ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

# COLLEGE LEADERSHIP APPROACH AND IMPACT ON ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING

BY

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The future of learning.

Approval of Dissertation

The undersigned certify that they have read the dissertation entitled

**COLLEGE LEADERSHIP APPROACH AND IMPACT ON ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING**

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**Doctor of Education in Distance Education**

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# Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my wife Heather, this would not have been possible without your relentless support and guidance. You gave me the strength and the desire to be the best person I could be. To my son, Brody, and my daughter, Ainsley, I love you both dearly and can only hope that your mother and I have modeled behaviour that will inspire you to always be passionate to learn.

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Abstract

As the economy continues to transition from the Industrial Age to the Digital Age, employers have a greater need for more people with trained skills and higher levels of education. A college education in today's society is becoming vital as this need for knowledge and skills in the workforce increases, and this trend towards higher educational requirements poses a significant challenge for many prospective students who cannot commit to attending a college campus on a full-time basis due to work and family demands. As well, the resulting increase in student demand requires that colleges and their executives, who have traditionally operated within restrictive administrative parameters and a dependency on local governments, must now approach student access in new and novel ways. Consequently, the role and influence of the college president is especially critical in order to deal with the resulting complex, long-term challenges of leading the evolution of our post-secondary institutes. If these institutes are to change to accommodate these changing external pressures, this change must come from within the colleges, and be embraced by both faculty and administration alike. College presidents must provide the leadership and vision to guide and facilitate these changes.

It is a significant shift for traditional post-secondary institutes to consider a greater focus on online and blended programming when their structures and models were developed according to more traditional educational models (e.g. in-class, F2F programming); however, Canadian colleges must adapt to meet these changing and evolving needs of a growing population of employers as well as prospective students. Despite the cited advantages for student access to online and blended learning, there are still barriers an institute and its leaders must overcome to be successful, with faculty

acceptance consistently cited as one of the leading challenges. Therefore, effective leadership could play a crucial role in the success of post-secondary institutes endeavoring to increasingly include online and blended learning in their institute's long-term strategic plan. The purpose of this study was to explore specific leadership characteristics that enable Canadian College Presidents to influence the growth of online and blended learning.

*Keywords:* polytechnic institutions, leadership approach, distributed leadership, transformational leadership, online and blended learning

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## Definition of Key Terms

**Online and Blended Learning.** Online learning is defined as any form of learning that takes place via computer network (Bates, 2015). Blended learning refers to "the practice of using both online and in-person learning experiences when teaching students." (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013)

**Face-to-face (F2F) Learning.** This refers to a live interaction between a learner and an instructor, where the learner and instructor need to be physically present in a classroom at a specific time and date.

**Distance Education.** The origin of online and blended learning is distance education. The fundamental concept of distance education is that students study in their own time, at the place of their choice, and without face-to-face (F2F) contact with a teacher (Moore, 2013). The terms online and blended learning and distance education may be used interchangeably throughout the study; however, in most cases distance education will be used to describe learning that is asynchronous and based primarily on the use of text-based learning management systems.

**Distributed Leadership.** Distributed leadership is used interchangeably with "shared leadership", "team leadership", and "democratic leadership". It is an organizational quality rather than an individual attribute and more about leadership practice than the leader. For learning and teaching it is a leadership approach in which individuals who trust and respect each other's contributions, collaborate together to achieve identified goals. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an institution (Spillane, 2005).

**Transformational Leadership.** Transformational leadership differs from other leadership approaches in its ability to create a vision that guides its followers through inspiration, and the creation of a connection with the followers' sense of self to that of the collective identity of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

## Chapter 1. Introduction

At this moment in time higher education as it is found to be "irretrievably immersed in a merciless marketplace" (O'Meara, 2015, p. 3). Over fifty years ago Drucker (1969) coined the term "knowledge-based economy" to describe the trend towards occupations that "work with their heads" rather than their hands as a consequence of the expansion of post-secondary education; as the number of graduates increased, so did the expansion of the knowledge-based economy. In a globalized world, as technology becomes the main driving force, knowledge assumes a powerful role in production, making its possession essential for nations if they are to successfully pursue economic growth and competitiveness (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). These massive changes in the economy also affect the way we learn; however, our education institutions are structured for the industrial age, not the digital era (Bates, 2015). According to Gilbert (2005), "Everyone, if they are to have a job, needs the kind of higher order thinking skills that only those in managerial or professional positions formerly needed. We can achieve this only through major structural reform of our education system" (p. 7).

Today, post-secondary institutes continue to face strong pressures to evolve rapidly and most public institutions have historically been slow to respond to external pressures; and their response to the commodification of knowledge is no exception. According to Altbach (2015), "the commodification of education and knowledge will have major implications in terms of how we think about schooling and the ability for people to access education" (p. 4). Economic development has been, and will continue to be, strongly linked to the ability of education systems to adapt to the demands of a knowledge-based society (Bates & Sangra, 2011). In Canada, the crossover between people employed in

service industries surpassed those employed in manufacturing in 1991 (Ehlers & Shneckenberg, 2010). Many other economically advanced countries, even those heavily industrialized like Britain, soon followed. Gilbert (2005) postulates that "…in order to maintain the high living standards of economically developed countries, it is essential to develop knowledge-based industries, and the large proportion of the population receiving post-secondary education helps to feed and stimulate that market" (p. 18). With a growing demand for more methods to access education, driven by this shift in the marketplace towards knowledge as the primary commodity, Canadian colleges are being forced to evolve to meet the changing needs of learners, or risk becoming extinct.

A part of this market-driven, educational evolution will need to address the issue of greater student access since today's post-secondary student is more typically a working adult with a family, commuting to campus or enrolled online, who seeks the education and skills necessary for his or her career (Rabourn, Shoup, & BrckaLorenz, 2015). The traditional, campus-based, classroom model of teaching does not provide the flexibility learners need so that they may achieve their educational goals while balancing the other aspects of their lives. Significant differences in the way the present generation of students learns compared to previous generations include the assumptions that learning is a mobile activity facilitated through the use of digital devices such as cell phones and iPads, and that communication with teachers takes place as much outside the classroom as within it, frequently by means of the same devices (Godfrey & Duke, 2014). The increased availability of distance education via online and blended programs, which are generally designed to serve an off-campus population, can play a strong role in helping to reduce the conflict these competing demands present.

While there are different types of instructional methods available today, the most common is the traditional method where the students and instructors meet F2F in a classroom setting. Online and blended learning, which represents a more recent form of distance education, differs from this to the extent that it does not always require meeting F2F in a formal classroom setting. Online and blended learning is now a key component of many educational institutes, and enrolments in online courses have exceeded a quarter of all post-secondary enrolments in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Keegan (2013) characterized distance education as consisting of the following: "the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner; the influence of an educational organization both in the planning and preparation of learning materials; the use of technical media - print, audio, video or computer; the provision of two-way communication; and, the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process." (p. 50). Simonson, Smaldino, & Svacek (2015) noted that "one fundamental concept of distance education is that students and teachers are separated by distance and sometimes by time" (p. 32). As well, in this particular form of educational delivery, each have a unique role to play as students and teachers other than what is normally required in the classroom. Ultimately, the aim of distance education is to provide instruction in places and times that are convenient for learners rather than teachers or teaching institutions (Simonson, Smaldino, & Svacek, 2015).

Throughout recent history educational institutes have experimented with different learning environments such as correspondence courses, courses on tape, and even televised courses to accommodate the needs of their students (Hannay & Newvine, 2006). Bates (2005) outlined four generations of distance education. The first generation is

characterized by print-based correspondence between the institute and the student, and a lack of direct interaction between the instructor and the student. The second generation incorporated multi-media through printed materials, broadcasting lectures through television, and pre-recorded lectures. Third generation distance education incorporated synchronous two-way communication such as live video conferencing. And the fourth generation is flexible learning based on asynchronous communication that is Internet-based (p. 6). The more recent increased focus on distance education via online and blended learning, however, has represented a significant shift for most post-secondary institutes since their structures and models were developed according to more traditional educational models.

Traditional educational models, in the post-industrial context, typically utilize the technique of on-campus classroom meetings for delivering course information, and students meet at an assigned time and place to partake in class lectures, labs, study groups, and exams. Traditional learning environments provide F2F contact with fellow students and instructors. Distance education, by definition, varies from the traditional educational setting not only due to the physical distance between the learner and their instructor, but also in the nature of the design of distance education (Hsiu-Mei, 2002). Early distance education researcher Otto Peters observed how the first distance education institutes were profit-making ventures motivated to seek efficiencies and economies of scale and he demonstrated how distance education institutes had organized the production of education around key concepts of industrialization: mass production, division of labour, and standardization (Peters, 1999). The most obvious advantage of the industrial model is the ability to produce on a larger scale, and distance education provided this

opportunity - mass delivery to those who may not have the educational opportunities without distance education (e.g. due to their physical separation from the classroom). Holmberg (2005) described distance education as having the unique ability to combine individual teaching with mass production, while at the same time encouraging independence to its learners.

Modern post-secondary institutions have adopted many features of industrial organizations with classes organized at scheduled times in a fixed location based on the assumptions of full-time attendance (Gilbert, 2005). Students registered in a course receive the same curriculum, the same reading material, the same deliverables or assignments, etc. Also, these same institutes have structured their on-campus courses to adopt the 'mass delivery' aspect of distance education, but not necessarily the 'distance' portion. This trend is indicated by the significant increases to class sizes at most post-secondary institutes in the past 30 years. Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley (2010) refer to this phenomenon as "massification" – characterized by the tremendous expansion of enrollments that has taken place in the past three decades. As of 2009 when Altbach's original report was prepared for the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, the number of traditional-aged students enrolled in tertiary education had increased roughly 53 percent since the year 2000 (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010). The report indicates that the response to massification by most institutes has been to hire more instructors, and enlarge existing infrastructure (as examples), with far less emphasis placed on increasing distance-learning offerings (such as online and blended learning) as a means to address the ever-growing demand. Gilbert (2005) states that the radical change that online and blended learning represents is unlikely to come from traditional

universities since they "…seek ways to integrate new technology within the parameters of the traditional model, and look for changes at the margins, in a slow and incremental manner, that sustain the existing goals and values of the organization" (p. 23) Willcox et. al. (2016) similarly state that "…higher education operates within an established system for its educational mission. It relies on established technologies such as textbooks and established delivery models such lectures, seminars, and laboratories. Its economic model is based on tuition for courses organized to fit semester time frames, with the completion of a designated set of courses required for conferral of a degree." (p. 27) This model has had political support in many countries, including both Canada and the United States through educational subsidies of public dollars that provide funding to both the institutes as well as the students. As such, the long-standing and socially-engrained nature of this system makes it difficult to transform; however, the innovations associated with online and blended learning are changing the existing higher education teaching paradigm by offering alternatives to many of the traditional approaches to education including: textbooks and lectures, the economics of tuition, competency assessment and credentialing, and faculty training for teaching (Willcox, Sarma, & Lippel, 2016).

The traditional, lecture-based (e.g. F2F) methodology of teaching has been challenged on many fronts in recent years; not just by those seeking greater access and content-delivery flexibility. Research has shown that different learners have different needs and learn in different ways; to have a truly rewarding and enriching learning experience, these factors must be considered in both the design of the course as well as the delivery (Gurian, 2011). Most people still think of teaching in the traditional context; as taking place in a formal educational environment where the instructor stands in front of a

classroom of students; however, teaching takes place in many different types of settings and takes different forms. Ramsden (2003) said of teaching that, "the aim of teaching is simple: it is to make student learning possible" (p. 7).

As relatively straight-forward as it seems to teach or to learn anything, it is not always or often the case. While teaching has often been recognized as an art, it also has historically been described as a science. Herbert Simon characterized teaching as a science, but as a design science not a natural science: "The natural sciences are concerned with how things are… design, on the other hand is concerned with how things ought to be" (Simon, 1969). Design will have a pragmatic impact on how students approach learning (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Regardless of the continual evolution of teaching strategies and delivery methods, the goal in teaching remains unchanged, "the imperative for teaching is that learners develop their personal knowledge and capabilities" (Laurillard, 2012). Given the emerging need in education to address the issue of increased access to a larger global demographic, the adoption of distance education via online and blended learning is a viable remedy given the evidence that suggests the effectiveness of distance education compares favorably with classroom-based (traditional) instruction (Wick, Yeh, & Gajewski, 2015; Sibirskaya, Popkova, Oveshnikova, & Tarasova, 2018; Nguyen, 2015). With government and public education institutions feeling the responsibility to ensure access to education along with the growing demand for higher and adult education, online and blended programs provide a strong option for providing greater student access (Knight, 2015).

The change required at an institute to support the integration of online and blended programs represents a radical change for most. A significant shift needs to take place

across an organization and those types of wide-spread, fundamental shifts are usually led by a transformational style of leadership. Transformational leadership differs from other leadership approaches in its ability to create a vision that guides its followers through inspiration, and the creation of a connection with the followers' sense of self to that of the collective identity of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The approach as conceptualized by Burns (1978) is that "an effective leader should be capable of creating societal changes in expressing and defining the transformational leader as a person who takes care of his or her followers, and mobilizes their forces to meet the needs and their potential" (p. 230).

Transformational leadership consists of four components including: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Northouse, 2007). Transformational leaders often create a positive organizational climate, reach goals more easily, and increase the levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment of stakeholders as a result of motivating followers and paying close attention to them (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009). The fundamental change and depth of commitment that is required to both implement the technology/infrastructure required to support online and blended education, and garner the support of faculty and staff to participate in, and embrace such a paradigm shift is monumental for most institutes. As a result, most institutes are too cautious in adapting technology and seem satisfied to use it as a method to enhance traditional F2F teaching, rather than using it to transform the way teaching is designed and delivered (Bates & Sangra, 2011). Transformational leadership could be critical in terms of leading the type of innovative

change that is required to overcome the many obstacles to online and blended learning at these institutes.

While effective leadership is essential for the adoption of quality online and blended programs, leadership from one individual alone will not result in success. Rather than a strongly directive leadership from an individual, it needs to be a style that facilitates a collaborative approach to the setting and execution of goals (Bates & Sangra, 2011). Leadership will need to be distributed throughout the institute as support and acceptance from a wide range of internal stakeholders will be necessary for success. Distributed leadership is an organizational quality rather than an individual attribute and more about leadership practice than the leader. For learning and teaching it is a leadership approach in which individuals who trust and respect each other's contributions, collaborate together to achieve identified goals. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an institute (Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership could be critical in terms of supporting and implementing innovative changes at these institutes. In recent years, the literature has been growing on a distinct form of distributed leadership and how it has been utilized in schools to help spread the potentially burdensome tasks of leadership and management. However, the application of transformational and distributed leadership approaches to online and blended learning remains relatively untested in a formal study.

**Background of the Study**

A modern university has to balance three competing factors: access, quality, and cost (Daniel, 2013). If student access is to increase without additional cost or a reduction in quality, online and blended learning can be a key in balancing these three factors. Studies have shown that the general public is becoming dissatisfied with the traditional

educational offering of teacher-centered, in-class instructional delivery and, as a result, the growth of online enrollments continues to rise and exceed that of overall higher education enrollments (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Institutes like Open University of the United Kingdom (OUUK) represent a new vision of independence for distance education, and were founded in response to this dissatisfaction based on the belief that "communications technology could bring high quality degree-level learning to people who had not had the opportunity to attend traditional campus universities" (Open University, 2015). In Canada, the University of British Columbia is in the midst of redesigning most of its large lecture classes into blended classes (Farrar, 2014), and the University of Ottawa is planning to have approximately 25 percent of its courses online or blended by 2020 (University of Ottawa, 2013). As anxiety increases with escalating tuition costs and student debt, there are mounting concerns about fiscal pressures driving more students to work, which could adversely affect their ability to stay in school (Boehner & McKeon, 2003). This is a concerning trend since statistics show that in Canada in 2009, 82% of the adult population aged 25 to 64 with a tertiary education were employed, compared with 55% of this age group with less than high school education (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Online and blended education has provided benefits for learners of all ages, and, most importantly, has facilitated and encouraged lifelong learning by increasing access to education (de Freitas, 2014). At the same time, the cost of traditional resident education has continued to rise (History of Distance Learning, 2014). With the online classroom changing the way people are learning, and the rising cost of traditional on-campus education, the conversation is beginning to center more around the usefulness,

advantages and disadvantages of the physical classroom (Ledergerber, 2014). With government budgets becoming further strained, the longevity of many traditional universities is questionable (Duderstadt, 2009).

