myself with each interview, I listened to the interview again alongside reading through the transcription, correcting errors, and adding notes to the side column. This took approximately 2-2.5 hours per interview, however it served as a 'refined' transcription process and allowed me to add reflections as side notes close to the relevant passage, for ease of access during analysis. The final de-identified transcripts and my

notes were uploaded into the software application 'nVivo' which I used to support the data analysis process.

3.9.2 Interview Protocol

As this research was exploratory, I wanted to ensure that the interview questions weren't too restrictive or 'tight', to allow participants the freedom to raise the matters that were important to them. Silverman (2010) argues that such open-ended questioning allows respondents to demonstrate their unique perspective and definition of their situation, making room for unanticipated, but important issues to be raised. Based on the research questions, I created an initial list of interview questions which were reviewed by my supervisors. Following discussions and based on their feedback, the interview structure was modified to flow more naturally, and clearer linkages were made to the research questions. The final interview guide (Appendix B) shows the structure the interview around a small number of topic areas relevant to the research questions, which acted as a launching off point for each section with the possibility to delve deeper through probing questions if needed, but also the flexibility for interviewees to respond in a way that made sense to them. The six areas that guided the interview were 1) perceptions of the partnership, 2) what's involved in managing a partnership 3) the impact of partnership arrangements on the university, 4). leadership capabilities required, and 5) impact on decision-making at the university.

The interview protocol provided an overall structure and sequence for the questions, however, the interviews did not all proceed in the same order. I used the protocol as a guide, ensuring that we covered the key areas by the end of the interview, which often occurred via different routes based on the flow of the dialogue. This approach enabled freer exchange between myself and the interviewees, supporting the concept that interviews are a dynamic exchange (Kvale, 1996) and acknowledging the role of the researcher- practitioner as a participant in the process and, as a participant, one of the challenges for me in conducting these interviews was managing my 'insider' position. Given my familiarity with the topic, it was very tempting to engage in conversation, particularly when interviewees as part of their descriptions for example, used words such as 'you know what it's like', potentially drawing me and my

experiences into the content. During interviews, I needed to be very actively aware to keep a balance between rapport-building and supportive probing (Edwards & Holland, 2013) but to ‘maintain distance’ and focus efforts on my listening role, attending to what is being said (or not said) by interviewees.

3.9.3 Field Notes & Memos

During the interviews I took handwritten notes, emphasizing key points introduced and recording observations. After each interview I spent 10 minutes making an audio recording or ‘researcher memo’ of my reflections about the interview, my perceptions about participants' reactions and contextual factors that I felt were relevant. Creswell (2013) suggests that researchers handwritten interview notes and memos enhance the data by serving as an additional layer to be interpreted and analyzed. These notes were subsequently added to the written transcript in a separate column against the relevant passage from the transcript, enabling me to connect my thoughts directly with the relevant section of the interview. My audio transcribed memos were added as additional files in NVivo was added and became an additional source of data for my research, which Cohen et al. (2007) notes aides the analysis process and enhances the dependability of the research. Visual representations of themes, groupings, and emerging connections also formed part of the data collection-analysis process.

3.10 Data Analysis

Creswell (2009) offers a structured set of steps for the analysis of qualitative data, which I broadly adopted for this study, starting with organizing and preparing the data. In this first step, I listened to the recording soon after each interview while reading the transcript, a strategy that Gibbs (2018) suggests is critical to check for accuracy. This process of engaging with the audio and written recount of each interview was a way of immersing in the data and linking the written and spoken words, which aided my remembering of each interview in later processes of coding. Gibbs (2018) notes that organizing the data is another important early step in the analysis process especially given the vast amounts of data that can be generated in qualitative research. After conducting, transcribing, checking, reading, and coding the first three interviews, I decided to move to a system that could more easily handle and structure greater

volumes of data and began using the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo, which I subsequently used to house, organize all data related to this research project and to manage the processes of coding and categorization.

As this research was exploratory in nature, I initially applied an inductive approach to analysing the data, allowing themes to emerge. This open coding approach was helpful as a starting point to "tease out what was happening" and involved 'line by line' naming and coding of each transcript, which (Gibbs 2018, p64) suggests has the advantage of forcing the researcher to pay close attention to what is actually said, and feedback from my supervisor offered insights into producing meaningful code and theme titles. As suggested by Creswell (2009) the process of analysis and coding was iterative and intense, involving multiple cycles of coding and categorization, and moving from open, to 'axial' coding whereby categories are refined and related to each other. This process initially resulted in 7 themes and 32 sub-themes and, through a process of revision and refinement, ultimately resulted in 5 major themes and 13 sub-themes.

Over time, and as multiple rounds of coding and analysis progressed, I was attempting to move beyond descriptive and category coding to more analytical codes, which Gibbs (2018, p. 73) suggests offer "new, theoretical or analytical ways of explaining the data". To this end through the analysis process, concepts from institutional theory and institutional work, which provide the theoretical frame for this study, began to inform the themes and categories. For example, the overall structure of themes, sub-themes and codes are organized by the macro- (field), meso- (organization) and micro (individual), the structure of which is a key concept in institutional theory and, although participants didn't frame their responses in this hierarchy, institutional theory has informed the generation of the codes and themes for this research.

According to Cohen et al. (2007, p. 368) analysis of data in qualitative studies is almost always interpretive, in that the researcher's output is a "reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data", itself already an interpretation of a social situation.

Hence reflexivity is an important feature of qualitative data analysis, and recognition of my own role in the process of interpreting results, by being open and reflecting on that influence in writing up the results along with, for example, presenting evidence such as direct quotes, so that readers can see how I have interpreted data, is an important aspect to trustworthiness.

3.11 Summary

In this chapter, I have highlighted the aims of my research and research questions. My positionality as a researcher has been explored and the theoretical framework which underpins the study described. The chapter justified methodological choices and described the design of the study including the sampling strategy, participant sample and recruitment processes. Ethical considerations and the steps followed for ethics approval were explained. Finally, the chapter presented the approach to, and processes of data analysis employed in this research. The next chapter reports the findings from the research and finishes with a discussion of the findings organized by the research questions.

Chapter 4. Findings & Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter reports data collected from this study which used semi-structured interviews to explore the work of academic leaders associated with managing university-OPM partnerships and outlines the findings that emerged from analysis. The following three research questions guided the focus of this study:

1. What is the institutional work associated with managing University-OPM partnerships?
2. How do academic leaders exercise agency in effecting change related to University-OPM partnerships?
3. How might university-OPM partnerships as proto-institutions become institutionalized or legitimated?

Through my interviews, I was able to gain an understanding of the day to day work that academic leaders undertake in managing university-OPM partnerships and how this forms part of a broader context related to evolving perceptions and arrangements for online learning at institutions, the influence of field-level drivers on these arrangements and on the work of academic leaders.

This chapter is structured in two parts. Part 1 presents the findings from this study organized by the key themes and sub-themes that arose through analysis, as summarized below in Table 4.2. Following the presentation of the findings section, Part 2 of the chapter discusses these findings by bringing together the data and theory by addressing each of the three research questions.

4.2 Profile of participants

Fifteen academic leaders were interviewed for this study from a range of institutions in the USA, the UK and Australia as summarized in Table 4.1. Two participants were academic leaders at higher education accrediting bodies and the remaining 13 hold various academic leadership positions in universities, covering the academic administration portfolios of Provost or equivalent, Vice-Chancellor/President, Partnerships, Dean, and academic leaders whose portfolio covers online and innovation in programs. Ten academic leaders currently work at research-focused universities, 3 at teaching institutions and public universities made up the bulk of the participants (10), with three from teaching focused institutions and two from higher education accrediting bodies. Based on enrolment numbers, academic leaders come from universities of varying sizes - 6 from small institutions (below 5,000 students), 1 medium (between 10-20,000 students), 4 large (20-50,000 students) and 2 extra-large (over 50,000 students). The gender mix of participants was 60% male, 40% female. Participant codes (P1-P15) were used to assure anonymity and confidentiality and to connect individual narratives and relate them to the key categories and overarching themes that evolved from the data. Each interviewee confirmed that they were involved in managing university-OPM partnerships at their current and/or previous institutions and willingly shared details of their experience and perspectives about university-OPM partnerships.

Table 4.1 Summary of participant profile

Participant number	Position Title	Gender	Country	Institution Size	Institution Type	Institution Focus
1	PVC (Partnerships)	M	UK	Small	Public	Research
2	Provost	F	Australia	Extra Large	Public	Research
3	Vice Chancellor	M	Australia	Extra Large	Public	Research
4	Dean, Faculty & Online	F	USA	Small	Public	Teaching
5	Registrar	F	UK	Large	Public	Research
6	Director, Partnerships	F	UK	Large	Public	Research
7	Provost	M	UK	Large	Public	Research
8	Head, Innovation	F	UK	Small	Public	Teaching

9	SVP, Innovation	F	USA	Small	Public	Teaching
10	President	M	USA	Small	Public	Regulatory
11	President	M	USA	Small	Public	Regulatory
12	Provost	M	USA	Small	Private	Research
13	VP (Academic & Tech)	M	UK	Large	Public	Research
14	Chief Online Officer	M	USA	Medium	Private	Research
15	Provost	M	USA	Small	Private	Research

4.3 Developing themes and clustering into sub-themes

The process of developing themes and sub-themes involved multiple iterations of coding. Each of the 15 interviews was examined individually and key content was coded to relevant concepts, resulting in 7 initial themes and 32 sub-themes. I undertook further rounds of coding and categorization to organize in the end into 5 overarching themes: External Change Drivers, Building Online Capabilities; Evolving arrangements for online learning; Day-to-day work of managing OPM partnerships; and Approaches to leading university-OPM partnerships. Each of the themes and sub-themes are presented and discussed in the following section and their relationship with institutional work is explored. The 5 themes and 13 sub-themes are identified in Table 4.2 along with frequency of codes associated with each and categorizes the themes into the three levels relevant for the study of institutional work, the Field Level, Organizational and Individual level. The structure of this section begins with the themes at the Field level, then considers institutional work undertaken by Individuals, followed by implications at the Organization Level.

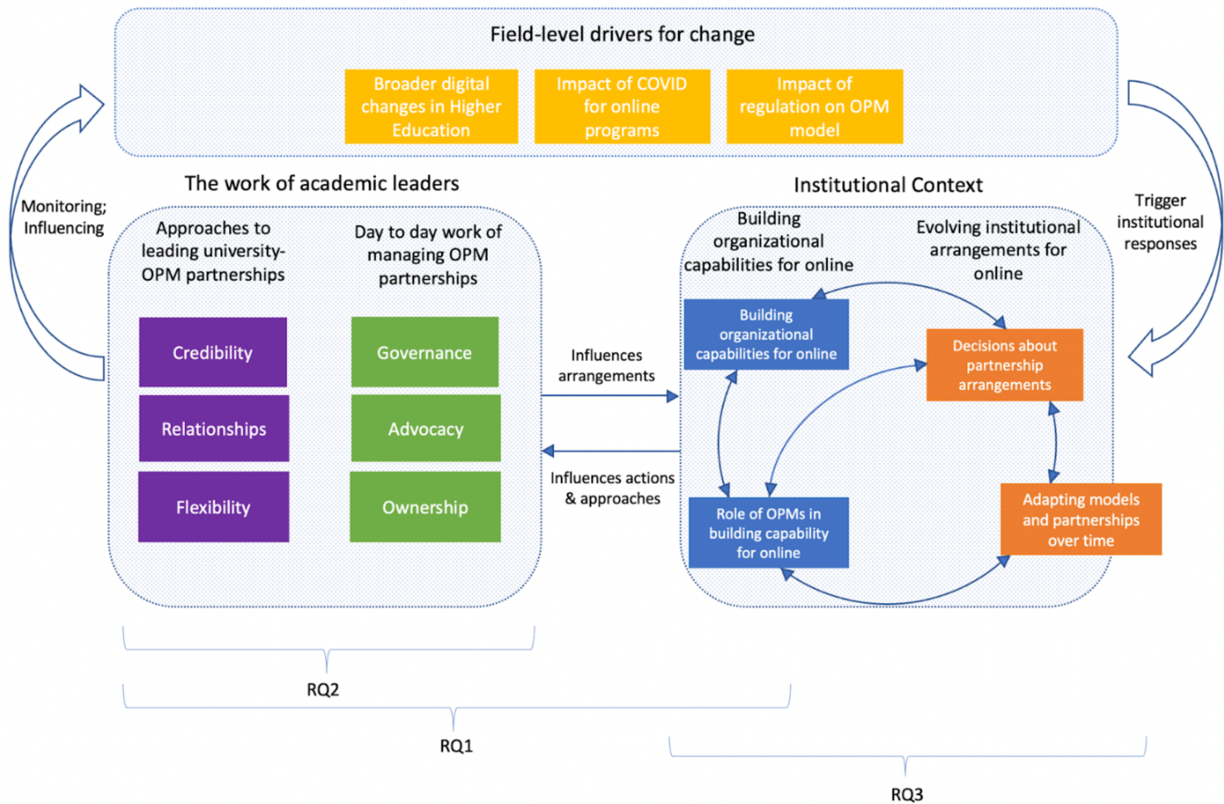
Table 4.2 Themes and sub-themes arising from analysis

Level	Themes	Sub-Themes	Code Freq.
Field	External Change Drivers	OPM as part of broader digital change agenda in HE	70
		Responding to the impact of COVID for online programs	18

		Impact of regulation on OPM model	14
Organizational	Building Organizational Capabilities for Online	Developing capabilities for new products & delivery	79
		Role of OPM in building capability for online	36
	Evolving Arrangements for Online	Decisions about OPM partnership arrangements	76
		Adaptation of partnership arrangements over time	69
Individual	Day-to-day Work	Governance arrangements & processes	156
		Advocacy & dialogue about the legitimacy of online	67
		Incentivizing ownership of online	46
	Approaches to Leading	Maintaining credibility with multiple stakeholder groups	83
		Maintaining relationships with multiple stakeholders	69
		Being Flexible & Entrepreneurial	36

Figure 4.1 graphically depicts the themes and sub-themes that evolved from this analysis, which are grouped into the micro, meso and macro contexts pertinent to the study of institutional work. The "flows of influence" (Lewis et al. 2019, pp. 317) between these contexts are illustrated, connecting the day-to-day practices of academic leaders, organizational arrangements for online learning and the broader field-level drivers in higher education. Each theme was mapped to initial research questions as depicted in Figure 4.3 and has been explored more fully in the following pages.

Figure 4.1. Graphical representation of themes, levels and relationships and link to research questions



4.4 Field Level Drivers for Change

Participants regularly referenced the external environment and broader changes in higher education when talking about their work related to online learning and managing university-OPM partnerships. Digital change in higher education was a strong theme, particularly the ‘normalization’ of online learning in the sector. The accelerating impact of COVID for online programs was identified, and particularly discussions at their institution about embedding digital for all students. Participants in some locations referenced the potential impact that regulation might have on their OPM partnership arrangement, prompting creative thinking about future options for delivering online programs. Three themes emerged as having the most influence on their work and will be explored in turn in this section: broader digital changes in higher education, the impact of COVID-19 for online programs, and the impact of regulation on the OPM model. Table 4.3 summarizes the sub-themes and frequency of codes for each, and Table 4.4 summarizes the forms of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders.

Table 4.3. Sub-themes - Field level Drivers for Change

Level	Theme	Sub-Theme	Code Frequency
Field	External Change Drivers	Broader digital change in HE	70
		Online learning and the impact of COVID	18
		Impact of regulation on OPM model	14

4.4.1 Broader digital change in Higher Education

There was a clear sense from academic leaders that online learning has become broadly accepted in higher education, although it is acknowledged that this sample of academic leaders are likely to perceive online learning in a favorable light, given their role in their university and remit to support the achievement of online education goals for their institution. One participant who is leading partnerships in a UK public university and has long experience with online learning in higher education summarized that ‘online learning is not in question now’ (P1), while the head of online learning at a private university in the US noted that online is just ‘part of the fabric’ (P14). One participant, who holds the dual role of Dean and leads online learning at a small university indicated that their university has been in online education for a while (P4), while the President of a regional accrediting agency who works with hundreds of universities in their constituency commented that universities need to get serious after bumbling around with online education (P11). The Chief Online Officer at a US university expressed the need to have a better strategy around OPMs and the digital space (P14). For these participants, online education ‘needs’ to be viewed more seriously as a core part of institutional strategy. These statements offer an insight into academic leaders' belief about the future eventuality of online learning, an example of what Colyvas & Powell (2006) describe as the perception of irreversibility, which in turn garners momentum for change processes (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). The President of a higher education regulatory body, who commented earlier about how universities were bumbling into online education, expressed that University leadership needed to be ‘more careful’ about their online strategy, and mentioned

big university systems that were moving forward with online, alluding to a new competitive environment and new technologies that allowed for rich online learning environments, stating that:

> *"Now there is a mindshift [in higher education] that we need to be much more careful about it, we want to take a more thoughtful approach to our online strategy." (P11)*

In these responses, the concept of time is referenced quite often, either future oriented, with some identifying this period as an 'era of change' (P15), 'getting onto the crest of a wave' (P2), an 'urgency for action' (P12) or 'navigating the future' (P14). Others positioned current changes with reference to the past and the journey of their institution through online education, recounting historical decisions 'we knew online was coming and something we needed to do' (P8). Some referenced demographic changes resulting in enrolment decline (P12) or loss of students to increased competition (P4) as reasons for change. One academic leader suggested that all universities are at different stages on their journey with online learning, the comment infused with the same sense of urgency echoed by others, identifying that for those 'who are behind and have to catch up, OPM partnerships are clearly the quickest path to doing that' (P10). These are examples of what Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016) refer to as temporal institutional work, where actors, in their attempts to change institutions, construct urgency and link institutional projects (e.g., OPM partnerships or online learning) with wider field level reforms. An example of the work associated with constructing urgency is the measurement of progress against peers, as illustrated by one academic leader:

> *"A few years ago, we looked at our strengths and weaknesses against our peers, nationally and internationally, and we realized that we were late in online provision." (P13)*

Academic leaders in this study are actively making connections between field-level drivers for change and the potential implications for their university. This work of constructing urgency

highlights how academic leaders 'translate' the possible consequences of external change and in doing so offer a narrative that supports their objectives and methods for change. For example, one academic leader linked the historical lack of responsiveness of higher education to its potential disruption:

> *"That [resistance to change by universities] has led to corporations thinking they can offer higher education better than universities. And that's not healthy for higher ed. You know, when Google and Amazon start building their own infrastructure and ignoring higher ed, that should be a warning signal that we haven't been sufficiently responsive to their needs." (P15)*

In referencing the impact of changes in the external environment, academic leaders also talked about how student demographics and student expectations for a digital experience were also changing. Some reflected on the trend that traditional on-campus 18–19-year-old students are now taking more hybrid classes, particularly after COVID (P4) and for others, the need to deliver digital experiences for all students, was becoming a standard expectation (P13). Academic leaders identified that their institutions' objectives for online and digital were more integrated inside the institution, suggesting that digital and online elements would be infused across all their programs and student experiences (P14). These examples show how academic leaders are challenging normative associations, by trying to convince stakeholders that online learning isn't just for working adults, but for all students, including undergraduate on-campus learners. One academic laid out their institutions' vision for an integrated digital experience, making clear links between their long-term strategy and decisions about OPM partnerships:

> *"The idea is ultimately, that a student will be able to move if they wish, between on campus and online, either on a weekly basis or on a semester basis - they can simply move between modes of engagement. We would certainly not be able to do that working with an OPM." (P7).*

Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 984) identify this type of activity as projective agency, involving "an imaginative engagement of the future" where actors generate possible future courses of action. Other examples of projective agency can be seen by academic leaders who suggested that new types of products, such as micro-credentials, could also be part of their offerings in the future (P12) or that online education could open new product opportunities as their institution was currently missing out on whole cohorts of people who were in employment but wanted to study (P13).

4.4.2 Responding to the impact of COVID-19

The jolt of COVID-19 was an accelerating force for online learning, prompting conversations within institutions about broader digital adoption and creating a time boundary for taking action about online learning. The entraining work of aligning activities with an external timing norm is evident here creating "windows of opportunity for action" (Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016, p.1010), 'that probably would have taken us another 5 or 10 years to get all the staff engaged with using technologies' (P2).

The experience of COVID-19 acted as an external trigger prompting questions for some about further embedding digital into all student experiences. Some referenced changes to student behaviors 'post' pandemic, noting that student preferences had changed with a higher proportion of traditionally on-campus students choosing to study in hybrid mode (P4). These examples show how academic leaders undertake institutional work associated with re-making normative associations, by suggesting that online learning and digital services should be a regular part of their institutions offering and linking student preferences and student experience to online offering. The example below also hints at what Taupin (2013) identifies as the institutional work of justification, whereby actors develop moral arguments for particular actions, in this case suggesting that the institution 'should' be offering digital services to all students, appealing to universities' social responsibility to deliver relevant, up to date education.

"Shouldn't we be doing this anyways, for on-campus students? This should be just the way of business for higher education moving forward." (P14)

For others it acted as the catalyst for changes to university processes that will not revert back to pre-pandemic ways of operating, with one academic leader describing the institutional work of enacting momentum and valorizing a new way of operating in this example:

"[During COVID] we ran every single board of examiners online. We've actually learned so much that we will never, ever do it face to face again, a year on and they are so well run and so well attended, and our outcomes and decision-making has never been tighter. There's lots of examples of that." (P6)

Changing the normative association of universities as slow and lagging in technology was highlighted by two academic leaders, one suggesting that the experience of the pandemic had 'proven that universities can change on a dime' and that 'universities aren't as resistant and recalcitrant to transformative change as we thought they were' (P12), with one academic leader, who has experience implementing online learning at multiple universities, deciding that the experience of COVID helped the institution reassess its own capabilities for online, 'realizing that we could probably do a lot more of it than we thought' (P2) and subsequently changing the services engaged by their OPM partner.

