

2013-07-10

# Organizational Identity Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study

Nippard, Eric

---

Nippard, E. (2013). Organizational Identity Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study (Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>. doi:10.11575/PRISM/27226

<http://hdl.handle.net/11023/792>

*Downloaded from PRISM Repository, University of Calgary*

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Organizational Identity

Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study

by

Eric Cecil Nippard

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

GRADUATE DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JUNE, 2013

© Eric Cecil Nippard 2013

## **ABSTRACT**

The origin and delineation of organizational identity (OI) as a construct has been well studied and documented by researchers. This research has suggested that insufficient study has been conducted on how organizational identity formation takes place from organizational inception, which factors influence this formation (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010), and that there is a limited understanding of how organizational identity forms. More specifically, there is limited knowledge of how organizational members' perceptions of leadership, and of professional identity, impact organizational identity formation. This descriptive, single case study grounded in the interpretive qualitative paradigm and featuring a sample of thirty-five organizational members of a virtual education organization, examines organizational identity formation in a virtual education organization, and advances rich data regarding such an organization's identity formation. Data were collected using interviews and through the examination of organizational documents. Analysis of the data used case study procedures and the constant comparative method borrowed from grounded theory. Findings indicated that organizational identity formation is impacted by the members' perceptions of formal and informal leaders and their leadership style, but that organizational identity resides in an amalgam of referents that are difficult to isolate as a function of a single impactful influence such as organizational leaders/leadership. The perceived ability to establish a professional identity also influenced organizational identity formation. Organizational complexity negatively impacted the members' abilities to develop professional identities, and influenced their perceptions of the organization's culture and influenced the organizational identity formation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A journey is rarely travelled alone. In my case, the journey involved many people without whom success would not have been possible. First, I have to thank my supervisor; Dr. Jim Brandon who was an invaluable support and was instrumental in keeping me on this path to success. Thank you for the words of encouragement and the positive assurances that this, indeed, could be done! Many thanks to the committee members: Dr. Kent Donlevy and Dr. Jim Paul. Your input and comments were instrumental in producing a quality thesis, as was your support and attention to detail.

I would like to thank the members of the organization, who remain unnamed for obvious reasons, but without whom this study would not have been possible. Your courage and dedication inspire me. You know who you are!

To friends, family, and colleagues. To the Calgary “team” who provided residences and mobility for seven years: Myra, Gus and Family (especially Laine! And Lola), Sharon, Craig and family, and Paul. To Dr. Pam Bishop who encouraged me in my study. A special thank-you to my classmate and friend Dr. Rose Burton-Spohn. You set the bar high and your sense of humour and drive kept me on the road. To my sons, daughter, brothers, sisters, and especially Mom, who inspired me to be who I am today. To a prominent group of former educators who maintained that education was everything and to this day, remain a large part of my life: Ray Meade, John Framp, and Roland Gale. To Perry White and Ms. Suzie McIntosh for reading and feedback. And last, but certainly not least, to my darling wife Sandra. I Love You! You sacrificed much in order for me to pursue this dream, and gave me the encouragement to continue when quitting seemed the only option. This is as much yours as it is mine!

## **DEDICATION**

This tome is dedicated to my Father Cecil Eric Nippard who exemplified life-long learning and instilled in me a profound curiosity and need to know; my father-in-law Thomas Collett who taught me that no obstacle is too big to overcome, and to my dear grandmother, Winnie Mercer who, even at ninety-eight years young, taught me a thing or two about how to live life! Thank you!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	III
DEDICATION.....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	V
LIST OF TABLES.....	VIII
LIST OF FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.....	IX
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	X
EPIGRAPH.....	XI
CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING	
ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY.....	1
Background and Overview of Organizational Identity Formation.....	2
Research Problem Statement.....	9
Purpose of the Study.....	10
Research Questions.....	10
Research Approach.....	10
Significance of the Study.....	11
Definition of Key Terms.....	12
The Researcher.....	12
Organization of the Thesis.....	13
CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	16
Introduction.....	16
Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Organizational Identity.....	17
Organizational Identity Defined.....	21
Expanding on Organizational Culture.....	27
Leadership and the Practice of Identity Formation.....	30
Leadership styles.....	31
The charismatic model of leadership.....	32
The full range of leadership model (FRLM).....	33
Distributed leadership.....	37
The Relevance of Leadership Models to OI Formation.....	41
Establishing a Professional Identity.....	43
Professional identity defined.....	44
Social capital and professional identity.....	47
The Virtual Education Organization (VEO) in Context.....	50
Summary.....	53

CHAPTER 3: DESCRIPTIVE SINGLE CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY.....	55
Introduction to and Overview of the Research Design.....	55
Elaborating the Research Design.....	61
Rationale for Using Case Study.....	61
The Case and Unit of Analysis.....	64
The Research Site and Sample.....	66
Research context.....	66
Site and participant selection.....	67
Gaining entry to the site.....	68
Study sample.....	70
Protecting the participant.....	71
The researcher and the researched.....	72
Data Collection and Management.....	73
Data collection.....	73
Self as research instrument.....	80
Protecting the data.....	80
Data management strategies.....	81
Data Analysis and Synthesis.....	82
Data analysis.....	82
Verification of the data.....	87
Trustworthiness of the Research and Findings.....	88
Dealing with validity and reliability.....	89
Study limitations and delimitations.....	92
The Final Product.....	93
Summary.....	93
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	95
Introduction.....	95
As noted in chapter three, data analysis in this case study was guided primarily by the research questions, and a set of propositions (Data Analysis and Synthesis section). These propositions were that:.....	96
Participant Demographics.....	97
Findings for Research Question One.....	98
i) Leader/leadership confidence and trust.....	101
ii) Leader/leadership communication.....	103
iii) Leader/leadership support.....	105
iv) Leader/leadership influence on organizational culture.....	109
v) Leader/leadership qualities.....	111
Findings for Research Question Two.....	115
vi) The level of experience drives informal leadership.....	116
vii) Everyone has leadership potential.....	117
viii) Culture of support and empowerment supporting informal leadership.....	118
Findings for Research Question Three.....	120
ix) Organizational size, structure and degree of bureaucracy that occurred over time.....	122
x) Regionalism and professional isolation.....	125
Summary.....	129

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	132
Introduction.....	132
Findings for Research Question One .....	134
i) Leader/leadership confidence and trust.....	134
ii) Leader/leadership communication .....	138
iii) Leader/leadership support.....	144
iv) Leader/leadership influence on organizational culture .....	148
v) Leader/leadership qualities.....	155
Findings for Research Question Two .....	163
vi. The level of experience drives informal leadership .....	164
vii. Everyone has leadership potential.....	167
viii. Culture of support and empowerment supporting informal leadership .....	171
Findings for Research Question Three .....	172
(ix) Changes to Organizational size, structure and an increase in the degree of bureaucracy that occurred over time.....	173
(x) Regionalism and professional isolation .....	180
Summary.....	184
 CHAPTER 6: SOME NECESSARY CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY, THIS RESEARCHER, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	186
Conclusions Drawn from this Case Study .....	186
What has been learned from posing the three research questions? .....	187
What has been learned from doing the research? .....	192
What has been learned about myself? .....	193
Recommendations for Future Research .....	193
Researcher Reflections .....	195
 REFERENCES .....	196
 APPENDIX A: LETTER APPROVING STUDY.....	218
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	219
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER.....	220
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	225
APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT.....	228

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Example of Second Order Concept Derived from Concept Statements.....	86
Table 4.1: Organization of first/second order concepts and alignment with research question one.....	99
Table 4.11: Supporting interview data for second order concept (i); research question one.....	101
Table 4.12: Supporting interview data for second order concept (ii); research question one.....	103
Table 4.13: Supporting interview data for second order concept (iii); research question one.....	106
Table 4.14: Supporting interview data for second order concept (iv); research question one.....	109
Table 4.15: Supporting interview data for second order concept (v); research question one.....	112
Table 4.2: Organization of first/second order concepts and alignment with research question two.....	115
Table 4.21: Supporting interview data for second order concept (vi); research question two.....	117
Table 4.22: Supporting interview data for second order concept (vii); research question two.....	117
Table 4.23: Supporting interview data for second order concept (viii); research question two.....	118
Table 4.3: Organization of first/second order concepts and alignment with research question three.....	121
Table 4.31: Supporting interview data for second order concept (ix); research question three.....	123
Table 4.32: Supporting interview data for second order concept (x); research question three.....	125

## LIST OF FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 2.1: Dimensions in the Full Range Leadership Model.....	35
Figure 2.2: Leadership Practice Over Time.....	39
Figure 4.1: Organization and participant totals with breakdown by gender.....	97
Figure 4.2: Participating members' years of experience with the organization sorted by gender.....	98

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CR	Contingent Reward
FRLM	Full Range Leadership Model
IC	Individualized Consideration
II	Idealized Influence
IM	Inspirational Motivation
IS	Intellectual Stimulation
LF	Laissez-Faire
MBE-P	Management by Exception - Passive
MBE-A	Management by Exception - Active
OI	Organizational Identity
SIT	Social Identity Theory
VEO	Virtual Education Organization

## **EPIGRAPH**

Identity is arguably more fundamental to the conception of humanity than any other notion - Dennis Gioia

## **CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY**

The origin and delineation of organizational identity (OI) as a construct has been studied and documented by researchers and scholars such as: Albert and Whetten, 1985; Alvesson and Empson, 2008; Bouchikhi, Fiol, Gioia, Golden-Biddle, Hatch, Rao, Rindova, Schultz, Fombrum, Kimberly, and Thomas, 1998; Gioia, 1998; Hatch and Schultz, 2002. However, this research has suggested, as well, that insufficient study has been conducted on how organizational identity formation takes place from organizational inception and which factors influence this formation (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010), and that “existing work thus provides a limited understanding of how organizational identity forms in nascent organizations” (p. 4).

This thesis is a descriptive, single case study grounded in the interpretive qualitative paradigm featuring a sample of thirty-five organizational members of a virtual education organization, and advances rich data regarding such an organization’s organizational identity formation. The virtual education organization is described as a geographically dispersed group of individuals who communicate and collaborate with one another using synchronous and asynchronous virtual communication tools, and who provide educational services to high school students using those virtual communication tools.

This chapter begins by providing a background and a context for the study of organizational identity formation, after which the research problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research questions are provided. Then, there is a brief description of the research approach used in this study, followed by an elaboration of the

significance of the study. Key terms used in the study are defined, and the chapter concludes with details of the organization of the thesis.

### **Background and Overview of Organizational Identity Formation**

This section provides a context for OI and begins by introducing two contemporary definitions of OI by presenting two sociological approaches to understanding how OI may be construed at the organizational level, and then briefly delimiting the social actor and social constructionist viewpoints. The section then provides a brief discussion of what OI is not. The section concludes with a discussion of research gaps that exist in the OI literature that my research study seeks to address.

Organizational identity (OI) is a fairly recent construct in that it had received little attention until 1985 when Albert and Whetten's (1985, 2004) seminal work, "Organizational Identity" first elaborated OI as "an organization level construct" (Gioia, 1998, p. 17). Albert and Whetten (1985) described OI as self-referential organizational properties, and OI was defined as the "features that are somehow seen as the essence of the organization [central] ... features that distinguish the organization from others [distinct] ... [and] features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time [enduring]" (Albert & Whetten, 2004, p. 90). The impact of Albert and Whetten's (1985) work was to promote a flurry of research and theory building that elaborated the foundations of OI and also led to different views of what constituted OI.

One alternate viewpoint to Albert and Whetten's (1985) work was offered by Gioia (1998) who described OI as a more fluid construct, and that "what is core about organizational identity can change" (p. 22), and, in further study, Gioia (1998) suggested that organizational identity is a function of individual members' shared beliefs and

identity, and that OI is malleable; it may retain specific core beliefs and values, but shifts in the interpretation and meaning over time, rather than have a fixed, enduring, and permanent uniqueness (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). The divergence of opinion between Albert and Whetten (1985) and Gioia (1998) is but one example of the scholarly debate that has evolved over what defines organizational identity, and this contested nature of OI is an example of the differing paradigmatic assumptions that underscore these definitions. The functionalist view of Albert and Whetten (1985) is of OI as an observable and relatively stable construct and is contrasted with the interpretive lens through which Gioia (1998) views OI as socially constructed.

The debate around OI exists throughout the organizational identity literature and has grown in scope as the literature base has increased. As an example, in addition to the paradigmatic differences regarding OI, a facet contributing to the dissimilarities of opinion stems from the two sociological approaches used to understand how identity is constituted. The approaches frame organizational identity as being socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966); the social constructionist view, an interpretation that is fundamental to Gioia (1998) and others' understandings of OI. Alternatively, the organization as social actor view of OI constituted as a set of institutional claims (Whetten & Mackey, 2002); the social actor view is inherent in Albert and Whetten's (2004) interpretation of organizational identity.

Taking a social constructionist view assumes, as Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) suggested, that "identity is a subjective, socially constructed phenomenon" (p. 64) and it answers the questions "is this who we are becoming as an organization" (p. 76. It is "a negotiated, interactive, reflexive concept that, at its essence, amounts to an

organizational work-in-progress” (p. 76), and questions whether the members’ perceptions of OI evolve over time? Organizational identity is said to emerge through the insights and interpretations of the members of the organization. Conversely, the social actor view “treats organizational identity essentially as a set of institutional claims that explicitly articulates who the organization is and what it represents” (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010, p. 5), the sum of which is not *shaped* by the members, but is instead passed on to the organizational members as the way to view the organization.

There are other levels of dissonance in addition to the social actor versus social construction debate for those who study OI, and one that has drawn a considerable level of deliberation from researchers. As Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol, and Hatch (2006) stated, “perhaps the most fundamental question is whether *organizational identity* is a metaphorical device useful for describing organizations or a real, lived, actual organizational phenomenon [emphasis in original]” (p. 89). As with choosing between paradigms or selecting one sociological approach over another, choosing to see organizational identity as a metaphor, or not, has implications for any researcher who undertakes a study of the construct. Accepting OI as a metaphorical tool for understanding organizations, at the very least, presumes a specific means of collecting data to support the OI claims, supposedly located in the awareness of organizational members (Hatch, 1997). Also contentious is the assumption that individual level characteristics can be employed at the organizational level (Cornelissen, 2002). Choosing to see OI from the realist perspective invokes a different dilemma, and that is that OI exists as a concrete set of observable organizational characteristics, and invites the question posed by Corley et al. (2006) as to exactly what set of values or attributes would

one look for in an organization that could be definitively used to describe that social reality?

As noted, differing interpretations defining what organizational identity *is* have emerged in the literature, and work in the field of organizational studies has also resulted in an elaboration of what OI is not, therefore provoking the comparison of several closely related constructs to OI. Included in the definitions are studies of the similarities and differences between image and OI (Dutton & Dukerich, 2004), comparisons and contrasts of identification and OI (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), and elaborations of the relationship of culture with OI (Parker, 2000; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). To elaborate, OI is an internal, collective level construct and seen as answering who we are as an organization, whereas image is an external individual and collective level construct that answers the question of how others outside of the organization perceive us, or the “set of views on the organization held by those who act as the organization’s ‘others’” (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 995). Identification is found at the organizational member level and describes the organizational member’s sense of belonging with their organization (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garad, 2001). Organizational identification is an extension of Social Identity Theory (SIT) as described by Tajfel (1972) where the person’s social identity is comprised of “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (p. 292). Finally, culture informs how things are done in the organization, and it is “a symbolic context within which interpretations of organizational identity are formed” (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p. 360). Organizational Identity is a construct that is related but distinct from image, identification, and culture.

Of the various comparisons, the culture-OI relationship is of interest to this researcher. Organizational identification, which occurs due to symbolic linkages by the individual to the organization, and organizational image which is the external impressions that individuals external to the organization have of the organization, are derived, in part, from the organization's identity. Where image and identification extend from OI, culture is seen to contribute to OI formation, and it is the organizational context within which "interpretations of organizational identity are formed" (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p. 360). Mills and Bettis (2006) define the relationship as being where "culture is the internal and symbolic context for organizational identity" (p. 74). Culture sets the conditions that define the physical and psychological environments in which the organization's members function. As Hatch and Schultz (1997) argue, because of the central role that culture plays in helping define OI, "organizational culture needs to be considered in explanations of the development and maintenance of organizational identity" (p. 360).

As discussed, significant research has been devoted to OI theory development and comparison with associated constructs, but "theory development has far outpaced theory testing" (Foreman & Whetten, 2002, p. 618). This study attempts to address several shortfalls in the OI literature. The first gap relates to the question of how a newly constructed OI actually develops, and as was noted by Lerpold, Ravasi, van Rekom, and Soenen (2007), despite twenty plus years of theory development, "research has yet to explain fully how individuals in organizations develop identity beliefs and aspirations ... and how they eventually become embedded in institutional claims and collective understandings" (p. 79). A similar sentiment was echoed by Gioia, Price, Hamilton, and Thomas (2010) who acknowledged that there has been research directed at understanding

ongoing identity construction, but “there has been no comprehensive study of how organizational identity forms from inception” (p. 1).