While online and blended learning can present their own set of unique challenges from several perspectives (technical, strategic, logistical), they are effective at addressing the issues of access, and cost-efficiency faced by traditional institutes. Norman Vaughan discussed two strategies institutes had taken to realize reductions in operating costs attributable to the implementation of online and blended learning (Vaughan, 2007). The first strategy involves increasing student enrollments with little or no change in course expenditures, and the second strategy keeps student enrollments the same while reducing the instructional resource cost for the course. With the second strategy, the predominant technique employed by institutes was to transfer instructional tasks from personnel to technology thus reducing costs by an average of 40%. Blended learning also results in cost savings through the reduction in physical space requirements since at least some of the learning takes place away from the physical classroom. The growing demand for online and blended learning shows no signs of slowing down and the academic community must continue to adapt to the evolving demands of today's complex learners (History of Distance Learning, 2014). Duderstadt (2000) states that "not only will social and technical change be a challenge to the American university, it will be the watchword for the years ahead. With change will come unprecedented opportunities for those universities with the vision, the wisdom, and the courage to lead in the twenty-first century" (p. 10).

From an academic leadership perspective, this study will determine 'what are the contributing factors that lead colleges and universities to move towards non-traditional educational delivery methods such as online and blended programs, and what role does transformational and distributed leadership play in influencing and empowering this move?' Some evidence has shown that cost-reduction is not seen as the primary motivator; rather, improved student access, particularly outside of the institute's traditional service area, growth of continuing and/or professional education, increasing the rate of degree completion, and enhancing the value of the college/university brand are the top reasons for offering online courses and programs (Allen & Seaman, 2003). A survey conducted in 2016 of American post-secondary institutes of varying types and sizes with distance offerings, showed a steady, positive trend in the attitudes of Chief Academic Officers towards the strategic inclusion of online education in their long-term planning for their respective institutes (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Despite the cited advantages to online and blended learning, there are still many barriers an institute and its leaders must overcome to be successful. Faculty acceptance has consistently been cited as one of the leading challenges institutional leaders face. Allen & Seaman (2016) summarize it best by stating "Even after a decade of substantial growth in the number of schools with distance offerings and the number of students taking these courses, the level of skepticism among faculty has remained very high. A continuing failure of online education has been the inability to convince its most important audience – higher education faculty members – of its worth." (p. 26) Perceptions of the value of online and blended learning as compared with traditional F2F learning have also not been consistently positive over the past decade. While results

from Allen & Seaman's surveys had indicated a pattern of slow but steady improvement between the years of 2003 to 2012, the results for the years since have been less positive (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Another issue cited with online and blended learning is lower retention rates. As colleges offer more online and blended learning programs and student enrollments in those programs continues to rise, educators continue to report course drop out and failure rates higher than those for their traditional, campus-based counterparts (Nash, 2005). Given the numerous and varying challenges that must be mitigated and overcome in order to have a successful distance education portfolio that includes online and blended programs, effective leadership will play a crucial role in the success of post-secondary institutes endeavoring to increasingly include online and blended learning in their institute's long-term strategic plan.

**Statement of the Problem**

Owston (2013) states that "there is a need for research investigating why blended learning, despite its many inherent advantages, has not been scaled up successfully in very many institutes" (p. 1). Considering the cited challenges with implementing and growing online and blended learning, a strong leader with a clear vision and strategic plan that can address the challenges and solicit the support needed to be successful is a key factor. Garrison (2004) states that transformational leadership needs to be exhibited by senior administration to fully realize the benefits and overcome the challenges associated with blended learning in higher education institute. Vaughan furthers this argument stating that the required leadership consists of three interrelated core elements: vision, interpersonal skills, and courage. The vision for online and blended learning must be embraced and supported by the stakeholders, and be in the best interests of the

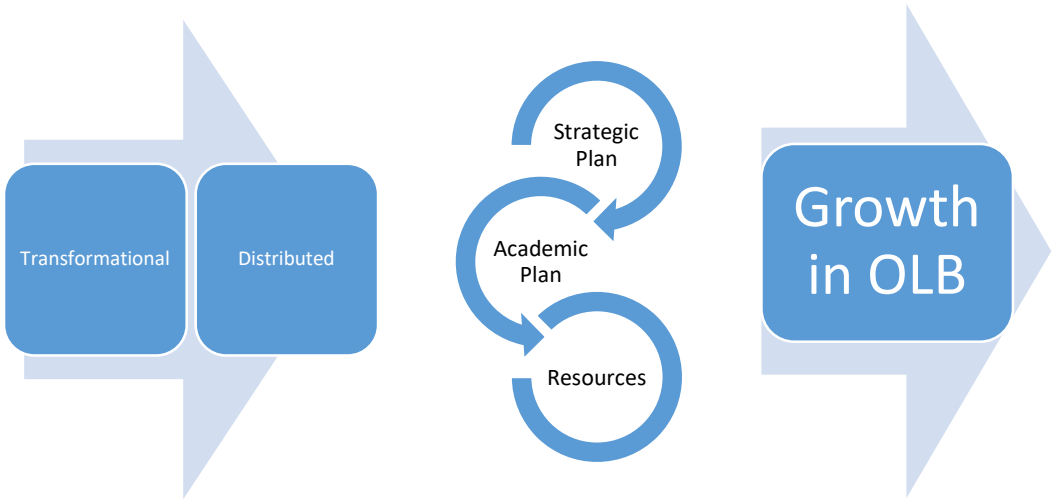
institute; the senior administrative team must possess the interpersonal skills to work collaboratively with others to share ideas and reconcile conflicting views; and finally, these leaders must have the courage to 'stay the course' and be willing to approach things in a novel way (Vaughan, 2007). The general problem addressed in the study was that the complex challenges associated with leadership of online and blended learning are combined, in the context of Canadian colleges, with internal organizational structures and cultures that can obstruct, rather than facilitate, effective leadership. This study will investigate if and how Canadian college presidents practice transformational and distributed leadership within their colleges to influence the growth of online and blended learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this multiple case study of Canadian college presidents is to describe if, and to what extent, these college leaders practice transformational and distributed leadership within their institutes, and whether these approaches to leadership serve to support the implementation and growth of online and blended learning. Understanding how leadership can be a catalyst in the growth of online and blended learning programs could be a key aspect in not only creating and executing a strategic plan that supports and encourages the growth of online and blended learning, but also in hiring the appropriate leader to bring this plan to fruition. Figure 1.1 maps the conceptual model developed for the study. This study will evaluate the existence or lack of transformational and distributed leadership approaches, and consider this in reference to the planning and implementation of online and blended learning.

**Figure 1**

*The Influence of Transformational and Distributed Leadership Approaches in Planning for Online and Blended Learning*




There have been institutes in recent years that have addressed a growing demand for learning opportunities via online and blended learning exceptionally well; and this has led to effective and sustained growth within their respective schools and institutes (The Canadian Higher Education Database, 2012). This study will endeavor to identify the factors, from a leadership perspective, that led these individuals to be successful in their approach, as little is understood about the particular traits necessary to provide effective leadership specific to this type of educational delivery. This study postulates that an effective vision that promotes growth in online and blended learning and garners the support of the staff through distribution of power, authority, and communication may be influenced by a transformational and distributed leadership strategy.

**Rationale**

It was over twenty years ago that Otto Peters referred to distance education as an industrialized form of teaching and learning. He argued that the industrialized society of that time had so many needs for education that conventional models or systems could not satisfy them, and therefore, new industrial techniques were needed (Peters, 1998). The marketplace for education is growing significantly as more people share a pressing need for new educational and training systems (Docebo, 2014). The explosion of growth in demand for online learning has led to a whole new audience of users who now span the globe (Docebo, 2014). Despite the apparent success of online and blended learning, many Western academics fear that academic standards will be compromised to meet the growing demand (Baggaley, 2007). Regardless of the pockets of resistance to this educational shift, the rapid development of online and blended learning must continue as it is vital to servicing the growing needs of both learners and educators.

If this significant increase in demand is to be addressed, certain factors need to be examined to identify how this growth might be achieved and what types of leaders would be best-suited, specifically at the presidential level, to define the institutional initiatives that will ultimately satisfy the demand. The research focused on the two core study questions:

- Can the characteristics and behaviors of transformational leadership and distributed leadership be identified among presidents at Canadian colleges with successful online and blended learning programs?

- What characterizes the relationship, if one exists, between transformational and distributed leadership, and the growth of online and blended learning at these colleges?

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this multi-case study, using Canadian college presidents as the cases, is to describe if and how these college leaders practice transformational and distributed leadership within their institutes to influence the growth of online and blended learning. The results of this study will provide college boards with direction towards leadership competencies that should be present in candidates who would be best suited to lead colleges through the global shift towards online and blended learning.

More students are working while they attend college or returning to college after working for a period of time after high school (Boehner & McKeon, 2003). The marketplace for graduates/workers is also changing as employers are moving away from traditional methods of labour toward more knowledge-based industries (Ramsden, 2003). To meet this demand, a greater number of workers with post-secondary education will be needed, which, in turn, will place demands on colleges and universities to provide even more graduates in the future. The role of leadership will be vital to help colleges transition through this evolution. The results of this study will better prepare college boards to effectively identify leadership characteristics that are most conducive to leading colleges through this global shift in education.

**Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

The assumptions of this study are:

1. The president of a college has impact on the ability of an institute to grow its online and blended learning offerings.
2. The 13 Canadian publicly funded colleges and institutes recognized by Polytechnics Canada are representative of the college population in Canada.
3. The president of a college is involved in and/or directly contributed to the growth or the sustainability of the current online and blended learning at that college.

The limitations of this study are:

1. The interviews were limited to only the presidents.
2. The study was limited to the number of willing respondents.
3. The variety of college artefacts that were used in the study were limited by those that were available publicly and those that were willingly shared as part of the research.
4. Student achievement was not measured, and no quantitative measure of the benefits of online and blended learning were researched.
5. Although revenue and/or enrolments from online and blended learning would be a useful variable to consider, those figures were not available to the general public and therefore could not be a factor in this study.
6. Scheduling/timing limitations on the part of both the researcher and study participants were a limiting factor in the amount and quality of data that could be gathered.
7. A qualitative case study can create a collection of data that is open to interpretation by others, resulting in conflicting understandings of the initial findings.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the topics of online and blended learning including the history and evolution, and barriers to its implementation, the role of transformational and distributed leadership in educational reform, and the role of the college president. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study, including the data collection and data analysis approach. In Chapter 4 the results are analyzed and discussed, and the resultant themes are considered in the context of the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusions, implications, and limitations of the study, and establishes a level of inference from the findings.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

A thorough literature review is critical to any social research project and will form the backbone of the research as it allows the researcher to 'view' the topic though the eyes of those who have previously studied it, and/or researched related issues. Hence the researcher can discern what issues related to the topic are worth exploring, where the largest areas of agreement or disagreement lie among scholars and other researchers, and what areas could be augmented with further research. This literature review, as such, will be based on the topics of online and blended learning - the history and evolution, the role of leadership in educational reform, barriers to the implementation of distance education, and the role of the college president in Canada. These topics will be explored while keeping the following themes in mind: the identification of common leadership strategies of presidents of Canadian colleges, and the influence those strategies had on growing online and blended learning; the rationale or influencing factors that led these leaders to focus their efforts on growing online and blended learning at their institute; and, challenges faced in implementing online and blended learning.

There is significant literature and research identifying common traits among leaders in a variety of disciplines and roles, including education; some of it dating back as early as the 1940s (Stogdill, 1948). Although the contexts vary somewhat; cultural variables, gender variables, varying leadership roles, and applications (business, government, education as examples), and leadership styles (servant, transformational, transactional as examples), the purpose of the inquiry is the same: to identify commonalities. In this research endeavor, the central question is 'What characterizes the relationship, if one

exists, between transformational and distributed leadership, and the growth of online and blended learning.'

**Online and Blended Learning – Its History and Evolution**

The origin of online and blended learning is distance education. Technological advancement in the past few decades has increased the overall amount of information available, at the same time improving accessibility to that information. These general shifts throughout society also apply to education and have caused students to be more demanding and more knowledgeable about alternatives for their education. Combined with demographic trends, political forces, economic factors, the need for lifelong learning, and the changing emphases in teaching and learning, the demand for education is greater than it ever was and educators have at their disposal more tools than ever before, such as the Internet and the science of learning and teaching (Ledergerber, 2014). Educators have observed two complementary movements in the educational landscape: the merging of online teaching and learning into the stream of everyday practices at post-secondary, and the increasingly relevant role of online and blended programs in institutions of higher education (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). Both of these have caused reactions throughout academic communities; and while there are many who feel that online education provides an opportunity to overcome the limitations of traditional classroom instruction, there are many others who feel that online education threatens the very essence of quality education (Tremblay, Lalancette, & Roseveare, 2012).

Online and blended education has a long history, but it wasn't until the widespread use of computers and the Internet that online and blended learning became significantly

easier and faster, and more widely accepted in educational institutes as many now offer full curricula online. Traditional distance learning morphed into different types of learning such as hybrid or blended courses where the course requires a physical, on-site presence at some point throughout the course. The definition of distance education has also been refined and redefined over the years. Most definitions, however, specify that distance education is teaching and learning that occurs asynchronously – the learner(s) and instructor separated by time and space – using a variety of technical media to support the teaching and learning (Parsad & Lewis, 2008).

For many students today online and blended learning is probably their only experience or exposure to distance learning when, in fact, distance education began back in the mid-nineteenth century at approximately the same time as the industrialization of society (Keegan, 2013). It wasn't until there was an expedient and regular postal service and a transport system that distance education even became possible (Keegan, 2013). While distance education then consisted of printed materials being sent through the mail, which was the main method of communication, teaching, and learning, technology has played a major role in changing how higher education institutes operate. Initially the main benefit to distance learning was that the student did not have to be physically present in a classroom. Current students expect more from distance learning – more availability of courses and better quality (Forrester & Parkinson, 2004).

In the years between the World Wars (1918-46), radio broadcasting licenses were granted to 202 colleges, universities, and school boards; however, at this time distance education was still struggling for acceptance (Nasseh, 1997). Access to higher education was limited due to financial constraints, but also in terms of entrance requirements.

Many elite universities were highly selective; however, after the Second World War, the demand for graduates increased as most economically advanced countries required a higher educated workforce. This resulted in a steady increase in the number of post-secondary institutes and an increase in demand for distance education. While distance education was starting to experience significant growth, this increase in visibility was leading to new questions arising about learner characteristics, students' needs, and effectiveness (Watkins, 1991). As a result of the quest for answers to these questions, research initiatives began to emerge in the mid-twentieth century, such as the work conducted by Childs over the course of several decades in the area of correspondence study as an educational method (Nasseh, 1997).

During the 1960s and 1970s, traditional higher education was experiencing a number of new pressures as the general public was becoming less satisfied with traditional educational institutes (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). Society was becoming more socially and economically mobile (Gumport, Iannozzi, Shaman, & Zemsky, 1997), interest was increasing in more informal and non-traditional forms of education as exemplified by the founding of The Open University in the UK, more time was being dedicated to career-oriented activities (Gumport, Iannozzi, Shaman, & Zemsky, 1997), and the cost of traditional resident education was increasing significantly (History of Distance Learning, 2014). Britain's 'Open University' was a leader in bringing a new vision of independence for distance education. It was founded by the serving government at the time based on the belief that "communications technology could bring high quality degree-level learning to people who had not had the opportunity to attend traditional campus universities." (About the OU, 2015). The Open University in the UK played a

significant role in the development of much of the important research in distance learning and its foundation helped to drastically improve distance education (History of Distance Learning, 2014). At the same time, new communication technologies were being developed, the design of instructional materials was improving significantly, there was a growing sophistication in the use of printed materials, and the support services for distance students was significantly improved (Keegan, 2013).