4.4.3 Impact of regulation on the OPM model

The potential for regulatory action that might negatively impact OPMs and their arrangements with universities was on the radar for some academic leaders. Field level actors engaged in demonizing the OPM model, leading to a distrust of for-profit companies operating in higher education underpins sentiment around potential regulatory action, with one academic leader noting that prominent legislators who are agitating for regulation 'don't believe in the explosion of private enterprise benefiting on the backs of students at the expense of the federal government' (P11). One academic leader interviewed was at the center of discussions with

politicians who represented state funding for the university to get endorsement to partner with an OPM:

> *"It was very controversial, it was very political, it had not been done before in our state. And so it took us at least a year, if not longer, to talk to board members, to talk to the politicians, to explain the model, because they are not used to a revenue share model nor the length of the contract." (P4)*

This example demonstrates how the institutional work of academic leaders, in this case advocating and educating, was able to convince state funding agencies to support a new operating model that would benefit the institution. Institutional theory proposes that the behavior of agents' is shaped by a need to be recognized as legitimate in their institutional environment (Battilana & D'Anno, 2009) and, if this is the case, from whom do academic leaders seek legitimacy when negotiating and advocating for OPM partnerships? Is legitimacy sought from academic peers, from those responsible for commercial sustainability of their institution, higher education innovators, an external peer group or from elsewhere? The theme of maintaining credibility with multiple stakeholder groups is covered in the next section of this thesis, however a deeper exploration of the social networks within which these academic leaders are embedded is an area for further exploration, potentially providing a richer understanding of how those networks shape or influence their institutional work, thus potentially capturing an added perspective the flows of influence (Lewis et al., 2019) in operation.

The activities of academic leaders in 'monitoring' and 'listening' for external changes that might impact, such as regulatory and policy activity, and preparing with possible responses, can also be understood as part of academic leaders' institutional work relevant to OPM partnerships. The academic leader from a small public teaching university in the USA, who is responsible for 'new ventures' related the example below.

"I'm always looking out for what's next and because of the federal legislation that could come down the pike. I do think it's possible that we'll have to unbundle and have to be more independent [of OPMs]. So I'm taking a look at the services that these OPMs provide and thinking 'okay, so which of these things could I do? Could we build capacity with a partner to [subsequently] do it on our own?" (P9)

This example illustrates what Palthe (2014, p.63) suggests is an important consideration for practitioners undertaking organizational change, in that all organizations will be influenced by the external environment, no matter how carefully orchestrated internal planning processes may be. Hence the active monitoring of the external environment, preparing and planning for potential alternatives seems to be an important form of institutional work, particularly for those in higher education which is perhaps more exposed to regulatory, policy and funding changes than other industries and increasingly exposed the implications of technology change. This form of institutional work, dubbed 'monitoring' has not previously been identified in the literature. Other academic leaders referenced collective approaches to planning future options - 'we'd like to have a discussion with the academic community about online learning, what should we do? How should we do it?' (P2). This type of institutional work is identified by Lohr et al. (2022) as 'inventing', an activity that forms part of the institutional creation process.

Summary

Influenced by external drivers for change in higher education and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, academic leaders in this study perceive that online learning has become more broadly accepted in higher education and are undertaking forms of institutional work to construct urgency around the development of online programs within their university by, for example, referencing peers who are already ahead in online programs, and citing loss of enrolments due to new competition. Internally, academic leaders are attempting to re-make normative associations by convincing stakeholders that online learning is for all students, including their current undergraduate on-campus learners and they are using the experience of

the COVID-19 pandemic to demonstrate that their university can adopt technology and change quickly when needed, while externally, academic leaders are engaged in forms of institutional work such as advocating and educating state funding agencies to gain support university-OPM partnership arrangements. Operating across internal and external contexts, academic leaders are monitoring regulatory activity and preparing for change by generating possible future courses of action and 'seeding' these ideas internally. These examples illustrate the downwards and upwards 'flows of influence' between field level drivers, which trigger forms of institutional work by academic leaders that subsequently influence organizational processes, structures, and operations.

Table 4.4. Forms of Institutional Work - Field Level Drivers for Change

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Cognitive-Cultural	**Justification**	Developing moral arguments to support institutional projects	Linking online learning to student preferences and the responsibility of universities to provide up to date educational experience
Normative	**Connecting to Macro Discourse**	Making connections to relevant external practices beyond their local organizational boundary	Referencing the growth of online learning worldwide and changing student preferences.
	Constructing Urgency	Expressing perceptions that change is necessary	Benchmarking online progress against peer institutions to show how the university lags; Articulating that unresponsiveness to online demand would lead to irrelevance.
	Entraining	Aligning activities with an external timing norm	Mobilizing activities for faculty engagement in online through the COVID period
	Inventing	Innovating with solutions or recombination of existing solutions into new approaches.	Conceptualizing new ways of structuring educational products.
	Re-making Normative Associations	Remaking the connections between a set of practices and the moral foundation of those practices	Academic leaders linking the rapid changes made through COVID to attributes of innovation and agility at their university
	Valorizing	Providing positive examples that illustrate the normative foundations of an institution	Academic leader recounting the improvement in quality, efficiency and engagement of examiners boards since going online.

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Regulative	**Advocating**	The mobilization of political and regulatory support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion	Convincing board members and state legislators to allow the university to partner with an OPM company.
	Monitoring**	Continual scanning to anticipate external impacts and planning alternative courses of action	Academic leader monitoring regulatory and policy activities and anticipating possible alternative models for online learning

*Forms of institutional work and definitions are adapted from Dorado (2005); Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016); Lawrence & Suddaby (2006); Lehmann et al. (2019); Lohr et al. (2022); Tracey et al (2011); Wahid & Sein (2014).
**A new form of institutional work not previously identified in the literature

4.5 The Work of Academic Leaders

Understanding the work that academic leaders undertake daily in managing university-OPM partnerships was one of the key questions I initially posed to understand how these daily activities, actions and decisions of academic leaders might influence the ways in which institutions adopt and configure online education. This section is organized into two parts. Part 1 addresses the day-to-day work of academic leaders and the three key themes that emerged from analysis: Governance arrangements and processes; Advocacy and dialogue; and, Negotiating Ownership. Part 2 focuses on the approaches to leading university-OPM partnerships, structured into the following three themes: maintaining credibility with multiple stakeholders; maintaining relationships with multiple stakeholders; and, being flexible and entrepreneurial. Each theme is addressed in the following section to include a table summarizing the forms of institutional work undertaken and examples provided by academic leaders.

4.5.1 Day-to-day work of managing university-OPM partnerships

The day-to-day work undertaken by academic leaders is at the core of this study. Interviewing academic leaders and data analysis identified the three sub-themes and seven code groups. The first sub-theme, governance arrangements and processes, was referenced many times by academic leaders as part of their work, within which activities to embed OPM related decisions

into governance frameworks, setting rules about how partnerships operate and adapting university systems and processes emerged as key concepts. A second sub-theme, Advocacy & Dialogue, incorporated academic leaders engaging in dialogue about the legitimacy of online learning and OPM models and activities that made links between OPM partnerships and the achievement of desirable outcomes. The final sub-theme identified in this section was the work of Negotiating Ownership, which included incentivizing engagement and ownership of OPM programs within the university, and the allocation of resources to new roles and functions. Table 4.5 summarizes the sub-themes, related codes and code frequency.

Table 4.5 Sub-themes and codes - day-to-day work associated with managing university-OPM partnerships

Sub-Themes & Related Codes	Code Frequency
Governance Arrangements & Processes	**156**
Embedding decision-making related to OPMs within established governance frameworks	*69*
Setting the rules about how the partnership operates	*52*
Adapting University Systems & Processes	*35*
Advocacy & Dialogue	**67**
Engaging in dialogue about the legitimacy of Online Learning & the OPM Model	*43*
Linking OPM partnership with achievement of desirable outcomes	*24*
Negotiating Ownership	**46**
Incentivizing engagement and ownership of online programs within the university	*37*
Allocating resources to new organizational roles & functions	*9*

Governance Arrangements & Processes

Embedding decision-making related to OPMs within established governance frameworks.

A significant proportion of academic leaders' work in managing OPM partnerships related to governance arrangements and processes, particularly those which introduce and embed OPM related processes or decisions within the existing governance frameworks of the university. This form of institutional work, identified by Lawrence & Suddaby (2006) as 'embedding and routinizing' provides a stabilizing influence by infusing an innovation within known and accepted organizational work systems. Ensuring that OPM-related decisions were seen to be part of the university academic governance structure was mentioned many times by academic leaders. Comments such as 'courses go through all of our normal committees' (P8) promote the idea that processes for OPM-related program decisions are subject to the same rigorous scrutiny as all other academic decisions, perhaps neutralizing any subsequent criticism about quality, outcomes or special treatment. Negotiating adaptations within the existing envelope of governance systems was mentioned by some academic leaders, either by creating new steering groups (P1) or streamlining approval processes (P15). Such adaptations result from advocacy and enabling work by mobilizing high level support and creating rules allowing committees and working groups to exist within the governance framework. Battilana & D'Aunno (2009) identify this type of adaptation to institutional practices as a 'practical-evaluative' form of institutional work, aimed at maintaining organizations and focused on making things work in the here and now.

Responses from academic leaders indicate that they transverse multiple decision-making contexts for OPM-related matters. They reference formal academic governance processes and managerial decision-making frameworks, in both formal and informal settings, within the university environment and in the OPM context. One academic leader, the provost of a small private institution in the US, described using a regular faculty forum to where they took a 'vote' on whether to go ahead with online programs via an OPM partner (P12), describing their speech where they 'went in front of the whole faculty, and I laid it out' (the choices ahead for the university) which was followed by much discussion among the group and then the vote. This example of the institutional work of 'convening' illustrates how academic leaders use existing organization mechanisms to share plans, get input and buy-in prior to formal decision-

making processes (Wahid and Sein, 2014). Many academic leaders described managerial decision-making processes, for example, the need to build and gain approval for businesses cases:

> *"Decisions about courses, regardless [of originator] have a business case and go through a course approval process. So even if the OPM says they want to have a Bachelor of growing tomatoes, it still has to go through a process for the business case to prove that out." (P2)*

In addition to formal channels for approval are the informal networks and ad hoc discussions, collaborations and negotiations that occur prior to or surrounding formal processes. Various examples of this type of facilitation work were mentioned, particularly processes to bring together university and OPM staff - 'the OPM will come with some information, the academics will come with their view on what they think is needed, and we'll go through a long list, then the market intelligence team will do another round of review' (P8). Another academic described a quasi-formal process that had been put in place to deal with suggestions originated from the OPM partner:

> *"Whenever we're going to come to a decision that's brought on by the OPM, I present to all the Deans and we have a conversation and get the temperature and see if everyone supports it. And if everyone's on board, I mean if the majority are on board, then it goes to the President and the President's cabinet to review." (P14)*

Wahid and Sein (2014) identify this type of activity as the institutional work of 'convening', through mobilizing allies and support by using deliberate techniques of persuasion. In this case, the informal mechanisms aim to share plans, get input and buy-in prior to formal decision-making processes.

Setting the rules about how the University-OPM partnership operates.

Academic leaders expressed confidence in the way they described the OPM-University partnership and their strength of position in how the partnerships should be designed and operated. Some identified their knowledge and expertise in managing partnerships, with OPM's as just one of their many partnership types (P6) or described how they design partnerships based on the needs of the university at particular points in time (P1). There was a sense of ensuring that the university was 'in control' of how the partnership progressed and the importance of maintaining a position of strength in that relationship:

> *"So we took the decision not to bring the OPM on board until we felt we were in a strong enough position in terms of our capability. Until we built that sense of where we were going, we didn't want to engage with a partner. With hindsight, I think that was exactly the right decision."* (P13)

Although academic leaders indicated that much of their work associated with managing OPM partnerships occurred in the social-organizational context of their university, they also talked about how they engaged within an OPM context, particularly when it related to 'rule setting' or negotiating how the partnership would operate in practice. In these activities, academic leaders engaged in forms of institutional work that Scott (2008) identifies in the regulative pillar through defining and policing work, such as setting the rules of engagement for the University-OPM relationship and monitoring compliance with those rules. The quote below is an example of how one academic leader related their discussion with the OPM partner at the commencement of the relationship, illustrating clearly how the power hierarchy was set from the beginning:

> *"I said, well just so you know, I'm going to work with you in good faith, I'm going to do your commercials slightly differently than you normally would. But you need us because of our brand and our position, so you are going to work with me in this way." (P3)*

Other interviewees described how they set expectations and monitor performance of the partner by marking current position and ‘setting that against the expectations we set when we went into the partnership, and we have an open, sometimes robust, dialogue with them’ (P13). The institutional work of establishing rules and monitoring compliance also occurs in the university engagement context where one academic leader recalled a new university policy that means ‘schools don’t negotiate on their own [with an OPM] but contracts would flow through my office and the general counsel, so you’ve got these checks and balances’ (P14). Another referenced ‘non-compliance’ with new processes for course design. The example below provides insight into the institutional work of other actors in the context of university-OPM partnerships (in this case academics within the university), identified by Beunen (2017) as important to fully appreciate the effects of institutional work. The last two sentences in the quote also demonstrate how academic leaders use a form of demonizing (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) to connect non-endorsed learning design processes with poor performing courses.

> *“They make complaints, they don’t engage in the program development in the way we wanted. We wanted to have a standard structure, you know, we break down learning into blocks - we don’t have one-hour lectures, because that isn’t really the best way of delivering. We had somebody just ignore all of that - they just uploaded 1-hour dialogues, without breaking tone. This one got very poor feedback and we had to rewrite the module.” (P1)*

Adapting University Systems & Processes

Many academic leaders described the challenges associated with adapting university systems to accommodate online learning and new delivery models through OPM partners, particularly as online enrolments begin to scale. Academic leaders describe the ‘ripple effect’ within the institution, from issues with faculty workload models and timing of access to the LMS, to systems interoperability, or dealing with rolling start dates, one identifying the administrative overhead of workarounds being the ‘cause of tension between the faculty and the center’ (P5). Recognizing the right time to act, or a ‘window of opportunity’ (Granqvist & Gustafsson,

2016) is reflected in academic leaders comments as they describe new delivery models as having ‘reached that tipping point now’ (P8) and that ‘we have standard then we have non-standard, but I think non-standard probably accounts for 30%’ acknowledging that ‘this might be the trigger for that realignment [of systems]’ (P5).

In monitoring issues and working with various stakeholders to find resolution, academic leaders engage in institutional work that Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013, p. 1026) describe as “situated in the practical work through which individuals encounter contradictory institutional practices and negotiate adaptations that facilitate task accomplishment”. Academic leaders acknowledge the difficulty of adapting university systems and processes that have on-campus ‘baked into underlying assumptions’ (P15) and for example, the difficulty of adapting to ‘one-month roll on, roll off delivery when systems are set up for a standard academic year’ (P6). Adapting university systems and processes isn’t limited to technology systems, but also extends to social systems. For example, academic leaders are engaged in adapting existing peer networks and forums to include OPM partners, as provided in the example below:

> *“We’ve always had something called the partnership forum. This year we had online sessions geared toward partners and we had such high attendance rates. It should create enhancement, because it’s just sharing that teaching practice and knowledge.” (P6)*

This example also illustrates how academic leaders are engaged in the institutional work of educating, which Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) describe as a critical form of cognitive work, given that creating new institutions requires the development of new practices - in this instance the sharing of teaching practices in online learning environments.

Table 4.6. Forms of Institutional Work - Governance Arrangements & Processes

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Regulative	**Advocating**	The mobilization of political and regulatory support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion	Voting processes to gain faculty support; Presentation of business cases to gain management support.
	Convening	Mobilizing allies and support by deliberate techniques of social suasion	Conversational meeting with the Deans in order to get support, prior to the formal approval process
	Defining	The construction of rule systems that confer status or identity, define boundaries of membership, or create status hierarchies.	Requiring negotiations with OPMs to go through central university approvals; Setting the rules of engagement for OPM partners.
	Policing	Ensuring compliance through enforcement, auditing or monitoring	Monitoring compliance with targets set for OPM partners;
Normative	**Constructing Normative Networks**	Constructing inter-organizational connections through which practices become normatively sanctioned	Creating forums connecting university and OPM staff to share knowledge and online teaching practices
	Demonizing	Providing negative examples that illustrate the normative foundations of an institution	Connecting non-endorsed learning design processes with poor performance.
	Embedding & Routinizing	Actively infusing the normative foundations of an institution into the participants' day to day routines and organizational practices	OPM related program decisions going through regular academic committees; Integrating the concept of business cases across all new program processes

*Forms of institutional work and definitions are adapted from Dorado (2005); Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016); Lawrence & Suddaby (2006); Lehmann et al. (2019); Lohr et al. (2022); Tracey et al (2011); Wahid & Sein (2014).

Advocacy & Dialogue

Engaging in dialogue about the legitimacy of online learning and the OPM model.

Almost all academic leaders referenced the many discussions, forums and meetings about the legitimacy of online learning and the acceptance of the OPM partnership within their university. One of the biggest areas of tension they described was the acceptance of a partnership with a for-profit entity. Marginson (2018) points out that universities have been navigating the challenges of marketization for many years, however the operationalization of a University-

OPM partnership presents this reality directly to academic staff in their daily work and brings to the fore tensions between multiple logics operating in universities, as ‘market-driven’ models become a part of what has traditionally been the zone of academic responsibility. One academic leader captures the sentiment of faculty toward the OPM model and their disdain towards a for-profit model, ‘Why are we working with [OPM name] because they're a hideous private profit-making company? We shouldn't be involved with them’ (P1) and another who describes this tension as an ongoing element of their role:

> *“I do want to tell you the biggest tension I have felt are the tensions between an online for-profit company and a university. And, and they're in your face all the time, and faculty will remind you of it.” (P12)*

Academic leaders undertook various forms of institutional work associated with engaging and responding to these tensions. Some described processes of educating through launching pilots and exemplar modules to show what an online course would look like and to demonstrate to academic staff that online courses could be high quality (P1), and in one case, faculty’s experience of a ‘well designed’ online course that used the OPM’s instructional designer working one-on-one with faculty led to the university hiring their own instructional designer. In this example, provided by the Dean of a small public teaching university in the USA (P4), the Dean mentioned the timeframes involved ‘after a year or two, we saw that this was a weakness’, illustrating that knowing the right time to act is crucial, even if the ‘window of opportunity’ (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016) takes quite a long time.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest that actors' ability to act isn’t static, but fluctuates over time, depending on changing situations, including the actions of other actors. There was a sense of fluidity in the way academic leaders described their actions (or absence of action) as they recounted the journey over time of initiating and engaging OPM partnership arrangements in their institution, sometimes stepping back to reflect on the actions of others in the institution and their influence on the shape of online learning and OPM partnership. One academic leader

recounted 'Others on this campus have decided they would do it on their own. Almost each one of those regretted it' (P12) and a similar example where the academic leader predicted the failure of an in-house online initiative:

> *"They'll say no [to the OPM running the program] we'll do it ourselves. And we'll get three students, and that'll be the end of it." (P1)*

These examples illustrate a form of institutional work related to 'deterrence', identified by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 232) as one of those which "make real the coercive underpinnings of an institution". However, unlike the overt coercive barriers described by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), aimed at maintaining or disrupting institutions, these examples represent passive 'blocking' or attempts to 're-route' direction, whereby in-house options to pursue online courses are possible, however organizational resources and expertise for online are tied up in the endorsed model, making it very difficult to succeed outside that endorsed model, ultimately leading to compliance. This new form of institutional work, dubbed '*corralling'*, represents more subtle work through the design of circumstances that shepherd stakeholders, rather than overtly coerce them, towards endorsed models.

Their engagement in discussions about the legitimacy of online learning was brought up by several academic leaders, who indicated that some faculty just did not endorse the notion that online learning was even possible 'Well obviously you can't learn anything online. That's just ridiculous' (P1), through to concerns about the reputation of the institution if the university went ahead with online programs, as in the example below:

> *"The big question, I'm sure you're going to hear this from everybody, are the naysayers against online. I would just say faculty always bring up the bricks and mortar, you know, are we a bricks and mortar, legit college - are we going to be online? Like online is not legit, you know. And so you're always going to have those pieces." (P4)*

These comments illustrate that for some, online education is not a legitimate option, either pedagogically or reputationally, even though all universities as part of this study were already offering online programs. The work of academic leaders in this context takes on various forms, some institutions implementing online programs with OPM partners outside the university boundary 'So we then created a subsidiary company, which would allow an online learning group, almost as its own company, to build out, unencumbered from the universities bureaucracy' (P2), practicing a form of what Lehmann et al. (2019) refer to as the institutional work of 'bypassing', by making arrangements that avoid formal coercive rules or, as in this case, avoiding the 'red tape' associated with administration that would slow down the initiative.

Other examples show how academic leaders advocate for a course of action by using existing methods of decision-making and their leadership position to influence faculty. One academic leader described their school assembly and faculty voting tradition as a forum to decide on whether to launch online programs with an OPM partner:

> *"But I said, you know, many of us are very critical of online instruction. And a lot of that criticism is fair, to be honest with you. But I look at it this way. Faculty are renowned for sitting on the sidelines, and looking at what other people are doing, and critiquing. And we'll be able to point out all the faults. But they'll be thriving, and we won't. So my take, I said, is that I can either sit on the sidelines and critique or create my own future, I would vote for B." (P12)*

This example also illustrates how the academic leader engaged in the form of institutional work 'constructing identities' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), by encouraging faculty to see themselves as innovators and with active engagement in designing their own future, rather than the more traditional academic identity of critique.

Theorizing and defining are forms of institutional work that help to develop concepts to support new practices so they might be accepted as part of the "cognitive map of the field" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006 p.226). One academic leader described their institution's process of defining the

different types of partnership models they have in place resulting from the university 'embracing' a diversity of relationships:

> *"So we're looking at how we define it all so that we can actually describe that better. We understand it, but university-wide, some areas, they're still new to it, and they expect there to be one model and they expect there to be one approach." (P5)*

In this example the academic leader went on to articulate the importance of messaging and information sharing as a vehicle for placing a boundary around what's possible and what's not, 'where's the red line of what we do need and where can you have flexibility and dispelling myths' (P5), thus using the process of creating definitions as a way to make policy and as a forerunner to policing the types of partnerships that are possible.

Linking OPM partnerships with the achievement of desirable outcomes.

The success of OPM-enabled online programs was mentioned by many academic leaders, who described positive outcomes on quality, student experience and financial dimensions. Comments such as 'it's just turned out to be breathtakingly successful, I mean we're driving satisfaction rates of over 83%, which is better than the university' (P3) and others who note that the student numbers are growing (P4) which 'wouldn't have been possible without the OPM partner' (P8). These examples illustrate how academic leaders engage in valorizing work by sharing positive outcomes of OPM-enabled programs aligned to the metrics that university stakeholders care about. Academic leaders also adapt institutional logics to fit the values and objectives of different audiences in their day-to-day practice, engaging in a form of institutional work that Lehmann et al. (2019) refer to as 'contextualizing'. For example, in addition to highlighting the success of OPM-enabled programs on financial dimensions, some used 'evidence' that is valued by faculty, such as academic outcomes, to persuade faculty that online programs are just as high quality as face to face (P3).