Another avenue of investigation that has not been extensively elaborated is the role that the identity of the individual plays in OI formation. Early identity work by Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) proposed a model that tested how the strength of members perceptions of organization shaped how the members defined themselves and how that imposed a strength of identity with the organization which is organizational identification. This model was merely proposed in theory but not tested in operation. Additionally, this theory work suggested linkages between the influence of organizational identity on individual, and not vice versa. More recent research by Lerpold, Ravasi, van Rekom, and Soenen (2007) has suggested that organizational members’ personal trait based identity cues can contribute to organizational identity development. If the members sense of individual identity and sense of self-definition can be influenced by their organization, the question that will be posed and investigated is can the reverse may be true as well, and that the members’ personal identity characteristics, read in this study as professional identity, can influence the overall identity of the organization?

One final area in the literature that warrants attention is the impact that leadership has on OI formation. The influence of leaders and leadership style on the organization has been extensively researched, but its role in identity formation has not been widely elaborated. The literature detailing the influence of leadership on organizational identity has dealt primarily with:

- the ability of individuals to manage identity (Dhalla, 2007),

- exploring how leadership may influence the impressions of identity for newcomers and outsiders (Barbulescu & Weeks, 2007),
- examining identity formation as a function of comparison with other similar industries (Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2006), and
- observing how leadership succession may create internal disagreement of an organization's identity (Balsler & Carmin, 2009).

What is not clear from the research literature is how the organizational members' perceptions of leaders, and the models of leadership that exist within an organization, influence the formation of organizational identity? In addition, individual members' identity cues in the form of self-leadership capacity; how individuals perceive their own leadership role, their perception of their ability to assume leadership roles, and the influence of those perceptions on identity formation has not been intensively studied.

With this lack of research on leader understandings of their own effect on organizational identities, my research will add another element by querying *what about organizational identity and organizational leadership when the members of organizations are geographically dispersed?* Members of virtual organizations may have limited personal contact with their peers, or with the formal leadership within the organization. Research has indicated that distance does affect manager-employee relations, and distance can affect virtual employees feeling of connectedness with their organization (Merriman, Schmidt, & Dunlap-Hinkler, 2007), and that the virtual work arrangement shapes relationships between the employee and the organization (Kurland & Egan, 1999), and affects the types of structures that develop within the virtual organization (Ahuja & Carley, 1999). The attributes of virtual organizations may impact the type of

organizational identity that develops, and as Dani, Burns, Backhouse, and Kochhar (2006) noted, the ability to develop organizational culture and identity has connotations for the overall success of the virtual organization (see also Grabowski & Roberts, 1999; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

In summary, significant theory development has taken place that has defined OI within the organizational studies literature. Several paradigmatic approaches have been elaborated in that literature that guides the study and understanding of OI as an organization level construct. Gaps do exist in the literature that extend the need for further investigation and understanding of whether individual identity plays a role in OI formation, whether the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership plays a role in OI formation, and understanding of how OI forms in a newly formed organization.

### **Research Problem Statement**

Current research literature indicates that significant strides have been made in developing an understanding of organizational identity, but there are gaps in knowledge regarding the factors that may impact the process of organizational identity formation in nascent and emerging organizations, particularly those organizations where the members are geographically distributed. This single case study research sought to answer the questions of how a) organizational members' perceptions of organizational leaders and leadership, b) organizational members' perceptions of informal leadership, and c) organizational members' perceptions of professional identity and the ability to establish professional identity influenced organizational identity formation in a virtual educational organization.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this descriptive single case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) is to gain a deeper and more rigorously evidenced understanding of how organizational members' *perceptions of professional identity and organizational leadership* might *impact* the formation of *organizational identity* in a virtual education organization. This study is conducted in response to questions that emerged from observations made as a participant-insider of the day-to-day activity of a virtual education organization, and my interactions with the individuals within that organization, over a ten year period from 2001 to 2011.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions guide this study:

1. What role has the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization?
2. What role has the organizational members' perceptions of self as leaders and self-leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization?
3. How do the members of a virtual distance education organization perceive their professional identity, their ability to develop a professional identity, and the role one's professional identity plays in forming and shaping the organization's collective identity?

## **Research Approach**

This researcher studied the perceptions and lived experiences of thirty-five members of a virtual distance education organization. The recruited participants included representation from the formally designated leaders, the teaching staff, support personnel,

and the information technology group. No members external to the organization were recruited. This single case study was framed within an interpretive/qualitative paradigm.

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, observation, and an examination of organizational documents and artifacts. Pilot interviews were conducted to test and refine the interview questions. All informants are identified using a pseudonym, and the interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Case study data analysis occurred using the constant comparative method described by Glaser and Strauss (1965) which is an inductive method that is accepted in case study (Merriam, 1998).

### **Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this study stems from a desire to understand how or whether organizational identity forms in organizations that are newly formed, and where the members are geographically distributed from one another. Organizational identity is a recent phenomenon that is gaining credibility for its significance to several areas of organizational theory including: organizational development (van Tonder, 2006); organizational change (Bettis, Mills, Williams, & Nolan, 2005); and organizational performance (Voss, Cable, & Voss, 2006). Gaps exist in the literature (Gioia et al., 2000) concerning how identity formation takes place. A dearth of information exists on organizational identity formation (Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010). This study may contribute to the body of knowledge around OI by expanding on current conceptions of organizational identity for applicability to newer organizational types (Gioia, 1998; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000) against traditionally accepted constructs (see as an example Albert & Whetten's, 2004 definition.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

1. **Organizational Culture (OC)** – A pattern of shared assumptions that are learned by a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that is work[ing] well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, can be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems (Schein's, 2004).
2. **Organizational Identity (OI)** – The perception of being one with the organization and that answers the question “who are we and who should we become as an organization?” (Gioia, 1998).
3. **Virtual Education Organization** – An identifiable group or organization whose use of ICT is substantially greater, reducing the necessity of their physical presence for doing business, or for doing work collaboratively to realize common objectives (Jägers, Jansen, & Steenbakkens, 1998)
4. **Asynchronous tools** – A set of virtual tools that allow access to information and data, and collaboration and communication without intervention by a second party, accessed irrespective of time or place.
5. **Synchronous tools** – A set of virtual tools that allow for real-time collaboration and communication between two or more individuals.

## **The Researcher**

I am, first and foremost, an educator and I am passionate about what I do. I am particularly passionate about working to further the profession in some manner. I am at heart, a practitioner, but in the same breath, I am eager to be a researcher. This research arises from my curiosity and inquisitiveness in trying to understand the professional

world in which I function. This duality, however, causes some distress in that it raises the ethics issue of studying what I practice. I am, most of all, a moral person, so understanding the ethical tension of such research, and maintaining a professional attitude, most specifically, upholding the commitment to protect the interests of those who participate in such research, enables me to pursue such research endeavors.

My interest lies in understanding the organization, and particularly, what makes the organization function. This study came about as a result of observing an organization over a number of years, and sensing a need to try and understand an aspect of that organization. I bring to the study many personal skills that allow me to venture into the research domain including a sensitivity to the needs of others, empathy, a willingness to listen to others, good writing and analytical skills, and a sense of humor. The sense of humor is what keeps me going through the days when the journey stalls or progress doesn't seem to be possible. My passion for knowledge trails me into the depths of this study and it is the intrigue of gaining understanding that drives me onward. It is from this sense of intrigue and curiosity that this study arose.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction and background and overview of organizational identity. A statement of the research problem and the purpose of the study and the research questions were given. The research approach was outlined and the significance of the study provided. The chapter concluded with a definition of key terms, information about the researcher, and the chapter concluded with an elaboration of the organization of the thesis.

What follows in chapter two is a review of the literature that will provide a comprehensive review of the literature examining the construct of organizational identity. The chapter will begin by examining the theories that describe the development of organizational identity as a construct. The chapter will then move to an elaboration of two definitions of organizational identity, noting two paradigmatic orientations to defining the construct: social actor and social constructionist paradigms. Next, organizational culture and the relationship to organizational identity are explored. Several models of formal and informal leadership are examined and considered in the context of identity formation. The construct of professional identity will be considered and its relationship to organizational identity formation, as will the role of social capital in professional identity formation. The chapter will conclude with a description of virtual organizations and why this type of organization was considered for the study of organizational identity formation.

Chapter three will provide a detailed delineation of the methodology employed in this study. The chapter details the methodological decisions that were made in completing this study including a discussion of the reasoning for selecting an interpretive qualitative approach using case study as a research design. Next, the research study context, site and participant selection, and entry to the site will be presented for consideration. A description of the study sample will be given and this will be followed by the methods employed to protect the participants. Next, a brief discussion of the researcher and his connection to the study will be presented. The methods used for data collection and management are described as well as techniques for ensuring data security and participant confidentiality. A comprehensive description of how the data will be

analyzed is undertaken along with a brief overview of data verification. The chapter will conclude with an overview of some ethical considerations, how to insure the trustworthiness of the study, the study limitations, and what the final written product would look like.

Chapter four will detail the research findings of the study, including representative evidence. An analysis, synthesis and discussion of those findings will be provided in chapter five. Chapter six will provide a set of conclusions that extend from the findings, provide recommendations for future study, and conclude with some researcher reflections.

## CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive single case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) is to gain a deeper and more rigorously evidenced understanding of how organizational members' *perceptions of professional identity* and *organizational leadership* might *impact* the formation of *organizational identity* in a virtual education organization. This study is conducted in response to questions that emerged from observations made as a participant-insider of the day-to-day activity of a virtual education organization, and my interactions with the individuals within that organization, over a ten year period from 2001 to 2011.

What follows in the next sections is a review of the literature that describes the emergence of Organizational Identity (OI) as a construct, explores two definitions of OI and considers a social constructionist orientation of OI formation, investigates the relationship between culture and OI, considers how leadership models can be used as a means of studying OI, describes and explores the connection between professional identity and social capital, and reflects on the virtual education organization.

The literature in this review has been drawn from a variety of document sources including books, professional journal articles, internet resources and thesis. Where it was possible, primary sources that were either directed to theory building, or to the application of theory, were used to develop this chapter. The documents were accessed through searches conducted through the following electronic search engines: ERIC, Google Scholar, Academic OneFile, Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. As example, search string keywords included individual

identity, organizational identity, identity, social identity, organizational identification, organizational culture, professional identity, leadership, sensemaking, organizational sensemaking, and social capital. The literature searches were narrowed, where possible, to resources published within the last ten years. However, it was necessary when accessing historical contexts and references of the constructs under study, to include searches that spanned twenty years or more.

This chapter begins with an examination of the origins of organizational identity.

### **Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Organizational Identity**

Organizational identity is derived from two constructs: identity theory and social identity theory that are “perspectives on the social basis of the self-concept” (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 255). These theories differ in that identity theory explains individual behaviors, whereas social identity theory refers to individual behavior as a function of “group processes and intergroup relations” (p. 255). This section will begin by providing a brief introduction and context for the notion of organizational identity. The section will then discuss the relationship between identity theory, social identity theory and organizational identity theory.

Seminal works by Stryker (1968) are the foundation for identity theory that “explains social behavior in terms of the reciprocal relations between self and society” (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 256). As Gioia (1998) suggested, the features of individual identity “supply the basis for the extension of the notion to organizations” (p. 20). Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) noted that individuals have many identities that are directly related to the roles that they undertake in society. The individual self is in part, a reflection of society, and “reflects the wider social structure insofar as the self is a

collection of identities derived from the role positions occupied by the person” (p. 259). Individuals can be mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and each of these roles has specific role identities that are assumed by the individual. Each individual can occupy many roles, and each role has a function in defining some identity characteristic of the individual. The person is a “multi-faceted social construct that emerges from [their] role in society ... [and] variation in self-concepts is due to the different roles that [they] occupy” (p. 256). However, within that set of roles, people view themselves as a distinct entity that is somehow unique from the rest of society. The common role assignments defined by society, such as father or mother, are assumed by the individual to be distinct and different for every person, and are contained in a person’s self-concept (Gioia, 1998). Individuals not only “see themselves as distinct but also act as if they *are* [original emphasis] distinct” (p. 19).

Individuals have a self-identity that is constructed from multiple role identities that they assume in their social role the importance of which is defined by the position the roles occupy in the individual’s salience hierarchy, where salience is an indicator of the level of importance of that role to the holder of that role, as well as the level of commitment that is shown to that role by the holder. Brewer and Gardner (1996) posited that along with an individual self, there exists a social self that is defined, not by the characteristics that differentiate the self from others, but by the aspects of a person’s self-concept that make them like, or part of, a social group; who the individual self is in relation to a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). A social identity, then, “is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

This could include being a member of a school staff, an ethnic group, a hockey team, a guild, or even a social club.

Groups have identities, and social identity theory “deals with intergroup relations – that is, how people come to see themselves as members of one group/category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the out-group), and the consequences of this categorization” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226). The in-group membership holds with it a level of emotional attachment that can define the individual identity. Tajfel (1972) proposed that there is emotional and value significance to the individual in belonging to a group, and that affiliation with the group carries with it a level of prestige and social position. The social identity comes from the knowledge of being a group member, and the social standing inherent in that association relative to other groups (Hogg & Terry, 2000). That becomes part of the individual’s self-concept; “the attributes as a member of that group ... [defines] what one should think and feel, and how one should behave” (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 260). This commitment to group is important because of the impact on the relationship an individual has with a larger group, such as an organization.

Where individual identity is defined by role, role salience, and commitment, social identity is defined by the processes of self-categorization and social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000). Self-categorization is a result of associating one’s self with an in-group through “sharpen[ed] intergroup boundaries ... [and] group-distinctive stereotypical and normative perceptions” (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 260). The social-self results from interpersonal identities: built from interactions and relationships with those in the in-group, and collective identities: built from the norms of the reference

in-group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Individuals view themselves as belonging to a common category of individuals, and are aware of categorical differences between the in-group and out-group. In-group identification is chosen due to the need for self-enhancement, that is “the need to see [one’s self] in a positive light in relation to relevant others ... [and] can be achieved in groups by making comparisons between the in-group and relevant out-groups in ways that favour the in-group” (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p.260).

Professional identity can be considered to be an extension of one’s self-identity and one’s social identity. Professional identity is defined as one’s professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Slay & Smith, 2011, p. 85). One’s professional identity is one of the roles that identifies and defines the individual. The role is governed by the strength and relevance of the identity to the individual. Identifying one’s self as a professional also involves aligning one’s self as belonging to a group: profession, and with the norms and references of that profession. Professional identity, then, is comprised of individual and social identity referents. This can be extended to the organization, because organization, as a social category, is seen to embody or even reify characteristics perceived to be prototypical of its members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 22), of which professional identity would be prototypical of all members. The individual’s perception of professional identity then becomes one of the prototypical referents that define the organization’s identity.

As Gioia (1998) posited, it is not a great conceptual leap to go from individual and social identity theories to the construct of organizational identity, as features of both theories can be extended to the idea of developing an organization’s identity within an

organizational context. Individuals define themselves personally by role, the salience of that role, and their commitment to the behaviors of that role. Individuals also define themselves as belonging to a group based upon a self-categorization process associated with interpersonal interactions and relationships. Collective group identities embody favored characteristics with which an individual identifies. A person's social identity is a reflection of the organization's identity. Organizations "reside in the heads and hearts of its members" (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000, p. 13) and is "an internalized cognitive structure of what the organization stands for" (p. 13). The collective organizational identity is a representation of these mental schema and identity "is actually contained in the stability of the *labels* used by organizational members to express who or what they believe the organization to be" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 64).

This section has provided an explanation of the relationship and development of organizational identity as a construct from identity theory and social identity theory by examining the notion of individual identity and social identity, and then extending these ideas to the construct of organizational identity. The next section will examine two different perspectives of organizational identity, discuss some of the debate that exists over how OI is described, and will conclude with a brief discussion of organizational sensemaking and its connection to OI.

### **Organizational Identity Defined**

The study of individual identity is directed to understanding the question of who the individual defines themselves as being, and answers the questions of *who am I* and what sets me apart from others, or *what makes me unique as an individual?* Social identity theory delves into how individuals identify and form connections with groups, posing the

question *which characteristics of a group make me wish to align myself with a specific group and not with others?* Organizational identity is not so much concerned with individual level comparisons as it is with whole organization comparisons and answering the question of what sets an organization apart from other organizations or what makes it unique? To understand how these questions can be answered requires some delineation of how organizational identity is and has been defined.

Albert and Whetten (2004) proposed a definition of organizational identity as a function of *organization as social actor* where the organization possesses “certain fundamental identity requirements ... [and] identities are conceived of as the categorical self-descriptors used by social actors to satisfy their identity requirements” (Whetten & Mackay, 2002, p. 396). Organizational identity was considered as being represented by those characteristics that are central, distinct, and enduring in the organization. Whetten (2006) further expanded the three principle components of Albert and Whetten’s (1985) original definition that included “the ideation component [or] organizational identity [as] members’ shared beliefs regarding the question ‘Who are we as an organization?’ ... the definitional component which encompass the central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics of the organization ... [and] the phenomenological component [that] posited that identity-related discourse was most likely to be observed in conjunction with profound organizational experiences” (p. 220).