According to Holmberg (2005), serious study of distance education was rare until the 1970s and 80s. In the 1980s, distance education emerged as a standard component of the provision of higher education in many systems (Ding, 1999). During that same time-period, UNESCO statistics showed that 10 million students, most of them adults, studied at a distance, some in nearly every country of the world (Keegan, 2013). This led to sudden and exponential growth in the literature of distance education (Ding, 1999), the foundation of a number of academic journals, and the development of research in sub-fields like course design, economics of distance education, student support services, and media in distance education (Keegan, 2013). Where correspondence had previously dominated, there was now a more prevalent use of various media to deliver educational content. As such, the term 'distance education' was officially adopted in 1982 when the International Council for Correspondence Education changed its name to the International Council for Distance Education (Holmberg, 2005).

The move towards a knowledge-driven economy has led to a transformation in the manner in which we discover, keep, and share knowledge. Traditional academic structures are too rigid to accommodate the shifting forces of education (decrease in public funding, student-centered learning, etc.). We are witnessing a significant paradigm

shift in the very nature of higher education enterprises, which will demand substantial rethinking and reworking on the part of our institutions (Duderstadt, 2009). Davidson (2017), states that many academics are traditionalists and their respective institutions revere their traditions and are rewarded for them. Many approaches that are currently being championed ultimately represent a misguided understanding of how learning actually happens; that iPads cannot be "…dumped into conventional classrooms without changing teaching or assessment methods and putting traditional lecture courses online and grading them by automated multiple-choice testing systems simply digitizes nineteenth-century assumptions about standardized learning, narrow specialization, and passive pedagogy." (Davidson, 2017, p. 89) The profile of a college student has changed and is more typically a working adult with family, commuting to a campus or enrolling online, who seeks the education and skills necessary for his or her career (Duderstadt, 2009). With government budgets becoming further strained, the longevity of many traditional, classroom-based universities is questionable (Ledergerber, 2014). The growing demand for distance education shows no signs of slowing down and the academic community must continue to adapt (History of Distance Learning, 2014). In Canada, the proportion of adults aged 25 to 64 with post-secondary education increased from 46% in 2005 to 55% in 2015, the highest rate among OECD countries. At the same time, the proportion of individuals with less than high school completion decreased, from 15% in 2005 to 10% in 2015 (Statistics Canada , 2017). In a knowledge-based economy, there is an increasing demand for higher qualifications in the workforce which subsequently places a higher demand on post-secondary institutes.

There have been several institutes (The Canadian Higher Education Database, 2012) in recent years that have addressed this growing demand for learning opportunities via online programs successfully; and this has led to effective and sustained growth within their respective schools and institutes. As the competition to recruit new students and retain current students' increases, effective leadership will play an increasingly greater role in institutes that offer online and blended learning. Duderstadt (2000) states that "…the forces of change upon the contemporary university, driven by social change, economic imperatives, and technology, may be far beyond the adaptive capacity of our current educational paradigms. We may have reached the point of crisis in higher education when it is necessary to reconstruct the paradigm of the university from its most fundamental elements, perhaps even to reinvent the university" (p. 261).

**The Role of Leadership in Educational Reform**

An objective of this study is to further the understanding of the reflective experiences of college presidents and to determine whether or not they have positively influenced the growth of online and blended learning at their institute. The current post-secondary environment requires online and blended learning leaders to be well-rounded; to possess good people skills; to understand the adoption process for emerging technologies and innovation; to be knowledgeable about course design processes, essential teaching and learning theories, and characteristics of adult learners and traditional-age students; to be able to manage change; and to understand and be able to apply salient leadership qualities (Nworie, 2012).

Leadership is generally defined as the ability to influence and persuade others to agree on the purpose of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). However, Gardner

(1993) defines leadership as "the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 2). Leithwood & Jantzi (2009) expands on this notion of persuasion and purpose, describing leadership in the following manner: at the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence. Thus, it may be said that leaders mobilize and work with others to articulate and achieve shared intentions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). They go on to describe leadership as involving social relations and ends, purpose, direction, and influence. Leadership, therefore, is contextual and contingent on the setting. Although there have been many different conceptual models in the field of leadership, transformational and distributed leadership have played a dominant role in educational administration in North America over the past three decades (Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Spillane, Winter 2005). For the purposes of this study, transformational and distributed leadership theories, and their influence on educational change and reform will be investigated.

According to Hallinger (2003), globalization and technology have resulted in a rapidly-changing landscape in education over the past 30 years. The top-down, policy-driven changes that characterized the 1980s were giving way in the 1990s to educational trends such as empowerment, shared leadership and organizational learning (Hallinger, 2003). Transformational and distributed leadership can play a crucial role in affecting educational reform in a variety of ways; the most relevant aspect for this study being its ability to influence, motivate, and empower followers to move toward a common goal. Transformational and distributed leadership also can help faculty to solve problems more

effectively by incorporating new and emerging technology into learning, and creating innovative ways to work in "highly interactive and collaborative environments while avoiding the pitfalls of wasted collegiality" (Cashin, et al., 2000). In a transformational and distributed setting, staff members are encouraged to talk, observe, critique and plan together; which leads to a collective sense of responsibility and involvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). Given the noted barriers of 'lack of support' and 'resistance to institutional change' (Berge & Muilenburg, 2009) when considering distance learning implementation, transformational leadership could provide the motivation and collective vision required to garner the support needed among teachers and other faculty. In their book "An Administrator's Guide to Online Education", Shelton and Saltsman (2005) suggest that "upper-level administrative support is necessary to bring about the required organizational change within the institute" (p. 39). In order for online and blended programs, to be integrated into the campus structure and truly accepted into academic culture, they need a champion to communicate the possibilities and promote implementation (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). Interestingly, this would suggest that online programs are 'add-on's' or complementary to F2F /campus-based programs rather than their own, stand-alone entities. Duderstadt, 2009, states that colleges and universities, in their attempt to respond to a rapidly changing world, are doing so via traditional paradigms; new programs are built up over old ones like archaeological layers, and he suggests that "the profound nature and rapid pace of the changes occurring in our society will demand corresponding transformations in social institutions such as the university if they are to continue to serve future generations" (p. 3).

Transformational leadership differs from other leadership approaches in its ability to create a vision that guides its followers through inspiration, and the creation of a connection with the followers' sense of self to that of the collective identity of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In contrast, distributed leadership is an organizational quality, rather than an individual attribute (Spillane, 2005). Spillane (2005) goes on to state that "distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures", and stresses the importance of the interactions between school leaders, followers, and their situation (p. 145). Distributed leadership seeks to provide a more inclusive notion of leadership that builds systematic, multi-facetted and collaborative leadership capacity and sees all academics as leaders. As with other leadership models, the context in which distributed leadership occurs as well as the presence of a culture of academic autonomy is of utmost importance. In their 2012 report of distributed leadership in the Australian higher education sector, Jones, Harvey, Lefoe, and Ryland provided the following description of the major elements of distributed leadership in the context of learning and teaching (pp. 21-22):

> Distributed leadership for learning and teaching is a leadership approach in which individuals who trust and respect each other's contributions, collaborate together to achieve identified goals. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an institution. It is an approach in which reflective practice is an integral part enabling action to be critiqued, challenged and developed through cycles of planning, action, reflection and assessment and re-planning. It happens most effectively when people

> at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise. It needs resources that support and enable collaborative environments together with a flexible approach to space, time and finance which occur as a result of diverse contextual settings in an institution. Through shared and active engagement, distributed leadership can result in the development of leadership capacity to sustain improvements in teaching and learning.

Unlike transformational leadership, which relies primarily on the overall influence and vision of a single leader, the contribution of a 'bottom-up' approach to change and development is central to distributed leadership. This approach, however, requires that the involved parties embrace change rather than avoid it. As such, for the purposes of this study, each of these leadership approaches could play a critical role in the growth and promotion of online and blended education – transformational leadership to influence and motivate faculty and staff to embrace change; and distributed leadership to put in place a structure that builds individual leadership capability in learning and teaching, and increases academics' awareness of their contribution to leadership across the institute.

**Barriers to Online and Blended Learning**

When looking at leadership in post-secondary institutes as it relates to online and blended education, it is both relevant and important to also consider the barriers, whether perceived or real, attitudinal, logistical, or technical to implementing this type of non-traditional offering. Despite all of the previously-mentioned advantages to online and blended learning, there are many studies that detail the critical barriers that would impact the ability of leadership to be successful in implementing this type of educational change

at their institute. According to Berge & Muilenburg (2009), impediments to online teaching and learning can be situational, epistemological, philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, technical, social, and/or cultural and can include issues such as "faceless" teaching, fear of the imminent replacement of faculty by computers, faculty culture, high cost of materials, technical challenges, resistance to change, and lack of technological assistance (Berge & Muilenburg, 2009). Many surveys have found that a majority of faculty still believe that online and blended learning is inferior in quality to F2F instruction; however, there is no scientifically-based evidence to support this opinion (Jaschik & Letterman, 2014).

Maguire (2005) conducted a literature review of barriers and motivators to faculty participation in online and blended learning and chose thirteen published research studies ranging in dates from 1997 to 2003, all set in higher education institutions primarily in the Unites States and ranging from community colleges to four-year institutes (Maguire, 2005). The findings of the review reported the following as contributing factors to concerns of faculty regarding participation in teaching online: a lack of standards for online courses, the threat of fewer jobs, a decline in usage of full-time faculty which faculty believe results in a decline in quality of faculty, lack of time, lack of institutional support, lack of scholarly respect in the areas of promotion and tenure, and a lack of training (Maguire, 2005). Mitchell, and Geva-May (2009) reported similar findings in their study which sought to explore attitudes towards and affecting online learning implementation. Their hypothesis stated "…faculty concerns about implementing OL (online learning) are affected by attitudes related to four barriers, identified as important in the distance education literature, and used as variables in this study: intellectual

reluctance, support, change, and cost-benefit." (pp. 84-5) Their research questions tested the hypothesis by asking which of these four variables were perceived as more or less influential in online learning implementation, and what is the degree of acceptance or resistance toward online learning as indicated by respondents' attitudes toward the four variables (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009). Ultimately the study's findings supported the hypothesis that attitudes towards online learning implementation are influenced by the four barriers identified in the distance education literature in the following order related to 'degree of concern': institutional change, support, cost-benefit, intellectual reluctance and job change. Of particular relevance to decision-makers were the findings that a relationship exists between attitudes and position (faculty or administrator), subject of instruction, and level of experience with online learning implementation (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009).

According to Allen and Seaman (2006), there has been greater acceptance of online and blended learning in recent years by institutional decision-makers, as evidenced by higher levels of institutional involvement; however, the increase in faculty acceptance lags behind (Allen & Seaman, 2006). In order to promote and successfully implement online and blended learning, many factors must be considered and mitigated from both an interests and values perspective, as well as the technological and administrative perspective that is prevalent in the field. Willcox et. al. (2016) said the following regarding acceptance and growth of online and blended learning: "Change agents are needed within interested higher education institutions to lead the actual design, development, and implementation of the innovations in local settings. Communities require leadership. No single "agent" will be enough. The "lonely champion" model

generally leads to isolating the innovation and preventing it from scaling; a core team must be built around change implementation to build mass and seek additional faculty buy-in. (p. 28)

**The Role of the College President**

Leadership in colleges is critical to the effective operation of institutes and the success of faculty, staff, and students. A growing concern of most academic stakeholders is the ability or preparation of college presidents to be effective leaders. Research on college presidents often focuses on the leaders of 4-year institutions. According to Eddy (2010), to be effective, community college presidents must understand what leadership is, particularly as it applies to higher education (Eddy, 2010). They must also understand the evolution of the role of the president over the last 30 years, from "manager" or "builder" in the early years to the more recent position of "motivator." They must be creative and charismatic and they must recognize the importance of exerting leadership in four key areas: (1) interpreting and communicating the college mission and goals; (2) creating a climate that encourages people and groups to work with the college; (3) establishing systems of governance that enable colleges to operate efficiently and effectively; and (4) providing educational leadership (Eddy, 2010). As the role has morphed and changed over the years, so too has the educational landscape. Today's college president must consider strategies to keep his/her institute current with both technological advances, as well as a changing student demographic that is looking for new and innovative ways to achieve their desired educational goals.

Kanter (2011) stressed, "The best CEOs do it. Effective entrepreneurs do it. Middle managers who become change agents do it" (p. 74). The "it" Kanter refers to is

convening: bringing groups together to tackle big issues and commit to action. Eddy (2010) examined the modern community college presidential leadership role and highlighted the emphasis on leading change and observed that "college presidents serve an important function in guiding these institutions in turbulent times. As college leaders, presidents act to help campus members create meaning during periods of uncertainty" (p. 157). In a context of perpetual change, the ideals of collaboration, mentoring, coaching, and servant-leading are gaining foothold in how educational leaders lead (Hickman, 2010). Rarely in the histories of their institutions have college leaders been under such pressure to solve a range of emerging challenges such as declining enrolments and stressed budgets to incorporating online learning, into traditional structures (Selingo, 2014).

Given the complexity of the position, those who assume the role of college president would benefit from a multifaceted skillset to help ensure their success.

## Chapter 3. Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to research if and how Canadian college presidents practice transformational and distributed leadership within their institute to influence the implementation or growth of online and blended learning. The study identified what specific actions, at the presidential level, were most common at Canadian colleges with the greatest number of online and blended programs. The objective was to study active leaders within a defined community and analyze their leadership and influence on the growth of online and blended learning. The 13 Canadian publicly funded colleges and institutes that are recognized by Polytechnics Canada were evaluated for this study based on current number of online and blended learning offerings in an effort to identify 3 study candidates.

As such, the selected methodology for this study was a qualitative, multiple case study of the influence of transformational and distributed leadership approaches on the growth of online and blended learning in the chosen institutes' strategic planning as defined and/or influenced by the current president. This qualitative, multiple case study approach involved studying three instrumental bounded cases to develop a deeper understanding of college presidents and their leadership approaches. Baxter & Jack (2008) detail the importance of "binding the case" to avoid a common pitfall with case study research which is for researchers to attempt to answer too broad a question. They state several suggestions for binding a case: (a) by time and place; (b) by time and activity; (c) by definition and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study was bound by definition and context; three presidents were selected based on their institute's online and blended learning offerings, and their leadership approaches studied in the context of

transformational and distributed characteristics. Through an exploration of if, and how, these leaders practice transformational and distributed leadership, it was necessary to triangulate a number of data sources in order to uncover multiple meanings. Yin (2003) identified six primary sources of evidence for case study research and although not all must be used, each were considered based on their relevance to, and availability in this particular study (Yin, 2003):

1. Documentation,
2. Archival Records,
3. Interviews,
4. Direct Observation,
5. Participant Observation,
6. Physical Artifacts.

Documentation, as a source of evidence, may consist of letters, memoranda, agendas, and study reports, and is considered to be stable (available for repeated viewing in a consistent state), un-obtrusive (exists prior to the study), precise, and broad-ranging in its ability to cover extended time periods. The validity of documents, however, should be carefully reviewed to avoid erroneous inclusion in the study. The most important use of documents is to corroborate evidence gathered from other sources however the over-reliance on documents as evidence in case studies has been criticized (Tellis, 1997).

Archival records share similar benefits and limitations to the documentation data source; they are precise, unobtrusive and broad-ranging; however, also

must be verified for accuracy and origin to determine reliability before inclusion in the study.

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information and can take several forms: open-ended (the researcher could ask the informants opinion of events of facts), focused (the informant is interviewed for a short time and the questions are pre-determined, or structured (formal surveys) (Tellis, 1997). Tape recorders can be used to ensure data accuracy and persistence but their use should be disclosed and permission sought from the informant.

Direct observation in case studies occurs when the researcher interacts directly with the research subject to gather data within context and in real-time however the researchers' mere presence could alter behaviours, and affect data relevance and reliability.

Participant observation involves the researcher participating in the events being studied and presents many of the same benefits and drawbacks as direct observations; however, with the added potential for researcher bias to influence the findings.

Finally, physical artifacts are any physical evidence that may be gathered such as tools, art works, notebooks, and computer output, and may provide insights into both cultural and technical phenomenon.

The inductive nature of this study allowed for the subjective data gathered from the presidents to become viable data in a qualitative study (Morgan, 1998). As the goal of this

research was to discover the "what" and "how" and not to develop theory, grounded theory was not utilized.