Table 4.7. Forms of Institutional Work - Advocacy & Dialogue

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Cognitive-Cultural	**Educating**	The educating of actors in skills and knowledge necessary to support the new institution	Launching exemplar modules and pilots. One-on-one instructional design support for faculty
	Theorizing	The development and specification of abstract categories and the elaboration of chains of cause and effect	Creating a set of agreed definitions to explain the different models operating at the university
Normative	**Constructing Identities**	Defining the relationship between an actor and the field in which that actor operates	Academic leader encouraging faculty to see themselves as actively designing their future.
	Valorizing	Providing positive examples that illustrate the normative foundations of an institution	Producing data that evidences desired quality and financial outcomes related to OPM enabled programs
Regulative	**Advocating**	The mobilization of support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion	Using faculty forums to put the case for online programs
	Bypassing	Circumventing formal coercive rules to avoid monitoring or finding informal arrangements through situated improvising	Establishing online program arrangements that are external or semi-external to the institution
	Corralling**	Designing circumstances that shepherd stakeholders toward endorsed models	Allowing in-house online initiatives to fail.
	Enabling	Creation of rules that facilitate, supplement and support institutions, such as creating authorising agents or resource diversion	Payment of academic staff to develop courses; Allocating instructional design resources; Allocation of resources
	Policing	Enacting regulation through coercive power exercise to enable or support new practices	Using definitions of partnership types to create policy about models and partnership types

*Forms of institutional work and definitions are adapted from Dorado (2005); Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016); Lawrence & Suddaby (2006); Lehmann et al. (2019); Lohr et al. (2022); Tracey et al (2011); Wahid & Sein (2014).
**A new form of institutional work not previously identified in the literature

Incentivizing Ownership

Incentivizing engagement and ownership of online programs within the university

The use of incentive mechanisms to engage and facilitate ownership of OPM-enabled online programs was mentioned by many academic leaders as part of their work. They described a

variety of reasons associated with lack of engagement or unwillingness to 'own' OPM-enabled programs, including lack of time, no interest in online learning, and lack of recognition for teaching innovation.

> *"You have a lot of colleagues who have a lot of potential, but one of the most common things you'll hear from colleagues is that they simply do not have the time' (P13), and another who identified 'it's not that they don't want to, they probably don't have the time - they have a lot of things on." (P2).*

Helfen and Sydow (2013) propose that parties enter a negotiation with conflicting perceptions and diverging needs, and this is evident from how academic leaders describe their interactions - 'we try to incentivize the faculty, so there's something in it for them' (P15). Academic leaders gave the sense that they had been engaged in many conversations on these issues and, to some extent, identified with the perspectives of their academic and department colleagues 'I know what it's like to be way down there in the school' (P2), perhaps revealing their multiple engagement contexts (faculty member, academic leader and administrator) and hinting at the pressure felt by attempting to maintain multiple associations. Pressure that Alexander, Jaakkola & Hollebeek (2018) suggest can result in role conflict and disengagement. One academic leader put the challenges of their role like this:

> *"It seems like it's connective tissue as well, because you're running across the top, you're horizontal, and everyone else is vertical. That's tough." (P9)*

Finding common ground was mentioned by a few academic leaders when negotiating with departments, individual faculty, or others in the university about OPM partnerships and program ownership. One academic leader described this as 'working with them and negotiating and showing them why we're doing this and where it can be a win-win for them' (P14). Another talked about engaging with Deans by framing conversations around the impact on students 'So let's see if we can go a couple of steps for what the faculty want to teach or the way they want to teach it, but what's the effect on students?' (P13) and another describing in more detail what

matters to academic staff and how changes that are proposed should have a positive impact on faculty and students:

> *"If you want the faculty to buy in, we need to help them with their research, you need to let them work with your staff on projects that will make their teaching, their courses, their programs better, make the experience better for their students." (P8)*

Allocating Resources

Direct allocation of resources as incentives to engage with, develop and own OPM-enabled programs was most cited by academic leaders. At a basic level compensation and expertise such as instructional design, was provided (P4) with others outlining the overall transition plan. 'That is the strategy. Identify the opportunity, create the beginnings of the relationship, and then incentivize the faculty and departments to take it over and own it' (P15). The following example provides insight into the academic leaders' empathy for the position of their colleagues, reinforcing that academic leaders hold multiple roles, some still teaching courses alongside their academic peers (P4), and seek to maintain credibility across these different dimensions:

> *"The other thing that is a universal truth in academia is that if you dangle some money in front of academics, they will generally think about how we can access them. And to be fair, that if it's in research, it's a means to advance your research. Similarly, if it's about the development of online programmes, quite often colleagues will tell you, they've been asked to do things without resource." P13*

These examples of resource diversion offer insights into the 'enabling work' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) undertaken by academic leaders as they initiate change related to OPM partnerships. Interactions associated with this work, however, weren't positioned as a straightforward 'exchange', but more of a negotiated process. Many academic leaders

referenced the give-and-take required 'people on both sides have to step out of their comfort zone a little bit - you've got to be willing to give' (P9), or another who described their negotiating approach - 'I try to work with the Deans in a way that they are going to support what I want to get done in terms of program development, refresh faculty changes, the program directors, all those things, by giving them what they want (P8). This latter is an example of what Campbell (2004, p. 1) references as the adaptations that can occur because of the 'struggle and bargaining' of institutional work. Academic leaders referenced the tensions they experience, not just in one-off negotiations, but in an ongoing manner, within the university as well as within the OPM context:

> *"That is part of [the role] a sort of pulling back and forth - the ability to not only manage those tensions and hold the line where you need to hold it, but also live with the fact that there will be these tensions. If you don't like it, it's going to get worse. And it's never going to get better." (P12)*

Walton and McKersie (1991, p. 3) define negotiations as "the deliberate interaction of two or more complex social units which are attempting to define or redefine the terms of their interdependence" and academic leaders are at the 'coal face' of these interactions, with some academic leaders describing the tensions felt as part of this process 'I have to take a deep breath, go home and yell, and then come back to work and say, okay, talk to me about how you see us working together to do this, and this and this. I meet with the Deans weekly, every week, it's hours and hours and I try to make sure we're on the same page' (P8).

Some academic leaders also questioned the allocation of resources, challenging the assumption that the university didn't have the capability to deliver online programs, as this following quote illustrates:

> *"Well the university really gives them [the OPM] so much. But when you look at the internal resources and you know a school trying to recruit a student for on campus programmes, they're not given an eighth of the marketing budget.*

People make the argument that the school doesn't have the capability to do it. But it's because they're not given the opportunity to try to do it." (P14)

Battilana & D'Aunno (2009) make linkages between institutional work and agency, emphasizing the temporal nature of agency and how an actors' orientation to time impacts their work in creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions. The above comment and others suggesting that the university is working their way to independence from the OPM partner (P3) or have the intention to 'ultimately have it all in house' (P10) underscore the way in which academic leaders are thinking forward about how arrangements might evolve over time and thus where resources are best deployed today to support models of the future. There are clearly different approaches depending on how the university is thinking about the future, with some academic leaders talking about resourcing a whole team of academic staff 'full time online, who live all over the world and their load is strictly online' (P4), while others allocate significant resources in-house for 'tutor services, media production, learning design that service both on-campus and online programs' (P7).

Table 4.8. Forms of Institutional Work - Incentivizing Ownership

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Cognitive-Cultural	**Coalition Building**	Expanding or deepening formal or informal networks or coalitions to support new practices	Negotiating and bargaining with Deans, departments and other stakeholders to gain support for OPM model
Normative	**Valorizing**	Providing positive examples that illustrate the normative foundations of an institution	Citing data about positive outcomes of OPM-enable programs on dimensions that are important to stakeholders
Regulative	**Enabling**	Creation of rules that facilitate, supplement and support institutions, such as creating authorizing agents or resource diversion	Paying academic staff to develop courses; allocating instructional design resources;
	Advocating	The mobilization of support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion	Voicing opinion that in-house initiatives should have the same resources as OPM-enabled models

*Forms of institutional work and definitions are adapted from Dorado (2005); Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016); Lawrence & Suddaby (2006); Lehmann et al. (2019); Lohr et al. (2022); Tracey et al (2011); Wahid & Sein (2014).

Summary

In their day-to-day work associated with managing university-OPM partnerships, academic leaders reported undertaking a myriad of forms of institutional work, much of it associated with incorporating OPM-related decisions within the university's existing governance processes. Regulative and normative forms of institutional work dominated this part of their activities, as academic leaders sought to ensure that OPM decisions were legitimated internally by going through sanctioned channels and, over time were embedded as 'normal' and regular part of decision-making in the university. This work incorporated formal activities on the regulative dimension such as voting processes, the development of business cases etc. as well as informal advocacy and convening work to mobilize allies and gain endorsement for proposals prior to formal decision-making processes. Academic leaders engaged in multiple contexts to undertake this work, including in the OPM partner context, where forms of institutional work in the regulative pillar, such as monitoring performance, was more common. The ability to move across organizational contexts enabled academic leaders to be involved in 'troubleshooting'

activities associated with negotiating adaptations of university systems and processes in order to incorporate OPM enabled programs in the university support system.

Academic leaders also reported undertaking institutional work associated with advocating for the introduction of an OPM partnership and for the implementation of online learning. Some suggested that online learning lacked legitimacy among their constituency, and cited tensions related to partnering with a for-profit entity. Forms of institutional work to manage these tensions and including educating and valorizing by conducting pilots and publicly praising examples of online programs with superior student outcomes. Academic leaders did undertake a number of forms of institutional work in the regulative pillar associated with advocacy and dialogue, however forms of this work when directed within the institution (as opposed to the OPM partner) took less direct forms, such as enabling through payment incentives, and a form of institutional work not previously identified in the literature of 'corralling' whereby for example, schools are able to mount their own online programs independently of a partner, however all the resources are tied up in the endorsed model, making it hard to succeed outside the supported design. Other forms of institutional work in the regulative pillar included 'bypassing', whereby OPM programs were established in external or semi-external units, thus avoiding standard decision-making processes. These non-aggressive forms of institutional work in the regulative pillar illustrate how academic leaders are attuned to the socio-cultural contexts of their institution adapt their work accordingly.

The final theme that arose in the day-to-day institutional work of academic leaders was that of incentivizing ownership of OPM programs within their university. As part of the process to embed online learning via an OPM partnership, academic leaders undertook forms of institutional work to encourage and incentivize faculty and school leadership by negotiating outcomes that would benefit them, such as directly allocating resources to pay for teaching and course development or allocating instructional design resources. Valorizing online programs by demonstrating examples of student outcomes was another example given by academic leaders,

who allude to the bargaining and negotiation that occurs as part of this process and the ongoing tensions that must be managed.

4.5.2 Approaches to leading university-OPM partnerships

How academic leaders approach their work related to university-OPM partnerships is a key consideration for this study, providing a connection between the 'what' of institutional work examined in the last section, with the 'who' and 'how', which recognizes academic leaders as actors embedded in their institutional context and the institutional work that happens through their exercise of agency (Maier & Simsa, 2021). The three sub-themes that emerged from analysis are summarized in Table 4.9 below and discussed in more detail in this section. The first two sub-themes, maintaining credibility with multiple stakeholder groups, and maintaining relationships with multiple stakeholder groups, recognize academic leaders' embeddedness in multiple logics of the institution, identified by Adler & Lalonde (2019) and Battilana & D'Aunno (2009) as a characteristic of diverse organizations like universities. The third sub-theme, 'being flexible and entrepreneurial' discusses the approaches taken by academic leaders to their work and the multiple contexts which they traverse in undertaking institutional work.

Table 4.9. Sub-themes and codes - Approaches to Leading university-OPM Partnerships

Sub-Themes & Related Codes	Code Frequency
Maintaining Credibility with Multiple Stakeholder groups	**83**
Maintaining academic credibility	*39*
Demonstrating Commercial nous	*36*
Exhibiting Change leadership	*8*
Maintaining Relationships with multiple stakeholders	**69**
Treating the partnership as a relationship	*32*
Building coalitions & negotiating stakeholder support	*29*
Engaging with a network of peers	*8*
Being Flexible & Entrepreneurial	**36**
Being Entrepreneurial	*22*
Managing multiple roles	*14*

Maintaining Credibility with multiple stakeholder groups

Kraatz (2009, p.72) shows that institutional leaders, particularly those at pluralistic organizations like universities, exhibit "legitimacy-seeking behaviors" as they undertake efforts to secure support from multiple stakeholders and Battilana (2006) suggests that actors involved in change must be seen as legitimate by other organizational members in order to convince them to discard practices that are widely accepted. Hence legitimacy is a key concept in institutional change and a foundational element of institutional theory (Battilana & D'aunno, 2009; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). For academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships, ensuring they remain credible in academic circles, are seen as commercially adept managers, and effective leaders of change, were themes that emerged from analysis. These themes, along with the corresponding forms of institutional work undertaken are discussed in more detail below and summarized in Table 4.11.

Many participants described themselves first and foremost as academics, with longstanding experience in academic contexts. Longevity working in universities, experience as both regular faculty members and in senior academic roles was mentioned many times, 'I've worked at three universities over the past 20 years' (P1), and 'before my role here as provost, I was Dean of Engineering at [university name]' (P15). Voronov and Weber (2016, p. 460) propose that people's primary connection with an institution is by way of the ethos, or the principal "ideals that lend moral authority to the institutional order" and by these strong references to membership of academia, participants are aligning themselves to the prevailing (academic) ethos, which Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence (2004) identify as a strategy that acts as an antecedent to the institutionalization of new practices. One participant, when describing the role of academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships, highlighted the importance of academic credibility:

> *"They need to have what I describe as academic street cred. I got it because the [university name] gave it to me. I'd already been a vice chancellor, so it was difficult for me to be harshly critiqued too much". (P3)*

Expressed this way, some participants leaned on their historical alignment as an academic to demonstrate their credibility in the academic context, rather than associating their credibility strongly with their current position, in some cases playing up their academic role 'I still teach, I need to make sure that I'm real when I talk to faculty about what's happening' and playing down the association with their current managerial responsibilities 'My position doesn't really fit, because I have a PhD. I come from the faculty' (P9). These findings align with Bolden et al. (2012) and Rehbock (2020) whose research suggests that academic experience and credibility are critical to being an effective leader in university environments. Extending this point, the 'overt' alignment with an academic identity expressed during interviews perhaps also highlights that some forms of institutional work are only *possible* for those who hold legitimacy as an academic in the eyes of their colleagues. Hence by reiterating their association with an

academic identity, academic leaders may be undertaking the institutional work of 'constructing identities' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) by continually defining the relationship between themselves and the field in which they operate.

However, not all academic leaders aligned themselves strongly with a traditional academic background, with some drawing credibility from their experience in related fields such as higher education quality assurance 'I'm quite well inculcated in the whole quality assurance system, so I know where the bodies are buried in terms of where the risks are' (P1) or those who drew on their knowledge of online learning and the credibility of their previous institution 'I had come from an institution where online learning was core business, so I know what good looks like' (P2). Both these examples come from participants who have been in faculty positions, but who have also worked in numerous commercial and academic organizations across their career, illustrating a point made by Kraatz and Moore (2002), who suggested that interorganizational mobility is likely to be associated with actors who conduct divergent organizational change given they are less likely to see prevailing arrangements as 'taken for granted'. While this may be the case for some in this study, 40% of participants have only ever worked in one university (their current institution), suggesting that academic leaders who lead change related to university-OPM partnerships may draw on their various internal role experiences or turn to external sources of knowledge to understand different ways of organizing online learning, reinforcing the form of institutional work 'monitoring', identified in the last section.

Battilana (2006) identifies that an actor's social position, made up of their position in a field, their formal role in an organization, and their duration of tenure, are sources of legitimacy and factors that enable actors' change activities. The examples above illustrate how, when seeking legitimacy in the academic arena, academic leaders appear to draw less on the legitimacy afforded by their formal position at the institution, and more on their position in the field, and their tenure in these contexts, supporting Kraatz's (2009, p.77) proposition that "winning trust and cooperation seems considerably more important in pluralistic organizations", something that may be hard to achieve by wielding formal power. Maguire et al. (2004) suggest that actors who are involved in organizational change are in positions that allow them to bridge diverse

stakeholders, and Battilana (2009) builds on this to suggest that actors who occupy higher hierarchical positions can access resources and use their authority to influence or impose change. One of the key strategies to do this, identified by Maguire et al. (2006) is the assemblage of an array of arguments or 'rhetoric', that frame problems or propose new practices in ways that translate to the interests of each stakeholder group. Similarly, Ivancheva et al. (2020) shows how academic leaders justify their choices by drawing on certain institutional logics.

Academic leaders in this study also use a collection of arguments, or justifications, that are tailored to different audiences to support the formation or continuance of OPM partnerships. This institutional work of 'justification' (Tracey et al., 2011), which occurs by developing moral arguments to support institutional projects, is well developed by academic leaders. Table 4.10 provides a summary of these arguments, illustrative quotes and target audiences. Analysis showed that academic leaders in this study framed university-OPM partnerships around three distinct areas. First the quality and credibility of the OPM partner, which included academic oversight and rigor of OPM-managed programs, setting rules about instruction and processes for accountability. These arguments seemed to be generally aimed at the academic community, through rhetoric that connects the quality and evidence processes that are used in OPM programs, as well as university management by demonstrating 'oversight' of partnerships. Financial responsibility was the second frame by which academic leaders characterized the rationale for university-OPM partnerships, made up of growing student numbers/maintaining sustainability, and generally being financially prudent. This set of arguments is aimed at a range of stakeholders, including external constituents, university leaders as well as the academic community, who have interests, although perhaps different motivations, for a financially healthy institution.

The third frame is about being innovative, servicing students, and keeping up with industry norms both in the short term (matching peers) and long term (building capability). In making these arguments, academic leaders are rationalizing the university-OPM partnership as a way of maintaining core aspects of what is central to university purpose (innovation, servicing

students) and which are important to academic values. In framing arguments in this way, academic leaders are attempting to change the normative association of OPM partnerships and online learning from a purely commercial logic (e.g., 'We need to grow enrolments to survive', 'This is a necessary evil') to one which supports academic values (e.g., 'This is a way we can keep up with innovative practice', 'We can better service our students'). The arguments summarized in Table 4.10 illustrate how academic leaders attempt to bridge diverse stakeholders by aligning arguments with the values of these stakeholders, which Maguire et al. (2004) suggests can result in the emergence of new norms, by helping to build shared discourse and establish patterns of interaction between the entities, stakeholders and practices involved.

Table 4.10. Array of arguments in support of university-OPM partnerships

Category	**Argument**	**Illustrative quotes**	**Audiences Targeted**
OPM Quality & oversight	Ensuring academic rigor in our online programs	"We're a research university that should be studying what we're doing. So I have an internal group that does our own analysis and they work with our [OPM] partners". (P12) "Our requirements are, if it's an OPM, the Instructor of Record has to be the university instructor. That's the rules of engagement that we've got out here." (P11)	Academic community
	Ensuring OPM partner accountability	"We set that [current status] against the expectations we set when we went into the partnership….and have robust dialogue [about performance]." (P13)	University management. Academic community
	Ensuring credibility of the OPM Partner	"If you just plonk someone from the [*highly ranked name*] university down in front of a small teaching focused University senior staff, they can say yes, this is our kind of guy." (P1)	Academic community
Growth outcomes & financial smarts	Growing enrolments / Achieve sustainability	"I hate to use the words dying on the vine, but we had to do something, so we started looking for a partner again. In six years, we've grown enrollment from a low of 1200 to 4500." (P4) "The partnership brought us more students….it really did accelerate our post-grad growth" (P8)	University management Academic community External constituents
	Being financially prudent	"It is expensive to build an online course properly - there's upfront development and renewal costs over the next 3 years" (P7)	University management

		"We were diversifying our revenue streams so that if one took a hit in a given year, the others would be able to supplement and on top of that." (P9)	Academic community External constituents
Innovating & servicing students	Providing better service for existing students	"I think part of the drive was, as we navigate kind of the future, what the digital experience is going to be for our students, both online and on campus" (P14) "The idea is ultimately a student will be able to move on a weekly basis, if they wish, between campus online, on a semester basis. They can simply move between modes of engagement." (P7)	Students. Academic community
	Innovating in teaching & learning practice	"We saw it as a space to experiment with digital…..and it's pretty very effective in terms of doing that." (P13) "They [the OPM partner] pair up Faculty from their partner schools with the same interests and they work on projects together". (P9)	University management. Academic community. Students. External constituents
	Keeping up with industry standards/elite peers	"There are institutions that are still just really late to market, and only doing online learning and pockets within the institution….and then there are institutions that realize that they're behind and they've got to catch up." (P10)	University management. Academic community. External constituents
	Building internal capability	"You can have a very rich digital physical learning experience in the classroom, which is what we were aiming towards….we could see an advantage in putting a push on full online digital programmes because of the washout effect that would have on capability." (P13)	University management

In addition to maintaining credibility in academic circles, participants identified that commercial nous was an important part of being seen as a credible leader in a modern university. Participants framed many comments in the language of business, speaking of revenue streams and bottom lines (P12), the economics of partnership models and value propositions in the market (P13). These comments were often framed as 'looking out for the interests' of the university as in the example below, suggesting that academic leaders, when discussing commercial arrangements and financial matters, also employ rhetoric to tailor the message to the primary audience and their key beliefs. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) suggest that this strategy is how shifts in institutional logic are secured. In this example, academic leaders talk

about commercial matters not in and for itself, which may conflict with prevailing academic values, but by connecting the arguments and language to their role as an academic and responsible steward of the organization, which is perhaps more palatable for academic stakeholders.

> *"If they [the OPM partner] are not bringing in that revenue stream that we need, then we start questioning, you know, is this still the way to do business?" (P9)*

Participants also described the desirable traits of senior leaders in universities to include 'being commercially minded' (P3) and some participants, as in the example below, expressed that universities have been adept commercial managers for some time, suggesting that sound commercial skills and financial management is not at odds with academic values or ethos, but is a trait of any modern academic leader, including those who lead research relationships.

> *"Universities aren't the dinosaurs they once were, you know. There are a lot of different kinds of industry relationships and research relationships that require very good commercial sense." (P2)*

Including the leadership of research and industry relationships into the frame of commercial mindedness is a strategy to connect highly regarded and legitimate activities of universities with the commercial skills required of online programs and university-OPM partnerships, an example of what Maguire et al. (2004) suggests is aimed at stabilizing relationships and providing a cognitive 'map' of how to relate new practices to what's already known and accepted.