In contrast, it has been argued that Albert and Whetten’s (1985) conception of organizational identity falls short (Gioia, 1998; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Gioia suggested that organizational identity is a much more fluid entity, that “what is core about organizational identity [central, distinct, and enduring] can change at a much more rapid

pace than individuals can reinvent themselves” (p. 22). This researcher is aligned with Gioia’s (1998) conception of organizational identity. Individuals maintain a relatively constant identity throughout their lifetime. It can shift subtly, but the individual does not frequently refocus and rebuild themselves. Organizations, on the other hand, are susceptible to the rapidly shifting environments, and as such, shift their identity to reflect the altered environment. Gioia suggested that organizations attempt to balance stability and fluidity, which is more the *management* of the appearance of stability while “still retaining essential features of core identity” (p. 22). Additionally, this dynamic identity is socially constructed rather than a fixed, observable set of characteristics, and “is the result of members’ collective perceptions and shared understandings of what characteristics are central, distinctive, and enduring” (Ran & Golden, 2011, p. 420). The social collective defines the organization’s identity rather than the organization possessing that identity and having it revealed to the organizational members.

The divergence in OI definitions has resulted in two camps of debate (Ran & Golden, 2011). The choice of perspective from which OI is defined, and how a researcher aligns him or herself within that debate has far reaching implications for the study. Albert and Whetten’s definition of identity as those features that are central, distinctive, and enduring predisposes the researcher to examining organization as a social actor where the facets of identity are revealed through what is central, enduring, and distinct. In this scenario, organizational identity is represented by the organizational form, is extended to the members of the organization as the way to see the organization, and “resides in a set of institutional claims ... explicitly stated views of what an organization is and represents” (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 435). The researcher is bound to assumptions of

realism and positivist methods that will seek out the observable truth of identity in the form of concrete and observable facets.

In contrast, the social constructionist perspective shifts the focus of the methodology from realist to a sensemaking approach to identity construction (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), with OI constructed through the eyes of the participants of the organization. An assumption of the social constructionist perspective is that “organizational members use a sensemaking process through their identity claims to collectively construct what characteristics are central, distinctive, and enduring” (Ran & Golden, 2011, p. 420). Sensemaking is the process through which individuals make sense of their organizational world. Some would argue that the very existence of the organization, or the concept of organization, is dependent upon this very idea (Weick, 2009). Individuals must collect and process data, information, images, sounds, tactile input, colour, and a host of other bits in order to gain a personal understanding of what is happening around them. The organization comes to life for the individual due to their work in constructing the understanding of what organization means to them. The social reality “is created by us for our own purposes and seems as readily intelligible to us as those purposes themselves” (Searle, 1995, p. 4).

A critical notion emerging from the sensemaking literature is the assertion that sensemaking is grounded in identity construction (Weick, 1995), that “the experiences that make up who we are influence how we interpret events” (Mills & Weatherbee, 2006, p. 269). Essentially, our experiences in the organization may or may not reinforce the perceived organizational identity that exists, that our own personal, professional, and even group identities are forged through the interpretations of experiences as being good

or bad, positive or negative, constructive or destructive. Sensemaking “is fundamentally a social process: organizational members interpret their environment in and through interactions with others, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world” (Maitlis, 2005, p. 21). A shared identity emerges as a result of the reality that comes as a result of “people try[ing] to make things rationally accountable to themselves and others” (Van Epps, 2008, p. 104).

Sensemaking is a retrospective act (Weick, 1995) in that the individual has to look to the past in order to understand the present. The immediate or now has no context for an individual without some comparison basis, and that comparison is provided by looking to the past and reflecting on how things were as compared to how they currently exist. The individual’s perspective of the reality of the present emerges from the meanings that “are interpreted through a lens of past experiences and understandings” (Thurlow & Mills, 2009, p. 462). In addition, every member of the organization elaborates a reality from past experience and understandings that are uniquely theirs. One of Weick’s (2001) analogies for the sensemaking process was the activity of cartography. With sensemaking there are indefinite numbers of mental maps that can be devised by the individuals, and as with mapmaking, there are an “indefinite number of plausible maps [realities] that can be constructed” (p. 9). In sensemaking as related to organizational identity, there are indefinite numbers of plausible identity maps or understandings that can be constructed concerning who we are as an organization.

Sensemaking is the process by which the individuals of the organization construct their perceptions of what constitutes organizational identity. What then is the process through which these identity maps become a cohesive, organization wide understanding

of organizational identity? Ashforth, Rogers, and Corley (2011) suggested that the collective identity is formed through the process of enactment. Enactment occurs when individual's perspective on organizational identity, or their sense of *we-ness*, is shared with other organizational members over time. These perspectives are shared through social interaction, and if acceptable to other members, the perceptions of *we-ness* "become reified and synthesized into a social structure recognized as a collective identity" (p. 1147). The strength of the acceptance of the collective identity is felt most "at proximal ... rather than distal levels" (p. 1148). This has implications for organizational identity formation in virtual education organizations where the organizational members are widely geographically distributed, and potentially isolated as single members or in smaller groups.

In summary, this section has provided and compared two definitions of organizational identity; a social actor conception of OI as consisting of those attributes that are central, distinct, and enduring in an organization, and the social constructionist conception of OI as being a socially constructed outcome that emerges through the sensemaking process of the various organizational members. The relationship between sensemaking processes and identity construction, and the retrospective nature of sensemaking in organizational identity construction has been described. The process of collective identity formation was discussed and issues associated with that formation were discussed. This next section will briefly examine and expand on the relationship of culture to organizational identity.

## **Expanding on Organizational Culture**

The culture of an organization is such an integral element of organizational identity that it is difficult to separate the two constructs. Current research (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Zaheer, Schomaker, & Genc, 2003) view culture and identity as overlapping distinct constructs. Mills and Bettis (2006) defined the relationship as being where “culture is the internal ... context for organizational identity” (p. 74). Culture sets the conditions that define the social, physical and psychological environments in which the organization’s members function, or *how* things are done. Organizational identity is perceived as being *who* we are as an organization, predicated on the individuals’ perceptions and assumptions of the existing culture. Culture can be seen to influence the member’s social identity within the context of the organization. Hogg and Terry noted that often, the importance placed upon that identity transcends other personal identities, that “their professional and/or organizational identity may be more pervasive and important than ascribed identities based on gender, age, ethnicity, race, or nationality” (p. 121).

There are a number of definitions of culture that have been used in recent literature including culture as: language, customs, and traditions; standards and values; shared cognitive frames, thought and language; and shared meanings (Schein, 2004). This study’s conceptual framework adopts two views of organizational culture, the first described by Schein (2004) and a second proposed by Martin (2002). Schein (2004) defined organizational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that [are] learned by a group as it solve[s] its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that [are] work[ing] well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, [can] be taught to new

members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to the problems” (p. 17). In Schein’s (2004) view, culture is inferred from the espoused values held by those members. Implicit in this definition is a level of difficulty with the word shared. Martin (2002) suggested that organizational members may not always share the same cultural frame of reference that exists within the boundaries of the organization. He noted that “cultural members may agree that certain issues are an important part of [those frames] ... but disagree regarding the particulars of each of those issues, creating ambiguity” (p. 61). Schein’s definition is in keeping with the interpretivist viewpoint of shared schema that are formed through social interaction.

Martin proposed a second definition that, when used in conjunction with Schein’s (2004) description, allows for the diversity and ambiguity of opinion. Martin (2002) suggested attending to the details of the organization but also looking beyond those to the meanings inherent in those details that account for the diversity of opinion:

Cultural observers also often attend to aspects of working life that other researchers study, such as the organization’s official policies, the amounts of money different employees earn, reporting relationships, and so on. A cultural observer is interested in the surfaces of these cultural manifestations because details can be informative, but he or she also seeks an in-depth understanding of the patterns of meanings that link these manifestations together, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in bitter conflicts between groups, and sometimes in webs of ambiguity, paradox, and contradiction. (p. 3)

Schein’s (2004) definition can provide a reference point to, and form the basis for, describing what the informants perceive as the culture that exists, but allowing for the

examination of the subtext that may underscore any conversation regarding organizational culture.

How then does culture provide the foundation for organizational identity? Hatch and Schultz (2002) proposed that organizational identity development is very much a social process that is rooted in the culture of the organization, that organizational identity develops for individuals as a result of the internalization of personal, shared and learned basic assumptions that develop within the organization through a comparison of events and issues. Parker (2000) advised that the comparisons can occur along four lines of cultural division that align the organizational members with group identities. These divisions are (a) spatial/functional, (b) generational, (c) occupational/professional, and (d) gender. *Spatial-functional* divisions occur when there are geographic or departmental divides. Cultures develop in regional divisions, or arise through association with common departmental connections. *Generational* divisions exist through age difference or historical associations such as the length of time with the organization. Members who have been with the organization for long periods of time have an association based upon that longevity, something that newer individuals may not be able to share. Chronological differences can also impose divisions. *Occupational-professional* divisions are created by association with like or similar job descriptions or professional affiliations. Gender is self-evident suggesting that male-female divisions in the organization can occur.

Culture then, defines components of what is central, distinct, and enduring about an organization, and members' cognizance and level of acceptance of the cultural milieu

influences the individual's perception of identity. The 'how' of culture informs the 'who' of identity, and as Schein (2004) suggested, the shared emotional experience of ultimately leads to a group maturity, a comfort with how things are done, and an identity defined by 'who we are' that extends from this acceptance. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) echoed the sentiment that culture guides "interpretation and action in organizations by defining appropriate behavior" (p. 437). This appropriate behavior stems from the learned values and norms that are part of the accepted practices of the organization by the individuals, and influence the identity of the organization. As Gioia (1998) observed, what is central, distinctive and enduring in an organization is relativistic and it is of the moment. The influence of changing what is central, distinctive, and supposedly enduring in an organization can impact overall perceived identity.

Culture and identity are two intricately related but distinct constructs. This section has provided a definition of organizational culture, briefly discussed the relationship with OI, and overall impact of culture on OI. This next section will turn to an examination of several leadership styles and their implications for OI formation. The next section will also detail some of the gaps that exist in the literature concerning leadership's impact on OI construction.

### **Leadership and the Practice of Identity Formation**

Two of the research questions posed in this study question (1) the influence that the members' perceptions of leaders and leadership had on identity construction and (2) the influence that perceptions of self as leaders played in organizational identity construction. Member perception of leadership may be a critical aspect of organizational identity formation because of the members sense of leadership control over what occurs

in the organization. As example, autocratic and tightly controlled decision making, as opposed to a consensual style of decision making. Although the role that formal leadership has had on an establishing and maintaining an organization's identity has been studied (see as example Walsh & Glynn, 2008; Prati, McMillan-Capehart, & Carriker, 2009), as has the influence of leadership on individual identity within organizational spheres, there is an identified gap in the literature concerning how member perceptions of leaders, the process of leadership, and informal leadership influences organizational identity formation in organizations (Gioia, 1998).

This section will begin by examining some of the leadership models described in current literature and discuss their applicability to the study of identity formation. What follows will be a brief elaboration on current leadership theory by comparing and contrasting some of the more contemporary leadership theories. There will be a brief examination of charismatic leadership style, which will then be followed by an elaboration of the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) that covers transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. The section concludes with a discussion of distributed leadership.

### *Leadership styles*

Stogdill (1974) noted that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 25). Early leadership models focused primarily on the management of individuals and organizations; power over rather than power shared. More recent models examine both leadership and followership because “leadership is not just the province of people at the top” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 2). The next paragraphs will briefly review and describe several

leadership models including charismatic leadership and the Full Range Leadership (FRL) Model that includes the transactional, transformational, laissez-faire styles, and ending with the distributed leadership model.

*The charismatic model of leadership.*

The charismatic models of leadership run somewhat counter to the extreme narcissist, even though it is highly conceivable that an extreme narcissist can also have charisma, as example, Napoleon and Hitler. It has been proposed that charisma is difficult to separate from the notion of transformational leadership (Conger, 1999). Where transformational leadership is defined in terms of leadership effect (Bass, 1999), charismatic leadership focuses primarily on the leadership qualities that *impact* leadership effect. Transformational leadership is about how leadership affects members' action, and how those leaders motivate through (a) serving as strong role models for followers, (b) arousing enthusiasm for the work of followers through the elaboration of a clear vision and expectations, (c) intellectually stimulating followers to think outside the box, to be innovative and creative and, (d) actively mentoring followers, by helping followers realize their potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Charismatic leadership also concerns itself with effecting follower action, but its defining characteristic has to do with the followers' evaluation of leader behavior, with action contingent upon the strength of the emotional attachment for the leader by the follower (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Conceptually both transformational and charismatic leadership are different (Conger, 1999; Yukl, 1999) but charisma has been cited as one of the descriptors of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders can be seen to be charismatic, but charismatic leadership is not necessarily

transformational. This study will assume that a distinct delineation of charismatic leadership exists, and deserves mention as a leadership type, but will defer to Bass and Riggio's (2006) assumption that it is a significant element of transformational leadership, and will be treated as such.

This section examined the charismatic model of leadership as one of the many leadership models that exist, and that can be suggested to have an influence on organizational identity formation. Aspects of this model have been embedded in the Full Range of Leadership Model (FRLM) that will be expanded on in the next section.

*The full range of leadership model (FRLM).*

The Full Range of Leadership Model (FRLM) (Bass and Riggio, 2006) defines leadership as being comprised of an amalgam of three styles: Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership. Transformational leadership has much in common with the notion of charismatic leadership and the FRL Model incorporates elements of charismatic leadership in one of the dimensions. The FRL Model, unlike other leadership models, treats each of the elements as a specific set of leadership qualities but assumes that leaders possess characteristic of, and exhibit all three dimensions, just in varying degrees. The FRL Model shown below (Figure 2.1) includes the four dimensions of Transformational Leadership: IC – Individualized Consideration, IM – Inspirational Motivation, IS – Intellectual Stimulation, and II – Idealized Influence, the two dimensions of Transactional Leadership: CR - Contingent Reward, and MBE – Management by Exception. Management by exception is further divided (not shown) into Active MBE (MBE-A) and passive MBE (MBE-P). The LF represents the third component of the FRL Model: Laissez-Faire. Each are described below.

Figure 2.1 : Dimensions of the Full Range Leadership Model.

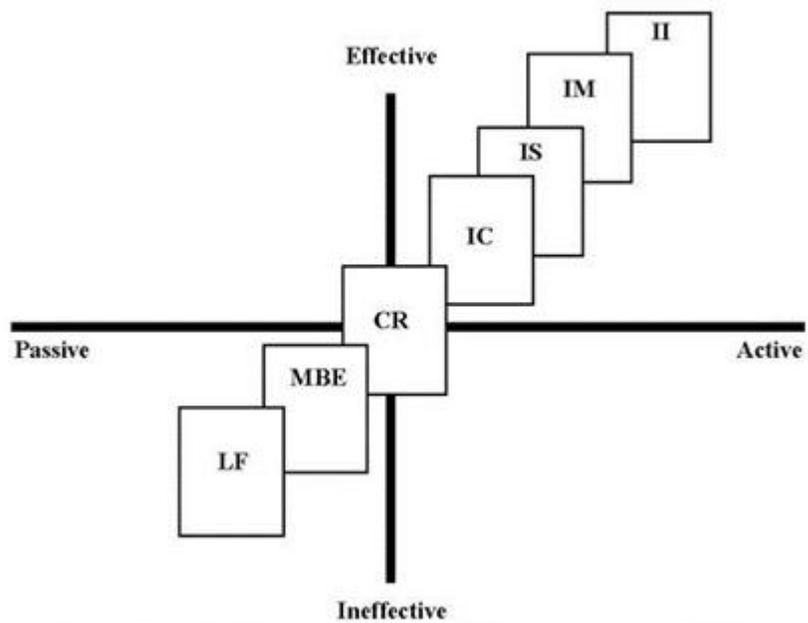


Figure x.Full Range of Leadership Behaviors. Adapted from "Full Range Leadership", by J. E. Barbuto Jr, & L. L. Cummins-Brown. p. 3. Copyright 2007, The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension.

The benchmark of *individualized consideration* is in the establishment of a culture and climate that supports individuals in their professional and personal growth (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leader concerns themselves with the needs of the individual, mentors the members by creating a supportive climate, and reaching out to the individual to address their specific need. The leader acknowledges the diversity that exists in the organization and their “behavior demonstrates acceptance of individual differences ... [and they] see the individual as a whole person rather than as just an employee” (p. 7).

*Inspirational motivation* is analogous to many of the charismatic leadership traits discussed previously. Inspirational, charismatic leaders “are agents of change” (Rowold & Heinitz, 2007, p. 122) which is accomplished through the elaboration of an organizational vision, and promoting “strong emotional ties between the leader and the led” (p. 122). Leadership behaviors that support the ties and connections with organizational members include “instilling pride in others for being associated with the leader – [charismatic draw] ... providing reassurance that obstacles will be overcome, promotion of confidence in achievement, talking optimistically about the future, [and] articulating a compelling vision for the future” (Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004, p. 182). *Intellectual stimulation* provides a benefit to both leader and follower. Followers are stimulated to think creatively, are encouraged to think beyond the boundaries of problems and to endeavor to develop innovative solutions to problems. Creativity is encouraged ... there is no public criticism of individual members’ mistakes” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 7). The benefit of this type of leader behavior is access to a diverse set of opinions and solutions to problems that may be facing the organization, and a chance to examine those issues from multiple perspectives (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

*Idealized influence* refers to the ethical and moral example that leaders provide to those around them in acting as an ideal or role model to their members. There is considerable trust placed in the abilities of the leader by the members and “followers identify with the leaders and want to emulate them” (p. 6).