There are varieties of case study defined in the literature, with little precision in how the term is used, case study "has become a catchall category for studies that are not clearly experimental, survey, or historical" (Merriam, 1988, p. xii). Here, the term case study was a means for understanding and interpreting a particular case, which can be an open or a bounded system. Although the case study method is viewed by some researchers as lacking rigor and objectivity, it may offer insights/angles that might not be achieved with other methods – to triangulate by combining methodologies. Yin (2012) provides an abbreviated definition of the case study method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 2). Bassey (1999) describes case study as the "study of an instance in action", or the "study of a bounded system" (p. 24). Creswell (1998) describes case study as "an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). Baxter & Jack (2008), define a qualitative case study specifically as "an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (p. 544). Regardless of the particular definition used to describe case study research, two key approaches guide case study methodology; one proposed by Yin (2003) and the other by Stake (1995).

Yin (2003) categorizes case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive. He also differentiates between single, holistic case studies, and multiple-case studies. Stake

(1995) identifies case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. While the methods of research they each employ is quite different, they both endeavor to thoroughly explore the phenomenon under study. From a philosophical perspective, as constructivists, they both believe that the truth is relative and is dependent on one's perspective. Constructivism attempts to understand the "world of human experience" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). A multiple-case study enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases by incorporating multiple sources of data which can provide a broader range of context thus covering a broader scope of variables within a given study, with the goal of replicating findings across cases. Because comparisons will be drawn, Yin (2003), stresses the importance that the cases are chosen carefully so that the researcher can predict similar results across cases, or predict contrasting results based on a theory.

**Sample**

The population for this study included all college presidents at institutes that are members of Polytechnics Canada. Polytechnics Canada is a national organization which represents 13 publicly supported colleges, institutes, and polytechnics in Canada. The intent of the study was to conduct a qualitative inquiry of the roles of a select number of presidents to study an instance in action - the growth of online and blended learning programs. A relatively small sample size allows for an in-depth study of a few cases with the goal of reaching thematic saturation, the point at which no new information emerges from the data, in a multiple case study (Yin, 2012). Therefore, in choosing three presidents and their institutes to study, each individual case was instrumental in learning

about the effects of their leadership traits and actions, and was also instrumental in comparing and contrasting the three cases with each other.

The three study candidates were identified by first evaluating their online and blended learning programs as compared to other members of Polytechnics Canada. Three institutes with comparatively large online and blended learning programs, and similar characteristics relating to geography (rural vs. urban), college size (full-time student equivalents), and length of tenure of the sitting president were approached for participation in the study. This information was obtained from publicly available records and the institutions' own websites. The rationale for the selection process was to narrow the differences across colleges, allowing for a degree of gross control over variables so that leadership approach as it relates to online and blended learning at each campus could then be isolated for study. The plan was to continue inviting presidents to participate in the study until there were three willing participants in the sample. Fortunately, this was not an issue as the first three presidents agreed to participate.

**Data Collection**

From a practical perspective, there were many factors that were considered when planning the data collection and analysis strategy. With respect to the data collection, the researcher anticipated the possibility that they could have been met with resistance on the part of the chosen subjects, either due to an outright lack of desire/willingness to participate in the study, or concerns about privacy and vulnerability due to the potentially sensitive nature of the subject matter; therefore, when soliciting the participants, they provided each with the following information to reduce the chance of receiving refusals for the aforementioned reasons: a letter of introduction stating the purpose of the study,

an informed consent form the criteria for their selection, an assurance of well-documented procedures relating to storage and use of the study data to maintain confidentiality of the data, and an offer to refuse to answer any questions or share any information they were not comfortable sharing, and finally, the ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

For this multiple case study, the primary source of data was participant interviews and written notes of observations made during the interviews. Gerring (2017) discussed two other potential sources of data for case study research: document review and observation (Gerring, 2017). While documents can be reports, newspaper articles, pamphlets, or correspondences, for these three cases it consisted of documents from each college including strategic plans, academic plans, institutional plans, annual reports (which included financial reports), department organizational structures, job descriptions, and written records of events within the institutions under study. Observation can be done of individuals within the case in their natural setting. This could consist of observing the college presidents in meetings, or during other school functions. Note that observations are not the same thing as notes taken during interviews. As Stake (1995) noted, interviews are guided by the researcher, whereas observations involve taking notes and documenting unguided, naturally-occurring events (Stake, 1995). During the research planning phase, the researcher decided that observation would not be used, except in the event that the interviews and or documents in each case did not provide enough information to allow a clear understanding of the situation at each college in order to extrapolate key themes; at which point observation could be reconsidered. Instead, the researcher opted to draw upon his knowledge of the topics and college systems in general

to determine the adequacy of the data received to answer the research questions. This approach was reassessed after interviews were conducted and documents were reviewed and it was concluded again that observations were, in fact, not necessary as the presidents had been open and forthcoming in sharing information and providing details both in their interviews and in sharing documents from their organizations.

The first step in data collection for this study involved conducting standardized, open-ended interviews over the phone to collect information related to a set of targeted, predetermined questions; each designed to ultimately extract the information, insight, and data required to address the broader research questions identified earlier. The purpose of the interview was to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters (e.g. online and blended learning). Personal interviews are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Tidwell, 2012).

For the standardized interviews, the precise wording of questions and instructions were prepared in advance. This constituted the interview schedule and prescribed the pattern to be followed in the interview. The first step in preparing the interview schedule involved specifying the aims of the study, identifying potential factors for investigation, and drafting the research questions. The second step involved a pilot run of the interview procedure, which included an evaluation of the questions, as well as a trial run of the software “Pro Call Recorder” that would be used to record the phone call. The pilot did not include any person to be interviewed later. In the pilot, the interview procedures, questions and the audio recording were trialed to help identify and remedy any problems. The pilot was vital in helping to finalize the interview questions, the overall length of the

interview and subsequently, the necessary pace of the interview to stay within the time frame. It was also helpful to coordinate the most effective sequence of events for the audio recording procedure.

For each of the interviews, it was important to establish rapport and allow the subjects to feel at ease, especially prior to the day of the interview and during the early stages of the actual interview. As such, in the invitation to participate (Appendix A), it was noted that a copy of the interview questions (Appendix B) would be sent to the subjects ahead of time if they agreed to participate. A follow-up e-mail was sent when signed consent (Appendix C) was received acknowledging the receipt of the consent and thanking each individual for volunteering to participate in the study. Additional contact was made with each of their executive assistants through e-mail and phone calls to set up and confirm interview dates and times. The interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience for one and a half hours over phone.

At the beginning of each phone call, prior to starting the formal interview, an informal discussion was held to answer any questions the participants may have had concerning the study. During the interviews it was important to state the questions as consistently as possible, with consideration for the developing context of the interview. In this research study where little was already known about the study phenomenon, detailed insights were required from the individual participants. Therefore, each candidate was asked about their leadership approach as it related to transformational and distributed leadership characteristics. It was important to be flexible and to adjust procedures to respond to the flow of the dialogue, as many times in the interviews the subjects provided stories and examples as part of their answers. The participants were asked a number of

questions in an attempt to capture their personal values, their broader understanding of leadership, and an understanding of the reasoning behind their actions that led to growth or continued success in online and blended learning at their institute. After the first few questions, the interview subjects were asked if they were comfortable with the approach. Then, specific questions relating to their experiences in education (professional and personal), education technology, and online and blended education were posed, as well as questions regarding the implementation and continued promotion/growth of online and blended learning at their respective institutes including how it started and the current day to day management. Finally, other possible sources of data that could be relevant to the study were discussed with each of the presidents to not only augment the amount of data available in each case, but also to potentially provide supporting evidence for their statements and claims. The interviewer focused on listening with interest and allowed the respondents to give a complete answer to questions without interruption. Since each of the interviews were conducted over the phone without the use of video, it was sometimes necessary to restate a question or part of a question, or to clarify its intent, especially if it helped the respondent to give a relevant answer. After the interviews, the audio recordings of each were transcribed into print for later analysis. In some cases, a follow-up email was required to clarify points of particular interest or meaning, and/or to gather further understanding of a statement. Transcriptions were double-checked against the recordings for accuracy and to make any necessary corrections, and then from each of the transcripts, narratives were identified and noted.

The final step of data collection involved gathering a wide spectrum of supporting documents from each of the institutions. This consisted of a variety of documents

including strategic plans, academic plans, institutional plans, annual reports (which include financial reports), department organizational structures, and job descriptions. In each phase of the data collection there was attention paid to the occurrence of common themes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). In order to ensure confidentiality, a reference code was assigned to each college and its president: College 1 (C1) and President 1 (P1); College 2 (C2) and President 2 (P2); College 3 (C3) and President 3 (P3). Codes were also assigned to data obtained from field notes and the supporting documents from each of the institutions (see Appendix D – Coding). Generic labels were also applied to the supporting documents as colleges often have unique titles that if used, could identify an individual institution. The labels used were Institutional Planning Documents (IP), Academic Planning Documents (AP), Financial Documents (FD), and Organizational Documents (OD). Appendix D provides a list of the specific documents that these labels could refer to when used in the report.

**Data Analysis**

For the purpose of this study, the unit of analysis consisted of the three presidents from the chosen Canadian Polytechnics. Content for analysis was a summary of their institute's current online and blended programs, interview data, and a collection of various college artefacts. The preferred strategy for analysis is to use the propositions that encapsulate the objectives of the study, and which have shaped the data collection (Rowley, 2002). Data analysis in this study was based on examining, categorising and tabulating data to assess whether the evidence supports the initial propositions of the study. Therefore, the qualitative data in these case studies was sorted by those concepts that related to the meanings, perceptions, symbols or descriptions of the subject matter

(Tidwell, 2012). In working with and analyzing data from each of the leaders and their institutions, the approach was to identify common or similar behaviors, situations, interactions, and environments among the three presidents as they relate to transformational and distributed leadership.

Unlike strictly quantitative research which evaluates its data quality in terms of data/measurement validity (whether the data represent the constructs they were assumed to capture) and data measurement reliability (whether the data consistently and accurately represent the constructs under examination) (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009), qualitative research seeks to measure its quality through credibility and trustworthiness. According to Baxter & Jack (2008), case study research design principles lend themselves to including numerous strategies that promote data credibility or "truth value" (p. 556). Triangulation of data sources, data types or researchers is a primary strategy that can be used and would support the principle in case study research that the phenomena be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives. The collection and comparison of this data enhances data quality based on the principles of idea convergence and the confirmation of findings (Knafl & Breitmayerm, 1989). Lincoln and Guba (1985), define trustworthiness as findings that are "worth paying attention to" and divide it into four components: credibility (defined as confidence in the 'truth' of the findings), dependability (defined as the consistency and repeatability of the findings), transferability (defined as the applicability of the findings in other contexts), and confirmability (defined as the neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest) (p. 290).

Six strategies can be used to determine the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009):

> (a) Prolonged engagement (spending enough time with participants to establish trust, learn about the participants, and check for misinformation),
>
> (b) Persistent observation (helping the researcher to use his observations to address his research questions),
>
> (c) Triangulation techniques (using multiple sources, methods, and investigators to best represent the reality or realities of the participants),
>
> (d) Member checks (asking participants to verify the researcher's interpretations and representations of their reality – events, phenomena),
>
> (e) Thick descriptions (analyzing multiple levels of meaning of reality – events, phenomena),
>
> (f) Reflexive journal (generating a diary in which researchers' record information about themselves, their use of self as an instrument, and the research method)

In this study, the data collected from the personal interviews and various artefacts was first assessed against the research questions to ensure that enough information had been gathered to address the study adequately, and then the data was scrutinized for patterns and categories, and cross-referenced with the supporting documents obtained from each institute, including strategic plans, academic plans, institutional plans, annual reports

(which include financial reports), department organizational structures, and job descriptions, for the purpose of identifying possible themes and the way these themes related to one another and related to the research questions. This method enabled a thorough analysis of the data to occur including cross-checking and triangulation of interpretation and findings both within each case, as well as across the entire data set. The collection of supporting documents and artefacts and subsequent triangulation of the interview data against all data sources helped to shed further light on the contents of the interviews and also provided valuable insights into the theories, values, and goals of the respondents in each case. As case study design is meant to be descriptive, an assumption is that any emerging patterns would only be described without conclusions regarding causality (Yin, 2012).

Thematic analysis was the specific strategy used to analyze and triangulate the multiple sets of qualitative data in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner in order to yield meaningful and useful results, and also to provide a systematic and methodical approach that could be transparently described to others (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). As such, the phases of thematic analysis as defined in their paper titled "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria" were employed in this study as a means by which to establish the required data trustworthiness, and ultimately enhance the credibility of the study and its findings. They outline 6 phases of thematic analysis that each propose multiple means by which to establish data trustworthiness: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and then producing the

report, and those phases as utilized in this study are described in greater detail in later paragraphs in this chapter.

According to Creswell, (2007), in qualitative research, the process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing is not always distinct steps; they are often interrelated and occur simultaneously throughout the research process, and this study was no different in that the various phases did not always occur in a consistently linear fashion but rather occurred synchronously throughout the research process. Although it is presented here as a linear, six-phased method, it was actually an iterative and reflective process that developed over time and involved regularly moving back and forward between phases.

The data analysis stage for this study consisted of roughly six steps based closely on those outlined in Nowell et.al. (2017): familiarization, coding, searching for themes, categorizing themes (major or minor), considering the resultant themes in the context of the research questions, and then writing the report to detail the findings. The first step was to get a thorough overview of all of the data collected (interviews and documents) from each college before beginning to analyze individual items or attempting to identify emerging themes. The documents included interview transcripts, written field notes of observations made during the interviews, strategic plans, academic plans, institutional plans, annual reports (which included financial reports), department organizational structures, job descriptions, and written records of events within the institutions under study. The volume, complexity, and varied formats of the data did present logistical challenges to the researcher when attempting to organize and sort the information due to the inherent lack of consistent structure; however, all were very useful and relevant in the analysis. As such, in this step, the researcher focused on one case at a time and only after

developing a thorough understanding of all of the data in that particular case did they shift their focus to the next case. Once the researcher was familiar with all of the data in each of the cases, they then began to analyze the data across cases and made notes for an initial coding strategy.

The second step was to code the data, which consisted of highlighting sections of text in the data and expanding on the initial codes identified in the first step to label the content more accurately. The goal of coding was to organize and arrange the data collected into useful categories or themes in order to support the theoretical concepts of the study (Strauss, 1987). It was necessary to be especially diligent in this process so that all aspects of the data were thoroughly scrutinized and everything of thematic relevance to the study highlighted. The transcripts, observations, and college documents were read multiple times to ensure accuracy and consistency with the coding. After reviewing the coded data, it was collated into groups identified by the codes. The use of codes allowed the researcher to gain a condensed overview of the main points and common meanings or themes that recurred throughout each case and across the cases. Numerous individual subsets of data were coded in a number of different groups in which they fit, and as many times as deemed relevant.

The third step involved reviewing the coded data and groups to identify commonalities and to identify emerging themes. A theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2007). At this stage the research questions were not yet considered as the focus was to identify the themes that were most relevant to building a greater understanding of the overall study itself. The initial themes

were reviewed and triangulated with the data. During this step, any themes that did not have adequate supporting data either within a case or across the cases were set aside. As well, those themes that seemed only marginally relevant were set aside for potential use later in the study. Lastly, the most highly relevant themes were named and defined which allowed the researcher to better understand what was meant by each theme and to identify its connection to the data.

The fourth step sought to further refine the final set of themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2007) it is important that by the end of this phase, the researcher can clearly define what the themes are and what they are not. The researcher determined what aspect of the data each theme captured and identified what was of interest and why. This involved returning to the data set and comparing each of the themes against it. The final themes were identified as either major or minor themes, and were considered major when they were prominently present within each of the cases, as well as across the cases.

For the fifth step, a detailed analysis was written for each individual theme to identify the story each theme told and its significance within the overall data set, and to frame it in relation to the research questions. Finally, the names and descriptions of the major themes were revisited to ensure each was succinct and adequately described. Minor themes as well as those identified as 'marginally relevant' in this study were deemed unnecessary at this point as adequate information was gleaned from the major themes identified, and, as such, no further action was taken on either of those categories of themes.