Although less referenced, academic leaders in this study also highlighted the importance of being trusted to lead change in online learning. A successful track record in implementing online learning in other universities was cited, including making the decision *not* to enter into partnership with OPM providers but to self-manage online learning inside the university. One

participant who has experience in various university contexts describes how leading in new territory of online learning requires some risk-taking on the part of the academic leader as well as the faculty and '...believing that they [faculty] will come with you and ensuring that what I wrapped around it will give them confidence that they will be caught if they fail' (P2). Kraatz (2009, p.78) identified that change leaders may need to make "moral and emotional displays of commitment to win trust and sustain cooperation" and this example alludes to such commitments, indicating that the academic leader in this case has a 'personal' stake in ensuring that the structures put in place will hold up, with faculty relying on them.

This section described how academic leaders in this study seek legitimacy to provide a 'footing' for subsequent change work, by aligning themselves to the dominant academic ethos by virtue of their longevity in academia, or expertise in adjacent areas such as quality assurance or online education, relying less on their formal position to gain credibility. Academic leaders in this study use arguments that frame university-OPM partnerships in ways that align with the values of diverse stakeholder groups, helping to build shared discourse and establish patterns of interaction, and they attach new practices with accepted ways of working, particularly those which are held in high esteem, such as research leadership. There is evidence that academic leaders make value commitments to gain trust and cooperation when leading change.

Table 4.11. Forms of Institutional Work – Maintaining Credibility

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Cognitive-Cultural	**Coalition Building**	Expanding or deepening formal or informal networks or coalitions to support new practices	Providing personal commitments of support to those who move to the new model.
	Justifying	Developing moral arguments to support institutional projects	Crafting a range of justifications to suit different stakeholders.
Normative	**Constructing Identities**	Defining the relationship between an actor and the field in which that actor operates	Defining and re-defining their own relationship with their role and identity as an academic

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
	Changing Normative Associations	Remaking the connections between a set of practices and the moral foundation of those practices	Framing arguments about OPM partnerships away from purely commercial logic Suggesting that commercial skills are not at odds with academic values.
Regulative	**Advocating**	The mobilization of support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion	Providing assurances and 'value commitments' that support will be there when needed.
	Enabling	Creation of rules that facilitate, supplement and support institutions, such as resource diversion	Using their social position and place in the hierarchy to enable their mobility between contexts.

*Forms of institutional work and definitions are adapted from Dorado (2005); Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016); Lawrence & Suddaby (2006); Lehmann et al. (2019); Lohr et al. (2022); Tracey et al (2011); Wahid & Sein (2014).

Maintaining Relationships with multiple stakeholder groups

The linkage between relationships and institutional work, and how interactions between actors influence and direct institutional work is illustrated in studies such as Smets & Jarzabkowski (2013) who suggest that interactions between 'opposites' provide the context for creating new practices. For academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships, their approach to treating partnerships as a relationship and the importance of individuals in that process, their actions to connect across different groups and build coalitions as well as their activities in forming relationships outside the institutional context were themes that emerged from analysis and are discussed in more detail in this section. Table 4.12 summarizes the forms of institutional work covered in this section.

Several academic leaders in this study spoke in detail about approaching the university-OPM partnership as a relationship, referencing the long-term nature of the partnership and their joint experiences 'it was rough in the first couple of years' (P9) and, 'these relationships wax and wane' (P2). Some referenced working toward the same goals and mutual benefits of

success (P14), with one respondent highlighting the seriousness of the nature of these relationships for the university, likening them to life partnerships such as marriage.

> *"If you partner with an OPM, it's almost like a marriage. When they're successful, we're successful when they're not, we're not. Pick the right one, because just like a marriage, it can be devastating." (P4)*

Despite these sentiments most participants were careful to include references to the underlying commercial/legal structure which provides the context for the university-OPM partnership, such as 'at the end of the day, we're in a contract with them, right? (P14) and 'even though it was very much a business relationship, there was a lot of care between us as well' (P2). These comments allude to the way in which social position, discussed in the last section, impacts actors' change activities and approaches. In this case, the underlying power structure formulated via the legal contract puts academic leaders in an elevated power position as 'customer' versus OPM as 'provider' and suggests that academic leaders undertake policing work by using the coercive power of the contract to ensure compliance from OPM partners. This dynamic is visible through the ways in which academic leaders described their relationship with OPMs and the caveats referencing expectations or contracts.

Andersson & Gadolinb (2020) and Smets & Jarzabkowski (2013) identify that relationships between individuals seem particularly important in complex professional environments, where actors appear to remain bound to their home logics, suggesting that the role of individuals who connect different groups are important in creating opportunities, locations, or spaces for interactions across these different groups to occur. As discussed earlier in this paper, the creation of working groups or project committees that bring together university and OPM staff is one such mechanism, and academic leaders also alluded to other ways in which they act as a 'bridge' between stakeholders (Maguire et al., 2004). For example, one academic leader described how they would take a faculty member to the offices where OPM-employed staff who support students or undertake recruiting activities are working, to 'meet the people' and

see for themselves the genuine effort and quality of the work, noting the positive response from the OPM staff (enrolments rising) and the faculty member's changed perception.

> *"You can actually see enrollments go up after I take a faculty member with me. I say, 'Come on. You don't you don't like this whole partnership thing. Come down with me and take a look and meet the people'. [response from faculty member] I didn't think this was like this. Wow. Super". (P9)*

This example suggests that academic leaders may be creating opportunities for groups related to university-OPM partnership to connect, and in doing so *may* be facilitating the creation of new interaction rituals between these groups, which Lawrence (2004) identifies as a way that relationship norms between actors are structured and is a form of institutional work to change normative associations. This possibility, and the implications for the role of academic leaders in setting the initial scene for these relationships warrants further investigation, which is difficult to ascertain wholly through interview methods as they are mediated by the interviewee's interpretation of events, with Maguire et al. (2004) suggesting a combination of methods, including observation, may be better suited.

Building coalitions and negotiating stakeholder support was a second theme that arose from analysis about approaches to leading university-OPM partnership. In the last section, coalition building was identified as a form of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders as they sought to deepen their networks in support of new practices. What became clear through the interviews, and is covered in this section, is that academic leaders are themselves embedded in coalitions related to managing university-OPM partnerships, through their own and other actors' efforts. In other words, academic leaders do not act alone in their university-OPM management activities but are also attempting to gain cooperation and win consent from their 'management peers', who are seeking the same from them.

Several participants referred to the varied skills and importance of cooperation between senior leaders at the institution in the management of University-OPM partnerships. Some identified

the need for an institutional leader with an academic remit and an institutional leader with a financial remit to have a productive working relationship (P2) and others suggested that an 'alliance' of senior team members seems to be important (P3), alluding to the sorts of negotiating and bargaining that occurs between different actors and interests, as illustrated below.

> *"The provost and I work really, really closely together. It's not a competition. But sometimes the deans are like, 'well, the Provost said….', I say, do you realize that the provost and I talk every day, so there's nothing I'm doing that he doesn't know about, and vice versa." (P9)*

Another observation that arose from analysis and is signaled in the above quote relates to the processes by which leaders create structures that simultaneously grant ownership, and also limit power so as to avoid allowing one constituent the ability to assume control. Kraatz (2009) refers to this type of institutional work as 'co-optation'. As noted in the previous section, incentivizing ownership (of OPM-managed courses) was a key activity of academic leaders, however, it also seems that academic leaders (and their senior management colleagues), while they want to secure support and ultimately cede ownership, also want to maintain control over various aspects of the structure, as is clear from one participant below.

> *"I think that's the main thing with that group [the Deans] is to keep them in the conversation early on and being very clear about this is the direction we're going. At that point, the strategy has been decided that this is the direction we're going. And we would like you to be part of that journey and help us do that journey". (P2)*

In describing the cooperation needed by their senior colleagues to effect change with university-OPM partnership arrangements, it is worth noting that academic leaders themselves may well be impacted by the same effects of co-optation. Knudsen (1995) describes this as the placement of groups with differing goals in dynamic tension with one another. In this case, the

organizational structure, and portfolios of responsibility between academic leaders and their peer senior leaders with different areas of focus, such as those with finance responsibility, which are put in place by those more senior, are designed to balance power between interests and keep tension between these portfolios.

Engaging with a network of peers external to the university was also mentioned by several participants as part of their approach to maintaining relationships with multiple stakeholders. The previous section identified that academic leaders undertook various forms of institutional work related to inputs outside the university, including connecting to the macro discourse, external monitoring, and aligning initiatives to external timing norms. This analysis shows that academic leaders used the vehicle of the OPM partnership to connect their university community with practices and peers outside their institution, in some cases framing these processes in familiar terms, such as 'communities of practice', as in the example below.

> *"We partnered with [OPM] and we took the view that we would very much engage with their communities of practice across all the partners, we engage quite heavily with that". (P13)*

This approach, a form of institutional work to construct normative networks, connects familiar practices, such as academic communities of practice with OPM partnerships, and creates an environment for intra-organizational interaction on familiar territory, in this case the sharing of practice about teaching and learning. Tracey et al. (2011, p.73) suggests that "institutional work at the macro-level is required to confer legitimacy upon new organizational forms" and this example is one way by which OPM organizations, supported by academic leaders, can use their location at the field, or 'service ecosystem' level to establish and encourage a network of academic peers across institutions to engage on matters that are important to academics, thus making a connection between the OPM partner 'brand' and accepted academic practice.

This section identified the importance of maintaining relationships with multiple stakeholders as an enabler of institutional work for academic leaders. With OPM stakeholders, academic

leaders approach the partnership as a relationship, but use the coercive power of the contract to ensure compliance. Academic leaders act as a bridge between different stakeholder groups, creating interaction opportunities and the re-shaping of normative associations between these groups, both internal and external to the university. The effects of co-optation are evident, whereby academic leaders seek to grant ownership of OPM-enabled programs to university stakeholders, but at the same time limit their power. Academic leaders are themselves likely being impacted by the effects of co-optation with their senior university peers, with whom they seek to build coalitions.

Table 4.12. Forms of Institutional Work – Maintaining Relationships

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Cognitive-Cultural	**Coalition Building**	Expanding or deepening formal or informal networks or coalitions to support new practices	Building an alliance of senior team members in the university.
Normative	**Constructing Normative Networks**	Constructing inter-organizational connections through which practices become normatively sanctioned	Engaging with a network of peers external to the university
	Changing Normative Associations	Remaking the connections between a set of practices and the moral foundation of those practices	Creating opportunities for faculty and OPM staff to re-define their relationship
Regulative	**Policing**	Enacting regulation through coercive power exercise to enable or support new practices	Using the coercive power of the contract to ensure compliance from OPM partners
	Co-optation	Avoid letting one constituency take over (i.e. “co-opt”) the organization	Incentivizing ownership of OPM programs to schools while retaining control over some aspects.

*Forms of institutional work and definitions are adapted from Dorado (2005); Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016); Kraatz (2009); Lawrence & Suddaby (2006); Lehmann et al. (2019); Lohr et al. (2022); Tracey et al (2011); Wahid & Sein (2014).

Being Flexible & Entrepreneurial

A final sub-theme that emerged through analysis related to the ‘entrepreneurial’ approaches of academic leaders who manage OPM partnerships, which are discussed in this section and the related forms of institutional work are summarized in Table 4.13. When describing their role and activities, many academic leaders used the term entrepreneurial, either referenced as a

'mindset' or to describe the ways in which they approach problem solving or constructing solutions. Battilana (2006, p.657) suggests that to be considered institutional entrepreneurs, individuals must "break with the rules and practices associated with dominant institutional logic(s) and thereby develop alternative rules and practices" and these sorts of new approaches can be seen in how academic leaders describe how they are building fledgling structures and processes, and their deliberate approaches to shaping and building norms for their ways of operating. For example, in the quote below, one academic leader, who works within a university that has committed to embedding digital experiences throughout all student experiences, describes how they engage in the institutional work of 'bypassing' by actively working outside the established system, both structurally and behaviorally, to create new ways of working.

> *"I do think that a critical aspect of the role is being comfortable operating in a space where you're not working through legacy systems, you're establishing yourself and your team and your operation as independent of the legacy structures. So, like a start-up, you have to have a start-up entrepreneurial mentality going in if you're going to really make an impact on the landscape." (P14)*

The above references an example whereby the academic leader as institutional entrepreneur occupies a legitimate subject position to exercise agency and compel changes to practice, in this case, as the academic leader who leads the team and controls the resources for a new organizational unit. Participants also described the ways in which they attempted to influence actors not under their control and, while their subject position may not allow them to compel change in practice, it does accord them enough legitimacy to be in discussions and put forward ideas and possible solutions. In the example below, one participant describes the 'justification' work undertaken by suggesting a range of ideas and possible ways forward related to the design of online programs. In this example the academic leader outwardly suggests solutions that would minimize work and maximize return for the school/program leader but is also

shaping future design, by proposing solutions that are likely to fit the institution's underlying schema for online learning, such as the efficiency of using one design in multiple contexts. Prefacing this example with 'at the beginning' also alludes to a process over time and alerts us to possible changes in the approach of academic leaders as time goes by, indicating that at the start of the process, academic leaders encourage schools to think differently about their online and blended offerings, but as the process unfolds, more concrete models may be demanded, potentially indicating a form of co-optation.

> *"At the beginning, we encourage people to think, if you're developing an online programme, have you got an on-campus equivalent? That way, you could move elements of it into blended mode. Could you offer online modules as part of a suite, for example, postgraduate programmes, perhaps a common module across, that could give you even more benefits?" (P13)*

Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) suggest that institutional entrepreneurship involves the creation of meaning through the strategic use of symbols and language. This is evident in the way some academic leaders describe how they interact and manage committees and working groups associated with university-OPM partnerships. Even if the committee itself is embedded within the accepted and approved governance structure of the university. The following quote from the president of a large university is an example of how academic leaders embed and routinize new ways of operating by adapting their approach within endorsed structures to create and instill new norms of behavior:

> *"I chair it like it's a tech start-up board, I don't chair it like I would chair a university meeting at all. I even wear different clothes and speak a different language, because I try to snap them out of it." (P3)*

The 'place' of the actor is an important factor when considering institutional entrepreneurship. DiMaggio's (1988) well cited definition suggested that actors with sufficient resources can be considered institutional entrepreneurs. Emirbayer & Mische (1998, p.1007)

suggest that those who transverse multiple contexts can more easily “seize purposive opportunities for intervention” as they move between their different contexts, networks and settings. Academic leaders in this study fit into both these categories, having sufficient resources by virtue of their senior position and by occupying roles that allow them the flexibility, or perhaps are requirement (stated or implied) to move between different contexts.

Academic leaders in this study described their varying remits and the importance of ‘being flexible’ to work across their different contexts. Several participants indicated that they inhabit multiple positions in the university, some more official than others. For example, one academic leader officially holds two positions ‘I'm the Dean for the College of Education. I'm also the dean for online programs’ (P4) while others have a role that encompasses multiple elements, enabling them to cut across different parts of the organization, as illustrated in the example below.

> *“I have three main areas to my role: product development, which could be new subjects, new courses, then there’s innovation, new modes of delivery, and I have partnerships, specifically collaborative provision [with partners].” (P8)*

What’s clear from responses of academic leaders in this study is that through managing university-OPM partnerships, they are actively involved in many day-to-day activities, rather than only ‘issuing instructions from the top’ and, in undertaking this work, are required and can traverse different contexts with different groups of people. Academic leaders see their role as needing to be entrepreneurial and are willing to work outside the standard rules to build new processes and new norms. Occupying legitimate subject positions gives academic leaders the ability to exercise agency and compel change, and offers the opportunity to traverse multiple contexts, which enables them to more easily see and act on intervention opportunities.

Table 4.13. Forms of Institutional Work – Being Flexible and Entrepreneurial

Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Form of Institutional Work*	Definition*	Examples
Cognitive-Cultural	**Justifying**	Developing moral arguments to support institutional projects	Suggesting new ways of designing online programs that benefit the audience.
Normative	**Inventing**	Innovating with solutions or recombination of existing solutions into new approaches.	Conceptualizing new products and ways of delivering online learning.
	Embedding & Routinizing	Actively infusing the normative foundations of an institution into the participants' day to day routines and organizational practices	Chairing the board 'like a start-up' to change practices.
Regulative	**Bypassing**	Circumventing formal coercive rules to avoid monitoring and enforcement or finding informal arrangements through situated improvising	Working outside legacy systems and structures.
	Co-optation	Avoid letting one constituency take over (i.e. "co-opt") the organization	Freedom of design for online programs at the start, alluding to more strict rules as time goes by.

4.6 Institutional Context

The institutional work of academic leaders identified in the previous section does not occur independently of the context in which it takes place. Academic leaders work in their university environment, in the OPM environment and at the intersection of these two organizations. This section addresses the two main themes that arose from analysis. The first is related to building organizational capabilities for online, and the second is about the organizational arrangements themselves and the evolving of such arrangements over time, including how both universities and OPMs are adapting their structures and relationships over time.

4.6.1 Building Organizational Capabilities

Academic leaders in this study frequently referenced capacity building related to the design and delivery of online learning and digital learning experiences. Developing capabilities for new (online) products and delivery was a clear theme that emerged from analysis along with processes for educating and upskilling stakeholders. A second, related theme was the role that

OPM partners play in building universities' online capabilities. These sub-themes and code groups are summarized in Table 4.14 and discussed further in this section.

Table 4.14. Sub-themes and codes - Building Organizational Capabilities

Sub-Themes & Related Codes	Code Frequency
Online Capability Building	**79**
Developing Capabilities for new products and delivery	*66*
Educating and Upskilling stakeholders	*13*
The Role of OPMs in Building Online Capabilities	**36**
Partnering helped build our capabilities for online	*21*
Using OPMS for what we're not yet good at	*15*

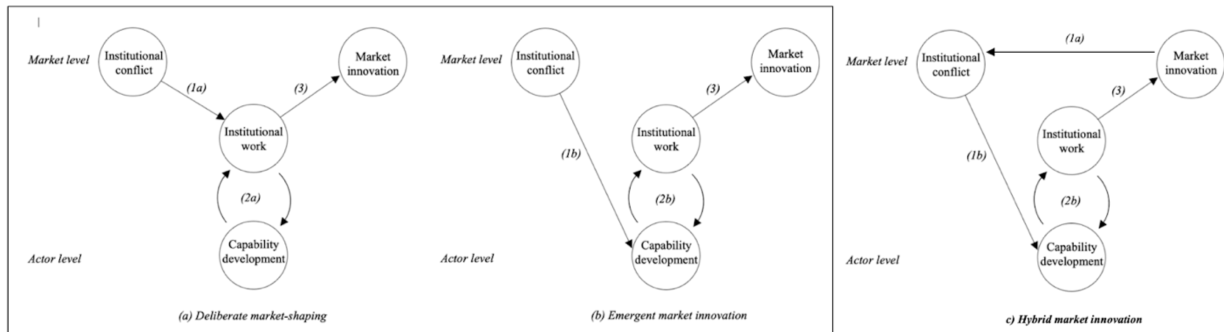
Online Capability Building

Eisenhardt & Martin (2000) propose that organizations require the capabilities to respond to changes in their external market or to proactively spur internal innovation from within. However initiated, Ekman, Röndell, Kowalkowski, Raggio & Thompson (2021) suggests that developing capabilities is the result of ongoing, incremented institutional work. For academic leaders in this study, the desire to build institutional capabilities for online was identified as a core issue when discussing OPM partnerships, including reasons to partner, or *not* to partner, as a direct source of capability, or to 'watch and learn' to build capability over the long term. One academic leader captures the breadth of characterization about capabilities, suggesting that it is more than technical aspects, but includes a 'whole approach'.

> *"Well, it [the partnership] certainly supported skill development in terms of our ability, you know, thinking about online delivery. And also, not just the kind of structures and the way we should run them, but also kind of a whole approach to learning tools and what would work and what wouldn't work and how you might move online engagement." (P1)*

Others referenced the process of decision-making about partnership as a catalyst for building their own capability for online. One academic leader recalled a situation where faculty opposition to a proposed university-OPM partnership 'catapulted the university to decide that we were going to build our own internal capabilities' (P14) illustrating what Ekman et al. (2021) refers to as moments of institutional conflict, which spark capability development and institutional work. Ekman et al. (2021) suggests that conflicts with current institutional arrangements, either generated from within or outside an organization, can trigger change processes that start the reformation of capabilities and institutions, which in turn can spur market innovation. As shown in Figure 4.2 below, Ekman et al. (2021) proposes that this process can be either deliberate market-shaping (a. in the figure below) whereby capability development results from 'deliberate' institutional work aimed at market innovation, or 'emergent' (b. in the figure below) whereby institutional conflict leads to the desire for capability development, which sparks associated institutional work, from which market innovation *may* be a by-product. For academic leaders in this study, there was not a strong sense of deliberately seeking to 'shape markets' as the ultimate outcome of building capabilities, nor was there naivety about the impact of the cumulative changes inside universities for the potential to shape the broader higher education landscape. However, there was a clear sense that academic leaders are aware of and engaged in following external changes and innovations in the market, which may spark institutional conflict mentioned by Ekman et al. (2021). As referenced earlier, academic leaders often expressed concerns about being left behind peers, or needing to catch up, suggesting that external innovations in the market are, at least in part, contributing to the beginning of change within universities. However, missing from Ekman et al's (2021) options is the possibility for this downward flow of influence between 'market innovation' and 'institutional conflict', an addition represented by Option C 'Hybrid Market Innovation'*,* where the arrow (1a) shows how innovation occurring in the market can lead to institutional conflict, spurring capability development, institutional work and the potential for further market innovations.

Figure 4.2. Three forms of market innovation (adapted from Ekman et al. 2021)



In their research, Ekman et al. (2021 p.474) found that capability development encompassed many individual actors who, proactively and reactively responded to the requirements of the capability change and engaged in institutional work, identifying that organizations acquire capability across three foundational elements. First, the infrastructure foundation consists of the ability to learn, identify, and implement technical solutions, use information management for better data utilization and the capability to reform processes. The second foundation, integration, consists of internal people capabilities (skills, know-how, mindsets) and influencing capabilities with external stakeholders (e.g., suppliers). Third, the interface foundation consists of the capabilities to bring new products and services to market. The capabilities related to online learning described by academic leaders in this study have been mapped to this framework (summarized in Table 4.15) and show that institutions are building capabilities across all three dimensions. Academic leaders spoke more about capabilities in the 'integration' dimension, particularly those related to learning design for online courses, although this weighting is likely due to their scope of responsibilities rather than necessarily indicative of the overall institutions' areas of focus or effort. Academic leaders also spoke of the work being undertaken to build technology infrastructure, highlighting the length of time required when dealing with many systems, historically devolved decision-making, and technology ownership, as well as the complexity of integrating student data across a multitude of systems.