Transformational leaders are considered to be more innovative and open to change in the workplace (van Eeden, Cilliers, & van Deventer, 2008). Transformational leaders are characterized by having a “visionary and interpersonal component” (p. 254) as well as “a focus on organizational change, a greater degree of risk taking, a tendency to be proactive, the use of more planning ... and innovative problem solving” (p. 254). Conversely, transactional leadership is rooted in a rewards based system that is reinforced by leaderships’ “promises, praise, and rewards or they are corrected by negative feedback, reproof, threats, or disciplinary actions” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 184).

Transactional leadership behavior arises as a result of a system of rewards that are attributed to follower behavior, and “occurs when the leader rewards or disciplines the follower, depending on the adequacy of the follower’s performance” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 8). Two factors of the multifactor leadership questionnaire assess transactional leadership. These factors are contingent reward (CR) and management by exception (MBE). MBE is observed in two formats: active and passive, where active referred to the leader actively monitoring the followers to observe whether established rules or regulations were contravened, and appropriating corrective measures to deal with transgressions. Passive MBE entails assuming a wait-and-see approach where the leader waits until someone violates a rule, “waiting passively for deviances, mistakes, and errors to occur and then taking corrective action” (p. 8). The contingent reward system works

similarly to a contractual arrangement where the leader determines the tasks and actions that are required as part of the follower's performance goals with the organization.

Agreement between the leader and follower is sealed "with promised or actual rewards offered in exchange for satisfactorily carrying out the assignment" (p. 8).

Laissez-faire leadership is described by Bass and Riggio (2006) as being defined by the absence of leadership. In this case the leader shrinks away from the responsibility of leading, preferring instead to avoid taking initiative and placing themselves in a position of authority, other than in name only. Laissez-faire implies dire consequences for an organization because "decisions are not made ... actions are delayed ...

responsibilities of leadership are ignored ... [and] authority remains unused" (p. 9).

This section described the Full Range Leadership Model proposed by Bass and Riggio (2006). The charismatic and FRLM are models used to describe formal leadership. The next section will detail a model that highlights an informal leadership style.

#### *Distributed leadership.*

Alternate descriptions of leadership exist that are not focused on the leader-as-individual model, but where leadership can be assumed by any individual in the organization, based on the situation in which the individual finds themselves facing. The model of distributed leadership and has been extensively described in the literature (Gronn, 2002; Macbeath, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane & Orlina, 2005).

The argument has been made that leadership is critical to the success of schools or organizations (Spillane & Coldren, 2011) but the idea of where that leadership lies is often skewed. Many models assume a single leader position in their description of where

the focus of control exists (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004), that “researchers, for the most part ignore[d] other sources of leadership in schools” (p. 4). In Spillane, et al.’s estimation, the focus needs to shift away from the leader-centric lens to an analysis of leadership activity that examine the dimensions that are inherent in all members’ leadership activity and not just identified as formal leadership practice. The FRL Model (Bass & Riggio, 2006) examined above made the assumption of one leader and placed great emphasis on the leadership aspects of that one individual. The Distributed Model proposed by Spillane (2006) diverges in its approach, placing the leadership capabilities in the hands of all members of the organization.

Leadership has been typically described in terms of leadership traits, behaviors, or leadership as a set of organizational qualities. Traits are generally defined as a function of individual personality and style. Behaviors have been elaborated as sets of taxonomies including monitoring and delegating. Personal behaviors have been typified as acting in an autocratic manner, assuming a democratic viewpoint, and or being non-committal, removed, and laissez-faire. The Distributed Model differs in that the individual is no longer the focus, that every member of the organization has leadership capacity that can be enacted through leadership activity, which is “a product of what the actor knows, believes, and does in and through particular social, cultural, and material contexts” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p. 10).

Spillane, et al.’s (2004) conception of distributed leadership is grounded in the notion that leadership forms on “leader thinking and action in situ” (p. 10), and is “not leaders or what they do, but leadership activity” (p. 10). Leadership is embodied in the *activity* of leadership, not the individual, and includes all individuals capable of acting

into the circle of leadership. Leadership is best understood, not from the perspective of a single leader's "ability, skills, and charisma" (p. 11) but as a function of "practice distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation" (p. 11) over time (Figure 2.2). Leadership occurs as a result of individuals acting in their knowledge and skills capacity, in a situation where those skills and knowledge are pertinent, mobilizing followers who are situated with the leader in a specific context, and acting on the situation. Different levels of leadership expertise are required in different leadership situations, providing the opportunity for all organizational members to experience leadership if the circumstances should allow. This is a significant shift in philosophy, even from that of the FRL Model in that the individual as sole leader is no longer relevant.

Distributed leadership is not about taking responsibility and distributing it across the membership of the organization as was proposed by some traditional leadership models as exemplified by the view of educators as managers of education (Cochran, Smith, & Lytle, 1999), Pearce and Conger's (2003) shared leadership model described by Bligh, Pearce, and Kohles (2006), shared leadership through team design (Pearce & Barkus, 2004), and the distribution of leadership across roles (Firestone & Martinez, 2007). Distributed leadership is primarily about the ability of an organization to surrender control of the idea of sole charge leader, to allow power to be assumed by individual members, and "implies an ability to relinquish one's role as ultimate decision-maker, trusting others to make the right decisions" (Macbeath, 2005, p. 353). In this instance the word relinquish implies a culture of power *over* rather than the jointly shared concept of power *with* (Parker-Follett, 1941). Power with would be culturally desirable in that the types of power structures of organizations can define the sense of organizational identity

Figure 2.2: Leadership Practice Over Time.

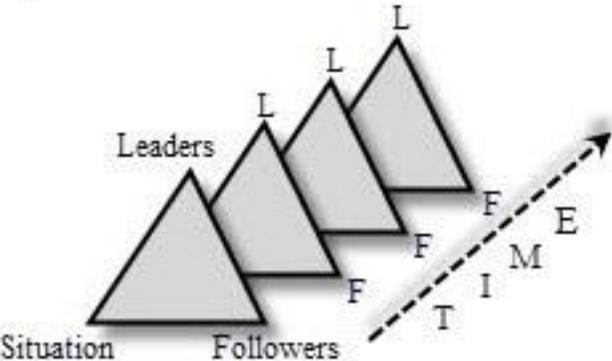


Figure X. Leadership practice as defined by leader and follower actions in a specific situation over time. Adapted from "Distributed Leadership," by J. P. Spillane, 2006, p. 3. Copyright 2006, John Wiley and Sons.

(Bouchikhi, Fiol, Gioia, Golden-Biddle, Hatch, Fombrum, Kimberly, & Thomas, 1998).

Distributed leadership defined in Spillane's context would exemplify the idea of power with as opposed to power over.

This previous section considered two models of formal leadership style: charismatic and FRLM, and a model of informal leadership style: Distributed Model.

This next section will move to consider why they are significant to this study of organizational identity formation.

### **The Relevance of Leadership Models to OI Formation**

The external categorization of a leader as possessing a specific leadership style is relevant to OI formation. The organizational members' perception of the leader may be contingent upon the specific leadership style exhibited. Negative perceptions of leaders cause the *we-ness* of a group or the collective identity to diminish. Conversely, those leaders exhibiting transformational or charismatic characteristics may increase the strong ties to the organization and leader noted by Rowold and Heinitz (2007). The perceived leadership style affects the emotional connection of an individual to the organization which may affect the members' ability to identify with the organization (Prati, McMillan-Capehart, & Karriker, 2009) which may frame the perception of organizational identity as a whole.

Organizational identity is borne out of organizational context which is heavily influenced, if not shaped to a large degree, by the actions of the organizational leaders and members. Organizational members understand the identity of the organization as a function of their sensemaking aspects which are defined by their everyday experiences in the organization. The perceptions of leaders and leadership form an integral component

of that experience, and thus, members' perceptions of leaders and leadership in turn influence the organizational members' perceptions of organizational identity and its formation.

The capability to define the identity of the organization and who the members are becoming is really a function of the capacity of the members to exhibit leadership and to lead, and to potentially cast their influence on the development of the organization. Traditional organizational identity research has relied on the single leader vision as an explanation of what constitutes identity, "that answering the question of 'who are we' as an organization is largely dependent on who the leader is" (Brown & Gioia, 2002, p. 27) and how they lead. The inclusion of a distributed perspective against which the organization can be examined may provide valuable insight into organizational identity formation.

The research literature relating the influence of leadership on organizational identity tends to focus on the leader persona and his or her influence on organizational identity formation. Scott and Lane (2000) examined the influence of founding organizational members and formal leadership on organizational identity construction through the dissemination of core organizational values. Rodrigues and Child (2008) asserted that the leadership of an organization controlled the characterization of corporate identity, which is thought to be a form of organizational identity. These ideas were also reflected in work by Prati, MacMillan-Capehart, and Karriker (2009) who argued that managers had the capacity to create and influence strong organizational identity in their followers. The research suggested that a high emotional intelligence enabled connections between managers and the members of the organization, allowing the managers to

“facilitate and effectively navigate interactions with others” (p. 406). The underlying message harkens back to work by Alvesson and Willmott (2002) whose assertion was that the identity of organizational members can be regulated and controlled by managers through established social practices such as “induction, training, and promotion procedures that have implications for the shaping and direction of identity” (p. 625). This viewpoint runs counter to the underlying principles of distributed leadership in that it disregards the fact that individuals can have influence and are not necessarily led by any one individual.

As previously stated, the purpose of the study is " to gain an understanding of how organizational members' perceptions of leaders, leadership styles, and professional identity and leadership might impact the formation of organizational identity in a virtual education organization. These past sections detailed several leadership models and provided a rationale as to why they are applicable to a study of organizational identity formation. This next section will examine the construct of professional identity by providing a definition and a brief discussion of how professional identity might be established.

### **Establishing a Professional Identity**

In this next section a model of professional identity formation proposed by Ohlen and Segesten (1998) is introduced that explicates three aspects of professional identity formation: the historical, personal, and interpersonal dimensions. The section then introduces the idea of social capital, and provides a perspective on professional identity formation as a function of the acquisition of social capital.

*Professional identity defined.*

This study poses the question of how the organizational members' perceptions of professional identity and their perceptions of the ability to create a professional identity may impact the formation of organizational identity. Professional identity occurs because of a self-conceptualization process that involves developing a change in, among other things, self-identity components (Mcgowen & Hart, 1990). As noted in an earlier section, the identity image that develops in an organization is a result of the experiences that make up who the members are in the organization. An external manifestation of the organization's identity exists as well. This inward looking, external perception of the organization's identity is called image. This, however, is not a construct that will be considered in this study as it is created primarily through the perceptions of external stakeholders. This study will only examine the perceptions of the organizational members. The individual professional identity formation is one such experience with professional identity defined as being "constructed through interactions and relationships between people ... [and] is an ongoing process in action, whereby people recreate and negotiate role performance" (King & Ross, 2004, pp. 53-54). The interactions and relationships are predicated on the ability to form personal and professional networks, with networks being a form of social capital.

The model of professional identity formation proposed by Ohlen and Segesten (1998) indicated three dimensions of professional identity formation: personal, interpersonal, and socio-historical. The personal dimension describes the skills and abilities that are perceived to make the person a professional, those characteristics that form the bonds between the person and those in the ranks of the professionals around

them. These are the self-perceived skills and abilities that describe a personal identity and the individual's perception of professional capability. The interpersonal dimension results from the interactions with professionals and others around the individual. These are the professional networks that form along common bonds with other like professionals and incorporate the knowledge and skills acquired through the process of socialization (Ohlen & Segesten, 1998). The socio-historical aspects are those that come from the ideas and norms that have historically developed in the profession or organization over time.

The personal dimension can be construed as being part of the personal and social identity of an individual. Professional identity constitutes a role that a person assumes in an organization; the individual is a professional educator. The role behaviors are a significant part of that identity and are defined by what the individual understands as what constitutes that role behavior. There is a self-conceptualization that comes from understanding the personal skills and attributes that are required to define one's own self relative to the profession (Mcgowen & Hart, 1990). The person also becomes socialized to the professional department from interaction with other professionals, which occurs in addition to the self-defined characteristics that the person uses to define their role and professional identity. In contrast, the inability of individuals to conceptualize their role in the organization where they assume roles of marginality (Hendry, 1975) may contribute to a type of alienation of that individual in the organizational context. For those members of the virtual education organization, such marginalization may occur as a result of geographical or social isolation within the organization itself.

The interpersonal dimension of professional identity development describes the process of socializing a person into the profession through interaction with other

members of the profession, through “reflective discussion with colleagues” (Ohlen & Segesten, 1998, p. 723), and through using those persons as models through which the knowledge of the profession is acquired (Ohlen & Segesten, 1998). The strength of the individual’s association and interaction with other professional groups within the organization may well impact the strength of a person’s professional identity. As an example, an investigation of factors that contributed to the development of professional identity in health and social care students by Adams, Hean, Sturgis, and MacLeod-Clarke (2006) posited that social identity: those characteristics that define the individual as belonging to or being a member of a group, a social group, directly affected or influenced the individual’s professional identity strength. Conditions that contribute to the marginalization of individuals such as isolation, gender conflicts, oppression, or any circumstance that might lead to an inability to connect or create a social identity, may influence that person’s sense of professional and organizational identity (Roberts, 2000). Again, diminished contact with other members of the organization may well subject organizational members to less interpersonal contact, as well as less interaction and association with their professional cohort.

The socio-historical dimension comes from the recognition of the norms and practices that have developed in the profession over time. This might include organizational members’ historical experiences within the organization and profession: levels of trust, credibility, types of responsibility afforded to the member, as well as historical influences such as mentors that may have impacted the decision to approach a specific profession or to become involved in a profession (Olesen, 2001). Professional identity, as Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) posited, is a function of “what

[members] themselves find important in their professional work and lives based on both their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds” (p. 108). Changes in organizational norms and practices that alter the culture of the organization may impact the members’ perception of professional identity. Nixon (1996), in a study of the impact of restructuring in higher education on professional identity, noted that change over time had a “profound effect on the role of university teachers and on their professional identity” (p. 14).

Acquiring a professional identity is a process that occurs over time, and is predicated upon the ability to develop connections with those who share the profession, and to build networks of connections within and without the organization. Professional identity is an individual and social identity that may develop in an organizational context. Having a sense of professional identity may influence organizational members’ perceptions of organizational identity and influence organizational identity formation.

The networks through which professional identity might be acquired are known as social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The next section will provide a delineation of social capital and its relationship with professional identity.

#### *Social capital and professional identity.*

Professional identity, at its root, is a form of social capital. Aguilar and Sen (2009) defined social capital as “the ability to gain access to benefits by virtue of belonging to a group” (p. 425). In this context, professional identity is a type of capital that “is a set of symbolic resources that reproduce an occupational order, favoring expertise and craftsmanship” (Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011, p. 97), the symbolic resources being the benefits derived from association with a contingent of professionals

or experts. Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011) noted that the appropriation of capital is contingent on the ability of the individual to develop exchange systems, in the case of social capital, social exchanges. These exchanges are “structured ... by social obligations, networks, and connections” (p. 104). Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011) further suggested that social capital is a contested resource that is managed and controlled by leadership, and is often implemented in the form of position, titles, or titles and credentials, all of which provide a position of status within the organization. Control of this resource by leadership or others within the organization, can limit the prospects of social exchange by members and hence, inhibit the members’ ability to establish a level of social capital and indirectly, a level of professional standing within the community.

Developing a professional standing is an integral part of becoming part of an organization, which implies being able to make the connections appropriate to developing that sense of belonging. For the members of a virtual education organization, making personal connections can be tenuous. Electronic communication can provide an immediate form of connecting, but the impersonal nature of the tools, specifically in the inability to gauge reactions to conversations can limit the usefulness of these tools, (Li, D’Souza, & Du, 2011) making the connections sterile, and less authentic. The connections determine the ability of being part of specific groups or social units; both formal and informal, in an organization. Social capital exists solely through the ability of individuals to form relations or social connections.

Making connections and being in a group is not congruent with the level of solidarity with a group. Individuals may belong but be peripheral members and not play a central role, or have close ties with the other group members. Social cohesion with a

group of individuals is a form of social capital (Oksanen, Kivimäki, Kawachi, Subramanian, Takao, Suzuki, Kouvonen, Pentti, Salo, Virtanen, & Vahtera, 2011). The import of the cohesion and sense of belonging goes beyond simply providing an emotional connection to the organization, and has even been implicated in the continued health and mortality of individuals. Workplace connections, in Oksanen, et al.'s (2011) study, were found to be instrumental in allowing individuals to establish a sense of community and connection, and an overall reduction in mortality among those individuals. Oksanen, et al. found that the "workplace can be at best as important a source of social capital as a residential community" (p. 1746). In essence, the resources embedded in the social relationships, either informal or formal, might have a profound impact on the individual, and are worth consideration when examining the overall culture and identity of an organization.