The sixth and final step began once the major themes were fully established and the researcher could thus finalize the analysis and detailing of the findings. In Chapter 4,

each resultant theme is discussed; the researcher describes the frequency and relevance of the themes in relation to the research questions, including examples from the data as evidence. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and presents conclusions, and discusses limitations and recommendations for future study.

**Ethical Considerations**

From an ethical perspective, the researcher in this study had to uphold the fundamental ethical principle in research of "do no harm"; and, in this study where the leaders and their experiences were closely described and interpreted in unique contexts, it was necessary to establish in any particular context what 'doing no harm' meant to these individuals (National Commission for the Protection of Human Services of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). In discussing personal values, motivators, and behaviours, a relationship of trust had to be developed as they shared and spoke openly about their experiences and it was necessary to present this data in a way that does not harm them. It was also important to not unintentionally misuse this information and exploit the study subject's openness or vulnerability. The names of the participants and institutions were only used to link institutional data with leadership style and once they were paired, the names of both became irrelevant to the remainder of the study and remained confidential. Another ethical consideration the researcher was aware of was the fact that the nature of narrative inquiry is such that once the subject's story becomes fixed in written text, the narrative in question is no longer tied to the moment in which it occurred. As such, the story has been liberated from its origin and can enter into new interpretive frames, where it might assume meanings not intended by the persons involved in the original event (Moen, 2006).

Several other ethical issues were also taken into consideration. Firstly, it was possible that the subjects could have experienced anxiety during interviews. The interview questions could have raised issues the subjects had not considered before, felt was too probing, or did not feel comfortable discussing. To minimize the likelihood of these concerns arising, the researcher provided background information explaining the purpose of the research, the manner in which it was going to be conducted and the means by which the research findings would be reported. The subjects were given an assurance that their confidentiality would be preserved by replacing their names and the names of their colleges with codes and removing any secondary references that may point to their identity. They were also reminded that involvement in this study was entirely voluntary and they could refuse to answer any questions or to share information they were not comfortable sharing. The possible benefits of the research for the subjects was also highlighted. The interview questions might have prompted the subjects to reflect upon their own practice in a way they had not done previously. In answering the questions, the subjects may have also found reassurance that they and their schools were dealing well with leadership and organizational issues.

Each president was invited to participate in an interview lasting up to one and one-half hours. They were informed that this consisted of a 15-minute orientation prior to the interview, up to one hour for the interview itself, and 15 minutes for any questions or comments at the conclusion of the interview. At the commencement of interviews, the subjects were asked to share any concerns and were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period up until the transcript of the

interview had been approved by notifying the researcher via email or by phone, and consequently, any data collected to that point would be destroyed.

Open ended, semi-structured questions were developed to elicit detailed responses from the subjects. The questions were drafted with terminology familiar to the subjects. Relatively neutral descriptive information was asked at the beginning of the interview to help the subjects feel at ease. These preliminary questions were in the category titled, *"Background Information"*. Follow-up questions focused on "*Leadership Model*", "*Organization Structure*", and "*Planning and Problem Solving*". The questions were piloted prior to the subjects' interviews. This allowed for the questions and interviewing method to be refined in the light of the responses in the pilot.

To help the subjects feel at ease in the interview, each of them were provided with a copy of the interview questions via email at least one week prior to their scheduled interview (see Appendix C – Interview Questions). Each interview was audio recorded with the subject's consent. Transcripts of each interview was prepared and labelled as draft transcripts and stored securely on the researcher's personal, password-protected laptop.

## Chapter 4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this multiple case study of Canadian college presidents was to describe if, and to what extent, college presidents practiced transformational and distributed leadership, and whether these leadership approaches contributed to the implementation and growth of online and blended learning within their respective institutes. The research focused on the two core study questions:

- Can the characteristics and behaviors of transformational leadership and distributed leadership be identified among presidents at Canadian colleges with successful online and blended learning programs?
- What characterizes the relationship, if one exists, between transformational and distributed leadership, and the growth of online and blended learning at these colleges?

The three presidents in the study discussed the topics of leadership, online and blended learning, organizational structure, and planning. Within each of these topics they described how they have applied specific and general aspects of their own leadership approaches throughout various situations in their role. The resulting interview data was correlated and triangulated against the documentation and institutional artefacts that were collected from each president and their institutes, and three major, consistent themes emerged: 1) faculty-led initiatives to transition each college to their current state of online and blended learning; 2) a dedicated strategy to growing online and blended learning; and, 3) a financial commitment to fund online and blended learning growth despite consecutive years of funding cutbacks. Further evaluation of the data sought to determine if the characteristics and behaviors of transformational and distributed

leadership were key components of each of the presidents' leadership approaches. Subsequent analysis assessed the impact of each president's leadership approach on the growth of their online and blended learning and to characterize the relationship, if one existed, between this growth and transformational and distributed leadership at their college

Implications and limitations of the research findings, as well as recommendations and conclusions are presented in Chapter 5.

**Discussion of the Results**

The case study method, and in particular a multi–case study design, offered a tool for achieving a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon – the impact of leadership on the growth of online and blended learning. The case study method was utilized to probe beneath the surface of the situation and to provide a rich context for understanding the phenomena under study by identifying consistent patterns of behavior and to uncover potential themes across multiple cases. When analyzing multiple cases, the researcher had the opportunity to extract generalizations and themes through various sources from each college. For this research study, three cases of college presidents were chosen through criterion-based sampling. In the first phase of this study, the three study candidates were identified by initially evaluating their online and blended learning programs as compared to the members of Polytechnics Canada. The rationale for the selection process was to narrow the differences across colleges, allowing for a degree of gross control over variables so that leadership approach as it relates to online and blended learning at each campus could then be isolated for study. Three institutes with comparatively large online and blended learning programs, and similar characteristics

relating to geography (rural vs. urban), college size (number of students - full load equivalent), and length of tenure of the sitting president were approached for participation in the study. While all three of the participating colleges were located in urban centers, one of the colleges supported a relatively equal mix of urban and rural students, while the other two supported mainly urban students. The three colleges were similar in student size as they ranged from 12,000 to 16,000 full load equivalents. In terms of programming, they offered a range of 180 to 220 programs with 500 to 700 fully online courses. Lastly, the range in tenure of the three college presidents was 7-10 years at the time of the study.

During the interview process, each participant was asked the same open-ended, semi-structured questions and follow-up questions were asked for clarification or to elaborate on a topic that emerged. Interviews were audio-recorded using a call recorder application with the participant's permission received prior to the interview date. The audio-recording of each interview was transcribed, and each participant was provided the opportunity to review drafts of the transcriptions for accuracy in order to demonstrate credibility of the data collected. A digital, typed transcription of each research interview was helpful in the data analysis as it made it easier to search the text for the presence of specific words or quotes as patterns and categories were emerging.

Field notes of observations were handwritten during each interview providing additional insight into the interactions with the participants allowing the researcher to capture the context and meaning of each interview. The information recorded as field notes was helpful in recreating the interview experience, identifying themes, and supporting other sources that triangulated the data. Follow-up questions were asked for

clarification or to expound upon a topic that emerged. From the audio-recordings, the interview answers were typed and then shared with the participant to verify the information captured accurately conveyed their answers. Participants were given the option of clarifying or adding information at that time.

The interviews produced raw data in the form of audio recordings transcribed to text, and field notes, which were initially reviewed strictly for familiarization, and to develop an overall understanding of each president's term at their college and their leadership approaches over this period of time. The researcher considered the raw data first as individual narratives describing a personal journey into leadership and growth of online and blended learning, with no organized thought or identification of patterns or commonalities among the cases before then engaging in a more robust process of coding the data with the goal of identifying patterns, and ultimately, themes. Using the core research questions as a guide, transcripts of the interviews were read and coded based on comments made specific to the research questions.

The interviews consisted of 15 questions in four different sections/categories: Background Information; Leadership Model; Organizational Structure; and, Planning (see Appendix B – Interview Questions). The questions in each section focused on a specific topic or group of similar topics. These sections and questions were designed to solicit commentary on the core research questions, and later, the resulting themes identified were linked to the research questions. For the five questions in the Background Information section, the purpose was to better understand the background of the participant, the state of online and blended learning at the college when they started, and how it developed under their leadership:

- How long have you been president at your college?
- Was the role of president your first position at the college?
- Can you describe the state of online and blended programs at the college now compared to when you started?
- If there's been growth in OLB, how significant has it been? Has there been a key factor in that growth (i.e. funding, organizational changes, etc.)?
- Has OLB been a focus at any time during your leadership or has its growth been mostly organic?

Based on the initial selection process that was utilized to identify presidential candidates to study, the backgrounds of the presidents were somewhat similar as each had been in their current role for a comparable amount of time. Although it was not part of the structured interview questions, each president elaborated on their background prior to their current presidency role, and in each case, they were quite different from each other with a broad range of industry and academic experiences across the cases. The initial state of their online and blended learning offerings when they began their tenure was also varied across the cases. For College 1 (C1), it had a strong portfolio of distance learning which mostly consisted of correspondence type courses, but no online and blended learning. The growth experienced at C1 was due to the transitioning of their courses and programming from traditional distance learning methods (e.g. correspondence and VHS video) to online and blended learning. In the case of College 2 (C2), they were already utilizing online and blended learning; however, it had reached a limit in its ability to continue expanding their programming as C2 was utilizing outdated technology, and all aspects of online learning were being managed in a separate department that was not

integrated within the college systems. The growth experienced at C2 was in transitioning to a new technology (learning management system) and the integration of online and blended learning within the college. In the case of College 3 (C3), it had experienced strong growth in the number of online and blended learning programs over the course of the president's tenure.

In the Leadership Model section, the three questions were framed to develop a better understanding of leadership from each presidents' perspective:

- Can you discuss your leadership approach and how it's developed over your time as a college executive?
- What are your expectations of your executive team in terms of their leadership approach?
- How do you develop your leaders or executive team members (i.e. through professional development)?

As reported in the Leadership Model section, all three presidents were quite similar in their approach to leadership. There were many commonalities throughout their answers, and in the researcher's field notes. Each president discussed leadership approaches that involved many qualities and examples of both distributed and transformational leadership. In all three cases there were consistent themes of collaboration, trust, growth (both individual and institutional), and support. Each of the presidents discussed the need to inspire, empower, and challenge others to help grow their institutes.

In the Organizational Structure section, the four questions were designed to help understand how each college was structured and more specifically, if the support and development of online and blended learning was in any way influenced by their structure:

- Describe the organizational structure at your college from the executive level down to the dean level?
- How has it changed from when you first became president and what may have precipitated those changes?
- Was OLB incorporated into any of your organizational structure changes?
- Is there a key area/team/division at the college responsible for OLB? If so, how does this area function?

The Organizational Structure section represented a key part of the interviews as each president shared details of organizational changes they initiated that were influenced at some level by a strategy or vision to grow online and blended learning. The presidents shared relevant examples of restructuring such as establishing a new division for teaching and learning, creating a new position at a director-level that was dedicated to leading online learning at the college, and a major organizational restructuring that was initiated to fully integrate online learning throughout the college where it was originally isolated to particular departments within the college. In these examples, each president detailed how the development of online and blended learning influenced their decision-making and led each of them to make significant organizational changes to help support this development. In each case, the presidents placed significant importance on people and structure. Throughout the Organizational Structure section of questions each spoke consistently about identifying the right people for key roles to support online and blended

learning, and positioning roles or areas/departments to support online and blended learning.

The three questions in the Planning section helped to confirm the importance of online and blended learning for each president:

- Does your college have a regular planning cycle?
- What does your planning process look like? Do you utilize committees or teams?
- Has OLB ever been incorporated into your planning?

In the Planning section the questions were developed to understand the presidents' approach to planning and how integral online and blended learning may have been in their planning. Throughout the cases there was a wide range of different types of planning with examples such as 1, 3, and 5-year plans, and plans that were strategic, institutional, operational, business, and provincially related. As noted previously, due to the unique naming each college applied to their planning and documents, generic coding was applied to reduce the possibility that the identities of individuals or colleges could be revealed. For example, rather than referencing a college's Strategic Plan or Business Plan, the researcher referred to these types of documents as Institutional Planning Documents. This was an area of the interview where the responses were quite different and the researcher spent a considerable amount of time triangulating the data collected from the interviews with the documents from each college. There were a number of types of plans referenced by the presidents that the researcher was not initially familiar with and this required follow-up questions to help better understand the types of planning each was referring to at different times. Although each of the presidents led different planning cycles and different types of planning, it was clear in the Planning section of the

interviews that they each valued planning, utilized it as a tool to engage their colleges, and that online and blended learning was a key component of their planning.

In the raw data from the interviews and field notes, it was noted that each president had a personal mandate to grow online and blended learning, and engaged in actions to stimulate and influence this growth. In the interviews, each president exhibited a passion for educational technologies (which included online and blended learning) and a solid belief in how it would play a key role in the future of learning. The leaders expressed passion for what they did, and commented on the need to keep a clear focus on their goals and not to become distracted by issues or challenges that jeopardized these goals. They provided examples and cited instances where transformational and distributed leadership approaches were utilized to accomplish core tasks central to their strategic goals. They described their commitment to educational technologies as driven by an intense desire to position their colleges to be successful in the future and to better meet the needs of prospective students.

The raw data collected from these interviews was cross-referenced with a wide spectrum of documents from each of the colleges to help develop a clear picture of each presidents' term at their college and understand what influence, if any, their leadership had on the growth of online and blended learning. It was also compared to the original research questions to ensure that enough evidence had been gathered to address the core questions. Copies of the participants' planning documents were obtained through their respective college web site or via email from their assistants. These planning documents helped to provide a deeper understanding of the strategies and implementation methods of each college and further triangulated the data from the field notes and interview

transcripts. A six-step thematic analysis was employed to analyze and triangulate the data from each college. The quantity of documents collected from each college and the different types of plans each college referred to required the researcher to dedicate a large portion of time to document familiarization as there were a number of instances where documents from different colleges were comparable and contained much the same content even though their titles and formats were very different. As an example, each college engaged in annual planning; however, their approach to this planning, how they recorded the planning, and how they referred to the planning (the different titles used for the documents each college developed through their annual planning) was very different from each other. As a result of these types of differences across the cases, a great deal of time was dedicated to familiarization with the documents from each college. To begin the more formal process of coding, each of these individual documents were identified and coded as either Interview Transcripts, Interview Notes, Institutional Planning Documents, Academic Planning Documents, Financial Documents, or Organizational Documents. Upon completion of the familiarization/identification process, the researcher began to code the data within each of the documents. In reviewing the interview transcripts, the written notes of observations made during the interviews, and reviewing the various institutional documents, the researcher coded the data and began a process of organizing and arranging it into categories based on commonalities. From the data, the researcher was able to identify eight emerging categories that eventually led to three major themes. These original categories were: a digital or IT strategy; increased student access/opportunity/flexibility; financial commitment; new educational technologies; delivery models; professional development; new programming; and, accommodating

growth in programming. The process used for generating initial codes, searching for categories, reviewing themes, and then defining and naming themes is best described by examining one of the first themes to emerge from the categorization of the raw data: faculty involvement which evolved from new educational technologies.

A focus on new educational technologies was referenced, and the term "innovation" was specifically mentioned by each of the three presidents in their interviews. Throughout the data there were multiple references to educational technologies and innovation, which subsequently led to discussions in the interviews regarding the resulting need in education for certain types of leadership approaches and change management practices to achieve innovation at their institutes, and successfully implement new educational technologies. The process by which the adoption of new educational technologies occurred required change management which, most often, was managed by those most greatly impacted; the faculty. As such, change management on the part of the faculty as a key component in the adoption of new educational technologies informed its eventual evolution into the broader theme of faculty involvement, which was ultimately identified as the common denominator in the success of these efforts.

In order to better understand how the categories and themes related to one another within a wider context, the eight categories were constructed with the intention of identifying a causational effect between leadership approaches and growth of online and blended learning. Some of these categories were helpful in exploring this relationship even though they subsequently were not one of the final major themes. For example, all three presidents described how they strongly believed in professional development and

this was supported in the coded data as professional development was a common topic throughout the transcripts, field notes, and college documents in all cases. King and Horrocks (2014) stated that a category that may be altered several times before it is finally accepted, rejected, or evolved, and any emerging data may confirm, challenge or constitute an outlier to the rest of the data already gathered. So although professional development was prominently present within each case and across the cases, when further refining the set of themes, professional development was identified as a part of two other themes rather than a standalone theme itself.