Table 4.15. Institutional capabilities being developed related to online programs

Institutional foundations (Ekman et al. 2021)	Capabilities being developed	Examples
Infrastructure. *The ability to learn, identify and implement technical solutions. Information Management for better data utilization. Reforming processes.*	Technology capability to collect, adapt, store, analyze and present data across the university.	“When I started, we had five learning management systems. Then we went to three and now down to two”. (P14) “We've been on a pretty steep learning curve. How do you integrate online master's degrees students into your registration system into your graduation system into your student mentoring and faculty support system?” (P15)
	Information management capability to use student data to improve the service.	“So what [OPM-managed program unit] is doing with learning analytics is best in class. The university is not doing that right now. They're doing some of it, but nowhere near as well. So we've got to produce a structured process now, of how we bring that back into, into the university”. (P3)
Integration. *Integrating updated infrastructure and internal capabilities to produce better outcomes or deliver services in new ways.*	Building internal ‘people’ capability (skills, processes, know how, mindsets), particularly in learning design.	“There are a lot of faculty that still don't understand the role of an instructional designer. So educating them on that whole profession, educating them on what it takes to build a really good online course.” (P14) “The university was required (via the OPM contract) to allocate a certain budget amount each year toward professional development for faculty, hiring learning designers who were paired with colleges, based on their background”. (P4) “The company [wholly owned by the university] has 130 staff who service the group in the production, curation and support for technology enhanced learning, whether it's video, learning design, or the pedagogy.” (P7) “We built out an entire recruitment centre and marketing the full structure to support our own online programmes” (P14)
	Developing partnering capabilities in how to work with external firms.	“We’re working together to work this through and test the model and trial that things work. But having that focus and the resource and the energy from us and the partner committed to it meant that we did accelerate that.” (P8) “We launched the whole programme of MOOCs. Not because we believe MOOCs are the future of higher education because we didn't believe that ever. But we saw it as a space to experiment with digital and to upskill colleagues.” (P13)
Interface. *Capability to deliver the digitally augmented services.*	The capability to bring a digitally enhanced program to market and to engage students and partners in new ways.	“We now deliver a fully online undergraduate and postgraduate nursing degrees where the students do the practice, in hospital and in simulation labs on campus, and all of the theory is delivered fully online. We can develop a partnership with a hospital anywhere in the country. We

Institutional foundations (Ekman et al. 2021)	Capabilities being developed	Examples
		wouldn't have been able to do those sorts of things without that capacity". (P7)

The role of OPMs in building University capabilities for online program delivery

Academic leaders reflected on the role and purpose of OPM partners related to the university building capabilities for online learning. Two themes arose from analysis, the first being acknowledgment that partnerships with OPM providers have assisted the university to build out its own capabilities for online learning, and the second was a sense that universities are more carefully selecting what services they want OPMs to provide, based on which capabilities the university has not yet developed, or those they do not wish to develop. Finally, the development of partnering capabilities also emerged from analysis and are discussed in this section.

Ekman et al. (2021) suggest that capability development and institutional work are interdependent, whereby changing ways of working can prompt capability development, and the development of new capabilities can affect worldviews (i.e., theories-in-use). Some academic leaders alluded to this dynamic when describing how, as part of their OPM partnership, faculty worked with instructional designers for online learning and as a result "now see a tremendous value in doing it in-house" (P14). In this example, having the partnership in place required a new way of working (faculty working with OPM instructional designers), which in turn resulted in the development of new capabilities (online learning design), subsequently supporting a change in faculty thinking (who recognized the value of working with instructional designers). Building upon Ekman et al's (2021) theory is the impact to organizational structure and partnering arrangements. In this example, Faculty's support for developing the instructional design function in-house paved the way to allocate resources and build the in-house team, but also had implications for the university-OPM partnership, whereby instructional design services were no longer required. This example offers a practical illustration of what Lewis et al. (2019, p. 317) regards as the "flows of influence" between the macro, meso

and micro levels in organizational change. There were several similar examples to that described above, particularly related to developing capabilities for the design of online learning, which appears to be a capability set that universities (or at least academic leaders) are focused on and are keen to bring in-house over time.

The role of their OPM partner as a conduit to the external market and source of market intelligence was also mentioned by several academic leaders in this study, who described how they use the external market knowledge of the OPM partner as input for program decision-making "I ask, where do you think the new areas for development might be? They lead on that because they're the ones with market analysis machinery" (P1), through to the example below whereby the academic leader is connecting external market innovations with potential adaptations to their internal operations, even if not directly focused on online programs or students.

> *"So for example, if the OPM is developing new methodologies that understand the market, they may be just as applicable to our on campus recruits. And so, to some extent, we gain value simply from the conversations. And so, you know, if online became a very significant part of our portfolio, we might want to develop the capabilities that the OPM currently provides. So it will depend you know, we have breakpoints in the contract" (P13)*

In the last section, 'connecting to the macro discourse' and 'external monitoring' were identified as forms of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders. The examples above suggest that academic leaders may use the vehicle of their OPM partnership to undertake some of this work, whereby the relationship with their partner acts as a 'conduit' to access field level change or innovation, which could subsequently be considered at the university.

Paiola, Saccani, Perona & Gebauer (2013) identify that organizations can develop capabilities internally, or externally via partners, or through a combination of both (mixed), suggesting careful consideration of their own capability to manage partnerships is required to avoid

strategic threats (such as the partner becoming a competitor), a point also made by Morris et al. (2020) when discussing the possible unintended consequences of unbundling in higher education via partnership arrangements. However, both acknowledge that ignoring partnerships is not the solution, with Morris et al. (2020, p.15) stating that universities should remain “relevant and active in this space” and Paiola et al. (2013) suggesting that a lack of partnering capability can form a barrier to the future growth of organizations as it may limit options for future products or solutions.

Academic leaders seem to be central actors in the process of building university capability for partnering, defined by Paiola et al. (2013) to include the ability to choose a set of partners with the right capabilities, the ability to interact closely, and coordinate with partners to provide optimal solutions. Although relatively high level in description, the latter two in this list, interaction and coordination, speak to the process, structure and relationships resulting from day-to-day institutional work by academic leaders and others in universities, which together ‘make partnerships work’. The first, ‘the ability to choose a set of partners with the right capabilities’, speaks to a more strategic and dynamic approach, whereby the university is making choices about what capabilities are vested in partners based on a range of factors including current internal capabilities (e.g. technology infrastructure, services for online students), cost to develop (e.g. capital availability), what the university wants to keep in their control (e.g. marketing and student recruitment versus teaching), their long-term approach to online programs and the universities’ objective for partnerships.

Many of the academic leaders in this study mentioned learning from the experience of their partnership to make longer term decisions about the delivery of online programs. What became clear, whether they aim to be independent of partners or not, is that the process of partnership itself can help the university to identify the capabilities that are required to deliver online programs, how their current capabilities stack up against those requirements, and what they want to develop versus outsource in the future. The quote below from the president of a

higher education regulatory body with over seventy institutions in their constituency, illustrates some of this thinking:

> *"I think there's an attitude of get in the door, learn from them and figure out how to bring it back in-house. I've heard a number of people express it in those terms. Now, that said, I don't know how successfully institutions actually do that, you know, I think that's maybe more of an aspiration than a reality for the majority" (P10)*

This quote also speaks to temporal considerations for both partnerships and capabilities, in that, what is currently needed and what is currently planned may change over time, supporting Paiola et al.'s (2013) view that academic leaders and university organizations require the capabilities to both navigate, and shape, how partnerships develop (or not) to continue meeting the changing needs of the university.

Summary

There is a clear sense that building organizational capabilities in the delivery of online programs is important to academic leaders, and results show that universities are building capabilities across infrastructure, people, and delivery. Ekman et al. (2021) suggest that changing ways of working can prompt capability development, which in turn can impact worldviews, an example of which is identified in these results, whereby faculty changed their thinking about the value of instructional designers, subsequently endorsing the development of a new in-house function. This practical example of the 'flows of influence' (Lewis et al. 2019), illustrates the connection between the day to day work of individuals and how organizational processes, and structures, can change over time as a result of this work including, in this example, a change to the arrangement between the university and their OPM partner, and also represents the point at which agreement was made (albeit tacit) that new capabilities should be established within the university.

Academic leaders are aware of, and following external changes and innovations in the market, which Ekman et al. (2021) identifies as potentially sparking institutional conflict, thus prompting capability development. They identify OPMs as vehicles for building organizational capabilities in the university, including as a conduit to the external market, with the ability to bring external innovations and knowledge, and new ways of doing things into the university. In this sense, it seems that academic leaders, their OPM counterparts and the contexts in which they interact, may represent a 'place' where an osmosis of ideas might occur between the internal and external bounds of the organization. Finally, academic leaders do seem to be central to building university capability for partnering, suggested by Paiola et al. (2013) as an important capability so as not to limit future opportunities. Examination of partnering capabilities within universities, particularly in academic areas, is beyond the scope of this study but may be an area for future research, given the growth in and evolution of these partnerships.

4.6.2 Evolving Institutional Arrangements for Online

The evolution of university-OPM partnerships over time was a theme threaded through many responses from academic leaders in this study. Initial decisions for partnering, including objectives for the partnership to act as a vehicle for enrolment growth and the lack of internal capability surfaced as sub-themes and are discussed in this section. Changes to partnership models over time, including the proactive and reactive adaptations of universities and OPMs to their changing contexts (separately and together) along with a long-term approach to change and partnerships, emerged as another theme, also discussed in this section. These sub-themes and related codes are summarized in Table 4.16 below.

Table 4.16 Sub-themes and codes - Evolving Institutional Arrangements for Online

Sub-Themes & Related Codes	Code Frequency
Decisions about partnering with OPMs	**55**
OPM partnerships as a vehicle for growth	*35*
Low capability to deliver on our own	*20*

Adaptation of models and partnerships over time	69
Universities and OPMs adapting to their changing contexts	*47*
Taking a long-term approach to internal change and partnerships	*22*

Decisions about partnering with OPMs

Almost all academic leaders in this study referenced enrolment growth as a key reason to partner with an OPM provider, with several comments underscored by financial imperatives. Many were also related to expertise and capability, particularly in the areas of digital marketing and online recruitment, with one respondent noting that 'It's not their core strength, and I think they have a hard time competing to attract the talent to bring that in-house' (P10), referencing the external competitive environment for talent, as well as the focus of capabilities for institutions. The need for new capabilities, particularly in digital marketing and student acquisition was highlighted by academic leaders in this study from different geographies and institution types, illustrating the point that traditional capabilities don't necessarily translate as environments change, reflection Paiola et al.'s (2013) suggestion the growing interdependencies between actors in service ecosystems mean that individual organizations are increasingly unable to deliver *all* parts of their value chain without the help of partners.

> *"So the toughest parts for us are marketing and recruitment. So we know how to market and recruit to the main campus, we do a fairly good job of that. But non-traditional marketing for hybrid, and online programs is way different." (P9)*

Pressure from the external environment was mentioned by several academic leaders related to reasons for partnering, with references to changing student needs, 'They work, they have families. They want advanced degrees, but with some convenience attached to it. And that's what online or hybrid brings' (P12). Growing beyond the university's local 'catchment' was picked up by some, one academic leader referencing the ability of their small institution to

attract a global set of learners, and another captured in the quote below from the president of a university regulatory body, referencing external demographic changes for the region in which they operate:

> *"Institutions are increasingly forced to reach beyond their region, because that's where growth and people are. And so the capacity of an OPM to assist with that is key." (P10)*

Reflecting findings in the previous section and aligned with research by Hall and Dudley (2019) and Hoffman (2012), a major reason for partnering with OPM providers given by academic leaders in this study was a lack of in-house capability to design and deliver online programs across the university. One participant, the provost from a small private, research-intensive university in the USA, suggested that there was both internal misconception about what was involved and the internal level of capability to deliver 'because things that they thought they knew, and they could do, they don't know and can't do' (P12). This comment referred to a large faculty within the university which initially planned to design and deliver online programs in-house, but after starting out, needed to bring in partners to support elements of the operation that they realized they didn't have the capability to deliver alone. This example also highlights internal tensions within universities undergoing this type of change, whereby traditional practices of devolved decision-making related to academic programs, including associated budget autonomy, and presumably the internal capability to deliver, can conflict with the complex interdependencies required when implementing fully digital approaches across the whole student journey. Paiola et al. (2013) suggests growing interdependencies between actors in service ecosystems, referring to the industry level, but perhaps this is also true within complex organizations such as universities whereby the 'internal service ecosystem' includes the different units, departments and processes that contribute to delivery of learning and the student experience. What these examples show is that with online programs, greater cooperation between organizational parts *within* a university is required, sparking institutional

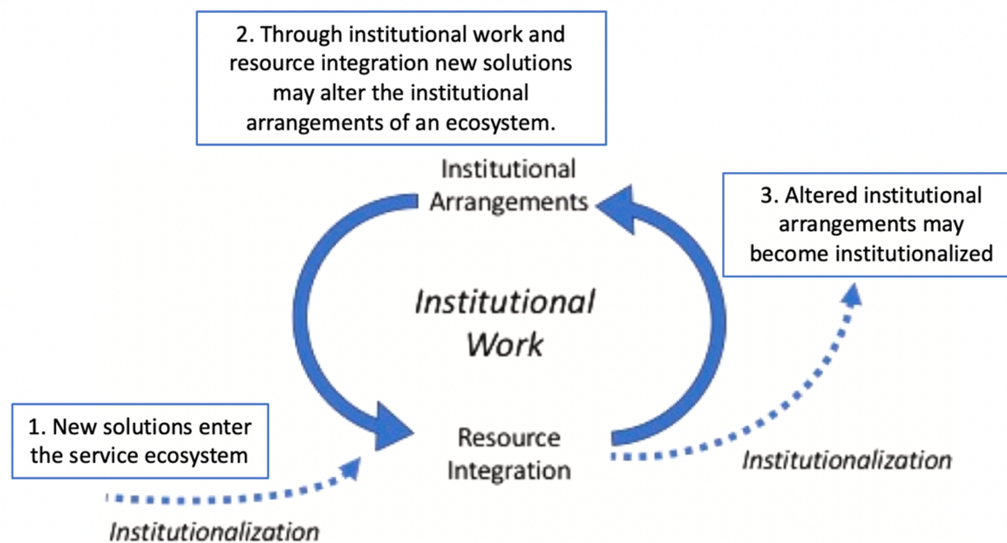
conflict and the cycle of capability development and institutional work as outlined by Ekman et al. (2021).

Adapting models and partnerships over time

Throughout this study, academic leaders referenced changes to their partnership arrangements over time due to continued reshaping of needs and adaptation to their changing contexts. Vargo et al. (2020, p.530) suggests that diffusion of a new idea or innovation does not occur through by "wholesale adoption" but rather can be understood as "an iterative process whereby ideas evolve as actors interact, integrate resources, and interpret ideas from their heterogeneous perspectives". Academic leaders in this study didn't take a static view of the form of their partnership with OPMs and were continually referencing how the university was iterating its 'form' related to the provision of online programs, how OPMs were also continually undergoing iteration, and how those two changing contexts impacted at the intersection of the two organizations, that is, through evolving partnership arrangements. Academic leaders spoke of this dynamic across time, referencing the past, present and possible future arrangements, not only in the context of their own organization, but also at the field-level.

Vargo et al. (2020) suggests that the diffusion of new innovations (such as the OPM partnership model in this case) is a process of co-creation that involves multiple actors integrating new resources and altering their institutional arrangements, emphasizing the importance of value cocreation as a core aspect of this process. Figure 4.3 below illustrates this recursive process, emphasizing the ongoing process of resource integration, altered arrangements, institutionalization, resource integration, and so on. Notably, institutional work, the process of creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), continually occurs at the center of this dynamic process, and feeds into the formation and re-formation of institutional arrangements.

Figure 4.3 Recursive processes of innovation (adapted from Vargo et al. 2020)



OPM partnerships can be considered a new solution in the higher education service ecosystem, whereby institutional work and resource integration is currently underway, and, as identified in earlier sections of this study, institutional arrangements at the organizational level are in some cases being altered. However, reinforcing Vargo et al.'s (2020) point about iteration, the innovation, in this case being the OPM, the university and the arrangement of their shared context, also continue to evolve as the process unfolds. Academic leaders in this study referenced the dynamic elements of all three contexts as it relates to the recursive process of innovation (as summarized in Table 4.17). For the university context, participants identified the institutionalization of online capabilities and arrangements, and one academic leader, the president of a higher education regulatory body in the USA, noted the possible institutionalization of partnering capabilities. Vargo et al. (2020) suggest that novel solutions can only endure so long as they cocreate value for those involved. One academic leader, the provost at a small private research university in the USA, suggested that the cocreative value of the OPM model in its current form, may over time be mis-aligned with university needs. Another, also from a small institution in the USA referenced new solutions that are entering the higher education service ecosystem.

Table 4.17. References to the recursive process of innovation for university-OPM partnerships

Institutional Context	Element of the innovation process	Examples
University	Institutionalizing online capabilities and arrangements	"Now that we've matured, and we can see what can and can't be done, I think there is just this natural evolution that, I think the whole online piece, there'll be less reliance potentially on OPMs, because I think our sector will think all we can do it." (P2)
	Institutionalizing online capabilities and arrangements	"With universities, everyone's building their capability is going to be much more blended in the future that they're going to be getting from the partner that they can't do themselves." (P8)
	Institutionalizing partnering capabilities and arrangements	"I think there has been fear and dissatisfaction with dependency on single partners. And so, the possibility of multiple partners and greater flexibilities as partners, across the range undergraduate and postgraduate options seems to make sense to me, based on what I've seen." (P10)
OPM	Value cocreation misalignment	"It's going to be harder and harder for OPMs to make money. Because they don't ideate the curricula, typically. I think it's going to be harder and harder for them to pose their value proposition to universities." (P15)
Higher Education Service Ecosystem	New solutions entering	"Even the term OPM is loose, because there's bootcamps and short courses that are wanting to partner which I think are the future, to be honest with you." (P12)

Negotiating and re-negotiating arrangements with OPM partners is a specific form of institutional work for academic leaders that has a direct line of sight to institutional arrangements. More than contract negotiation, the form of institutional work 'enacting' incorporates the design or creation of new or altered services based on the changing needs and capabilities of the institution along with activities to 'bring into being' new ways of operating between actors. It also speaks to the evolving nature of the higher education service ecosystem in that, as partnership arrangements are re-negotiated their form changes, which sparks new iterations of institutional arrangements in the university (as well as the shared context of the university-OPM partnership). These modifications are not occurring in vacuum but are also influenced by the higher education service ecosystem, and in turn if enough similar changes occur in institutions, the ecosystem itself many modify (Vargo et al. 2020). Academic leaders identified how they consider changing external contexts and internal needs when negotiating contracts, as illustrated by the quote below from head of innovation for a small public teaching

university based in the UK. This quote illustrates how changes over time within the university context (e.g., capabilities for online delivery), such that there is a point where aspects of the partnership arrangement, which might have been fully aligned in the past, are no longer in 'sync'. The phrase *'we got to the point'* suggests that over time, the cumulative impact of these misalignments may have triggered the re-negotiation of the overall arrangement.

> *"We got to the point where we're saying, well, we want to develop these ones [online courses] and so we worked with our partner to develop a model where we could do that ourselves in house. And I think that was really important to that continuing strategy with that partner….if you're not aligned and you've got one partner who's restricting the potential growth and development it's a quite short-term partnership, so they recognize that as well." (P8)*

Academic leaders are not only responding to external and internal events that trigger their institutional work but are also anticipating future change and integrating possible future models into their thinking and, in some cases, into their discussions with their OPM partners. Table 4.18 summarizes these 'anticipatory' forms of innovation to university-OPM partnerships.

Table 4.18. Anticipating innovations related to university-OPM partnerships

Form of Innovation	Example
1. OPMs supporting campus-based learning.	"I see more OPMs are going to do more campus based. I personally feel like we're in conversations right now – 'you were so successful helping us get our online, and we know campus feeds our online, so will you consider doing some of this partnership on campus?' I foresee that happening. I think that's a smart move, and if you have the same partner, you know, it's going to help them at the end game, too." (P4)
2. OPMs offering universities capacity-building services for online delivery.	"People are now wanting a little bit more face to face, they want to be able to step into a faculty members office, even if the majority of what they do is online. So we're trying that. I don't know how that's going to end, we've also been in conversation with other OPMs, who are now coming out with things like, okay, so you don't want a full service OPM, let us help you build capacity internally" (P9)

Form of Innovation	Example
3. OPMs pivoting their models to short courses and micro credentials, rather than only degree programs.	“It [online programs] is core now. I think that's why some of the OPMs are starting to pivot a little bit where, you know, 2Us acquisition of edX, Noodle announced that they're going to be launching some type of non-credit platform. So I think they're all seeing the writing on the wall and starting to figure out ways they could enhance their offerings to schools and broaden out of out of degree programmes. I mean, maybe it's the next new capability, I don't know, in terms of micro credentials and things like that. Bootcamp type things.” (P14)
4. Universities building their own internal ‘OPM’ model.	“I think, if I was running a large university with a reasonable bank balance, and partly because I think I know how to do a chunk of it now, I would say, let's not work with an OPM. I think I would set up a completely separate unit, not to try and bury it into your normal marketing team, fund that unit and not to be looking at generating a surplus for probably two or three years and put a significant amount of money in it. Like an internal OPM.” (P1)
5. OPMs and university partners cocreating new service innovations.	“There is opportunity to move away from just being about an online learning experience to being something much more and even moving into joint venture type spaces. So you get that opportunity to be innovative with a partner where you can jointly take the risk on something.” (P2)

For the first two noted in the table above, relating to OPMs supporting campus-based learning or offering capacity building services, academic leaders see innovation in existing partnerships as an opportunity to extend the remit to service other possible needs of the university. The third is an observation from the provost at a US-based research university that OPMs are continuing to evolve as their context changes, identifying a movement to partnering for short-courses. The words ‘they're all seeing the writing on the wall’ references that, in the view of this academic leader, the delivery of online programs is now core to university operations (thus have been institutionalized) and the cocreative value of partnerships may be diminishing for universities over time, hence OPMs seeking other innovations.

Example four suggests opportunity for changes to the university's institutional arrangements for online programs, but with clear caveats by references to capabilities and previous experience, as well as the financial means to pull it off. These reflections by academic leaders are ideas, some already spoken with partners, and others perhaps voiced only in these interviews. However, as suggested by Vargo et al. (2020, p. 530), the diffusion of innovation is "an iterative process, through which ideas evolve as actors interact" and ideas themselves can become institutionalized, whereby the ideas, shared through an ecosystem, can legitimize the approach and solution to a particular problem at least for an amount of time. In this way, the ideation of novel innovations for the university, for the university-OPM partnership, or for the OPM, could be seen as a form of institutional work, through processes of idea generation, exchange and sharing. Finally, the fifth example in Table 4.15 remains open to as-yet-unknown possibilities for partnership arrangements, but with the cocreation of value and sharing of risk (and presumably reward) central to the proposition. This example, from the provost at a large Australian university, suggests a confidence in partnering capability, noting that this participant had previously described the successes of previous partnering arrangements.