There is inherent value in social capital but only to the benefit of those on the inside of the network. As Helliwell (2001) posited, social capital does not always result in close ties for all members of an organization or group. Different social groups exist that may be differentiated by project teams, departments, divisions, or as previously noted, curriculum groupings, regional geographic groupings of individuals, or even office cliques. Arregle, Hitt, Sirmon, and Very (2007) suggested that significant group heterogeneity in an organization coupled with complex social interconnections among group members likely have important effects on organizational social capital creation" (p. 74). The establishment of a network of individuals can come at the expense of dissociation for some members, and can result in "increase[d] distance and tension between groups" (p. 43). The may be true in the case of an organization where an

established network of individuals may exist: an old boys club, or a group of legacy members. These individuals may be perceived as being privileged, or as having special status that garners them rights that are not necessarily available to others in the organization. Conversely, legacy and existing networks may exhibit territorial behaviors as part of their perceived status in the organization, a feeling that may not necessarily be shared or based in reality. This type of network may contribute to an inability to access certain groups or sub-groups resulting in tension or friction.

This section provided a definition of professional identity and an overview of the relationship of social capital to professional identity development in an organization. As previously noted, having a sense of professional identity may influence organizational members' perceptions of organizational identity and influence organizational identity formation.

The next section will provide a description of the organizational context under which professional identity formation is being studied.

### **The Virtual Education Organization (VEO) in Context**

A virtual education organization is an organizational form that provides education to stakeholders using virtual tools, and where the members of the organization are geographically distributed. The organization examined in this study is one type of virtual organization called a virtual education organization (VEO) and it exhibits the characteristics of a standard organizational form in that it is a complex system (Close & Raynor, 2010), but exhibits other characteristics that distinguish it from traditional conceptions of organization. Some features that characterize the VEO are the geographic and sometimes temporal isolation of the organizational members, and the reliance on

communication technology to accomplish the day-to-day operations of the organization. Virtual organizations are defined as “groups of people working independently with a shared purpose over space, time, and organizational boundaries using technology” (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000, p. 18).

Virtual organizations and their members, as opposed to their face-to-face organizational counterparts, experience some unique challenges. Organizational members who are geographically dispersed tend to feel less connected to their organization (Kurland & Egan, 1999) and experience a sense of isolation (Rapp, Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2010; Raghuram, Garud, Wiesenfeld, & Gupta, 2001). The inability to frequently immerse themselves into, or even to experience the social fabric of the organization may cause workers at a distance to feel less socialized and involved in the organizational culture (Kurland & Egan, 1999). Additionally, the physical isolation of individuals may lead to a sense of professional isolation of individuals as members experience difficulty establishing a connection to a professional community (Bartel, Wrzesniewski & Wiesenfeld, 2012). This sense of disconnect can have far reaching implications for the cohesiveness experienced between members, groups of members, and within the organization, possibly contributing to feelings of disconnect from the organization (Fjermestad & Hiltz, 2000). It was also indicated that a sense of loyalty to the organization may decline as a result of virtualization (Kurland & Egan, 1999).

Geographic distribution of organizational members may also result in instances of regionalism if there is opportunity for localized groups to form. Au and Marks (2012) questioned whether the cultural strength of local sub-groups might impact the perception of organizational identity as compared to the perception of organizational identity held by

other sub groups, an assertion that was previously noted in Ashforth, Rogers, and Corley's (2011) work on organizational identity. Au and Marks (2012) also noted that attachment to the organization may be impacted by geographic dispersion. Of additional interest are the findings from a study by Bartel, Wrzesniewski and Wiesenfeld (2012) who suggested that physical isolation which can be a result of geographic distribution, can impact the perceived level of respect accorded an individual working in the organization.

Leadership is especially critical in the success of virtual organizations (Kahai, Carroll, & Jestice, 2007; Merriam, Schmidt, & Dunlap-Hinkler, 2007; Bergiel, Bergiel, & Balsmeier, 2008), particularly in managing the level of trust that exists between organizational members and leadership. Oakley (1998) posited that there is a temptation to assume that a democratic orientation exists in the virtual organization where employees not extensively supervised and monitored. The reality may be that external regulation and top down decision making diminishes any real decision making authority by the virtual membership, creating distrust and a "deterioration of an atmosphere of freedom and mutual respect" (p. 6). Additionally, the separation from one's fellow members can contribute to a lessening ability to form relationships (Merriam, Schmidt, & Dunlap-Hinkler, 2007) which can exacerbate the ability to connect and build any trust relationships with organizational members. The ability of leaders and leadership, then, to first, recognize any issues that may exist and second, be prepared to deal with them, underscores the critical importance of leadership.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature examining the construct of organizational identity. The chapter began by examining the theories that described the development of organizational identity as a construct. The chapter then moved to an elaboration of two definitions of organizational identity, noting two paradigmatic orientations to defining the construct: social actor and social constructionist theory. Next, organizational culture and the relationship to organizational identity were explored. Several models of formal and informal leadership were examined and considered in the context of identity formation. The construct of professional identity was considered and its relationship to organizational identity formation, as was the role of social capital in professional identity formation. The chapter concluded with a description of virtual organizations and why this type of organization was considered for the study of organizational identity formation.

Chapter three will provide a detailed delineation of the methodology employed in this study. The chapter details the methodological decisions that were made in completing this study including a discussion of the reasoning for selecting an interpretive qualitative approach using case study as a research design. Next, the research study context, site and participant selection, and entry to the site will be presented for consideration. A description of the study sample will be given and this will be followed by the methods employed to protect the participants. Next, a brief discussion of the researcher and his connection to the study will be presented. The methods used for data collection and management are described as well as techniques for ensuring data security and participant confidentiality. A comprehensive description of how the data will be

analyzed is undertaken along with a brief overview of data verification. The chapter will conclude with an overview of some ethical considerations, how to insure the trustworthiness of the study, the study limitations, and what the final written product would look like.

Chapter four will detail the research findings of the study, including representative evidence. An analysis, synthesis and discussion of those findings will be provided in chapter five. Chapter six will provide a set of conclusions that extend from the findings, provide recommendations for future study, conclude with some researcher reflections.

### **CHAPTER 3: DESCRIPTIVE SINGLE CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this descriptive single case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) is to gain a deeper and more rigorously evidenced understanding of how organizational members' *perceptions of professional identity and organizational leadership* might *impact* the formation of *organizational identity* in a virtual education organization. This study is conducted in response to questions that emerged from observations made as a participant-insider of the day-to-day activity of a virtual education organization, and my interactions with the individuals within that organization, over a ten year period from 2001 to 2011.

This chapter details the methodological framework that was used in this study and the data gathering, sorting and analysis methods that were used to conduct and complete the study. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework that frames case study methodologies and, then, will provide an overview of case study design. Next, a description of the research site and researcher choices around sample will be given, followed by an elaboration of the situatedness of the researcher. As well, a discussion of data collection methods, how data were managed, and the data were analyzed will be put forward. The chapter will conclude with the study limitations and delimitations, and a chapter summary.

#### **Introduction to and Overview of the Research Design**

This study explored how the perceptions of organizational member's professional identity and the organization's leadership might impact organizational identity formation. Understanding others' perspectives implies "attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.

2). Qualitative research “help[s] us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomenon with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). Qualitative research was appropriate and justified as a means to explore this topic of organizational identity formation because the focus of the study was to gain “meaning in context” (Merriam, 1998, p. 1).

Gioia (1998) and others have discussed Organizational Identity as the process of answering the question of *who are we as an organization, or who are we becoming?* These discussions imply drawing out and capturing meaning from others’ experiences, interpreting those meaning-experiences, and writing the interpretation which involves filtering the data through the socially constructed meaning-experiences of the participants and the researcher. Qualitative research is designed to “understand and explain the social world primarily from the point of view of the actors directly involved in the social process” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 227) and specific qualitative methods exist that acknowledge how the researcher is situated, and focus on finding the meaning of the situation through the interpretive lens of those being investigated. Interpretivism acknowledges the socially constructed nature of organizational identity (OI) and a qualitative study grounded in the interpretive paradigm is accepted as a means of gaining such meaning (Kelliher, 2005).

The philosophical positioning and worldview of the individual conducting the study also affects decisions that are made about the qualitative methodology and methods used in the study. As Hertz (1997) noted, the theoretical positioning, the political perspective, even gender, and the personal interests of the researcher will affect how the research questions are conceptualized and developed, what methodological approach is

used in the research, and how a researcher analyses and interprets the data that are collected from that research. This study dealt with multiple organizational members' perceptions embedded within their mediating experiences *within* an organization, implying multiple constructions of reality. The interpretive paradigm fosters the acceptance of multiple realities and encourages the “researcher [to] seek out the variety of perspectives” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5).

The Interpretive Research paradigm is concerned with interpreting the subjective perspectives and realities of the lived experiences of participants. Interpretive studies seek to “understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience ... within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 28). As Smith and Osborn (2008) suggested, there is a balance to be achieved when conducting qualitative research framed within an interpretive paradigm because of the need to understand the overall sense making aspect of the participant, which also integrates the sense making aspect of the researcher. Interpretive research involves a type of dual understanding in that “the participants are trying to make sense of their world ... [and] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p. 53). In this context it is the interpretation of the situation that provides the sensemaking. The world, in this case as the world of a virtual education organization, is considered to be a socially constructed reality and, therefore, the use of a qualitative rather than a quantitative study to explore the perceptions of those who inhabit that world, was justified.

The interpretivist lens offers an approach that attends to individual perspectives and individual realities, and disregards the basic tenet of positivism, that “something is meaningful if and only if it is verifiable empirically” (Phillips, 1987, p. 39). Positivism assumes that a value free, detached observation of universal features as a means of understanding is actually possible (Crotty, 2003), whereas the interpretivist acknowledges the researcher’s immersion in the culture of the studied, and that the researcher seeks to increase rather than decrease his/her interactions with the participants (Glesne, 1999). Gioia (1998) suggested that “interpretivism blurs the distinction between researcher and researched ... the project of the researcher becomes that of faithfully rendering the constructions of the participants studied and accurately representing *their* interpretations” (p. 27), and, as such, the goal of which is to seek understanding through the lived experiences of those participating, or through “the frame of reference of the participant” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 28).

Historically, the study of organizational identity has not focused on the lived experiences of the organizational members, but has been more concerned with observing and reporting the central, distinct, and enduring characteristics of the organization; a decidedly positivist approach. Work on organizational identity theory carried out by Albert and Whetten (1985) took an objective and functionalist approach in their characterization of identity as being exhibited through those observable characteristics that are central, distinct, and enduring. Why not simply parallel the methodology espoused by past authoritative research that had been completed on the construct? The key to a response rests in the words “observable characteristics” and the researchers’ assumptions that surround those words. The interpretivist paradigm opens up and lays

bare the assumption that lived experiences may defy direct observation and are the domain of those who live within mediated organizational – life world – constructs. Positivistic researchers ‘assume’ they are not implicated in their own worlds of study and they can somehow – usually via empirical regimes of falsification and verification protocols – objectify the subjectivity of others; ironically, this claim is a subjective one made by positivistic researchers. More recent OI research (Gioia, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Lerpold, Ravasi, van Rekom, & Soenen, 2007) has cast a completely different light on methods of examining organizational identity, and this recent research has chosen to focus on the sense making aspect of those living the organizational experience and, therefore, prompting a move from positivist to inquiry based research.

The researcher’s belief system has implications for choosing an inquiry approach to research. Ontologically, my belief is that the world, in this case the world of the organization, is a mediating mixture of socially constructed realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Searle, 1995) that are a composite of all individual members’ constructions, and the sense of meanings that the members make out of those constructions (Weick, 2001). There is no one reality that is *true* in the sense of being true for all. Everyone has a perception and everyone’s perception is equally valid. The interpretive qualitative paradigm assumes that “reality is assumed to be multiple and constructed rather than singular and tangible” (Sandelowski, 1993, p. 3), and because I sought multiple perceptions, the interpretive paradigm best fits the research investigation for this thesis.

To say that reality is individually constructed by individuals in a social – collective presumes that the manner in which the evidence is presented will exist in some

form other than as determined as observable characteristics by a researcher.

Interpretivism assumes an ideographic approach to knowledge and sense making in that researchers can gain understanding only by placing themselves inside the social frame of reference of the subject and exploring “the detailed background and life history” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 6). The artifacts and other representations put forward by the participants in an interpretively-framed study as descriptions of the phenomenon in question contain the value laden data.

As researchers, we are tied to those who participate in our research “by a context of tradition – the accumulation of beliefs, theories, codes, metaphors, myths” (Arnold & Fischer, 1994, p. 56). Care had to be taken to ensure that the filtering of the data through my own belief structures did not remove the meaning and intent of the primary voices, namely those of the participants. The researcher must take care and caution to ensure that the interpretation is not a self-fulfilled prophecy which is a result of an unexamined perspective and pre-determined assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). As well, a basic methodological assumption evident in qualitative research is that meanings or understandings will be different for observer and observed; however, in a research study the interpreted reality represented as data must somehow reflect the reality and subjective meaning held by the observed (Lee, 1991). Therefore, in order to attend to this qualitative study principle and to conduct research within an over-riding Human Sciences / Interpretive paradigm, this researcher, aware of his own implicated-ness in the study, selected a single case study analysis design and method.

This section has provided an overview and justification for using a qualitative methodological approach as grounded in the theoretical framework of the interpretive

paradigm. The next section leads on from the theoretical framework and into the study's specific research design and selected research methodology.

### **Elaborating the Research Design**

#### *Rationale for Using Case Study*

Choosing qualitative research opens access to several methodological traditions for the investigation of a phenomenon, with case study counted as being one method. Yin (2009) suggested five methods for conducting a study that include (1) experimentation, (2) surveys, (3) archival analysis, (4) historical analysis and (5) case study, each of which has its own set of conditions for use. These conditions include the type of research questions posed, whether the study focuses on contemporary events, and whether the control of behavioral events is required. Case study was preferred for this study as it conformed to the *how* type of questions being posed for this research study. A second distinction for the use of case study was that this study did not rely on control of behavioral events which is the domain of an experimental approach, and last, it was situated in the present as a contemporary rather than historical event. Each of the preceding criteria is defined by Yin (2009) as critical to case study selection.

Choosing a case study methodology encumbers a specific set of qualitative tools and methods for data collection and analysis. How the data are gathered is a critical consideration for the researcher and is influenced by the complexity of the research phenomenon. Yin (2009) noted that case study is a particularly useful method for researchers to understand “complex social phenomena” (p. 4). A case study is “an exploration of a *bounded system*, (a case or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context”

(Creswell, 1998, p. 61). And, case study can make use of the qualitative tools of data collection and analysis (Cavaye, 1996) to get to participant contextually bound information. Given that this study investigated a complex, contextually bound situation, the use of case study and its associated tools was warranted.

Case study has several strengths that made it the most suitable research design for this study. Three obvious strengths are those previously cited in its suitability to answer *how* type questions, its applicability to studying contemporary events, and its relevance for situations where the researcher has no control over behavioral events. There are other strengths, as Merriam (1998) noted in stating that case study is well suited to studying “complex social units consisting of multiple variables ... [it is] anchored in real life situations ... provides a holistic account of a phenomenon ... [and] offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences” (p. 41). This study examined a complex, real life organizational situation where insight into a contemporary phenomenon was sought. Case study research was an appropriate method to use in this study situation.

The use of case study as a qualitative research methodology, however, is not without criticism (Gerring, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Rowley, 2002; Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007; Yin, 2009). There is debate as to whether case study warrants inclusion as a method, a research design, or a methodology (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007), in past years, if it even warranted inclusion as a valid means of doing research (Campbell & Stanley, 1966), and this is an argument that remains strong to this day (Yin, 2009). The reasons against using case study as a research methodology lay in arguments that arise from comparisons between qualitative and quantitative research and the persistence in

trying to extend constructs associated with positivist methods to qualitative domains. Qualitative research has been perceived as having trustworthiness and credibility issues when cast against the quantitative benchmarks of construct validity, generalizability or external validity, internal validity, reliability and the inability to make causal claims (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Ragin, 1999; Yin, 2009). All these criticisms are deflected if they are cast against the primary reason for doing qualitative research, and that is to make sense out of a complex, contextually bounded situation and to produce thick description of that situation (Denzin, 1988; Geertz, 1973). The sole intent is not necessarily to extrapolate or generalize findings to larger populations or groups, although that may certainly be possible in some cases, but it is to gain a depth of understanding of a specific phenomenon in a specific context.

Any study incorporating qualitative case study research must be able to stand on its merits as being trustworthy. Yin (2009) suggests that the tests described above are still applicable and proposes several steps to be taken to insure reliability and validity. The language describing the means of assessing trustworthiness, however, have shifted from the quantitative terminology to expressions that better suit and describe the needs of qualitative study. As Krefting (1991) noted, “qualitative research is evaluated against criteria appropriate to quantitative research and is found to be lacking” (p. 214). Case study research, a qualitative methodology, has several strategies that can be used to insure a form of validity, reliability, and can confront the issue of generalizability, all of which will be covered in further detail in a subsequent section.