From this study, the data collection and analysis as outlined in detail in the methodology chapter ultimately resulted in the identification of three major themes. These themes were: 1) at each institute the presidents implemented faculty-led initiatives that transitioned each college to their current state of online and blended learning; 2) each of the college presidents had a dedicated strategy to growing online and blended learning at their institutes; and, 3) each president maintained a financial commitment to fund online and blended learning growth despite consecutive years of funding cutbacks. These themes related to the strategy employed by each president, and framed their approach to leadership as it related to the growth of online and blended learning at each of their institutes. The following paragraphs describe the three emergent, final themes in greater detail.

**Theme 1 - Faculty Involvement**

In the cases under study there was a significant change that took place recently at each of the colleges that led them to their current offering of online and blended learning. For College 1 it was the move from distance learning (correspondence, etc.) to online and

blended learning. For College 2 it was the move from an older technology for online learning to a new learning management system. For College 3 it was the move to a new learning management system and significant growth in the number of programs they offered through online learning. Although the circumstances were different, a theme throughout each and across all of the cases was the deep level and degree of involvement of the faculty.

When President 1 for College 1 started in the role, the school had a *"healthy offering of distance education programming already".* At that time, the college was not teaching online as their programming was being offered mostly through correspondence, with a few programs offered through videos that were presented to students in the form of VHS tapes. President 1 felt that when they started at College 1 there was already a culture in place that supported all learners, not only their F2F students but their distance students as well. Through their distance programming, the college serviced a number of students who worked and lived remotely. President 1 recognized that although the college provided adequate support for the distance learning format they offered at the time, and despite the favorable culture that was already present, the move to adopt online and blended learning would represent a significant transition due to the *"complicated adoption of educational technologies"*. They were concerned particularly about the integration of technology with teaching and learning, as the dominant profile of their faculty was long-tenured and accustomed to teaching via more traditional methods (e.g. F2F and correspondence). President 1 identified at the time that in order to grow online and blended learning, it would first be necessary to foster and promote an environment that encouraged the faculty to transcend their own, immediate self-interests and comfort

for the sake of the vision of the college. Creating a *"faculty-focused environment that considered the needs of the faculty"* was an over-arching strategy the president employed when the college moved to adopt online and blended learning with the integration of a learning management system.

In the case of College 2, when President 2 began their tenure, the college was already familiar with online and blended learning; however, all activities and responsibilities for online and blended learning were siloed within a continuing education department at the college. Although this department was functioning well, it was not integrated within the college system as many of its services and systems were separate and dedicated to continuing education students only (this included all online students). This included separate registration services, student services support, and IT support. Regarding the siloed structure of their online learning, President 2 stated, *"the siloed model was only functional when continuing education students were treated and managed separately, and to grow as a college it was necessary for us to create a variety of learning opportunities across all of our programs, for all of our students."* The president utilized the move to adopt a learning management system to fully integrate online and blended learning within their college by providing all faculty with the opportunity and subsequent skills to teach in an online environment.

College 3 was familiar with online learning; however, it was limited to a select few programs. These online programs were taught by a small, specific group of faculty who were self-managed with minimal institutional support provided to them; however, unlike College 2, the systems and processes for online programming were not siloed, but were fully integrated within the college's systems and processes. This meant identical

registration services, student services support, and IT support for all students at the college, regardless of their programming. President C identified shortly after they started however that their online programming was not scalable as it was delivered through an outdated online platform, and course delivery relied too heavily on a small, core group of faculty. The college needed to transition to a learning management system that would be utilized in all programs (e.g. F2F and online and blended learning) and to subsequently introduce more faculty to online and blended learning.

Although the circumstances in each case were unique, the colleges engaged in similar endeavors in that each adopted new educational technology to support the growth of their online and blended learning. In all cases the colleges integrated new learning management systems which resulted in significant disruptions throughout their institutions. Within the past six years, and during the time of the study, all three colleges had undertaken the transition from an older technology (correspondence, video recordings, older learner management systems, etc.) to adopting a newer technology for online and blended learning. In two of the cases, the presidents led an initiative to transition from an older technology-based learning platform to a new learning management system, while in the other case the president led an initiative to adopt a learning management system where one did not previously exist. All three presidents identified that the move to their current learning management system was an initiative that took 1-2 years of planning and preparation that included significant involvement of faculty and even required faculty, in many cases, to shoulder leading roles in the change management process. One president shared that in each program there was a faculty member identified as the "*program champion"* and that individual was assigned to work

as a member of a team of staff that led the integration of the new technology. There were similar models adopted at the other two colleges where faculty played leading roles. Another president stated that the key to their success was based on their ability to allow faculty to lead this initiative, "*It was important at my college where online learning was kept separate, that faculty played a leading role in the adoption of online learning throughout the college, and this opportunity presented itself when we integrated our new learning management system."* The other two presidents shared similar perspectives regarding the crucial need for faculty involvement and each felt that it was the role of the president and vice-president to provide the framework and environment to support them appropriately. *"Our vice-president explained the process as faculty walking with us through this change, not us leading faculty through this change. I thought this was a great representation of how we had to approach this."* This approach aligns with evidence from studies that suggests giving faculty time to adjust to and embrace change, as well as fostering an environment of trust, is vital to ensuring success of the implementation of new technologies into teaching and learning (Rosenthal & Eliason, 2015).

Each of the three presidents shared the vision they had for their colleges, and the role online and blended learning played in that vision, which was crucially significant in providing insight into how each leader intended to both define and enact the changes that would be required of their respective institutions going forward. In the interview questions that addressed organizational structure, each of the presidents shared the character traits, abilities, and attitudes they sought in their leaders. They used phrases such as *"future-focused",* "*thinking at a higher, more macro-level",* and *"forward-*

*looking vision*". One president stated, *"I demand of my vice-presidents to think 'institutional', not 'functional'",* while another stated, *"it's vital for my executive to be strategic and for them to rely on their teams to be tactical and operational"*. Each of the three presidents discussed how they dedicated time with their executive teams to explore and discuss the future of education. Some examples of this was sharing academic journals or newsletters, attending professional development tailored to trends in education, hosting guest lecturers and guest speakers, and even one president organizing a 'book-club' approach with educational journals. All three presidents agreed that while they 'planted the seeds' for growing online and blended learning, it was first necessary to have the right academic leaders (vice-presidents, deans, and directors) in place. Two of the presidents referenced Jim Collins' concept of "getting the right people on the bus".[1]

Each of the three presidents referred to making strategic choices to grow environments that focused on developing teaching and learning practices. In response to the interview question "*Has online and blended learning ever been incorporated into organizational structure changes?"*, all three presidents agreed that it had been, and gave examples such as creating new positions (e.g. Associate VP of Learning and Teaching), new departments (e.g. Center for Teaching Design), and new committees (e.g. Professional Learning Communities). While in each case these organizational changes were made to better support and develop their teaching and learning practices, each president stated that online and blended learning was a key part of that change. In one interview, the president noted that they only agreed to consider a new learning management system once they and their executive team were confident that their college

[1] https://www.jimcollins.com/concepts/first-who-then-what.html

culture was ready to embrace the change. The researcher brought this topic up with other two presidents who both agreed that the process for a new learning management system was only initiated once they felt they had the right people in the right positions, and the environment or culture was supportive of this change. One president commented, *"this was a change that couldn't be forced upon people. It was important for us to create an environment where our people were the ones who were convincing us why we needed a new learning management system."*

The adoption of a new learning management system was something that the researcher studied more closely as it appeared to represent a key point in time for the growth of online and blended learning at each college. While each of the presidents alluded to utilizing a mix of both formal and informal methods to facilitate teaching and learning throughout their colleges, they shared a number of commonalities that were utilized throughout the process of integrating the learning management system:

- They all involved faculty in the process of integrating their learning management systems.
- They all provided some form of teaching offload to specific faculty involved in the process (one college even assigned a faculty member as their lead on the project).
- They all held regular opportunities for their staff to have input and be involved in the process. These opportunities ranged from town halls (one college referenced utilizing the World Café Method to host and promote large group dialogue),

webinars, surveys, regular email updates, SharePoint sites with regular updates, focus groups, and working committees.

- They all had a least one strategic initiative to support the professional development of faculty in the move to adopt newer technologies.

Examples of these types of commitments were found in copies of their institutional planning documents.

Given the large body of research that indicates the negative perceptions on the part of faculty of online instruction with regards to value, legitimacy, and learning outcomes despite the evidence to the contrary, and given the statistics that further indicate the low participation levels of faculty in online teaching and course development (less than 20%), faculty involvement in the development and implementation of online and blended learning appears to be critical to its adoption and success in ultimately shifting the paradigm of higher educational delivery to newer, more accessible formats (Allen & Seaman, 2009; Allen & Seaman, 2011; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Mandernach, Mason, Forrest, & Hackathorn, 2012) .

**Theme 2 - Dedicated Strategy**

In this study, the participating colleges were identified on the basis of their apparent success in building online and blended learning programming as compared to other members of Polytechnics Canada. This provided an opportunity to examine how each president's leadership approach may have influenced the decision-making process, and actions taken that led to that success. Close examination of these actions and decisions revealed that the growth in online and blended learning did not materialize organically or

through indirect methods, but rather was a deliberate and strategic direction involving the allocation of dedicated personnel that was undertaken at some point in the recent history of the college. The decision to build online and blended learning programming was accomplished either through transitioning traditional F2F programs to online and blended learning programming entirely, or moving established distance education programs (i.e. correspondence, video recorded tapes, audio recorded lectures) to newer technologies (online and blended learning). While each college was unique in how they grew their online and blended learning programming, in all cases it was deliberate and strategic; with each college having at least one strategic goal in their planning that was focused on the growth of online and blended learning programming. Two of the colleges even defined a specific annual percentage of targeted growth for their online and blended learning programming.

All three colleges are governed by boards and each of their boards were focused on building and maintaining online and blended learning portfolios. College 1 historically had a large distance portfolio with correspondence courses as it was part of their mandate to provide education across the province (e.g. to rural areas where students did not have access to their campuses). When the president (incoming) at the time was going through the hiring process for the presidency at that college, the board was clear to all candidates in the selection process that it had a clear mandate to continue to provide distance education. This president was confident that their strong background in online and blended learning education (their previous role at a different college involved building a successful portfolio of online and blended learning) was a key factor in their ultimate success in securing the presidency over their competitors.

In response to the interview question, *"Has online and blended learning been a focus at any time during your leadership or has its growth been mostly organic?"* each president was adamant that online and blended learning had always been a dedicated focus during their leadership. Much of the conversation surrounding this question referenced key words and phrases such as 'future-looking', 'building skills that industry needs', 'advancing the use of educational technologies', 'improving learning opportunities for students', 'online and blended learning education as a catalyst for changing how learning is organized and supported', and 'transforming how teaching and learning is organized'. All three presidents interviewed in the study believed that the implementation of educational technologies such as online and blended learning would create changes in learning opportunities for their students. They also indicated that their mandate and interests were to promote online and blended learning as not only a useful and necessary learning platform for students, but also as a competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving post-secondary landscape.

For the interview questions, *"Was online and blended learning incorporated into any of your organizational structure changes?"* and *"Is there a key area/team/division at the college responsible for online and blended learning?"*, all of the presidents responded that online and blended learning did, in fact, play a role in organizational structural changes and that there was a area/team/division at their college that was ultimately responsible for online and blended learning. Each president, at some point in their tenure, had made a significant structural change to support online and blended learning either directly or indirectly.

President 1 shared how they had created a new position with a dedicated focus on online and blended learning, a Director of eLearning, to oversee all online programming at College 1. This was at a time when the president was preparing to lead the college through *"an evolution from distance learning to eLearning"* and felt that such a change required a dedicated resource to better ensure the successful transition. While College 1 already incorporated a culture that supported all learners, including distance students, the president was aware that the integration and use of new, educational technologies to support online and blended learning *"demanded significant and systemic change"*. They felt that in order to successfully adopt educational technologies, significant pedagogical and technological issues had to be considered and mitigated, and these kinds of changes required a dedicated *"champion"* in a more senior-level position.

For President 2 at College 2, the college was already familiar with online learning; however, the work with online learning was being driven by a separate entity within the college that was dedicated to continuing education (which included online learning). They made a number of structural changes to better integrate their online programming throughout their central services and systems that historically did not support online students. President 2 shared that although these changes took place over a longer period of time because they involved a number of different areas within the college, their ultimate goal was to support the growth of online and blended learning by integrating it throughout the college's functional and logistical areas so that it was no longer an isolated and siloed entity.

President 3 at College 3 faced a different situation as they were positioning the college to better support the growth of online and blended learning programming.

College 3 had made the move to a new learning management system, and at this time the president was confident that this change required a dedicated resource to lead the implementation and integration. The result of this was a new division at the college that was dedicated to teaching and learning. This structural change required a merger of two previously separate areas which at first brought on a *"tension-filled environment"*, as the general perception at the time was that the college and its systems were performing well and this change was not necessary. To mitigate the potential problems from this merger, the new department engaged in a "*visioning session"* over a two-day period to develop a number of vision statements, all focused on teaching and curriculum excellence. The president was the keynote speaker at this session and they began by sharing their ideas and then discussing what different vision statements could look like (including one for eLearning), referring to their past experiences as an educator and the future needs of their students. One of the initiatives that emerged from this session was a suggestion to adopt online and blended learning courses throughout all programs over a specified period of time. Later that same year, this suggestion led to a goal in the college's new strategic plan: *"Ensure all programs provide at least five per cent online delivery by XX date."*

It was clear in the interviews with each of the presidents that they recognized the transformational change that had to take place at their institute and their role to influence and shape this change. There was a consistent belief that learners' needs were changing rapidly and as a result, education providers needed to evolve to help meet those needs. When asked about this rapid change, in each of the interviews, the presidents felt there was currently a gap in meeting learners' needs and that while a few colleges were closer to meeting those needs, overall, colleges and universities were too slow to respond.

When each of the research candidates was asked if anyone was meeting learners' needs, all three presidents referred to private colleges, employers themselves, and industry-leading companies who had recognized the market deficiency (e.g. lack of flexibility and a gap in education/training models). One of the presidents even referred to edX, an open source platform founded by Harvard and MIT that is home to more than 20 million learners[2].

**Theme 3 – Dedicated Financial Resources**

In the first phase of this study, the three study candidates were identified by first evaluating their online and blended learning programs as compared to other members of Polytechnics Canada. These three institutes were identified as having comparatively large online and blended learning programs, similar characteristics relating to geography (rural vs. urban), similar size in terms of student numbers, and finally the length of tenure of the sitting presidents. Another factor that was similar with each of the colleges, although it was not considered in the methodology as part of the sample, was the size of the operating budgets at each college. Each of the three colleges had comparatively similar annual operating budgets at the time of the study.

For the three presidents under study, their length of tenures involved periods of time where their colleges' budgets experienced moderate increases in government funding over an annual basis. Each of the presidents' tenures also involved periods of time where they had to manage status quo government funding and/or budget cutbacks that ranged from two to three consecutive years. In spite of these periods of time with consecutive annual budget restraints, each president made the decision to continue dedicating funding

[2] https://www.edx.org/about-us

to online and blended learning growth initiatives. In each case, this decision was not originally supported across their colleges or even within their executive teams. One president referred to their approach and attitude towards online and blended learning as *"a sacred area even with budgets"*. Each college had specific examples where dedicated funding was set aside for multiple years (minimum two consecutive) to grow online and blended learning resources during a period of provincial funding cutbacks.