Summary

Academic leaders in this study described how arrangements between their university and the OPM partner continue to evolve over time, which Vargo et al. (2020) suggests is a recursive process, whereby an innovation is introduced (such as the university-OPM partnership), resources are integrated, and institutionalization might occur, only if the new solution continues to cocreate value for those involved. The need to build new capabilities for designing, delivering, and growing online programs was identified by several academic leaders as one of the key factors for originally entering partnership with an OPM, which is indicative of the value that the university saw the OPM partner offering at the point of partnership.

Academic leaders referenced changes in university needs over time as, for example, internal capabilities were discovered or developed, external drivers influenced priorities, or as the strategy for online programs evolve. These ongoing changes can trigger misalignment of value cocreation between the university and their OPM partner, to the extent that partnership re-

negotiation is triggered. Such renegotiation processes, including the identification of approaching misalignment, the co-design and agreement of new arrangements, is identified as a specific form of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders in managing university-OPM arrangements. Labelled 'enacting', this newly identified form of institutional work illustrates the 'flows of influence' (Lewis et al., 2019) between the micro- and meso- levels, in that the individual work of academic leaders can alter organizational arrangements, impacting the shared context between universities and OPMs as well as their separate organizational contexts. The institutional work of academic leaders goes beyond reacting to events as they occur, but incorporates monitoring the internal, external, and shared environments, anticipating innovations in the form of new university-OPM arrangements that may offer future cocreative value and, as such innovations enter, undertaking forms of institutional work that support their stability, at least temporarily (Vargo et al., 2016). Ideating these possible future arrangements forms part of the institutional work of enacting and represents an example of what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) identify as projective agency, whereby academic leaders are generating possible courses of action, based on their ambition for the future.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of findings from the research project organized by the three research questions. It begins by restating the research aims and offers a discussion of the research findings presented in the previous chapter with connections to the theoretical framework and review of literature. Next the limitations of the research are described followed by implications for practice. Finally, opportunities for future research are outlined.

This thesis sought to understand what is involved in managing university-OPM partnerships and the relationship between that day-to-day work, and the meso (organizational) and macro (field level) contexts related to university-OPM partnerships, organizational arrangements for online learning and broader field-level drivers in higher education. Academic leaders are actors, embedded in their institutional context, and the institutional work they undertake occurs through their exercise of agency.

5.2 What is the institutional work associated with managing university-OPM partnerships? (RQ1)

Creating and maintaining institutions

Institutional work, which focuses on the actions of actors at the center of institutional dynamics, is aimed at creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) and Table 5.1 summarizes the forms of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders in this study and maps them against Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) institutional phases and Scott's (2008) institutional pillars. What's apparent is that the forms of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders in this study center on the phases of 'creating' and 'maintaining' institutions, whereby the work of introducing and integrating new arrangements takes place, along with the subsequent tasks of ensuring that these new ways of working 'stick',

or become institutionalized. There were no examples found of institutional work related to the phase of 'disrupting' institutions, which says something about the remit of academic leaders related to university-OPM partnerships, but rather more about the way that academic leaders perceive university-OPM partnerships and its goals, which is clearly not, at least intentionally, to "disrupt the controls which underpin institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006 p. 235). Academic leaders in this study for the most part, engaged in forms of institutional work in the regulative and normative organizational pillars, and to a much lesser extent the cognitive-cultural pillar (Scott, 2008).

Normative Pillar - Creating. In the phase of creating institutions, academic leaders undertook many forms of institutional work in the normative pillar at the field level, this work is aimed at changing conceptions about what is desirable, preferred, and legitimate (Scott, 2008) about online learning and OPM partnerships. In this phase, academic leaders focused on 'bringing the outside in' and made use of their ability to work across contexts, particularly at the boundary of the organization. This work incorporated, for example, connecting to the macro discourse by referencing the global growth of online learning and changing student preferences, expressing perceptions that change was necessary by benchmarking online progress against peers and advocating for new models by convincing board members and state legislators to allow the university to partner with an OPM company.

A new form of institutional work not previously identified in the literature, and which operates at the nexus of Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) 'creating' and 'maintaining' phases, emerged in this research. This new form of institutional work, 'enacting' involves the integrated process of designing new or altering existing services, along with the activities to 'bring into being' new ways of operating between actors. In an example from this study, changing university needs required an altered product, and altered arrangements between the university and the partner. The process of iterating on the new product and negotiating 'who would do what' in that new form, and then implementing these modifications in the university and in the shared context of the university-OPM partnership constitutes the institutional work of 'enacting'.

Normative Pillar - Maintaining. Working in the normative pillar was also apparent in the phase of 'maintaining' organizations, however the institutional work took a different form than in the creating phase. In the maintaining phase, for example, academic leaders undertook multiple types of valorizing work, inside and outside the organization, by providing positive examples of the outcomes of the university-OPM partnership that illustrate the normative foundations of the organization by producing data that evidences desired quality outcomes of OPM-enabled programs, which is both a metric that is important to university stakeholders and a process they know and value. These different approaches between the same forms of institutional work illustrate how academic leaders are attuned to their contexts when undertaking institutional work and modify their approaches accordingly. This speaks to the expertise and experience of academic leaders who are in these roles, their deep familiarity with the institution, and trust of key stakeholders, which Battilana (2006) identifies are sources of legitimacy and factors that enable actors' change activities.

Regulative Pillar - Academic leaders' institutional work in the regulative pillar was evident in both the creating and maintaining phases. The regulatory pillar involves the capacity to create rules, monitor compliance and to implement sanctions or rewards (Scott, 2008) and by virtue of their formal position, its power authority and associated resources, academic leaders have such capacity. However, academic leaders chose carefully how to exert formal power. In the creating phase, institutional work in the regulatory pillar was more 'hands on' through advocating work such as convincing legislators to approve partnerships, the presentation of business cases, using voting mechanisms to gain faculty support, or by setting up organizational units outside the regular structure of the university to manage online programs, thus 'bypassing' the regular rules and processes of the university. Academic leaders also chose more direct means with OPM partners, through policing work by, for example, monitoring compliance to agreed targets. Internal to the university, academic leaders generally focused on more indirect means to gain compliance, such as the enabling work of incentivizing faculty through payment, allocating resources to the endorsed model or allowing in-house online initiatives to fail.

Aligned with this more ‘subtle’ approach to institutional work in the regulative pillar a new form of institutional work not previously identified in the literature emerged from analysis. Closely related, but distinct from ‘Deterring’ a form of institutional work identified by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006 p.230), is a new form dubbed ‘Corralling’. Whereas Deterring is defined as “the establishment of coercive barriers” for those who are reluctant to engage in new practices, Corralling represents a less overt approach, through the design of circumstances that shepherd stakeholders towards endorsed models. An example of this was identified by an academic leader in whereby in-house options to pursue online courses were possible, however the resources and expertise required to successfully deliver online programs are vested in the endorsed model, effectively, but not overtly, steering decisions toward the endorsed model.

Table 5.1. Summary of forms of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders

Category of Institutional Work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006)	Institutional Pillar (Scott, 2008)	Academic Leader's Area of Work	Form of Institutional Work
Creating	Cognitive- Cultural	Field	Justification
		Advocacy	Educating; Theorizing
	Normative	Field	Advocating; Changing Normative Associations; Connecting to Macro Discourse; Constructing Urgency; Entraining; Inventing;
		Evolving Arrangements	Enacting*
		Governance	Advocating; Constructing Normative Networks
		Advocacy	Constructing Identities
	Regulative	Field	Monitoring*
		Governance	Defining
		Advocacy	Advocating; Bypassing
		Ownership	Advocating; Co-optation; Corralling*
Maintaining	Cognitive- Cultural	Ownership	Coalition Building
	Normative	Field	Valorizing
		Governance	Demonizing; Embedding & Routinizing
		Advocacy	Valorizing
		Ownership	Valorizing

	Regulative	Governance	Convening; Policing
		Advocacy	Enabling; Policing
		Ownership	Enabling

*New forms of institutional work identified

Academic leaders' engagement in multiple contexts enables their institutional work

Academic leaders in this study undertake multiple forms of institutional work as part of their role in managing university-OPM partnerships and this work occurs across multiple contexts, including at the individual, organizational and field levels, in commercial and academic contexts, and within the organizational setting of the OPM, the university, as well as in their shared setting. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) suggest that those who operate at the intersection of numerous contexts are better able to recognize and act on opportunities as they move across these settings, although academic leaders in this study don't seem only to act as 'independent agents' of change as Mische's quote suggests but, as Smets & Jarzabkowski (2013) note, are individuals who connect different groups and are therefore important in creating opportunities, locations or spaces for interactions across multiple groups, with one academic leader referred to this in describing their role as "connective tissue".

Academic leaders' ability to traverse contexts is a critical aspect to their engagement in institutional work, as they form a connection point and provide linkages between the micro- meso- and macro- environments, moving between each and undertaking forms of institutional work at all levels as described in the earlier chapter. This ability to traverse is enabled by a combination of their formal role in the university, which for academic leaders in this study is generally broad in remit and senior in status such as president, provost, head of online learning or innovation. Their familiarity with either their current institution due to tenure, or their experience in university contexts across their career, as well as their experience working with OPM partners. All academic leaders in this study have worked with more than one OPM partner, suggesting that this experience has exposed them to the multiple contexts and groups involved in partnering and building online programs. Critically, academic leaders' ability to

traverse, and undertake institutional work in these contexts is predicated on their legitimacy in each of these contexts. Academic leaders in this study drew more heavily on their membership of academia for legitimacy, rather than their current positions or historical experience in the private sector. In doing so, they attempt to align themselves to the prevailing (academic) ethos of their university, supported by Smith and Adams (2008, p.349) who notes that 'academics continue to lead academics' and Rehbock (2020, p.255) who emphasizes that academic credibility and "experience of university life" are crucial for leadership success in universities. Hence credibility in the academic sphere is critical for academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships in order to give them access to the contexts in which institutional work occurs and allows them to be effective in that institutional work.

Institutional work to build organizational capability and new systems of norms

Building organizational capabilities in the delivery of online programs is important to academic leaders and many forms of institutional work undertaken by academic leaders (and presumably others in the university) is in support of capability building. More than merely technical capability (although that is required), academic leaders spoke of organizational capabilities for online in terms of a 'whole approach', to include the combined organizational capabilities to implement technical solutions, the capability to reform processes, the skills, know-how and mindsets of people in the organization and the capability to bring new products to market. Most academic leaders saw their OPM partner as, in part, a mechanism for helping the university to build some of these capabilities.

The building of new capabilities, particularly a 'whole approach' as described above, is interdependent with institutional work (Ekman et al., 2021) whereby changes to ways of working can prompt capability development which can in turn affect worldviews as was observed in the previous chapter when one academic leader described how the incorporation of instructional designers into program design processes changed faculty's mind about the value of such expertise, paving for the way for an in-house instructional design team to be formed and presumably new ways of designing programs, incorporating instructional designers along with faculty, to be incorporated into standard practice. Other examples identified in this

study include building capabilities in supporting remote students or recruiting students by digital means.

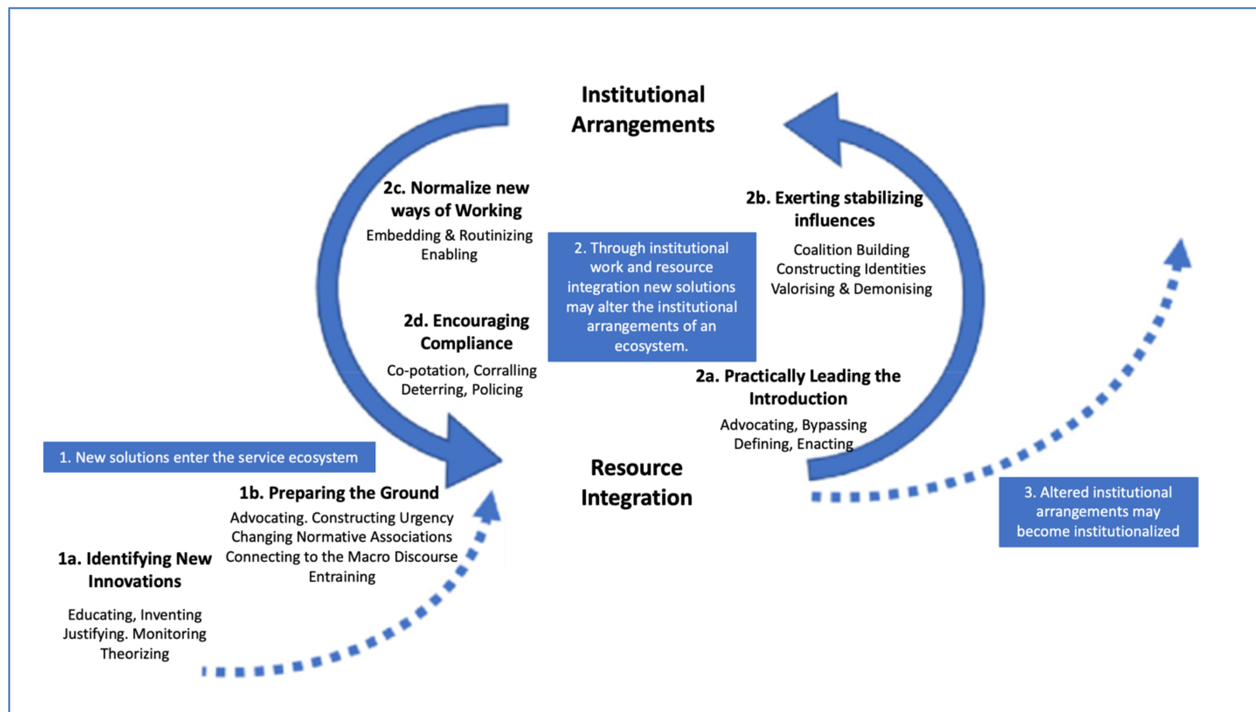
Thus, over a period of time, with many occurrences and cycles of iteration, new systems of norms may form, with institutional work at the base (micro), organizational capabilities representing the meso level, influenced by and in aggregate influencing, the higher education service ecosystem (macro), representing the 'flows of influence' offered by Lewis et al. (2019). Part of, but also cutting across these flows of influence is an organization's capability in partnering, which Paiola et al.'s (2013) suggests is important so as not to limit future opportunities, based on the premise of growing interdependencies between actors in service ecosystems. In the case of universities, having the capability to identify when a partnership may be an option, as well as the organizational capability to select, navigate and shape partnerships on an ongoing basis to meet the university's needs, particularly in academic arenas, is an important area for consideration, including the individuals in universities who tie many of these aspects together, such as the academic leaders in this study.

Summary

Academic leaders who are responsible for managing university-OPM partnerships undertake a vast array of forms of institutional work, at multiple levels, in multiple engagement contexts. However, far from atomistic in approach, the institutional work of academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships could be considered an iterative, recursive process (Vargo et al., 2020) of identifying new innovations (e.g., Monitoring, Inventing, Justifying, Theorizing, Educating) preparing the ground for a new ways of working (e.g., Constructing Urgency, Entraining, Advocating, Connecting to the Macro Discourse, Changing Normative Associations), practically leading their introduction (Bypassing, Enacting, Advocating, Defining), then exerting stabilizing influences (e.g., Coalition Building, Valorizing) and work to normalize these new ways of working (e.g., Enabling, Embedding & Routinizing), buttressed by coercive work to encourage compliance (Corralling, Policing). This cycle is shown in Figure 5.1 below. In aggregate, institutional work builds organizational capabilities as well as new systems of norms. Academic

leaders' ability to move across, and be legitimate in multiple engagement contexts, enables their institutional work.

Figure 5.1. Academic leaders' institutional work related to managing university-OPM partnerships, as a recursive process (Adapted from Vargo et al. 2020)



5.3 How do academic leaders exercise agency in effecting change related to University-OPM partnerships? (RQ2)

Agency is an individuals' capacity enact change and incorporates the intention, capability, and positionality to act. It is interactive between the individual and their changing environment (Adler & Lalonde, 2019; Phillips & Lawrence, 2012). Academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships undertake many forms of institutional work, which occurs through their exercise of agency.

Practical and Projective Agency

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest that agency has a temporal dimension, where actors' intentionality can be oriented to the past (iteration), present (practical-evaluative) or future

(projective) and Battilana & D'Aunno (2009) connect actors' orientation to time impacts their work in creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the institutional work of academic leaders in this study focused on creating and maintaining institutions. Correspondingly, their temporal approach to agency is via the current, 'practical-evaluative' and future 'projective' orientation, as summarized in Table 5.2 As became clear through the interviews with academic leaders, much of their day-to-day work involved responding to the demands and complexities of the immediate situation at hand, requiring them to make decisions, negotiate outcomes and respond to evolving issues as it was presented. Smets & Jarzabkowski (2013) suggest that this 'mundane' sort of work should not be labelled 'unintentional' but is at the core of institutional work.

Academic leaders demonstrated agency oriented to the future through forms of institutional work geared their institutions' immediate and long-term arrangements for online learning involving a 'creation lifecycle' of monitoring, connecting to the macro discourse, inventing, constructing urgency, entraining, and advocating, through to designing its implementation via bypassing and corralling forms of institutional work. As shown in Table 5.2, no forms of institutional work were identified in the disrupting category, nor were examples of iterative agency identified. This analysis explains the focus of the work of academic leaders in this study, but also offers opportunities for future research to understand the full range of institutional work occurring as related to university-OPM partnerships.

Table 5.2. Dimensions of Agency and Forms of Institutional Work

Category of Institutional Work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006)	Iterative Agency	Practical Evaluative Agency	Projective Agency
Creating	-	Advocating Defining Educating Justifying Theorizing	Advocating (3) Bypassing Changing Normative Associations Connecting to Macro Discourse Constructing Identities Constructing Normative Networks Constructing Urgency Corralling Enacting

			Entraining External Monitoring Inventing
Maintaining	-	Coalition Building Convening Co-optation Deterring Embedding & Routinizing Enabling (2) Policing (2) Valorizing (2)	Valorizing Demonizing
Disrupting	-	-	-

Sotarauta and Suvinen (2018) also suggest that agency is best studied by situating it in the flow of time, proposing that actors' agentic efforts and capacity to intervene fluctuates and is influenced by internal and external factors that affect their ability to act. Many academic leaders in this study referred to long time periods when describing their institutional context or their own change efforts and used "windows of opportunity" (Granqvist & Gustafsson (2016, p.1010) to take action when it was possible, supporting the proposal that academic leaders are both in a subject position that allows them to be aware of opportunities and have the capacity to act.

Institutional Agency & Subject Position

Academic leaders in this study articulated a deep understanding of the context of their institution and expressed a clear perspective on future possibilities and change. In this respect, they could be considered as having 'institutional' rather than 'primary' agency, where Maier & Simsa (2021, pp 556) describe the latter involving reactions to a situation while trying to survive it, and the former involving "an elevated level of reflexivity, requiring actors to have articulate understanding of their institutions, of their positions towards and within them, and of how they would like to change or maintain them". Battilana (2006) suggests that social position is a key variable in understanding how individuals' agency is enabled and for academic leaders in this study, the need (and willingness) to be 'entrepreneurial' was highlighted by participants, as they undertook forms of agency that placed them outside established practices to build new

ways of operating. Maintaining their credibility and relationships with different stakeholders was an important factor to enable the exercise of agency for academic leaders and, while their formal role allowed academic leaders to compel change for those under their control, maintenance of individual relationships and efforts to maintain legitimacy among academic and management peers provided academic leaders with the moral authority to influence change.

Summary

Academic leaders in this study exercised agency through various forms of institutional work focused in the present, by attending to current issues and dilemmas as they arose, and the future, by orientation towards their institutions' short and long-term arrangements for online learning. Their formal position in the organization enabled academic leaders the agency to compel change and their legitimacy among academic and management peers offered the opportunity to influence change.

5.4 How might university-OPM partnerships as proto-institutions become institutionalized or legitimated? (RQ3)

Lawrence et al. (2002, p.281) define proto institutions as those "practices, rules and technologies that transcend a particular collaborative relationship and may become new institutions if they diffuse sufficiently". As partnership arrangements between universities and OPM companies become more widespread, and related ways of working more deeply embedded into practice, understanding how these new forms of practice might form proto institutions, and diffuse beyond individual arrangements was one of the questions of this research. As described in the previous chapter, collaborative arrangements, such as university-OPM partnerships, form and innovative practice occurs within the context of the collaborative arrangement, which are integrated through the recursive process of institutional work, resource integration, and altering of institutional arrangements to make room for new practices, which may then become institutionalized. Lawrence et al. (2002) suggest that in some cases these new forms of practice move beyond the boundary of the initial collaboration context and are adopted by other organizations (across a field or within other parts of an

organization). Once these new practices are adopted by other organizations, they can be considered proto institutions, with some continuing to develop and become institutionalized, and others not. This section considers how the forms and practices imbued within university-OPM partnerships may diffuse beyond the boundary of that collaboration context as a first step in the potential institutionalization of new practices, both within the university and across the field of higher education.

Partnership Arrangements

The ways in which the partnership is structured between universities and OPMs is a consideration for the extent to which innovative practices can transcend the partnership context. Lawrence et al. (2002) suggest that collaborative arrangements that can lead to diffused innovation incorporate many forms such as joint ventures, alliances or consortia, but that interorganizational cooperation that is purchased, such as through a vendor relationship or mandated, for example via a regulative authority, are not generally able to result in new understandings or norms, as they are already operating within (and constrained by) a well understood framework. Examples were provided by academic leaders when describing the fully or semi- external arrangements with their OPM partner, and those who described new organizational units created to recruit or support students in online programs, whereby in both cases, new practices are disconnected from the broader university. In these examples, the collaboration has not produced any institutional effects, in that new practices remain within and are unlikely to diffuse across the boundary of the collaborative context. Hence, those university-OPM partnerships that are structured as vendor relationships, or those which are structurally, technologically, and culturally separated from the university are unlikely to lead to diffused innovation and new forms of practice that become institutionalized, although some academic leaders suggested that they aim to “set up structured processes of how we bring that back into the university” (P3). Conversely, some academic leaders described highly embedded partnership arrangements and alluded to new practices being taken up and integrated into ‘accepted’ ways of operating, such as academic units incorporating instructional design (people

and process) into their online program development (P14), or new, collaborative approaches to determining what programs will be created in the future (P8).