### *The Case and Unit of Analysis*

This study draws on two definitions of case study. These are (1) Merriam's (1998) classification of case study that is an investigation of a narrowly-bounded, well-defined, situation that presents an opportunity for discovery, and (2) Yin's (2003) definition which places case study as "inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). In the research examining organizational identity cited in previous chapters, the boundaries of phenomenon (professional identity, personal identity, and organizational identity), and context (the organization) are not clearly defined.

Both Merriam (1998) and Yin (2009) view the case as being the overall bounded system and the associated study. This study investigated the formation of organizational identity of a virtual education organization as a function of the perceptions of a group of stakeholders of that organization. The case, or bounded system, was the virtual education organization. The definition of case has been located in the context of Yin's (2003) criteria of uniqueness and appropriateness, where the "objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation" (p. 41). The organization under study was unique in it had only been in existence for twelve years, had gone through several major transitions during its growth phase.

Case study has also been described as "research in which in-depth data are gathered relative to a single individual, program, or event, for the purpose of learning more about an unknown or poorly understood situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 114). The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of organizational identity

that, as a topic of research, is in its relative infancy, having been formally established as a subject in the mid to late 1980's. It has not been clearly delineated in all contexts, particularly in the field of K-12 education and in the context of virtual organizations. The phenomenon under investigation in this study can be viewed as providing an understanding of a poorly understood situation.

This descriptive case study design was grounded in interpretive sociological method because of the intent to investigate "social life and the roles people play in it" (Merriam, 1998, p. 37). Organizational identity is considered to be socially constructed and derived from the perspectives of the individuals of the organization (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010). There is no single overarching description, only the amalgam that comes from the individual perspectives. A case study is an inquiry that investigates such a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Merriam (1998) proposes that the case is "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27), the boundaries being the units of analysis that define the boundaries of the case. The construct of organizational identity is bounded by the individuals and the perceptions of the individuals in the organization. The case will be the construct of organizational identity as it exists in a virtual education organization (VEO), and the unit of analysis will be the virtual education organization and its members.

This section provided a rationale for using case study and detailed some of the associated criticisms of case study as a research methodology. The case and the unit of

analysis were then identified. The next section will provide a detailed description of the research site and sample selected for study.

## **The Research Site and Sample**

### *Research context*

A case study design was chosen to implement this study. The organization selected for this study was chosen because it represented an opportunity to examine how organizational identity formation had taken place in a unique organizational context. The virtual education organization (VEO) used in this study provides distance education to rural secondary students in a Canadian province. The VEO was formed as a result of a call for the expansion of educational services and course offerings to rural students. The VEO operates as a branch of a provincial department of education and it is not an independent organizational entity. The VEO has connections and ties to the Province's school districts and the VEO has other service linkages with provincially-located organizations that provide access to office space for VEO staff.

The VEO is led by a Director who reports directly to the province's Assistant Deputy Minister of Education and the program staff report to the Director. IT Professionals, programmers, and multimedia production staff report to an IT Manager. The VEO educators report directly to a program delivery person. Currently, as of 2012, the organization employs fifty-two members. The number of educators employed by the organization can change each year, dependent upon student enrollments and curriculum requirements. The current f educators were hired based on program and curriculum demands and at various points of the organization's existence.

The educators are located in multiple locations province wide. The offices of the staff are geographically dispersed with many site locations physically separated by several hundred kilometers. The day-to-day business of the organization is completed primarily by video conference, e-mail, and other tools of technology. Face-to-face leadership meetings occur approximately once every three months and face-to-face meetings are held each year that include all staff members. The organization operates out of fifteen physical locations. The organization holds a staff meeting each month using electronic communications. An agenda is issued to all teachers and suggestions for items of teacher importance made for inclusion. The Director and program staff meet every Monday through video conferencing and have periodic face-to-face meetings to facilitate budgeting and planning.

The teaching staff is further organized into departments. These are similar to the departments found in most secondary high schools. The departments have a designated “leader” and that person acts as a liaison between the program specialist for human resources, the Director of the organization, and the members of the subject area. The departments have frequent meetings where the issues and concerns of the educators are discussed. The department leaders have additional meetings with the program specialist for human resources and Director, if necessary, and the concerns that are raised in the educators meetings are directed to the person responsible for addressing those concerns. All staff is encouraged and free to contact any member of the organization.

#### *Site and participant selection*

In any qualitative study, the researcher “must make a wide range of sampling decisions, even with one case ... [because] there may be, for example, samples of actors,

settings, events, time periods, and processes” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 25) within a site. Site selection is critical because the sample should be “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The site selection for this study was based on non-probabilistic sampling because my intent was to study a specific organizational context, that of a virtual education organization offering rural educational services in a Canadian province. The VEO was a natural choice, given that the interest in responding to those questions could be accomplished using this particular organization as a site-specific case.

#### *Gaining entry to the site*

Four levels of permission were necessary to access this site that included ethics clearance from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB), permission from appropriate government officials to contact the organization, permission from the Director of the organization to approach the organizational members, and finally, consent from the participants.

Ethics clearance had to be obtained before formally beginning procedures to acquire permission to conduct research in this site. Application was made to the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) for permission to conduct the study. Approval was received (Appendix A) in March of 2010 and preparations were made to begin site access.

Once ethics approval was obtained, a letter was drafted and sent to a provincial ministry official requesting a meeting to discuss the possibility of initiating and completing a research study. The provincial official replied requesting a synopsis of the

research, indicating that a date for a face-to-face meeting would be confirmed after there was sufficient time to read through the study description and digest the implications. A copy of the thesis proposal was forwarded and the official consented to a meeting where the implications of the study, any ethical concerns, and the possible worth to the organization were discussed. The official gave verbal permission to proceed with the study and forwarded a written copy of a letter stating said consent (Appendix B).

In order to gain access to the organizational members, I requested a telephone conversation with the Director of the organization. During that meeting I discussed my planned study and indicated that ethics clearance had been received from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Ethics Research Board, and permission had been received from an authorized government official to proceed with the study. I requested the Director's approval to proceed via an e-mail exchange, and asked for a time and date to hold a recruitment session. The Director's consent was obtained and approval was given for me to provide a thirty minute information session to be held at one of the organization's face-to-face staff meetings.

Prior to the meeting, a recruitment letter (Appendix C) was forwarded in electronic format to all employees of the organization by e-mail explaining my reasons for attending and providing the session. I attended the session and outlined the basis for my research, put forward the research questions that I wished to investigate, detailed the process that would be followed, and left time for questions from the members. I also provided e-mail and telephone contact numbers in case individuals wished to contact me after the session to further discuss the study. An informed consent letter along with a self-

addressed stamped envelope was distributed to all members with a request to read, sign, date and return if interested in participating in the study.

### *Study sample*

The research questions posed in the study generally point to the selection of a favoured unit of analysis (Yin, 2009) because the information necessary to answer the research questions will extend from the unit of analysis. This study sought the perceptions of organizational members on the construct of organizational identity. Purposeful (Merriam, 1998) rather than random sampling was used to obtain the participants for the study because the aim of this qualitative study was to gain insight into a specific situation. The sample selected had to contain the best probability of yielding that insight; the sample “from which the most [could] be learned” (p. 61). The sample pool was very specific because the study focused on a specific organization and involved intrinsic casework (Stake, 1994). In this study, because of the tightly bounded nature of the case, the sample was selected from the members of the organization under study.

The participant sample was stratified and heterogeneous in that the recruitment of participants from the pool of fifty-two possible members of the organization yielded individuals from all organizational levels and departments. Thirty-eight of a possible fifty-two persons; seventy-three percent, responded and indicated a willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. Sixteen individuals did not respond at all to the invitation. All individuals who responded were accepted for participation in the study. Three of the thirty-eight persons selected for participation withdrew for personal reasons before data collection began or did not complete the data collection phases leaving a total of thirty-five viable participants. Twenty-six percent of the participants were female and

seventy-four percent male. Sixty-nine percent of the participants had been with the organization for five years or greater.

*Protecting the participant*

My relationship to those who participated in the study is not one of formal power. I am considered to be a member of a team of specialists who concern themselves with aspects of the operation of the organization, but I do not have direct authority over individuals who work for the organization. However, in recruiting participants from my organization for this study, my position as researcher may have imposed a power differential between me as researcher and the organizational member as participant. Members were recruited and voluntarily participated in the study. I did not directly solicit participation from individual members, relying instead on a call for participation to engage participants. However, in interacting and accessing data from participants I imposed a type of power over what is implied from the conversations. I am the instrument through which interpretation was ultimately arrived at and therefore, I was ethically bound to be as faithful in my representation of the participants understanding as possible. In making the members anonymous, they and their voices are removed from the process. Participants had to rely on me to faithfully render what they provided as their understanding.

Obtaining informed consent is a necessary step in any qualitative research study that seeks to guarantee the “protect[ion of] research participants from exploitation and harm” (Miller & Boulton, 2007, p. 2202). An informed consent letter was distributed (Appendix C) to all potential participants. Returned consent letters indicating a willingness to participate were collated and participant data entered into an electronic

database. To further protect the identity of the individual, each person was assigned a pseudonym to be used in place of their name. The researcher chose not to identify participants with gender specific labels. Each participant was assigned the same name: Participant, with a randomly assigned number that had no specific meaning other than to distinguish one participant from another. This use of pseudonyms was done to, as much as possible, avoid the identification of individuals. In order to assure that issues of coercion were dealt with, the members of the organization were provided with the option of opting out of the study at any time. Participation was entirely voluntary and there were no conditions imposed that would bind the participant to stay in the study.

*The researcher and the researched*

I am implicated and embedded in this research study. I am associated with the organization that I have chosen to study. I have a deep sense of pride in, and connection with, the group of individuals that form the organization's membership. I also hold an intense sense of satisfaction that emanates from the role that the organization plays in delivering education. I have experienced the growth and expansion of the organization, and the issues that have accompanied any evolution and change.

The growth of the organization has allowed me to grow in parallel as an individual, both professionally and intellectually. The roles that I have been assigned during my tenure have challenged me to think about the organization, and try to better understand the life of those who work within the organization. I have always been fascinated with the manner in which the organization was formed and the resulting connections and relationships that formed over the life span of the organization, relationships that often developing in spite of the conditions under which the organization

functioned. My observations and thoughts led to the formal questioning of how the identity; how *who we are*, came into being. This study is a result of that questioning.

The connection to the organization though, has other less positive implications. To do justice to the study, to do justice to those who have placed themselves in the precarious position of trust, requires that I resist the urge to report things as *I* see them, a view that occurs through a set of lenses that are enveloped in the biases that have come about *because* of my embeddedness. I cannot extract my experiences from myself, nor would I try to distance myself from them, but I can acknowledge up front the existence of bias and stay “ever conscious of [my] verbal and nonverbal behavior [and stay] ... more than usually attuned to [my] behavior and its impact” (Glesne, 1999, p. 41). My experiences followed me into this study, informed the direction of the study, but the key is to insure that those experiences don’t subvert the voices that I truly wish to represent, those of the participants.

This section has provided detail on the site and participant selection, has detailed how entry was gained to the site and provided a description of the study sample. Techniques used to protect the participants were given and researcher embeddedness was outlined. This next section will expand on the data collection methods used in this study, data protection and data management strategies employed in the study.

## **Data Collection and Management**

### *Data collection*

Polkinghorne (2005) noted that the purpose of data collection in qualitative research is “is to provide evidence for the experience it is investigating. The evidence is in the form of accounts people have given of the experience” (p. 138). In this study data

collection was focused around the three research questions posed in this study. The research questions are the crux of the study because they “narrow the research objective and research purpose” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006, p. 475). The research questions also dictate the overall design of the study, as well as narrowing the types of instruments that can and will be used to gather the data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). Data were collected using a variety of sources, contributing to the possibility of converging findings through triangulation (Mathison, 1988).

Multiple methods of collection are recognized in research as legitimate means of obtaining data, and each returns specific types of information (Bailey, 1997; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Merriam, 1998, Yin, 2009). Included in those methods are semi-structured interviews, document collection, creating field notes through researcher journaling that described researcher hunches, interpretations of events, and decisions that were made during the research process, examining policy statements, historical artifacts; memos, e-mails, memorandum of understanding, and other organizational artifacts; web pages, posters, and flyers. Three primary types of data collection activities were used in this study: semi-structured interviews, document collection and examination, and field notes.

Data collection began with the collection of demographic information from the participants using electronic means. An e-mail was forwarded to each participant asking that they provide their gender, years of teaching service, years of service with the organization, the curriculum area in which they were teaching, their job classification if not an educator, their age, address, and alternate e-mail contact information. The e-mail also asked them if they wished to supply a pseudonym and informed them that one would

be supplied if they did not. This information was used to gain some insight into the overall demographic variation that existed among and across the group of participants and to assure that as diverse a set of perspectives as possible could be obtained. Multiple perspectives are critical in case study analysis as it contributes to data triangulation and also provides a route through which a researcher can search for disconfirming evidence, a validity procedure that is recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000).

The second type of data collection strategy was to use semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a powerful means of getting to the crux of the understanding in a research situation. Using semi-structured interviews gave the flexibility to probe interesting asides that appeared over the course of the interview, and allowed the “interviewees to bring up what they [saw] as relevant” (Alvesson, 2011, p. 53). Each of the participants in this study was asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The time and date of each interview were negotiated with the participant, and took place at a time and location chosen by him or her, in a non-threatening environment in which they felt comfortable. The interviews took place after work hours, either late in the afternoon or during early evening, and from Monday to Friday.

The interviews consisted of a series of 14 probing questions that were administered in a semi-structured interview format using an interview protocol (Appendix E). The interview began by asking for some general descriptive information from the participant to place them at ease. This information included items such as his or her name, the length of time with the organization, the year he or she began working with the organization and then moved to asking specifics about the participant’s professional skills and knowledge. The introductory questions were designed to relax the individual

and ease them into the routine of the interview. The questions progressed from general information to those that probed into the specifics of organizational culture, organizational leadership, their own leadership, organizational identity, the structure of the organization, decision making, and their experiences with and impressions of the organization as a whole. The interviewee was allowed to take new directions and raise asides as he or she saw fit.

Interviews were conducted in person where possible and using a web-based tool when weather conditions, scheduling, or travel distances impacted or impaired the ability to meet. All interviews were recorded electronically. Face-to-face interviews were recorded using a digital recording unit that produced an electronic file. Web-based interviews were recorded using a programs built in session recorder that produced a downloadable electronic file. The files were encoded in wav or mp3 format and were transferred to a password protected data drive as soon as the interview was completed and it was physically possible to do so. Transcription of the interview took place directly after the interview occurred. Twelve of the thirty-five recordings were transcribed by paid, professional transcriptionists, with the remainder transcribed by the researcher. Each person hired to transcribe the recordings were required to sign and return a confidentiality agreement before beginning the work (Appendix F). All transcripts were returned to the participants for review and verification once the interviews were transcribed.

The first two scheduled interviews with educators were used to pilot the interview questions. Post-interview conversations and discussion with each person identified some structural issues concerning readability and clarity of the questions. The length of some questions proved to be problematic, introducing a level of confusion around question

intent. The questions were re-written and truncated to allow better participant. The wording of two of the questions was revised to provide greater clarity. The revised questions were presented to the two participants for further input and, if necessary, further revision. The interviews took between 60 and 90 minutes on average to complete. Some discussions with participants diverged into several areas of interesting asides causing some interviews to extend beyond the standard time frame to 120 minutes or more. These interviews were only extended with the express permission of the participant. In two cases, because of personal time constraints and at the request of the participants, interviews were spread over two separate sessions.

As the interviews progressed the interviews were supplemented with questions that had emerged from the interviewing process. I took note of several specific discussions that had emerged and had focused the past and present professional standing of the members within the organization, and specifically, their perceptions around the ability to develop a professional identity, the barriers or enablers to this development, and how this impacted their overall perception of the organization. Several asides were followed and the associated questions, although not part of the interview protocol, were included in subsequent interviews. The repeated appearance of these conversations in different interviews prompted me to develop some tentative premises around professional identity and that at that moment, and later, formed the basis for further analysis.

A third means of data collection centered on my writings that I maintained in a journal during this study. This journal served several purposes, not the least of which was to use the journal as a means of recording and archiving spontaneous thoughts and ideas that occurred to me during interviews, as I read through and analyzed data, or as I

reflected on what I felt was emerging from the data as themes and ideas. Note taking is considered to be one of the primary tools used in qualitative research (Glesne, 1999), and as a form of data collection, which allows the researcher to experience and record thoughts about the research setting, and information concerning researcher ideas and intuitions, or avenues for further. The note-taking was limited during the actual interview discussion in order to minimize the distraction to the participant, and to maintain focus on what was being said. It was imperative during the discussions to provide assurance to the individual, through body language and behavior, that they were being taken seriously, that I could show understanding, and that they were the priority at that moment. I followed the imperative of Seidman (2006) to “listen more, talk less” (p. 78), sage advice when the purpose is to try and understand a situation from the perspective of another. I did, however, follow Merriam’s (1998) advice and spent time writing observer comments to “stimulate critical thinking about what [I saw]” (p. 163), developed memos myself in the CADQAS software as I coded, and in my journal, to track and describe what I had learned (p. 163), and jotted notes to myself as the interviews progressed, and as I immersed myself deeper and deeper in the data analysis.