When President 1 started their term with College 1, the school had a *"strong offering of distance education programming already"*. President 1 therefore led a transition at their college from correspondence programming to online and blended learning programming. Working within the mandate of the board of directors at College 1, President 1 adhered to the desire to support access to students throughout a large geographical area, including areas where there was no access to the physical college campus. While this direction eased the decision-making process when budget cuts were being made, the president still had to defend the case to fund online and blended learning when cuts had to be made in other areas. Some of these cuts were to F2F programs with dedicated faculty. President 1 shared that even in a college with a long history of supporting distance education, it was still a tough argument to make cuts that involved on-campus programming, on-campus resources, and resulted in subsequent job losses. For one of the more significant budget cuts they had to endure, College 1 engaged in a *"program vitality process"* where they identified factors to essentially rank all of the programs at the college (in terms of their program success factors). President 1 was confident that this open, transparent process was a key factor in building the support to continue funding online and blended learning resources (the financial commitment to

transition from distance programming to online and blended learning programming) as the process determined that their distance programming was some of the fastest growing programming at the college. The enrolments for distance programs had experienced some of the highest year-over-year increases and their data showed that they were also experiencing significant increases in enrolments from students located within close proximity of their campuses (less than 25kms), whereas in previous years (5-8 years ago), the majority of enrolments were from students located at greater distances from their campuses (greater than 25kms) where physically attending classes was significantly more difficult. The process helped the faculty and staff understand that online and blended learning could be utilized to not only enable students in different geographical locations to engage in learning, but also to meet the needs of local students who were looking for flexibility in scheduling their learning around other demands in their lives. Compared with their traditional correspondence programs, online and blended learning was seen as providing their students greater support from instructors by virtue of faster communication and interaction, quicker turnaround time between submitting assignments and receiving feedback, and an overall increased engagement in learning activities.

In the case of College 2, online learning was managed separately or siloed within the college and not integrated within the college's systems. While President 2 utilized the move to adopt a learning management system as an opportunity to fully integrate online and blended learning within their college, partway through the integration process, the college had to endure a government funding cut as part of their annual budget. Although the cut was minor, it was unexpected and the college still had significant looming costs associated to their new learning management system. The president stated that they were

sure their plan to continue the funding for the learning management system would not be well received amongst the executive team at the college, especially since this would mean greater cuts to other areas at the college. While ultimately the budget would have to be approved at the board level prior to being rolled-out, the president first had to convince their executive team that online and blended learning had to be supported and the continued learning management system rollout was necessary. In the interview President 2 stated, *"the funding cut could not have come at a worst time as we were facing a significant financial investment for our new learning management system and other new investments related to integrating our online programming throughout our college systems."* Their task was even greater as the historical approach at College 2 was to spread any budget increases or decreases evenly throughout the organization. That is, whatever percentage change the college faced, this same percentage change was applied evenly across all departments. President 2 had to spend considerable time with their executive team as they planned and negotiated how to absorb the budget cut and what areas would be affected. President 2 shared that the discussions that took place during this planning was more about the future of education, how the college had to position itself to move into the future, and how the past practice of across-the-board increases or cuts did not support this forward-looking strategy and vision. In the end, the executive made the decision to discontinue the practice of *"across-the-board cuts"*, and to work to identify where cuts should be made and what areas should be protected from any cuts. It was ultimately decided that online learning represented a key component in the future of education and this meant in order to position College 2 for this future it was necessary to continue the funding to support the learning management system rollout.

In the case of College 3, the institute had recently published a 5-year strategic plan that included a specific goal for online and blended learning: *"Ensure all programs provide at least five per cent online delivery by XX date."* In the third year of this strategic plan the college had to make a decision - they were informed to expect status quo government funding for the upcoming year with possibly a small cut in the following year. Since institutional costs would likely increase year-over-year with no matching increase to funding, this would represent an annual budgetary deficit. However, to reach their goal for all programs to provide at least five per cent online delivery, they required targeted annual budgeted resources for the next two years to reach that goal. Similar to College 2, College 3 had to philosophically explore the future of education and how to be successful in positioning itself accordingly; and the conclusion was that the college was committed to supporting the growth of online programming despite the imposed budgetary challenges. President 3 shared how the strategic planning process they undertook to address the budget challenges afforded their college the necessary time to acknowledge and address any remaining barriers to growing online and blended learning within the college, primarily at the administrative level. Previously, it was identified that the key contributor to any tension surrounding growing online and blended learning at College 3, was that faculty were generally the leaders in promoting educational technologies and that college administrators were often slower to respond. President 3 noted that one of the faculty explained this by saying, *"we know that new technologies are supported at the college, but it often feels that we're the ones convincing administrators why it's important for our students, where it would be nice if administrators would play more of a spokesperson role."* They took this advice and

influenced their executive to play more of a leading role in understanding and supporting educational technologies going forward. This shift of support from the executive meant a greater sense of commitment on the part of all stakeholders and thus a greater chance of their 5-year strategic plan succeeding despite the reduced funding.

The qualitative research questions provided a focus to ensure that the purpose of the study was addressed adequately. The research questions for this study were:

- Can the characteristics and behaviors of transformational leadership and distributed leadership be identified among presidents at Canadian colleges with successful online and blended learning programs?
- What characterizes the relationship, if one exists, between transformational and distributed leadership, and the growth of online and blended learning at these colleges?

This study postulated that a transformational vision and distributed approach to leadership could garner the support and commitment of faculty and staff through distribution of power, authority, and responsibility to implement and grow online and blended learning at each institute. Each of the presidents had similar, often difficult decisions to make throughout their mandates – to continue to fund online and blended learning endeavors in the face of funding cuts, as well as the level to which to involve and empower faculty in the process to ensure a smooth and successful transition through the required functional, logistical and technological changes. The complexity of leadership concerns and responsibilities associated with growing online and blended learning became greater when resources were becoming scarcer and resistance to change greater. Each of the presidents referred to the need to spread, or “distribute”, the

leadership responsibilities across functional areas in order to deliver results across a large span of areas of responsibility by empowering faculty and staff to varying degrees and levels of involvement. Unlike other leadership methodologies, a distributed or 'collaborative' leadership approach is an organizational quality rather than an individual attribute whereby stakeholders trust and respect each other's contributions, and collaborate together to achieve identified goals (Spillane, 2005). The existence of a 'bottom-up' approach to change is central to distributed leadership and is in contrast to a more autocratic-type leadership which is characterized by individual control over all decisions and little input from group members. It seeks to provide a more inclusive notion of leadership that builds systematic, multi-facetted and collaborative leadership capacity and sees all academics as leaders. This deep involvement on the part of faculty and staff was crucial in all three cases under study in order to implement and provide continuous support for innovative change at each institute.

Distributed leadership alone; however, likely would not have inspired the commitment among the 'followers' to stay the course of an often troublesome and divergent path the transition to online and blended learning represented for each of them. Transformational leadership involves inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals of an organization, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers' leadership capacity through coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership appeals to intrinsic motives and needs, as well as elevates followers to higher levels of moral character (Wong, 1998). Transformational leaders must embody those characteristics in order to motivate members to become part of the organization. One of the three

presidents commented, *"Have your actions reflect what you value and the principles you stand for"*. Transformational leadership approaches can provide the means by which leaders of an organization can build a vision, motivate employees and encourage individuals to rise above self-interest (Vermeulen, Van Acker, Kreijns, & van Buuren, 2015). In each of the interviews with the college presidents, they alluded to significant mental and cultural shifts that took place within their colleges throughout the growth of their online and blended learning portfolio. Some of the words used by the presidents in their interviews to describe these shifts or changes were "*transformative", "significant", "revolutionary", "innovative",* and *"institutional"*. One president defined their role as follows:

> "*I saw my role in this change like a head coach or a conductor of an orchestra. I constantly had to be clear in communicating where we needed to go and I had to provide a vision that was greater than what was already there. You have to aspire for greatness no matter where you are in the stages of growth, and you have to convince people that it can be done and that they can be a part of it. I had to constantly remind myself to routinely communicate what our expectations were, and I had to give regular feedback to the people I was delegating authority to".*

Transformational leadership, in each of the cases, enabled each of the Presidents to clearly communicate their vision, and to garner the support and commitment of their teams to continue to work towards the institutional goals that were set for online and blended learning despite setbacks and difficulties. The following sections outline, specifically, the results in the context of the original study questions.

**Study question 1: Identifying the characteristics and behaviors of transformational and distributed leadership.**

In their interviews, the college presidents each noted that they regularly utilized transformational and distributed leadership approaches throughout their tenures. Recent research in the areas of transformational and distributed leadership identifies that there is a focus on developing an organization's capacity to innovate (Shafique & Kalyar, 2018). In an educational setting, rather than focusing specifically on centrally coordinating and controlling activities, transformational and distributed leadership seeks to build the organization's capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning. Transformational leadership may be viewed as complementary to a distributed approach in that it focuses on developing a shared vision and shared commitment to school change, and then allows others to lead the coordination, control, and supervision of that change. A goal of this type of leadership is to create a climate in which faculty, working toward a shared vision, engage in continuous learning and support, and lead colleagues in their learning. This approach is believed to increase commitment of faculty who see the relationship between what they are trying to accomplish and the mission of the school (Hallinger, 2018).

The characteristics and behaviors of transformational and distributed leadership were found to be present in the approaches of each of the three presidents. This was most evident in their responses to the interview questions (see Appendix B – Interview Questions) that focused on their leadership models: *"Can you discuss your leadership approach and how it's developed over your time as a college executive?", "What are your expectations of your executive team in terms of their leadership approach?", "How*

*do you develop your leaders or executive team members (i.e. through professional development)?"* In discussing their leadership approaches the presidents each had a number of similarities in their responses. Each of the presidents shared how they regularly practiced such things as empowering others, being future-focused, and setting clear goals. By triangulating the data, these practices were also present in the identified themes: faculty-led initiatives to transition each college to their current state of online and blended learning; a dedicated focus to growing online and blended learning; and, a financial commitment to fund online and blended learning growth despite consecutive years of funding cutbacks. Individually, the presidents discussed how they strived to empower others and this could be observed in each of the cases where they directed the roll-out of faculty-led initiatives to transition their colleges to increased online and blended learning programming. Each of the presidents also used language such as "*future-focused*" and "*forward thinking*" when describing the institutional culture to which they aspired; and the actions they took to further encourage and promote that culture included a strategic commitment to grow their online and blended learning programming rather than simply allowing it evolve organically. They alluded to significant mental shifts that took place within their colleges throughout the growth of their online and blended learning and used terms such as *"transformative", "significant", "revolutionary", "innovative",* and *"institutional"* to describe these shifts. In triangulating the interview responses with data from institutional artefacts, there were a number of examples where each college appeared to be forward-looking and actively working to position themselves to face the future of education. In terms of setting clear goals, the presidents were consistent in their views that specific goals were a key

component of their leadership approaches and the data supported these statements, as each college had examples of strategic goals with explicit performance measures or targets relating to online and blended learning.

In discussing their expectations of others there were also a number of similarities, especially focused on the ability to think strategically rather than just tactically as each of the presidents referred to actions and attitudes such as *"thinking institutionally not just functionally", "being leaders rather than just managing",* and *"operating at more of a macro-level than a micro-level".* Each also discussed how they expected their executive members to lead with a *"team approach", "to empower their team members",* and *"to encourage their people to add-value to their work".*

The data exhibited how each president, throughout their tenures, paid specific attention to building capacity to innovate within their colleges. In this, the researcher found evidence of a number of examples where each of the presidents empowered others to manage college initiatives, while there was no evidence found of any of the presidents directly controlling or supervising college initiatives themselves. There was also evidence that each college developed shared visions through collaborative approaches when they developed their college strategic and academic planning documents. In dealing with many of the challenges the colleges faced, there were examples of a shared commitment to school change, and allowing faculty and staff to lead that change. In all cases, rather than the president coordinating and controlling from above, they each focused on stimulating change through bottom-up participation.

**Study question 2: What characterizes the relationship, if one exists, between transformational and distributed leadership, and the growth of online and blended learning?**

With the period of educational reform in North America during the 1990s, scholars and practitioners began to popularize leadership terms such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003). Prior to this evolution, the principal or president of a school was most often the sole decision-maker and the center of expertise. The conceptual distinctions between the historical leadership approach and transformational and distributed leadership was that rather than 'coordinating and controlling' staff towards the school's desired ends with no focus on individual needs, the transformational and distributed model is grounded in understanding the needs of the individual with behavioral components such as individualized support, collaboration, intellectual stimulation (Li & Yuen, 2015).

In study question #1 it was confirmed that each of the presidents had utilized transformational and distributed leadership approaches at different times in their tenures. A deeper analysis and triangulation of the data was required to address study question #2 which sought to determine whether or not a relationship existed between these leadership approaches and the growth of their online and blended learning programs. The three major themes, identified in Chapter 4, helped to shape these findings.

For the first theme of faculty-led initiatives, it was identified that there was a significant change that took place recently at each of the colleges that led them to their current online and blended learning programming (at the time of the study), and that although each case was different, a theme throughout each of the cases was the deep level

and degree of involvement of the faculty in each of the situations. All three colleges had recently transitioned from using an older technology to adopting a newer technology for online and blended learning, and before these transitions could take place, each president had to focus on developing their organization's capacity to innovate. Each president, rather than focusing specifically on direct coordination, control, and supervision of the change process, utilized transformational leadership to create a vision that was supported by college stakeholders, and then to build their organization's capacity to select its purpose and work collaboratively towards the development of changes to adopt newer technologies in support of online and blended learning. These experiences helped to build their teams' capacities to innovate by empowering them to share the commitment to grow online and blended learning.

For the second theme of a dedicated focus to growing online and blended learning at their institutes, it was identified that each college's growth in online and blended learning did not materialize organically or through indirect methods, but rather it was a strategic direction taken at some point in the recent history of the college. When describing the cultural changes that took place during the transition to online and blended learning at their respective institutes, each president used terms such as transformative, significant, revolutionary, innovative, and institutional. Through an analysis of several studies of the impact of the school leader from a transformational leadership perspective, Leithwood and Sun (2012) highlighted 'people effects' as a cornerstone of the transformational leadership model. Within the model proposed, many of the outcomes of interest in terms of restructuring schools are faculty effects (e.g. changes of behaviour, adoption of new programs, adoption of new technologies, teaching techniques). Thus, the president's

efforts become apparent in the college conditions that produced changes in people rather than in promoting specific instructional practices. According to each of the three presidents, the transformational vision inspired the people to 'get on board', and as the leadership became more distributed and engrained throughout schools, the people involved in the changes accepted greater and greater responsibility and accountability for the success of the endeavor. The resulting sense of commitment on the part of those involved was especially important as this 'hand-off' and distribution of power from the top down created a great deal of uncertainty at all three institutes as people 'felt' their way through their new roles. As Jackson (2010) suggests, transformational leadership requires a higher tolerance for ambiguity, and an ability to live with the messy process of change. Distributing the power and responsibility allowed the people involved in affecting the change to feel a greater sense of control over their fate and success of their mission.

For the third theme, each president maintained a financial commitment to fund online and blended learning growth despite consecutive years of funding cuts, and despite the fact that these financial commitments were not originally or universally supported across their colleges or even, in some cases, their executive teams. Faced with the pressure of stressed budgets over multiple years, each of the presidents chose to continue incorporating online learning into the educational structures at their colleges. Each of the three presidents successfully navigated potentially turbulent situations by utilizing transformational and distributed leadership approaches to influence, motivate, and empower their colleges to move toward a common goal. These approaches contrasted with the historical type of autocratic leadership where the focus was on the corporate

leader who made all decisions without any consultation with those below them. In this type of leadership model, the president would limit uncertainty by making a decision and ordering others to carry it out. Each of the presidents in this study took a transformational approach by motivating and inspiring their people to go 'above and beyond' to achieve goals despite inadequate resources. This was achieved in each case by reiterating the importance of their colleges' future and values, and inspiring others to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the common good of the college and its students.

The purpose of the qualitative multi-case study was to explore specific leadership characteristics that enabled Canadian College Presidents to influence the growth of online and blended learning. The three college presidents in the study discussed the topics of leadership, organizational structure, planning, and online and blended learning during semi-structured interviews. The interview transcripts, interview notes and various college documents were analyzed to shed light on two research questions regarding the characteristics of transformational and distributed leadership and their potential relationship to the growth of online and blended learning. From the interview data the researcher was able to identify eight emerging categories that eventually supported three major themes. These categories were: a digital or IT strategy; increased student access/opportunity/flexibility; financial commitment; new educational technologies; delivery models; professional development; new programming; and, accommodating growth in programming. The resulting three major themes were; 1) faculty-led initiatives to transition each college to their current state of online and blended learning; 2) a dedicated strategy to growing online and blended learning; and, 3) a financial

commitment to fund online and blended learning growth despite consecutive years of funding cutbacks. Each theme was linked in the analysis to at least one of the two research questions. The data was examined through a combination of coding techniques, and the emergent themes were assessed for significance and cohesion.