Combining logics

The diffusion of innovations, technologies, and new practices to become institutionalized require the combining of logics (Boxembaum, 2004; Perkmann & Spicer, 2008; Tracey et al. 2011). As discussed earlier, universities are complex organizations with multiple logics operating, and many academic leaders in this study described the tensions present in the university-OPM context as competing logics collided. This was particularly evident by the discomfort of university stakeholders with market logics apparent when collaborating with a for-profit partner. While there may be a combining of logics within the university-OPM contexts of this study, managing tensions between them was the dominant discourse from academic leaders. However, what does seem important to navigating these tensions, perhaps with a view to combining logics over time, is the embeddedness of academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships within multiple logics of the university, and particularly their ability to create opportunities for interactions between actors who are situated in their home logic. Additionally, the institutional work of 'enacting', which incorporates the negotiation and re-negotiation of arrangements between the university and the OPM partner over time could be considered a critical mechanism to enabling combined logics in university-OPM arrangements as this activity represents the practical enactment of the evolving organizational form which is itself, Greenwood, Díaz, Li & Lorente (2010) note, an expression of institutional logics.

Field Level Interactions

Recalling the importance of the 'flows of influence' (Lewis et al., 2019) between the field, organization and individual level, Lawrence et al. (2002), Smolka & Heugens (2020) suggest that structured interactions between the internal and external environment and paying attention to how their collaboration 'fits' in the wider institutional field is an important to the potential institutionalization of practices, both within the context of their own collaboration and at the field level. Smolka & Heugens (2020) found that interactions between organizational and field-

level actors involved in the emergence of proto-institutions become more interdependent, particularly between actors in organizations and policymakers or regulatory groups. Hence, the new form of institutional work identified in this study, ‘external monitoring’, which involves continual scanning to anticipate external impacts and planning alternative courses of action, along with advocacy work in mobilizing political and regulatory support seem to be particularly relevant to the potential for institutionalization of new forms of practice.

Multifaceted forms of institutional work, undertaken by many actors

Boxembaum (2004), Lawrence et al. (2002) and Perkmann & Spicer (2008) suggest that the emergence of proto-institutions and the integration of new practices across a field result from a broad range of institutional work undertaken by a variety of actors in a decentralized manner, rather than being undertaken and directed by one primary actor. This suggests that the institutional work of academic leaders, while important to institutionalizing new practices, should be seen in combination with the work of other actors, presenting an opportunity for further studies on the institutional work involved in university-OPM partnerships. It also highlights the importance of mechanism to build organizational capabilities, and particularly those capabilities related to partnering. Perkmann & Spicer (2008) identify that varied forms of institutional work need to take place across multiple domains to support institutionalization of new practices and organizational forms and the credibility of academic leaders to operate across these multiple contexts assists in their ability to undertake this work.

Summary

Proto institutions, as fledging arrangements, represent new forms of practice, are part of an ongoing recursive cycle of innovation within and between organizations. New forms can emerge to become institutionalized, continue to evolve, or dissipate. University-OPM partnerships can be seen as one of these transitory forms, which will continue to evolve as part of this process. The extent of embeddedness of the arrangement between the university and the OPM can impact the likelihood of institutionalization, which requires multifaceted forms of institutional work undertaken by many actors, across different organizational pillars. The ability

of academic leaders to move between and connect logics, and their institutional work of 'external monitoring' contribute to the potential for institutionalization of new practices.

5.5 Limitations

This research aimed to understand the work of academic leaders in managing university-OPM partnerships and how that work might shape and be shaped by organizational and field level influences. This study employed a small sample size of 15 academic leaders and participants offered their individual experience and perspectives which represents their unique journey. University contexts and OPM partnership arrangements are similarly unique. Therefore, while the findings may be informative for others who are considering or have in place partnerships of this type, the results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, transferability to other contexts and groups may be possible.

While data from participants is rich and detailed, it represents only one perspective of institutional work related to the phenomenon and thus offers a limited view of what's involved in managing university-OPM partnerships. This limitation presents opportunities for further research to gather insights from, for example, those working in OPM companies, or those in academic roles, who may contribute alternative perspectives about what's involved in managing university-OPM partnerships. The data in this study is self-reported, representing academic leaders' interpretations of their actions, the actions of others, and the results of such actions. Chia and Holt (2009) suggest that reliance on retrospective accounts may portray actions as more purposive than they originally were, offering the opportunity for ethnographic approaches in future research that enables observation of the phenomena.

Finally, as the researcher I have familiarly with the context of implementing technology-based change in universities, hence may be biased in my interpretations of the data and choice of themes to pursue. I attempted to reduce bias by including detailed verbatim descriptions of academic leaders' accounts and drawing on the theoretical concept of institutional work, which offers thorough accounts in the literature from which to compare my interpretation.

5.6 Contributions to practice

It is only relatively recently that online learning, including through University-OPM partnerships, has become widespread in higher education. As such there is little by way of research examining the practice of academic leaders who are leading these arrangements, although their work is likely to have a significant impact on the outcomes of partnership arrangements and thus on outcomes related to online learning strategies for universities. This study helps to fill that gap, by providing university stakeholders with rich descriptions of the work of academic leaders and insights into what is involved to make these partnerships work.

This study helps to explain how organizational change related to online learning and university-OPM partnerships happens over time, using institutional theory to highlight the mechanisms by which new practices and norms may become embedded and institutionalized. For university leaders, deeper insights into these processes can highlight critical junctures and contexts where daily decisions occur which, taken over time, could result in the normalization of practices. Knowing where and when these critical junctures are, for example at the informal pre-meetings prior to academic board, inside certain committee meetings, or at meetings with Deans, can provide an opportunity for university leaders to be more actively involved at these critical points, or to create other mechanisms for explicit conversations about intended or unintended consequences of daily decisions over time.

The development of partnering capability deep in the academic function that was highlighted in this research may be a new insight for university leaders. Building capability to partner with external parties across different student and academic functions, from marketing and recruitment, information technology, through to program development and design processes, and student support, may become a strategic advantage for universities. Recognizing this ability internally and being able to apply it into new areas (for example into alumni, university-industry collaborations) through internal information sharing and professional development can assist universities to leverage the significant investment in one partnership across other parts of the organization and in other functions.

This study examines the work of academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships and has highlighted the multi-faceted nature of the work, which requires a deep understanding of the organization, and the ability and experience to operate effectively and maintain credibility with different stakeholder groups. However, much of the critical work identified through this study may occur 'invisibly', and therefore not be accounted for in organizational structures (or restructures). Deeper understanding of this work, and who undertakes it can help university leadership as they consider future configurations and organizational structures for online programs and the portfolios of senior leadership team members, as well as offering insights into how best to support academic leaders who manage university-OPM partnerships.

This research may also offer academic leaders who are managing university-OPM partnerships deeper insights into their own practice of leading change and help to explain some of the processes in which they are embedded. For example, this study highlights the multiple contexts in which academic leaders operate and how they transverse them. While academic leaders seem aware of this in their daily practice, they may not be so aware of their critical role in *creating* contexts that allow interactions between 'opposites', thus providing the opportunity for forming new practices in the organization. Similarly, academic leaders' work at the edge of the institution, by 'scanning' the external environment, bringing new ideas into the organization directly or by way of the OPM partner, may not be fully appreciated for the critical role it plays in the early stages of idea seeding and organizational decision-making.

For those who lead Online Program Management companies, this research may offer a deeper appreciation for the ways in which universities are considering online delivery as part of their overall mission, and how OPM partners are positioned within this longer-term strategy. One of the key takeaways of this research for OPM partners is the recognition by academic leaders of the continued evolution of partnership arrangements, the requirement for co-creation of value and the openness to different types of partnerships beyond online programs. Thus, OPM companies should consider other ways in which they can co-create value with universities and continue to examine their own underlying capabilities that could be applied into different services.

Regulators play an important role in the 'service ecosystem' of higher education. In some jurisdictions, the phenomenon of university-OPM partnerships is not well understood and, in some cases, seen as a potential threat to academic quality or outcomes for students. This research sheds new light on the details of how university-OPM partnerships are managed by institutions, how these arrangements may change over time, and the potential for growth of partnerships in higher education, particularly for academic services. Regulators and quality assurance agencies should seek to better understand this evolving context and engage with universities about it to fulfil their objectives without stifling innovation.

For others researching change related to online programs in higher education and university-OPM partnerships, the forms of institutional work examined in this research, including those not previously identified in the literature, may be a useful starting point for further exploration of the institutional work related to online programs undertaken in universities.

5.7 Researcher Reflections

This doctoral journey has been interlaced in my, and my family's life over the last six years and has been the source of both inspiration and exhaustion. This whole program of study, including own research as part of that, represents a personal and professional milestone, and an important source of learning for me. Drawing a connection with the theory of institutional work that helps to explain the work of academic leaders, I reflect on how my own 'day-in-day-out' practices as a researcher have culminated in this thesis, and the skills I have developed along the way, ranging from the practical - time management, strategic reading, data analysis and using research tools, through to 'conceptual heavy lifting' of drawing connections between theory and practice, and creativity to deliver original research that contributes to practice. One of the most important skills I have learned through this process (and which I will continue to develop) is the ability to communicate complex ideas succinctly, in a way that is accessible to the reader, and that can help explain practice using powerful theory. The latter particularly opens many possibilities for understanding and improving practice, and for the continued development of theory, the interplay between these I see more clearly now.

Having identified new forms of institutional work in this research project, I can see the importance of sharing my findings with those who are practicing in university-OPM partnerships and online learning in higher education and collaborating with others who are researching in this area. Disseminating my research through, for example, presenting at relevant conferences and by sharing my research directly with those who have published on university-OPM partnerships, as well as the participants of the study I hope will spark new ideas and possibly other research collaborations.

Having undertaken this study, I am more adept in conducting qualitative research and have a deeper appreciation for the importance of process, structure, iteration, and improvement through feedback and collaboration in research. I will take these new skills and knowledge into my future research projects, and into my professional practice.

5.8 Opportunities for future research

Academic leaders represent one actor of many who are undertaking forms of institutional work related to managing University-OPM partnerships. Future research that examines the institutional work of others involved, such as OPM leaders and staff, faculty in universities, other academic leaders (e.g., those who take ownership of OPM-enabled programs in the long run) and administrative or technical staff who manage other aspects of management, may provide a more complete picture of institutional work undertaken to manage university-OPM partnerships.

This study focused on the work of academic leaders in one aspect of their role. What became clear during the research was that academic leaders operate across different contexts of the organization, requiring significant experience, knowledge, and competencies to balance the differing requirements. Further research to better understand changes to senior leadership positions in universities, or the “stretched second leadership tier” as described by Smith and Adams (2008, p. 350), how these roles are changing, and the capabilities required, may provide insights into how academic leaders are impacted by internal and external influences, what skills

and experiences are required in these roles, and for university leaders, how best to support academic leaders in these positions.

Academic leaders may be central to building organizational capabilities for partnering, particularly as it relates to academic functions, which Paiola et al. (2013) suggests as an important capability given the growing interdependencies between actors in service ecosystems. Deeper examination of partnering types in the academic arena (not limited to OPMs) and partnering capabilities within universities, may offer a better understanding of the organizational capabilities required to effectively manage partnerships.

Many academic leaders in this study referenced how the university's partnership arrangements with OPMs evolved over time, however as this research was based on the retrospective accounts of academic leaders, a deeper understanding of how these partnerships change may be better served by a longitudinal approach, which Ekman (2021) suggests can reveal complex phenomena over time, enabling a deeper understanding of the university-OPM partnership model and how it develops. Relatedly, the continued evolution of arrangements and models for partnerships between universities and external parties may give rise to longer-term impacts for universities (Swinnerton et al., 2020) changes to their 'shape', and possibly their direction (Sperka, 2020). Further research in this area might help to explain how, and the extent to which, partnership arrangements change universities.

References

Adler, C., & Lalonde, C. (2019). Identity, agency and institutional work in higher education: a qualitative meta-synthesis. Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 15(2), 121-144. https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-11-2018-1696

Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 5(2), 9-19. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9

Alexander, M. J., Jaakkola, E., & Hollebeek, L. D. (2018). Zooming out: actor engagement beyond the dyadic. Journal of Service Management. 29(3), 333-351. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-08-2016-0237

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013). Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States. Sloan Consortium. Newburyport, MA. Retrieved from: https://www.bayviewanalytics.com/distance.html

Altbach, P., Reisberg, L. & Rumbley, L. (2009). Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution. A Report Prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education.

Andersson, T. & Gadolin, C. (2020). Understanding institutional work through social interaction in highly institutionalized settings: Lessons from public healthcare organizations, Scandinavian Journal of Management, (36) 2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2020.101107

Battilana, J. (2006). Agency and institutions: The enabling role of individuals' social position. Organization, 13(5), 653-676. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508406067008

Battilana, J., & D'aunno, T. (2009). Institutional work and the paradox of embedded agency. In: Lawrence, T., Suddaby, R. and Leca, B. (eds) Institutional work: Actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 31- 58

Battilana, J., Leca, B., & Boxenbaum, E. (2009). How actors change institutions: towards a theory of institutional entrepreneurship. The academy of management annals, 3(1), 65-107. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520903053598

Beck, R., Gregory, R. W., & Marschollek, O. (2015). The interplay of institutional logics in IT public-private partnerships. ACM SIGMIS Database: the DATABASE for Advances in Information Systems, 46(1), 24-38. https://doi.org/10.1145/2747544.2747547

Bentz, V. M., & Shapiro, J. J. (1998). Research: The new context and a new approach. In Mindful inquiry in social research (pp. 1–14). London, UK: Sage

Beunen, R., Patterson, J., & Van Assche, K. (2017). Governing for resilience: the role of institutional work. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 28, 10-16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.04.010

Biesta, G. (2005). Against learning. Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning. Nordisk Pedagogik, 25(1), 54–66

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (2006). Getting started. In How to research (3rd ed., pp. 21–52). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Bolden, R., Gosling, J., O'Brien, A., Peters, K., Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S., Longsworth, L., Davidovic, A. & Winklemann, K. (2012). Academic leadership: Changing conceptions, identities and experiences in UK higher education. University of Exeter. https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/15098

Bond, M., Bedenlier, S., Marín, V. I., & Händel, M. (2021). Emergency remote teaching in higher education: Mapping the first global online semester. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 18(1), 1-24 https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-021-00298-3

Boxenbaum, E. (2004). The emergence of a proto institution. Working paper (Ed.): Copenhagen Business School. Retrieved from https://research.cbs.dk/en/publications/the-emergence-of-a-proto-institution

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). Doing Interviews (Vol.2) Sage.

Bryman, A., Becker, S. & Sempik, J. (2008) Quality criteria for quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research: a view from social policy. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 11(4), 261-276. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401644

Burd, E. L., Smith, S. P., & Reisman, S. (2015). Exploring business models for MOOCs in higher education. Innovative Higher Education, 40, 37-49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-014-9297-0

Cai, Y., & Mehari, Y. (2015). The use of institutional theory in higher education research. In Theory and method in higher education research 1,1-25. Emerald Group Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2056-375220150000001001

Campbell, J. L. (2004). Institutional change and globalization. Princeton University Press.

Carey, K. (2019). The Creeping Capitalist Takeover of Higher Education. The Huffington Post. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/highline/article/capitalist-takeover-college/

Carvalho, A. D. P., da Cunha, S. K., de Lima, L. F., & Carstens, D. D. (2017). The role and contributions of sociological institutional theory to the socio-technical approach to innovation theory. RAI Revista de Administração e Inovação, 14(3), 250-259 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rai.2017.02.001

Chambers, M., Bliss, K., & Rambur, B. (2020). Recruiting research participants via traditional snowball vs Facebook advertisements and a website. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 42(10), 846-851. https://doi.org/10.1177/0193945920904445

Chia, R. C., & Holt, R. (2009). Strategy without design: The silent efficacy of indirect action. Cambridge University Press.

Chowdhurry, M. F. (2014). Interpretivism in aiding our understanding of the Contemporary Social World. Open Journal of Philosophy, 4, 432-438. DOI:10.4236/ojpp.2014.43047

Cheslock, J. J., Kinser, K., Zipf, S. T., & Ra, E. (2021). Examining the OPM: Form, Function, and Policy Implications. Penn State College of Education. Retrieved from: https://osf.io/py3sz/download

Chronicle of Higher Education & P3*EDU. (2019). The Chronicle of Higher Education & P3•EDU2019 Public-Private Partnership Survey. https://www.p3edu.com/wp- content/uploads/2019/03/2019-Public-Private-Partnership-Survey.pdf

Clark, B. R. (1983) The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-national Perspective. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Coghlan, D. (2019). Doing action research in your own organization. Sage.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). Research methods in education. Routledge.

Colyvas, J. A., & Powell, W. W. (2006). Roads to institutionalization: The remaking of boundaries between public and private science. Research in organizational behavior, 27, 305-353 https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085(06)27008-4

Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative Inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage

Czerniewicz, L., Mogliacci, R., Walji, S., Cliff, A., Swinnerton, B., & Morris, N. (2021). Academics teaching and learning at the nexus: unbundling, marketisation and digitisation in higher education. Teaching in Higher Education, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1876019

Czerniewicz, L., & Walji, S. (2019). Issues for universities using private companies for online education. Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT), University of Cape Town.

Dalal, A. (2021). Scaling Online Graduate Programs: An Exploratory Study of Insourcing Versus Outsourcing (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California). Retrieved from: https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-021-00282-x https://doi.org/10.1186/s41687-018-0043-8

Davis-Blake, A., & Broschak, J. P. (2009). Outsourcing and the changing nature of work. Annual Review of Sociology, 321-340. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134641

Dempsey, C. (2018, October 9). Wiley Signs Definitive Agreement to Acquire Learning House from Weld North. Wiley. https://universityservices.wiley.com/wiley-signs-agreement-acquire-learning-house/

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. American sociological review, 147-160. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101

Dorado, S. (2005). Institutional entrepreneurship, partaking, and convening", Organization Studies, 26(3), pp. 385- 414. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605050873

Edwards, R., & Holland, J. (2013). What are the power and emotional dynamics of qualitative interviews?. In What is Qualitative Interviewing? (The 'What is?' Research Methods Series, pp. 77–88). London: Bloomsbury Academic. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472545244.ch-007

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities: what are they? Strategic management journal, 21(10-11), 1105-1121 https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266(200010/11)21:10/11%3C1105::AID-SMJ133%3E3.0.CO;2-E

Ekman, M., Lindgren, M., & Packendorff, J. (2018). Universities need leadership, academics need management: discursive tensions and voids in the deregulation of Swedish higher education legislation. Higher Education, 75, 299-321. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-017-0140-2

Ekman, P., Röndell, J., Kowalkowski, C., Raggio, R. D., & Thompson, S. M. (2021). Emergent market innovation: A longitudinal study of technology-driven capability development and institutional work. Journal of Business Research, 124, 469-482. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.10.061

Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. SAGE open, 4(1), 2158244014522633. DOI: 10.1177/2158244014522633

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency?. American journal of sociology, 103(4), 962-1023 https://doi.org/10.1086/231294

Englund, C., Olofsson, A. D., & Price, L. (2017). Teaching with technology in higher education: understanding conceptual change and development in practice. Higher Education Research & Development, 36(1), 73-87 https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1171300

Farakish, N., Jaggars, S., & Fay, M. (2020). Public-private partnership: How and why six community colleges loved and left a for-profit partner. Innovative Higher Education, 45(3), 237-252. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09500-2

Flavell, H., Roberts, L., Fyfe, G., & Broughton, M. (2018). Shifting goal posts: the impact of academic workforce reshaping and the introduction of teaching academic roles on the scholarship of teaching and learning. The Australian Educational Researcher, 45(2), 179-194. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-017-0247-6

Flick, U. (1998) An Introduction to Qualitative Research. London: Sage.

Garrett, R. (2018). Prove It: Do OPMs really boost enrollment? Retrieved from: https://encoura.org/prove-opms-really-boost-enrollment/

Garud, R., Schildt, H. A., & Lant, T. K. (2014). Entrepreneurial storytelling, future expectations, and the paradox of legitimacy. Organization Science, 25(5), 1479-1492 https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0915

Gay, L.R., Mills, G.E., & Airasian, P.W. (2011). Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications (10th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education International.