Notes were also produced during my periods of reflection on the research process, while transcribing and reading the interviews, and during the analysis of data. Yin (2009) described researcher notes as an essential component of a case study database. During the analysis of the data, ideas would occur to me that might have been sparked by a participant’s comment, by a quotation referenced in a piece of literature, or from simply thinking about and mentally digesting hunches that emerged from the data. These ideas, hunches, and potential data connections were written down and expanded upon in my

field note book, and where possible, included cross references to data sources such as direct quotations from interviews, references to documents, and the authoritative literature. Hunches and ideas that developed while coding the interviews were electronically recorded as memos in the qualitative analysis software used to code the interviews.

Organizational documents were collected, archived and examined by the researcher. Approximately one hundred items were collected that included minutes from staff meetings, leadership meetings, and department meetings, organizational handbooks, job descriptions, government reports, and informal and formal policy documents and manuals. In addition the organization's web structure was examined with screen shots grabbed and converted to graphics that could be archived. All text documents were imported into the Atlas/ti program for inclusion in the coding process. These documents were included and examined as a means of corroborating data collected in other data collection phases.

Given that the organization has been in existence for multiple years, a considerable document trail such as memos, e-mail, formal reports, white papers, and formal research, had amassed that described and defined the organization's development, and provided insight into its structure and culture. This paper trail revealed facets of the organization that supplemented evidence provided by the members of the organization. The documentation was significant in its potential to show the values, beliefs, and possible influences in the early stages of the development of the organization.

### *Self as research instrument*

For the researcher to fully understand and represent the experiences of the researched, he or she has to become what Seidman (2006) termed the “researcher as instrument”. The researcher following the interpretive paradigm stands on the belief that multiple realities exist, that knowledge is socially constructed by those who are immersed in the world around them, and that their knowledge is created as a function of their social context (Glesne, 1999). The job of the researcher is to become the instrument and “their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (p. 5). The interpretation offered by the researcher comes as a result of the multiple perspectives that are “mediated through [the] human instrument ... rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7).

### *Protecting the data*

Security and the confidentiality of the data were an imperative. It is important to note that other than in a limited number of cases where a transcriptionist was paid to transcribe interviews, no person other than the researcher was privy to what was recorded from the participants. An electronic or printed copy of the transcribed interviews were returned to each interviewee to examine for a period of two weeks to review, confirm, and verify that the content and context of the data was a complete representation of what they wished to say. Each participant was given the opportunity to add to the interview if they wished. Any clarification of topics by the individual was done by having them create a copy of the electronic file to which additional data would be added. The participant

would insert and identify their comments in a text color other than black. The amended file would be returned to the researcher to incorporate any additional information.

#### *Data management strategies*

Transcribed versions of interviews were generated and stored on a secure, encrypted external hard drive. The transcripts and other field notes were encoded as Microsoft Office Word (\*.doc) text files for coding and analysis using Atlas/ti™ computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Barry (1998) discusses some of the positive and negative aspects of using such software to assist in analysis, one positive being the ability to speed up the coding process, and a negative being that the inexperience of users often results in missed or overlooked data. However, an advantage of electronic software lies in the ability to manage large volumes of data. The Atlas/ti™ software has several embedded tools that allow the researcher to link codes directly to specific quotations, tracks similar codes and quotations across all interviews, and to create analytic memos that can be linked directly to quotations. Multiple data types can be added to each analytic unit and triangulation across those data types can be accomplished. Complex network diagrams showing relationships between data could be quickly created. This data management and analysis tool streamlined the analysis, saved incredible amounts of time that would have been lost creating physical charts and tables, and assisted in keeping the researcher organized while sifting through an enormous volume of data.

This section provided an elaboration of the tools used to collect data, as well as some of the precautionary measures taken to ensure protection of the participants and the data. Last, some data management strategies were outlined. This next section will discuss

the process used to analyze the data and verify the conclusions drawn from the data. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the mechanisms employed to insure validity, reliability and trustworthiness.

## **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

### *Data analysis*

The data analysis undertaken in this study was not a linear process but was very much an iterative and ongoing process that began with the collection, reading, and coding of the first interview. A modified version of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of analysis was used to analyze the data. The constant comparative method implies cycling through and completing multiple examinations of all data. Even though this was not a grounded theory qualitative study, Merriam (1998) suggests that because the constant comparative method is inductive in nature and similar to the "concept-building orientation of all qualitative research" (p. 159), it is an acceptable means of analyzing case study data.

Yin (2009) suggested that in order for the researcher to "produce compelling analytic conclusions, and rule out alternative interpretations" (p. 130) with case study analysis, an analytic strategy is needed. The preferred analytic strategy is to rely on the theoretical propositions that led to the research study (Yin, 2009). The data analysis in this case study was guided by the following set of propositions. An initial study proposition was that the culture of the organization impacts identity formation. Therefore, I looked for references in the interviews where descriptions of the cultural milieu might have implicated a shift in a participants' perception of the organization and its identity. A second proposition was that the ability to access the benefits of the organization: as

example professional networks and relationships, known as social capital, forms the basis for professional identity development and that in turn might impact the individual's perception of organizational identity. I looked for statements and references in the documents, interviews and other data that indicated emerging social connections, relationship forming, and references to professionalism. A third proposition was that isolation, geographic, social, or psychological, might impact the ability of the perception of organizational identity. I was acutely aware of references that singled out feelings of disconnect by individual members with other members, or feelings of disconnect from the organization itself. A final proposition directing the study was that perceptions of leaders, leadership, and the ability of individuals to enact leadership might influence the perceptions of organizational identity. Therefore, an awareness of references to leaders and leadership developed as the data were examined and analyzed. Laying bare these propositions provided the foundation for an analytic strategy (Yin, 2009) "focus[ing] attention on certain data and ... ignor[ing] other data (p. 130).

There were no tables of pre-defined codes created in advance of analysis to code the data. Coding was an emergent process that began with the reading through and each subsequent iterative reading of the interviews and documents. Codes emerged from the data as relevant ideas were encountered. As participants words were reviewed, specific "units of data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179) or potentially meaningful comments were revealed. Each unit was highlighted and a specific code electronically attached to that snippet of text, tying the code to the text. For example, the comment "external organizations threaten the sense of who we are" was highlighted and prompted me to add a code identifying this text references as *ID\_threat*. As textual units were identified and

codes applied, I also inserted analytic memos to myself that discussed why the text might be of interest, referenced other documents or observations that supported the meaning, or recorded connections that might be emerging. All documents and interviews were searched for similar textual units and verbal references, and the codes applied. This process was performed iteratively until no further textual units could be identified. This process was completed a minimum of four times with all documents.

The Atlas/ti™ program kept track of the occurrences of each code, the specific text quotation from which the code came, and the specific interview that was referenced. Essentially, a significant case study database (Merriam, 1998) was being created that allowed me to manage the associations that were developing within the data. I also inserted memos to myself during this and subsequent coding processes. Memos were an invaluable means of “generating the unusual insights that move the analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 161). Intuitions and ideas regarding explanations, and notations indicating alternate or contrasting ideas were added to the memos. An advantage of using the computer assisted software was that exporting the codes also attached and exported associated memos and quotations, effectively tying groups of data together and assisting with the overall analysis. This was very useful in linking ideas. Additionally, all data sources such as written descriptions, interviews, documents, notes, and memos were added to the software program for analysis. All data were placed in one central location and easily accessible,

Open, axial, and selective coding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) were used to code the data. The initial process of identifying and coding the interesting textual occurrences was known as open coding. Open coding is one of the discovery phases of analysis where

phenomenon and categories are identified, and a reference applied to the phenomenon or category in the form of a code. Once the codes were identified and I felt that no further codes could be located in the data, I began assembling the first order themes into groupings using the CADQAS software. This was accomplished by grouping similar codes together into categories or themes. The leadership category, as example, included codes that referenced organizational leadership, distributed leadership, individual leadership, informal leadership, and innovative leadership. This process allowed me to develop silos in which to electronically store common codes.

In the first round of coding, as I read I allowed myself to note any idea, thought, or comment in the text that I found to be interesting or representative. As I moved through the interviews in succession, I re-applied each of these codes that I found to previous interviews, looking for similar representative comments that enabled confirmation across the data. A stringent open coding process (Creswell, 1998) insured that as much as possible, all data were derived from the raw data in the form of examples based on the unit of analysis. The codes derived from this process formed the basis for specific thematic fragments such as *association with external entity altering org identity*. I began by using open coding to create the initial categories from the data, and then progressed to axial coding. “Whereas open coding fractures the data into categories, axial coding puts the data back together by making connections between the categories and sub-categories” (Kendall, 1999, p. 747). Axial coding was accomplished by sorting and grouping the categories that developed from the open coding process into second order groupings or themes. For instance, several core concepts continuously emerged that referenced the impact of external organizations and individuals on the virtual

organizational members' ability to form an organizational identity. As an example, Table 3.1 shows one of the codes generated during the open coding process, three concept statements that were extracted from the interviews, and the associated second order theme extracted from those concept statements. The concept statements, among others, were used to create a second order, overarching themes.

The final step was to reassemble the data into second order themes and concepts, ending with selective coding where the story line or interpretation was generated from the analysis. The end result was the making of inferences through a chain of data that linked the general through to the specific, and concluded with the development of overall themes. The research was drawn through the constant comparative process (see as example, Conrad, 1978; Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The comparative method invoked the comparison of data within and across categories until all relationships were discovered until no new themes or categories appeared to emerge. Category construction is a form of case study data analysis (Merriam, 1998) and was the key process used to make sense out of the data.

Table 3.1- Example of second order concept derived from concept statements.

Code	Concept statements	Second Order Concept
External influences - identity	association with external entity altering org identity  identity has diminished due to external influence  greater external control and rigidity of decision making	external entities influence members' identity formation

### *Verification of the data*

Verification, in an interpretive sense, is a process of confirmation that insures that the data collected, the analysis of that data, and the conclusions drawn from that analysis are sound – that is there is internal consistency and inter-reliability between the parts of the data process from generation to analysis. It is a process that is woven into the fabric of the study and is not something that the researcher invokes post-data collection or post analysis. Verification requires diligence and continuity throughout the life of the study in order to confirm the reliability and validity of the research (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). This study integrated a number of approaches to increase the reliability and validity of the findings.

One means of verification was accomplished by drawing from multiple methods of collection and data sources or triangulation. Seale (1999b) suggests an alternate term to triangulation as the use of methodological validation that, in the strictest sense, simply implies corroboration of evidence from multiple sources, that “links between concepts and indicators are checked by recourse to other indicators” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 199). This study drew data from several sources that included semi-structured interviews, documentation, and research notes (Creswell, 1998) as a means of corroborating findings.

The credibility of the research findings can be impacted by the level of specificity that the researcher employs in clearly laying out the pathway through coding and analysis decisions. The coding and analysis of the data in this study was accomplished using a software program called Atlas/ti™. This tool was beneficial in creating what Guba and Lincoln (1989) termed an audit trail. An audit trail consists of a clearly delineated

pathway through which decisions were made regarding the analysis of the data. In this research study I archived all related data in a single, searchable case study database which made it efficient to connect ideas, categories, and themes across several types of data. I created electronic memos and notes that were stored in the body of the document being analyzed and in conjunction with the creation of codes, and the connections to these analytic items within and across data were tracked and maintained by the software, as well as the researcher. The process provided a rationale for the line of enquiry that was taking place at that time by allowing me to strategically place memos and notes that were electronically connected to a quotation in the body of the interview. I could document and raise links to theory, query any contradictions that I might have encountered in the data, and connect similar and dissimilar ideas that might be emerging across the interviews and within the additional data being used in conjunction with the interviews.

### **Trustworthiness of the Research and Findings**

The trustworthiness of any research study is grounded in the validity and reliability of that study. A qualitative researcher, however, approaches the idea of validity and reliability from slightly differing angles than that of a quantitative researcher. As Maxwell (2002) suggested, in qualitative research there is no one objective reality that can be offered from a researcher's interactions with a research situation that "it is always possible for there to be equally different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives" (p. 41). The central concern of a qualitative researcher is to insure that "the content of the [data are] properly analyzed ... [and] the conclusions of the case study rest upon the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). This next section reports on issues of how validity and reliability were dealt with in this study.

*Dealing with validity and reliability*

Validity asks the question “do the findings capture what is really there?” (Merriam, 1998, p. 201) and is a challenging question to answer in case study research (Yin, 2009) because “the purpose in qualitative research never is to measure anything” (Stenbacha, 2001, p. 551). This study examined how professional identity and leadership impacted organizational identity formation so the challenge was to insure that the data gained were a reflection of those constructs. Yin (2009) proposed several solutions to insuring validity within a case study. Two of these solutions: (1) creating an audit trail to detail the case study in such a way that the reader can follow the path of evidence from the research questions through to the conclusions (p. 122), and (2) using multiple sources of evidence from which to draw conclusions, were used in this study. As discussed in a previous section, first, this study employed a case study database to track all data and conclusions drawn from that data. Second, multiple perspectives stemming from the recruitment of a variety of voices and perspectives in the organization provided multiple sources of evidence. This was coupled, thirdly, with data collection through multiple sources.

Internal validity asks whether the researcher’s explanation of events and outcomes that are described in a study document actually captures the multiple realities put forth by the participants in the study. Are the inferences made by the researcher correct or are there alternative explanations that may not have been considered? Yin (2009) suggested pattern matching as a means of addressing internal validity. The constant comparative method used to analyze the data required an iterative approach to reading the data and identification of patterns in the data across the various participants’ interviews, which is a

form of pattern matching. This study also relied on explanation building to develop a rationale for the themes that emerged from the data. Rival explanations were considered along with my explanation as a means of comparison. Triangulation of multiple data sources through interview, documentation, and journal notes, as well as consulting multiple sources in the organization; educators, administrators, and other personnel, to provide data served as a means to enhance the validity of this study (Denzin, 1988).

External validity refers to the ability of a study's findings to be generalized to similar populations or situations beyond the bounds of the population or situation being studied (Yin, 2009). Generalizability arises as an empirical generalization in quantitative study and theoretical generalization (Seale, 1999a; Sim, 1998) in qualitative study, a term that Yin (2009) also labeled "analytical generalization" (p. 43). Empirical generalization lies in the positivist realm and is the result of a statistical representation of a sample being extrapolated to the population at large. Generalization in qualitative case study can be accomplished if the researcher "strives to generalize a set of results to some broader theory" (Yin, 2009, p. 43). The act of generalization in case study is not, as Payne and Williams (2005) suggested, "to claim that what is the case in one place or time, will be so ... in another time" (p. 296). Instead, analytic generalization infers the findings achieved from a study to understanding some general level of understanding. The goal in this study was not to be able to generalize the behaviors of the population to some other population, but rather to be able to generalize the behaviors and motivations to the larger construct of organizational identity. In this manner, a type of generalizability is possible using case study.

Reliability poses the question of whether the case study could be conducted by another investigator and would yield similar results (Yin, 2009). This is a problematic area in qualitative research because qualitative research involves the participation with and study of human behavior, and “human behavior is never static” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Merriam (1998) suggest that reliability should be examined not from whether the findings could be replicated, but “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 206). Several techniques recommended by Merriam (1998) and Yin (2009) were incorporated in this study to insure reliability. First, the researcher’s positioning was well-delineated and described up-front researcher biases, assumptions and propositions behind the study, and the embeddeness of the researcher in the study. A case study protocol (Yin, 2009) describing the case study questions, procedures for recruiting and selecting participants, the instruments for data collection, and a detailed description of the context from which the data was drawn was created at the beginning of the study and guided the study’s progress. A second technique was the development of a case study database (Yin, 2009) compiled using the qualitative analysis tool Atlas/ti™. The database contained a record of all interviews, memos, and notes that were encoded in text format and were fully searchable, and provided a means of creating an audit trail (Merriam, 1998). Codes were extracted, tabulated, grouped by common theme, and tied to a higher order overarching theory. In this sense, the database and tables provided the basis for an audit trail and chain of evidence that could be followed by another researcher. Last, triangulation insured the confirmation of emergent findings through the use of multiple sources of data and multiple perspectives, therefore insuring a level of reliability.

### *Study limitations and delimitations*

The results of this study had to be carefully analyzed and interpreted with explicit attention to the study's limitations and delimitations. First, this study was limited in that the concept of organizational identity formation was examined in a single, specific context. Causal inferences to other situations may not be possible as the behaviors attributed to one group may not apply to a second group of individuals. Second, the research on organizational identity undertaken in this study was completed using a single paradigmatic lens. Other lenses may well reveal aspects of organizational identity that were not exposed in this study. Third, there was a possibility that some participants were not entirely forthcoming or completely thorough in their answers to questions, a phenomenon described by Nederhof (1985) as Socially Desirable Response (SDR) bias that refers to the tendency of individuals to provide an overly positive picture that downplays negative behaviors. And fourth, because the sample selection depended upon voluntary participation, the study did not include all members of the organization and, therefore, any inferences drawn from the study may not reflect the perceptions of all.