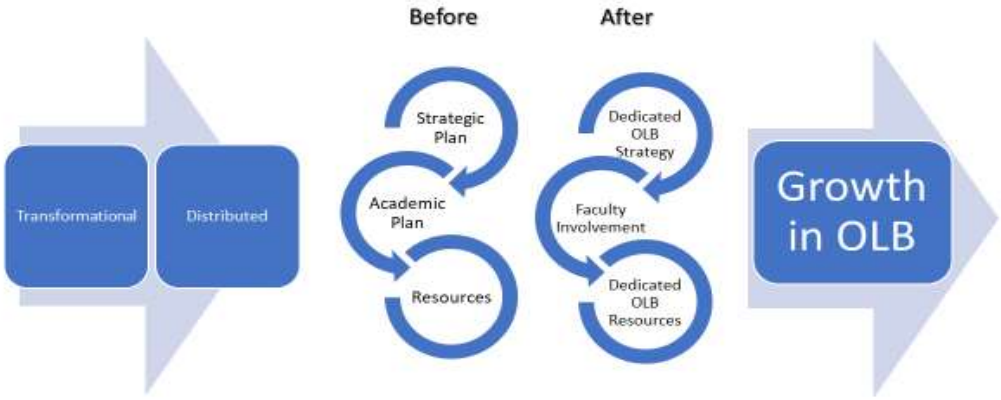
## Chapter 5. Conclusion

The overall problem addressed in this multiple-case study was that the complex challenges associated with leadership in online and blended learning are combined with internal organizational structures and cultures that can obstruct, rather than facilitate, change and growth. This study investigated if and how Canadian college presidents practiced transformational and distributed leadership within their colleges to influence the growth of online and blended learning. Chapter Four provided a discussion of the thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered in each case; the information synthesized from the transcripts of the interviews conducted with the presidents, and the analysis and triangulation of college artefacts collected from each institute led to the emergence of themes which ultimately explored the degree to which the results of strong online and blended learning programming could be attributed to transformational and distributed leadership approaches by the presidents. Through an understanding of the relationship between leadership approach and the growth of online and blended learning programs, the knowledge gained could assist in creating and executing a strategic plan to further support and encourage the growth of online and blended learning, and also aid in identifying the appropriate leader to bring this plan to fruition (see Figure 2). Ultimately, the findings in this multi-case study align with the findings by (Hartley, 2009) which indicate that complex organizations like educational institutes require a greater number of personnel who have been empowered to deal with those complexities through a clearly communicated vision, and the distribution of leadership to establish a culture in which talent can be nurtured and developed. There appears to exist, in each of the three cases included in this study, a correlation between the transformative and distributive

leadership actions and strategies taken on the part of each of the presidents as described in the three themes, and the successful growth of their respective online and blended learning institutional portfolios.

**Figure 2**

*The Influence of Transformational and Distributed Leadership Approaches in Growing Online and Blended Learning – Study Results*




**Implications**

The schools of the future are unlikely to succeed utilizing leadership styles that favor more traditional educational methods, and an examination of how these presidents transformed their institutes to embrace and grow online and blended learning could help us better understand how to provide vision, guidance, and management for this evolution. Considering the challenges colleges face to integrate educational technologies, a leader with a clear vision and a collaborative leadership approach may be able to address these challenges by soliciting the support necessary to successfully grow online and blended learning. A vision for online and blended learning must be embraced and supported by the stakeholders, and be in the best interests of the institute; the senior administrative team must possess the interpersonal skills to work collaboratively with others to share

ideas and reconcile conflicting views; and finally, these leaders must have the courage to 'stay the course' and be willing to approach things in a novel way (Vaughan, 2007).

In this qualitative, multi-case study the researcher utilized transformational and distributed leadership theories as the lens through which to consider the presidents' actions and strategies to understand if these approaches were instrumental in supporting online and blended learning as these approaches appear to offer ways to address the pedagogical, organizational, and leadership challenges associated with the complexity of integrating online and blended learning. Previous research of online and blended learning has been dominated by studies of learner engagement and performance (Smith & Santori, 2015); however, there exists a growing need for further study of the impact of leadership on online and blended learning as it becomes a more and more integral part of education.

Online and blended learning programs continue to attract the attention of students and prospective students who are looking for flexibility and alternatives to traditional schooling or delivery models. Despite this growing interest, and the potential that online and blended learning could be a mechanism by which to transform how teaching and learning is organized, online and blended learning programming continues to have minimal impact on the desires of most faculty to move away from more traditional delivery models (Loyd, Byrne, & McCoy, 2012). The traditional organization of education with the teacher and students together in a physical classroom remains the dominant paradigm. An increasing number of educators are utilizing online and blended learning in an effort to change how they organize and support their programming in an effort to increase choice and opportunity for learners. The presidents in this study

believed that the increased presence of online and blended learning would create greater learning opportunities for students and ultimately help position their college to be more aligned with evolving future trends in education. This view is supported in the related literature, where the adoption of new educational technologies, such as online and blended learning, is integral to educational reform from a post-industrial, knowledge-based model of information dispensing, to a knowledge building model (Warschauer, Zinger, & Tate, 2017). The identification of specific leadership traits and strategies presented in this study could prove to be instrumental in future planning for educational reform, and the identification of appropriate candidates to best implement and lead those endeavors.

**Limitations**

Marshall & Rossman (2006) believed there is no perfect design and every proposed research study has limitations. For this study, the following limitations are recognized.

An initial limitation of the study was the number of colleges in the sample size. There are approximately 135 colleges in Canada[3]. Using purposeful sampling, the researcher intentionally chose colleges that were members of Polytechnics Canada, a national organization which represents 13 publicly supported colleges, institutes, and polytechnics in Canada. The intent of the study was to conduct a qualitative inquiry of the roles of a select number of presidents to study an instance in action - the growth of online and blended learning programs. A sample size of three allowed for an in-depth study of a few cases with the goal of reaching thematic saturation, the point at which no

[3] https://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/our-members/member-directory/

new information emerges from the data, in a multiple case study (Yin, 2012). Three institutes with comparatively large online and blended learning programs, and similar characteristics relating to geography (rural vs. urban), college size (FLEs), and length of tenure of the sitting president were approached for participation in the study. Confining the research to a specific college type, size, and geographical region, however, could hinder the opportunity to have a richer, diverse pool of participants that could potentially present unique and varying perceptions and insights.

Another limitation related to sample size was the number of people from each case or institute to involve in the study. In this study, the intent was to conduct a qualitative inquiry of the roles, responsibilities and actions of a select number of presidents to evaluate an instance in action - the growth of online and blended learning programs. A sample size of 3 out of the 13 Polytechnics in Canada provided the opportunity to analyze the data within each situation and across different situations to understand the similarities and differences between the cases and therefore provide the related body of literature with important insights from those differences and similarities. Although more case studies often mean less observation time per case, the more likely it is that the researcher is confident in their study's representativeness (Gerring, 2017). In this case, the inclusion of multiple cases in the study resulted in less observation time per case which limited the ability to involve a larger number of individuals throughout the college or institute for the purpose of achieving a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

A final limitation was that the researcher has worked in the Canadian college system for over 12 years. The researcher interacted with the participants to "…construct

the meaning of the situation" and, therefore must acknowledge that their prior experiences and opinions may have shaped and influenced the interpretation of the data. It was important for the researcher to continually reflect on their personal inquiry and how it could have influenced the study. Any bias on the part of the researcher was mitigated through triangulation of multiple sources of data.

**Recommendations**

The results of this study add to the body of knowledge that already exists on leadership approaches for online and blended learning. As indicated previously, earlier research on online and blended learning was dominated by studies of learner engagement and performance; however, more recently there exists a growing need for further study on the impact of leadership on online and blended learning as it becomes a more and more integral part of education. Thus, a need for continued research in this area exists in order to bring greater awareness and understanding of online and blended learning and effective leadership approaches that support its success. From this research study, two specific recommendations for future research are suggested and provided within this section.

An initial recommendation for future research is to conduct a single case study of one of these colleges involving a number of staff members throughout the organization (faculty, administrators, managers) who were directly involved in the actions and strategies to grow online and blended learning under the leadership of the president. This would allow for a variety of different perspectives, and thus greater insight into the effectiveness of the presidents' actions and leadership approach, and would add to the body of knowledge on effective leadership that supports online and blended learning.

A secondary recommendation for further research would be to conduct a multi-case study of colleges with similar, small portfolios of online and blended learning. A comparative study of presidents at colleges that have either not embraced the use of educational technologies, or have not utilized their educational technologies to grow their online and blended learning could provide a contrasting perspective of presidential leadership approach. These presidents may have made a strategic choice to prioritize areas other than online and blended learning or may have recognized that their colleges were not positioned effectively and/or culturally to support the growth of online and blended learning at that time.

**Summary**

Through an understanding of the relationship between leadership approach and the growth of online and blended learning programs, the knowledge gained could assist in creating and executing a strategic plan to further support and encourage the growth of online and blended learning, and also in identifying the effective leadership approaches to bring this plan to fruition. This study evaluated the existence of transformational and distributed leadership practices and considered this in the context of the planning and implementation of online and blended learning. The presidents included in the study exemplified a leadership model that worked well in its context, and that allowed authority and responsibility to be assigned to participants of distributed leadership within that context. As such, the stakeholders involved were committed to the cause and vision of educational reform, and this appears to have contributed to the successful implementation and growth of online and blended learning at each institute.

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## Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

College Leadership Approach and Impact on Online and Blended Learning

March 2019

**Principal Investigator (Researcher):**
Scott MacPherson

**Supervisor:**
Dr. Mohamed Ally

My name is Scott MacPherson and I am a Doctor of Education in Distance Education student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about college leadership and its impact on the successful growth of online and blended learning. I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Mohamed Ally.

I invite you to participate in this project because your college has a large portfolio of online and blended (OLB) learning programs, making it one of the most successful colleges in Canada for OLB learning.

The purpose of this research project is to explore how your college leadership approach helped to influence the growth of OLB learning at your college.

Your participation in this project would involve participating in an interview either in-person or over the phone, arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule. I will also allow time for any follow-up conversation for you to review the interview transcript, with the opportunity to alter/clarify your comments. The interview will take no longer than one hour.

The research should benefit by providing a better understanding of how college leadership approaches can influence the growth of online and blended learning. I do not anticipate you will face any risks as a result of participating in this research.

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, (the principal investigator) by e-mail scottf_macpherson@yahoo.ca or phone (902)717-4495 or my supervisor Dr. Mohamed Ally by e-mail mohameda@athabascau.ca

Thank you.

Scott MacPherson

**This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.**

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

Your college has one of the highest numbers of online and blended courses/programs (OLB) throughout the college system in Canada.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. How long have you been president at your college?
2. Was the role of president your first position at the college?
3. Can you describe the state of online and blended programs at the college now compared to when you started?
4. If there's been growth in OLB, how significant has it been? Has there been a key factor in that growth (i.e. funding, organizational changes, etc.)?
5. Has OLB been a focus at any time during your leadership or has its growth been mostly organic?

LEADERSHIP MODEL:

6. Can you discuss your leadership approach and how it's developed over your time as a college executive?
7. What are your expectations of your executive team in terms of their leadership approach?
8. How do you develop your leaders or executive team members (i.e. through professional development)?

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

9. Describe the organizational structure at your college from the executive level down to the dean level?
10. How has it changed from when you first became president and what may have precipitated those changes?
11. Was OLB incorporated into any of your organizational structure changes?
12. Is there a key area/team/division at the college responsible for OLB? If so, how does this area function?

PLANNING:

13. Does your college have a regular planning cycle?
14. What does your planning process look like? Do you utilize committees or teams?
15. Has OLB ever been incorporated into your planning?

## Appendix C: Informed Consent

College Leadership Approach and Impact on Online and Blended Learning

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Principal Researcher:** Scott MacPherson

**Supervisor:** Dr. Mohamed Ally

You are invited to participate in a research study about college leadership and its impact on the successful growth of online and blended learning. I am conducting this study as a requirement to complete my Doctor of Education.

As part of this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview either in-person or over the phone, arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule. I will provide you with a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview (at least one week). The interview will take no longer than one hour. I will also allow time for any follow-up conversation for you to review the interview transcript, with the opportunity to alter/clarify your comments.

To maintain confidentiality of data during collection and analysis I will assign a code to the information/names obtained from each participant and the key to the code will be kept away from the data set (in a locked filing cabinet or a password-protected file). As well, any references to people or institutions made by participants during the interview will be altered to maintain privacy and ensure anonymity. However, since qualitative research focuses on how people live and act in very particular, situated contexts, removing identifying information could also remove contextual information that has potential value to the researcher. In the case that anonymity is detrimental to the study, permission to disclose identities will be sought from the participants to do so.

Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions or to share information that you are not comfortable sharing. You may withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period up until you have approved/edited the transcript of your interview. This can be done by notifying me via email or by phone and any data collected to that point will be destroyed.

Through my questions, and resulting analysis and conclusions, I hope that this endeavor may help you as a participant, to better understand your own leadership approach and inherent strengths that have led to your success.

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact me, (the principal investigator) by e-mail scottf_macpherson@yahoo.ca or phone (902) 717- 4495 or my supervisor Dr. Mohamed Ally by e-mail mohameda@athabascau.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718 or by e-mail to rebsec@athabascau.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

**CONSENT:**

I have read the Letter of Information regarding this research study, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will keep a copy of this letter for my records.

My signature below confirms that:

- I understand the expectations and requirements of my participation in the research;
- I understand the provisions around confidentiality and anonymity;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences;
- I am aware that I may contact the researcher, research supervisor, or the Office of Research Ethics if I have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research procedures.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Please provide specific consent for the following.

By initialing the statement(s) below,

_____ I am granting permission for the researcher to use an audio recorder

_____ I acknowledge that the researcher may use specific quotations of mine, without identifying me

_____ I am granting permission for the researcher to attribute my name to certain quotes with my approval of attribution of each quote used

If you would like a copy of the research results, please complete the section below specific to the mode of delivery of the results.

_____ I would like to receive a copy of the results of this research study by:

e-mail address:

_____

Or mailing address:

_____

If you are willing to have the researcher contact you at a later time by e-mail or telephone for a brief conversation to confirm that I have accurately understood your comments in the interview, please indicate so below. You will not be contacted more than six months after your interview.

_____ Yes, I would be willing to be contacted.

## Appendix D: Coding

| Code | Reference |
|---|---|
| C1, C2, C3 | College 1, College 2, College 3 |
| P1, P2, P3 | President at College 1, College 2, and at College 3 |
| IT1, IT2, IT3 | Interview Transcripts 1, Interview Transcripts 2, and Interview Transcripts 3 |
| IN1, IN2, IN3 | Interview Notes from President 1, President 2, and President 3 |
| IP1, IP2, IP3 | Institutional Planning Documents at College 1, College 2, and at College 3 |
| AP1, AP2, AP3 | Academic Planning Documents at College 1, College 2, and at College 3 |
| FD1, FD2, FD3 | Financial Documents at College 1, College 2, and at College 3 |
| OD1, OD2, OD3 | Organizational Documents at College 1, College 2, and at College 3 |

Institutional Planning Documents – Strategic Plans, Institutional Plans, Operational Plans, Student Success Strategy, Business Plans, Provincial Plans

Academic Planning Documents – Academic Plans, Education Plans, Department Plans

Financial Documents – Annual Reports, Operating and Capital Plans

Organizational Documents – Organizational Structures, Job Descriptions, Academic Models

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

## Appendix E: Certification of Ethical Approval

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (AUREB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The AUREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

**Ethics File No**.: **23399**

**Principal Investigator**:
Mr. Scott MacPherson, Graduate Student
Centre for Distance Education\Doctor of Education in Distance Education

**Supervisor**:
Dr. Mohamed Ally (Supervisor)

**Project Title**:
College Leadership Approach and Impact on Online and Blended Learning

**Effective Date:** April 24, 2019 **Expiry Date**: April 23, 2020

**Restrictions:**

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

**Approved by:** **Date:** April 24, 2019

Debra Hoven, Chair
Centre for Distance Education, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

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Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
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