Gehrke, S., & Kezar, A. (2015). Unbundling the faculty role in higher education: Utilizing historical, theoretical, and empirical frameworks to inform future research. Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research (30), 93-150. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-12835-1_3

Gelinas, L., Pierce, R., Winkler, S., Cohen, I. G., Lynch, H. F., & Bierer, B. E. (2017). Using Social Media as a Research Recruitment Tool: Ethical Issues and Recommendations. American Journal of Bioethics, 17(3), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2016.1276644

Gibbs, G. (2018). Analyzing Qualitative Data. SAGE Publications Ltd, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526441867

Glenn, M. (2008). The future of higher education: How technology will shape learning. Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium. Retrieved February 10, 2022 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/182088/

Graham, M. (2021). Institutional Satisfaction with Online Program Management (OPM) Providers. Doctoral Dissertation, National Louis University. Retrieved from: https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/610/

Granqvist, N., & Gustafsson, R. (2016). Temporal institutional work. Academy of Management Journal, 59(3), 1009-1035 https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0416

Gray, L. M., Wong-Wylie, G., Rempel, G. R., & Cook, K. (2020). Expanding qualitative research interviewing strategies: Zoom video communications. The Qualitative Report, 25(5), 1292-1301. https://www.iths.org/wp-content/uploads/2.-Expanding-Qualitative-Research-Interviewing-Strategies.pdf

Greenwood, R., Suddaby, R., & Hinings, C. R. (2002). Theorizing change: The role of professional associations in the transformation of institutionalized fields. Academy of Management Journal, 45(1), 58-80. https://doi.org/10.5465/3069285

Greenwood, R., Díaz, A. M., Li, S. X., & Lorente, J. C. (2010). The multiplicity of institutional logics and the heterogeneity of organizational responses. Organization science, 21(2), 521-539. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0453

Grossman, G. M., & Helpman, E. (2005). Outsourcing in a global economy. The Review of Economic Studies, 72(1), 135-159. https://doi.org/10.1111/0034-6527.00327

Guerra-López, I., & Dallal, S. (2021). A content analysis of change management strategies used in technological transitions in higher education institutions from the lens of a strategic alignment framework. Online Learning, 25(3), 191-207. doi:10.24059/olj.v25i3.2395

Guest, G., Namey, E. E., & Mitchell, M. L. (2013). Collecting qualitative data: A field manual for applied research. Sage

Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. PloS one, 15(5), e0232076. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076

Hall, S., & Dudley, T. (2019). Dear Colleges: Take Control of Your Online Courses. The Century Foundation. Report. Retrieved from: https://tcf.org/content/report/dear-colleges-take-control-online-courses/

Hardy, K. & Bower, B. (2004). Instructional and work life issues for distance learning faculty. New Directions for Community Colleges, 128, 47-54. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.174

Hays, D. and Singh, A. (2011). Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings. Guilford Press

Helfen, M., & Sydow, J. (2013). Negotiating as institutional work: The case of labour standards and international framework agreements. Organization Studies, 34(8), 1073-1098 https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613492072

Hill, P. (2021, December 1). OPM Market Landscape and Dynamics: Fall 2021 updates. Phil Hill & Associates. https://philonedtech.com/opm-market-landscape-and-dynamics-fall-2021-updates

Hill, P. (2023, March 24). Pearson Sells Its OPM Business. Phil Hill & Associates. https://philhillaa.com/onedtech/pearson-sells-its-opm-business/

Hinings, B., Gegenhuber, T., & Greenwood, R. (2018). Digital innovation and transformation: An institutional perspective. Information and Organization, 28(1), 52–61. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2018.02.004

Hoffman, M.S. (2012). Online Education Vendor Partners: When and How to Select One. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 15(3). Retrieved June 18, 2022 from https://ojdla.com/archive/fall153/hoffman153.pdf

HolonIQ (2019). OPM, meet OPX. New models & the $3.5B global online higher education services market. Retrieved from: https://www.holoniq.com/notes/opm-meet-opx-new-models-driving-the-global-online-higher-education-market

HolonIQ (2021). OPM + MOOC = OPX. 244 University Partnerships in the first half of 2021. Retrieved from: https://www.holoniq.com/notes/opm-mooc-opx-244-university-partnerships-in-the-first-half-of-2021

HolonIQ (2022). Now 2,627+ OPM, Bootcamp and Pathways Partnerships with Universities globally. Retrieved from: https://www.holoniq.com/notes/2627-opm-bootcamp-and-pathways-partnerships-with-universities-around-the-world

Hwang, H., Colyvas, J. A., & Drori, G. S. (Eds.). (2019). Agents, actors, actorhood: Institutional perspectives on the nature of agency, action, and authority. Emerald Group Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20190000058005

Ivancheva, M. P., Swartz, R., Morris, N. P., Walji, S., Swinnerton, B. J., Coop, T., & Czerniewicz, L. (2020). Conflicting logics of online higher education. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 41(5), 608-625. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2020.1784707

Jomo, K., Chowdhury, A., Sharma, K. & Platz, D. (2016). Public-Private Partnerships and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Fit for purpose? Department of Economic and Social Affairs Working Paper No. 148, United Nations. New York. http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/papers/

Jomo, J. & Chowdhury, A. (2009). Re-considering public-private partnerships in developing countries, International Journal of Institutions and Economies, 1(2), pp. 191–205.

Kim, J. (2020). Thoughts on the 2U Transparency Report. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from: https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/thoughts-2u-transparency-report

Kleinaltenkamp, M., Corsaro, D., & Sebastiani, R. (2018). The role of proto-institutions within the change of service ecosystems. Journal of Service Theory and Practice, 28(5), 609-635 https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-12-2017-0241

Komljenovic, J., & Robertson, S. L. (2016). The dynamics of 'market-making' in higher education. Journal of Education Policy, 31(5), 622-636 https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1157732

Kowalewski, S., & Hortman, K. (2019). The Impact of Online Program Management (OPM) on The Growth of Online Learning: A Case Study. Conference Paper. World conference in Online Learning 2019. http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3804014

Kraatz, M. S. and Moore, J. H. (2002) 'Executive Migration and Institutional Change', Academy of Management Journal 45(1), 120–43. https://doi.org/10.5465/3069288

Kraatz, M. S. (2009). Leadership as institutional work: A bridge to the other side. Chapter 3 in: Institutional work: Actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations, 59-91

Knudsen, C. (1995). The competence view of the firm: what can modern economists learn from Philip Selznick's sociological theory of leadership? In W. R. Scott & S. Christensen (eds.), The Institutional Construction of Organizations: International and Longitudinal Studies, pp. 135–163. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Krishnamurthy, S. (2020). The future of business education: A commentary in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic. Journal of business research, 117, 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.034

Kvale, S. (1996) Inter Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing, London: Sage.

Lawrence, T. B., Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. (2002). Institutional effects of interorganizational collaboration: The emergence of proto-institutions. Academy of Management Journal, 45(1), 281–290. https://doi.org/10.5465/3069297

Lawrence, T. B. (2004). Rituals and Resistance: Membership Dynamics in Professional Fields. Human Relations, 57(2), 115–143. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726704042924

Lawrence, T. B., & Suddaby, R. (2006). 1.6 institutions and institutional work. The Sage handbook of organization studies, 215-254.

Lawrence, T. B., Leca, B., & Zilber, T. B. (2013). Institutional work: Current research, new directions and overlooked issues. Organization studies, 34(8), 1023-1033. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613495305

Lehmann, J., Graf-Vlachy, L., & König, A. (2019). Forms of Institutional Work: A Systematic Review. In Academy of Management Specialized Conference, Bled, Slovenia https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3499467

Lewis, A. C., Cardy, R. L., & Huang, L. S. (2019). Institutional theory and HRM: A new look. Human Resource Management Review, 29(3), 316-335. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.07.006

Lewis, N., & Shore, C. (2019). From unbundling to market making: Reimagining, reassembling and reinventing the public university. Globalisation, Societies and Education, 17(1), 11-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2018.1524287

Löhr, M., Chlebna, C., & Mattes, J. (2022). From institutional work to transition work: Actors creating, maintaining and disrupting transition processes. Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions, 42, 251-267 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2021.12.005

Lyons, R. K. (2017). Economics of the ed tech revolution. California Management Review, 59(4), 49-55. https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125617717708

McKenzie, L. (May 9, 2019). California Mull Crackdown on Online Partnerships. Inside Higher Ed (Periodical) Retrieved May 14, 2019 https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/05/09/calif-lawmakers- consider-legislation-aimed-profits-and-online

Maguire, S., Hardy, C. and Lawrence, T. B., (2004). 'Institutional Entrepreneurship in Emerging Fields: HIV/AIDS Treatment Advocacy in Canada', Academy of Management Journal 47(5), 657–79. https://doi.org/10.5465/20159610

Maier, F., & Simsa, R. (2021). How actors move from primary agency to institutional agency: A conceptual framework and empirical application. Organization, 28(4), 555-576 DOI: 10.1177/1350508420910574

Marginson, S. (2016). The worldwide trend to high participation higher education: Dynamics of social stratification in inclusive systems. Higher Education, 72(4), 413-434 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0016-x

Marks, M., & Sparkman, J. (2019). The new era of public-private partnership in higher education. P3• EDU, www. P3edu. Report. https://www.p3edu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-New-Era-of-Public-Private-Partnership-in-Higher-Education.pdf

Mattes, M. (2017, August 7). The Private Side of Public Higher Education. The Century Foundation. Report. Retrieved from: https://tcf.org/content/report/private-side-public-higher-education/

Menard, J. (2022). The rise of Online Program Management (OPM). Retrieved from: https://listedtech.com/blog/online-program-management-applications-and-advantages/

Merriam, S. B. (2009). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. American Journal of Sociology, 83(2), 340–363. https://doi.org/10.1086/226550

Mikecz, R. (2012) '"Interviewing elites": addressing methodological issues', Qualitative Inquiry, 18: 482–493. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800412442818

Miles, A., Huberman, A. & Saldaña, J. (2013). Qualitative Data Analysis, SAGE Publications

Mohammad, H. I. (2020). Outsourcing and public universities performance in Nigeria, the mediating effect of trust. Journal of Global Operations and Strategic Sourcing, 13(3), 275-300 https://doi.org/10.1108/JGOSS-04-2020-0015

Mollenkamp, D. (2022). Colleges Are Losing Students. Is That A Growth Opportunity For Coursera? EdSurge. Retrieved from: https://www.edsurge.com/news/2022-05-04-colleges-are-losing-students-is-that-a-growth-opportunity-for-coursera

Moneta, L., & Dillon, W. L. (2001). Strategies for Effective Outsourcing. New Directions for Student Services, 96, 31-49. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ640579

Morris, N. P., Ivancheva, M., Coop, T., Mogliacci, R., & Swinnerton, B. (2020). Negotiating growth of online education in higher education. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 17(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00227-w

Myers, M. (2019). Qualitative research in business and management. Qualitative research in business and management, 1-364. Sage Publications.

Naisbitt, J. (1982). Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives. New York, NY: Warner Books.

Nambisan, S., Lyytinen, K., Majchrzak, A., & Song, M. (2017). Digital Innovation Management: Reinventing innovation management research in a digital world. MIS quarterly, 41(1). https://www.jstor.org/stable/26629644

Newton, D. (2021). Colleges Pull Away From The For-Profit Companies That Run Online Programs. Article, Forbes. Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereknewton/2021/12/28/colleges-pull-away-from-the-for-profit-companies-that-run-online-programs/?sh=737687515b92

Paiola, M., Saccani, N., Perona, M., & Gebauer, H. (2013). Moving from products to solutions: Strategic approaches for developing capabilities. European Management Journal, 31(4), 390-409 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2012.10.002

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research, 42(5), 533-544 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Palm, R. L. (2001). Partnering through Outsourcing. New Directions for Student Services, 96, 5-11. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ640577

Palthe, J. (2014). Regulative, normative, and cognitive elements of organizations: Implications for managing change. Management and organizational studies, 1(2), 59-66 http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/mos.v1n2p59

Palvia, S., Aeron, P., Gupta P., Mahapatra, D., Parida, R., Rosner, R. & Sindhi, S. (2018). Online Education: Worldwide Status, Challenges, Trends, and Implications, Journal of Global Information Technology Management (21) 4, 233-241, DOI: 10.1080/1097198X.2018.1542262

Patrinos, H. A., Osorio, F. B., & Guáqueta, J. (2009). The role and impact of public-private partnerships in education. World Bank Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. Qualitative social work, 1(3), 261-283. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325002001003636

Pearson. University Online Learning Services (n.d.). Retrieved from: https://www.pearson.com/en-au/educator/university/pearson-online-learning-services

Perkmann, M., & Spicer, A. (2008). How are management fashions institutionalized? The role of institutional work. Human relations, 61(6), 811-844. DOI: 10.1177/0018726708092406

Petersen, R.D. & Valdez, A. (2005). Using snowball-based methods in hidden populations to generate a randomized community sample of gang-affiliated adolescents. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 3, 151-167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204004273316

Phillips, N., & Lawrence, T. B. (2012). The turn to work in organization and management theory: Some implications for strategic organization. Strategic organization, 10(3), 223-230. DOI: 10.1177/1476127012453109

Pongsiri, N. (2002). Regulation and public-private partnerships. International Journal of Public sector management, 15(6), 487-495. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550210439634

Rai, N., & Thapa, B. (2015). A study on purposive sampling method in research. Kathmandu: Kathmandu School of Law, 1-12. Retrieved from:

Ramani, S. (2020). The Impact of a University/Online Program Management Provider Partnership on Faculty Approaches to Teaching Design: A Case Study Using Activity Theory. CGU Theses & Dissertations, 195. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd/195

Raviola, E., & Norbäck, M. (2013). Bringing technology and meaning into institutional work: Making news at an Italian business newspaper. Organization studies, 34(8), 1171-1194 https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613492077

Reay, T., & Hinings, C. R. (2009). Managing the rivalry of competing institutional logics. Organization Studies, 30, 629–652. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840609104803.

Rehbock, S. K. (2020). Academic leadership: Challenges and opportunities for leaders and leadership development in higher education. Modern Day challenges in academia, 252-264. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788119191

Rhodes, G. (2007). Technology-enhanced courses and a mode iii organization of instructional work. Tertiary Education and Management, 13(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583880601145496

Rogers, J., Patton, A., Harmon, L., Lex, A. and Meyer, M. (2020). Insights from experiments with rigor in an evobio design study. IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics 27 (2): 1106-1116.

Russell, C. (2009) A systemic framework for managing e-learning adoption in campus universities: individual strategies in context, ALT-J, 17:1, 3-19 https://doi.org/10.1080/09687760802649871

Ruth, S. (2018). Faculty opposition to online learning: Challenges and opportunities. International Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning, 14(1), 12-23. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1211994

Scharle, P. (2002). Public-private partnership (PPP) as a social game. Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research, 15(3), 227-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/1351161022000027630

Schmoyer, A. (2020). Outsourcing Online Programs: Exploring the Organizational Impact & Planning for the Future in OPM Partnerships at a Private University (Doctoral dissertation) Vanderbilt University. Retrieved from: https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/handle/1803/16336

Scott, W. (2004). “Institutional theory.” in Encyclopedia of Social Theory, George Ritzer, ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Pp. 408-14

Scott, W. (2008). Institutions and organizations: Ideas and interests. Sage Publications.

Scott, W. (2014). Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities. Sage publications.

Seaman, J. E., Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2018). Grade increase: Tracking distance education in the United States. Babson Survey Research Group.

Shreaves, D. (2019). Faculty Perceptions of Online Teaching at a Mid-Sized Liberal Arts University in the Pacific Northwest: A Mixed Methods Study. (Doctoral Dissertation) Boise State University. DOI 10.18122/td/1580/boisestate

Sherrod-Brown US Senator for Ohio. (2022). Brown, Warren, Smith Press Largest Managers Of Online Degree Programs To Answer For Concerning Business Practices. Press Release. Retrieved from: https://www.brown.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/brown-warren-smith-largest-managers-online-degree-programs-business-practices

Silberman, E. (2020). Views of University Administrators on the Outsourcing of Online Education. In Innovate Learning Summit (pp. 228-235). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).

Singh, V., & Thurman, A. (2019). How many ways can we define online learning? A systematic literature review of definitions of online learning (1988-2018). American Journal of Distance Education, 33(4), 289-306. https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2019.1663082

Silverman, D. (2010). Collecting your data. In Doing qualitative research (3rd ed., pp. 189– 217). London, UK: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2013). Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook. Sage.

Smets, M., & Jarzabkowski, P. (2013). Reconstructing institutional complexity in practice: A relational model of institutional work and complexity. Human relations, 66(10), 1279-1309 https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726712471407

Smith, D., & Adams, J. (2008). Academics or executives? Continuity and change in the roles of pro-vice-chancellors 1. Higher Education Quarterly, 62(4), 340-357. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00387.x

Smolka, K. M., & Heugens, P. P. (2020). The emergence of proto-institutions in the new normal business landscape: dialectic institutional work and the Dutch drone industry. Journal of Management Studies, 57(3), 626-663. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12540

Sotarauta, M., & Suvinen, N. (2018). Institutional agency and path creation: Institutional path from industrial to knowledge city. New avenues for regional innovation systems-theoretical advances, empirical cases and policy lessons, 85-104. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71661-9_5

Sperka, L. (2020). (Re) defining outsourcing in education. Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 41(2), 268-280 https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1722429

Springer, S. (2018). One University's Experience Partnering with an Online Program Management (OPM) Provider: A Case Study. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 21(1),. Retrieved June 13, 2022 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/188465/.

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. Academy of management review, 20(3), 571-610. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331

Suddaby, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. Administrative science quarterly, 50(1), 35-67. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2005.50.1.35

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. Academy of management review, 20(3), 571-610 https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331

Swedberg, R. (2020). Exploratory research. The production of knowledge: Enhancing progress in social science, 17-41 https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108762519.002

Swinnerton, B., Coop, T., Ivancheva, M., Czerniewicz, L., Morris, N. P., Swartz, R., ... & Cliff, A. (2020). The Unbundled University: Researching emerging models in an unequal landscape. In Mobility, data and learner agency in networked learning (pp. 19-34). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36911-8_2

Taupin, B. (2012). The more things change... Institutional maintenance as justification work in the credit rating industry. M@ n@ gement, (5), 529-562 https://doi.org/10.3917/mana.155.0529

Thompson, S. A., & Miller, K. L. (2018). Disruptive trends in higher education: Leadership skills for successful leaders. Journal of Professional Nursing. 34. 10.1016/j.profnurs.2017.11.008.

Tracey, P., Phillips, N., & Jarvis, O. (2011). Bridging institutional entrepreneurship and the creation of new organizational forms: A multilevel model. Organization science, 22(1), 60-80 https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0522

Upton, S., & Warshaw, J. B. (2017). Evidence of hybrid institutional logics in the US public research university. Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 39(1), 89-103 https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2017.1254380

US Government Accountability Office. (2022). Education Needs to Strengthen Its Approach to Monitoring Colleges' Arrangements with Online Program Managers. Retrieved from: https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104463

Van Marrewijk, A., Clegg, S. R., Pitsis, T. S., & Veenswijk, M. (2008). Managing public–private megaprojects: Paradoxes, complexity, and project design. International journal of project management, 26(6), 591-600 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2007.09.007

Vargo, S., & Lusch, R. (2016). Institutions and axioms: An extension and update of service-dominant logic. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-015-0456-3

Vargo, S. L., Wieland, H., & Akaka, M. A. (2016). Innovation in service ecosystems. Journal of Serviceology, 1(1), 1-5.

Vargo, S. L., Akaka, M. A., & Wieland, H. (2020). Rethinking the process of diffusion in innovation: A service-ecosystems and institutional perspective. Journal of Business Research, 116, 526-534. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.01.038

Voronov, M., & Weber, K. (2020). People, actors, and the humanizing of institutional theory. Journal of Management Studies, 57(4), 873-884 https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12559

Wahid, F., & Sein, M. K. (2014). Steering institutionalization through institutional work: The case of an eProcurement system in Indonesian local government. In 2014 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (pp. 4264-4274). IEEE DOI: 10.1109/HICSS.2014.527

Walji, S., & Czerniewicz, L. (2018). Degrees of (un) ease: Emerging Relationships between Online Programme Management Companies and University Stakeholders in an Unbundling Landscape. Conference Paper, Networked Learning 2018. Retrieved from: https://wcol2019. ie, 1001.

Walton, R. E., & McKersie, R. B. (1991). A behavioral theory of labor negotiations: An analysis of a social interaction system. Cornell University Press

Wekullo, C. S. (2017). Outsourcing in higher education: the known and unknown about the practice. Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 39(4), 453-468. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2017.1330805

Wells, P., & Ingley, C. (2019). Governance and leadership implications for academic professionals in the era of technological disruption. Journal of Management and Governance, 23, 21-32. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10997-018-9424-x

Wiley Higher Ed Services and Solutions: Wiley University Services. Wiley. (2023). Retrieved April 7, 2023, from https://universityservices.wiley.com/

Williamson, B. (2021). Making markets through digital platforms: Pearson, edu-business, and the (e) valuation of higher education. Critical Studies in Education, 62(1), 50-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1737556

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2013). Mass media research. Cengage learning.

Wingo, N. P., Ivankova, N. V., & Moss, J. A. (2017). Faculty perceptions about teaching online: Exploring the literature using the technology acceptance model as an organizing framework. Online Learning, 21(1), 15-35 https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1140242

Yates, L. (2004). What does good education research look like? Some beginnings and debates. In What does good education research look like? Situating a field and its practices (pp. 15–35). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Yin, R. K. (1979). Changing Urban Bureaucracies: How new practices become routinized. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1979.

Yin, R. K. (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. Evaluation, 19(3), 321-332 https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389013497081

Zawacki-Richter, O. (2021). The current state and impact of Covid-19 on digital higher education in Germany. Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies, 3(1), 218-226. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.238

Appendices

Appendix A – VPREC Approval

Dear Maria

I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	
School:	HLC
Title:	
First Reviewer:	Dr. Rita Kop
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Janet Hanson
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Lucilla Crosta, Dr. Marco Ferreira, Dr. Kal Winston

Date of Approval: 4th February 2021

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix B – Interview Schedule

CATEGORY	PROPOSED QUESTIONS + PROBES	LINK TO RQs
Introductions	Connect online and welcome, thank interviewee for participating. Confirm about recording, interview duration, withdraw at any time etc	
Background/ Context	It'd be great to start off by learning about your academic background and professional journey to get to this point (open ended, let them describe) • How long have you been working in this role and what is your responsibility with respect to the OPM partnership?	
Perceptions	I'm interested in overall perceptions about your university's OPM partnership arrangement. • How is it perceived generally? Is it considered a positive arrangement, overall? Has sentiment changed? Who is the biggest advocate? • For example, if I were to ask general academic staff, what would they say about the partnership? (awareness/impact/interest?) • Are there/were there any tensions when bringing the partnership into place? Pushback from any stakeholders, for example? Was it a controversial move? • Where do you stand on this? What are your perceptions of the arrangement? Is it a positive/negative thing for the university/students/staff? Who benefits the most? (probe on why that position, depending on response/approach to leadership) • How do you think these types of University-OPM arrangements will play out in the future?	RQ1 RQ2 RQ3
Role / Impact	What do you think it takes to effectively manage an OPM partnership? • What does managing the partnership involve for you? What type of work/decisions/tasks are required? How much of your role does it take up? What are the key challenges? • How do you manage/balance/juggle the organizational, academic and commercial elements? • Are there others involved in managing the relationship? How are decisions made? • How did you come to have these responsibilities? Was it added to your portfolio/ role created specifically?	RQ1 RQ2

<table>
<tr><td>Purpose/ Impact</td><td>What are the main impacts of the OPM partnership on the university and on your role?
How important is the arrangement to the university? Is it a central part of the institution's strategy?
What would you say are/have been the greatest impact of this OPM partnership on the university?
What are the main complexities or challenges of this partnership for the university? (e.g. an internal change management challenge? Clash of 'cultures'? processes? Speed of action?)
How has it impacted the way decisions are made with respect to programs or students or policies for example? Who calls the shots?
To what extent are academic staff impacted? (Control, autonomy, jobs etc?)</td><td>RQ1
RQ2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Leadership</td><td>What would you say are main skills and capabilities required to effectively lead university-OPM partnership arrangements?
How did you acquire these capabilities? Does this come from your previous academic management experience/professional background?
What are your thoughts on what's required of future academic leaders in terms of skills and capabilities?
How are these types of arrangements changing the role of academic leaders and what's required of them?</td><td>RQ2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Arrangements</td><td>From your experience, how, if at all, has having the OPM partnership impacted decision-making or governance at your university?
Are decisions made differently/by different groups/in different ways when it comes to the programs within the partnership?
Have there been any positive/negative implications/impacts or tensions related to these differences?
Do you approach leadership differently with respect to the OPM arrangement?
What are the main goals or objectives of the university-OPM partnership?
Why are you doing this role? What is your objective/goals related to the university/opm partnership? (leadership approach)</td><td>RQ3</td></tr>
</table>