The study was delimited in the following manners. The study did not examine organizational identity in multiple contexts, choosing only to examine one type of virtual organization. By definition, other organizational designs and virtual arrangements might have existed that were distinct, and that may have yielded differing study results from those that were obtained in the current study. Second, the decision was made to only include those stakeholders who were directly employed by the organization as participants. There were other stakeholder groups associated with the organization who were not included in the sample (as example, district personnel, parents, students). Other

stakeholders' perceptions of identity were not included because this study was only interested in the internal representation of identity.

### **The Final Product**

Merriam (1998) cautions that when generating a qualitative thesis, consideration has to be given to the audience. Case study research, by its very nature, implies providing a wealth of information about the phenomenon or cases under study and in providing a rich description that “affords the reader the vicarious experience of being there” (p. 238). This rich description has to be balanced with a sense of giving accurate findings requiring a process that necessitates equilibrium between engaging prose and avoiding potentially mechanistic reporting. The final story of this descriptive case study is a rich description of the perceptions and experiences of those involved in the organization, but also contributes insight and understanding to a larger theoretical phenomenon, that of Organizational Identity formation.

### **Summary**

This chapter shows the methodological decisions that were made in completing this study. I first discussed the reasoning for selecting an interpretive qualitative approach using case study as a research design. Next, the research study context, site and participant selection, and entry to the site were presented for consideration. A description of the study sample was given and this was followed by the methods employed to protect the participants. Next, a brief discussion of the researcher and his connection to the study was presented. The methods used for data collection and management were described as well as techniques for ensuring data security and participant confidentiality. A comprehensive description of how the data were analyzed was undertaken along with a

brief overview of data verification. The chapter concluded with an overview of some ethical considerations, how to insure the trustworthiness of the study, the study limitations, and what the final written product would look like.

Chapter four will detail the research findings of the study, including representative evidence. An analysis, synthesis and discussion of those findings will be provided in chapter five. Chapter six will provide a set of conclusions that extend from the findings, provide recommendations for future study, conclude with some researcher reflections.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive single case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) was to gain a deeper and more rigorously evidenced understanding of how organizational members' perceptions of organizational leadership and professional identity might impact the formation of organizational identity in a virtual education organization. This chapter presents the findings that were derived from the study's data sources. The case study was framed by the following questions:

1. What role has the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization?
2. What role has the organizational members' perceptions of self as leaders and self-leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization?
3. How do the members of a virtual education organization perceive their professional identity, their ability to develop a professional identity, and the role one's professional identity plays in forming and shaping the organization's collective identity?

The findings will be presented in three sections and each section will correspond to a research question.

The data were analyzed using a modified version of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of analysis. The constant comparative method involved the researcher cycling through and completing multiple examinations of all data, stopping only when saturation (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was reached. This researcher searched the data in an iterative fashion, selecting items of interest, and then

searched within and across all data sources for additional occurrences. The iterative process broke the mass of data into discrete units. Each unit of interest was coded using a unique identifier. The coded data segments were then sorted into groups of first order concepts that provided the key perceptions of the participants about their situation. The first order concepts were further analyzed to reveal a deeper or second order concept. These perceptions were then examined at a higher level of abstraction and an overarching second order concept for each group of data identified. The second order concepts were then arranged and aligned with each of the three research questions.

As noted in chapter three, data analysis in this case study was guided primarily by the research questions, and a set of propositions (Data Analysis and Synthesis section).

These propositions were that:

- The culture of the organization influences and impacts identity formation;
- The ability to access and create professional networks and relationships (social capital) forms the basis for professional identity development and that, in turn, might impact the individual's perception of organizational identity;
- Participant isolation including geographic or social may be factors influencing the members' perceptions of organizational identity, and
- The members' perceptions of leaders, leadership, and the ability of individuals to enact leadership might influence the perceptions of organizational identity.

As previously noted, the analytic strategy (Yin, 2009) was to focus the analysis, and to “focus attention on certain data and ... ignore other data (p. 130). The data were searched with attention to the research questions, the above propositions, and any other findings of interest evident in the data and recognized by the researcher that may have emerged.

## Participant Demographics

Thirty-five of the 52 members of the organization chose to participate in this study. Figure 4.1 provides the organizational population and participating member sample, and the breakdown of those populations by gender.

Figure 4.1- Organization and participant totals with breakdown by gender.

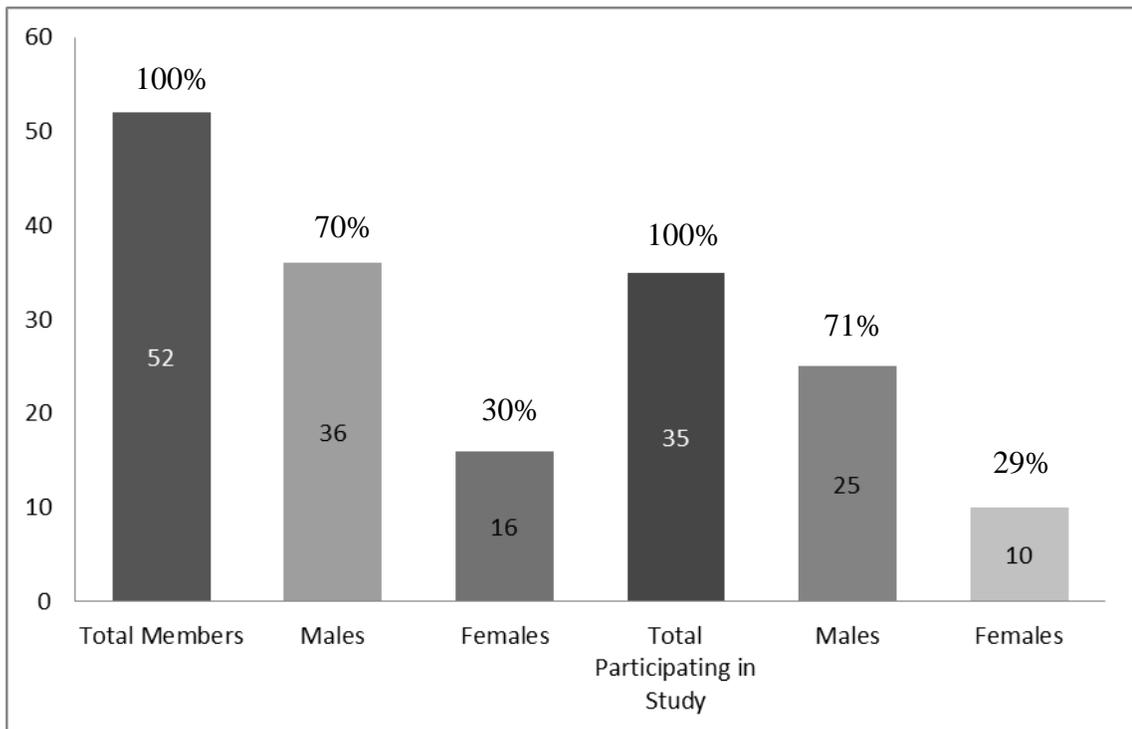
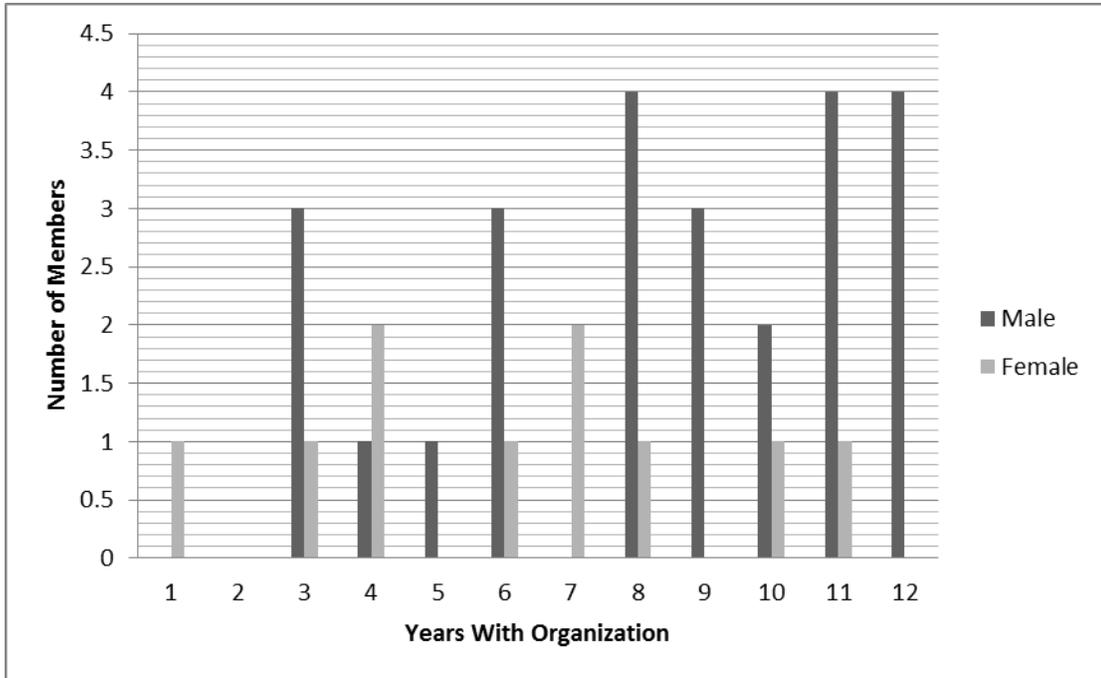


Figure 4.2 provides a breakdown of the number of years of participant experience with the organization desegregated by gender of the thirty-five organizational members that chose to participate in this study. Twenty-two of the 35 (63%) participating members had greater than seven years of experience with the organization. Twenty-seven of the 35 (77%) participating members had greater than five years of experience with the organization.

Figure 4.2 - Participating members' years of experience with the organization sorted by gender.



This section provided a brief overview of the demographics of the organization, and of the participants that took part in this study. The breakdown by gender was provided as was the number of years of experience by gender. The next sections will detail the findings for each of the research questions and will include representative supporting data from the data sources.

### Findings for Research Question One

Research question one asked what role the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization. Table 4.1 shows the concept structure of the findings for research question one. The identification and grouping of the first order concepts gave rise to the second order concepts shown in column two.

Table 4.1- Organization of first/second order concepts and alignment with research

question one.

First Order Concept	Second Order Concept	Overarching Concept (research question)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members can depend on leaders</li> <li>• Members opinion valued by leaders</li> <li>• Leaders working for the best interest of the members</li> <li>• Treated as professionals</li> <li>• Not micromanaged</li> <li>• Gender issues – low confidence, voice not heard **</li> </ul>	(i) Leader/leadership Confidence and trust	Leader and leadership impact on organizational identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication detachment between members and leaders</li> <li>• Members isolated from contact with leaders</li> <li>• Inequitable communication – some members favoured with information over others</li> <li>• Not consistent across departments – information gaps</li> <li>• Organizational size impacted communication between members and leaders</li> <li>• Ineffective communication</li> <li>• Top down communication model</li> </ul>	(ii) Leader/leadership communication	

First Order Concept	Second Order Concept	Overarching Concept (research question)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders monitor needs and support based on those needs</li> <li>• Leaders make members feel part of the organization</li> <li>• Members feel valued</li> <li>• A culture of support exists</li> <li>• More individualized and less teamwork</li> <li>• Support exists despite geographic separation</li> </ul>	(iii) Leaders/leadership support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders foster a sense of closeness among members</li> <li>• Leaders establish a culture where members are valued</li> <li>• Leaders foster a culture of respect for member knowledge and ability</li> <li>• Leaders establish and communicate a vision, mandate and direction</li> <li>• Sense of family established</li> <li>• Leaders foster innovation and risk taking</li> <li>• Leaders instill a sense of pride in organizations identity</li> </ul>	(iv) Leader/leadership influence on organizational culture	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders are strong decision makers</li> <li>• Leaders communicate</li> <li>• Leaders enable members</li> <li>• Leaders encourage members</li> <li>• Leaders don't connect with members **</li> <li>• Leaders show respect for members</li> <li>• Leaders are accessible</li> </ul>	(v) Leader/leadership qualities	

\*\* Note: Contradictory evidence

*i) Leader/leadership confidence and trust*

Five second order concepts were identified in Table 4.1 relative to research question one. Table 4.11 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (i) drawn from the data collected during interviews. A summary of findings for second order concept (i) will be provided after the table.

Table 4.11 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (i); research question one.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(i) Leader/leadership Confidence and trust	<p>“I perceive the leadership as someone who’s got my back. I’ll say this simply as possible. As a professional, because I’m hired by this organization, I felt there’s a certain level of trust that comes with me being a ... teacher.” (Participant 23, March 14, 2011)</p> <p>“I think that relates both to the professional, respectful manner in which we are treated by our bosses, by how when we ask for something we are looked upon as somebody who is asking for a tool to better do the job. Our opinions are respected by our bosses. They take our opinions to heart.” (Participant 7, February 4, 2011)</p> <p>“I feel valued when I’m given the opportunity for my voice to be heard, be it via an online meeting or face-to-face meeting, whatever the case may be.” (Participant 3, December 1, 2010)</p> <p>“Sometimes I feel that it’s a man’s world out there and this is a little bit difficult to explain. But I feel lots of times that it’s a man’s world in the sense that if I make a suggestion, sometimes it has gone in one ear and out the ear. Somebody else of the male gender could go and make the same suggestion and then it’s considered right away because of who it came from ... I like the people to be treated fairly, not based on who they are or their gender, but I just feel sometimes it’s a men’s world out there and I resent that a little bit.” (Participant 20, March 3, 2011)**</p>

\*\* Note: Contradictory evidence

The participating members in this case study reported on their perceptions of leader/leadership confidence and trust as related to the leader/leadership impact on organizational identity formation. Two distinct perceptions of leader/leadership confidence and trust were evident. The first emerged as member awareness that acknowledged the confidence that was felt in the leadership as a result of being supported as a professional, of feeling valued, trusted, and trusting in return, and that there was a perception of professional respect accorded to the members by the leaders in the organization that engendered confidence and trust. Elements of these perceptions were reflected in the comment by Participant 29 who stated:

And I think as a staff you respect your leaders when you feel that they are, they're working for your best ... so I guess-they got your back and they appreciate that you're doing your best ... when you know that your principal or your director, whatever, is there to support you, you'd do anything. You don't mind. You go the extra mile, right? And you feel like you're-like, I said again, I use the valued – a valued employee, so, it's huge. (March 16, 2011)

Opposing opinions were evidenced in member comments that reflected on the perceived inability of the leaders to manage the priorities of the organization. Participant 6 stated, “I just don't get a great feeling. And that may be just the way [the individual] comes across as ... not having very good interpersonal skills? So maybe [they are] not able to communicate that [the organizational priorities] very well to us ... I don't get a great feeling” (December 1, 2011). Additionally, the issue of gender was raised as a contributing factor to lowered confidence in leaders and leadership, evidenced in the

perception of not being taken seriously or treated equally because of being a female, that the world of the organization was a man's world.

*ii) Leader/leadership communication*

Table 4.12 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (ii) drawn from the data collected during interviews. A summary of findings for second order concept (ii) will be provided after the table.

Table 4.12 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (ii); research question one.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(ii) Leader/leadership communication	<p>“If the person [leader] doesn’t have a feel for what’s going on in the organization ... the morale of the whole organization just drops ... [members] don’t feel that they’re being listened ... don’t feel their opinion matters ... I think if the person is not interested in listening to the members of the organization, then having a voice ... it’s almost like you don’t have a voice.” (Participant 24, March 14, 2011)</p> <p>“I guess the bottom line is ... that from my perspective, and from what I could see around me that there’s, there’s a big communication gap between the upper and the lower levels. I’m not sure what happens in between ... it was just, basically, on your own.” (Participant 26, March 17, 2011)</p> <p>“Some of the teachers got really upset over that ... I was guessing they got left out of stuff that was actually important. But I hadn’t, so I didn’t know.” (Participant 18, July 24, 2011)</p> <p>“And I think that’s the part of our communications that right now is a bit wonky. Everybody doesn’t feel like they’re in the loop ... I guess that everybody needs to be aware so that everybody’s in the loop.” (Participant 1, August 2, 2010)</p>

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
	<p>“Never are we consulted . . . again, we make these comments and we have these discussions, but, again, are they ever acted upon by the decision makers?” (Participant 20, March 3, 2011)</p>

Participants indicated negative responses to formal leadership communication, indicating that there were issues with a lack of communication between formal leaders and organizational members that contributed to feelings of communication isolation and suggesting a reduction in member morale. The inability of members to access information and the perception of being unable to provide input were portrayed as making the members voiceless and isolated from the channels of communication. Members suggested that there were gaps in the transfer of information between leaders and members.

Documents related to yearly face-to-face meetings and virtual staff meetings suggest that the mechanisms such as the department structure were established in 2003 to provide an avenue through which all members could channel suggestions, opinions, and feedback to the formal leadership, and were put in place to address the gaps in communication. This evidence seems to run counter to what is suggested by the members. Additionally, documents providing details of formal leader position responsibilities include specifics concerning the duties of the person being tasked with the position to include the development and delivery of organizational communications to organizational members (HR Job Description Document, March 29, 2004). There are no details provided that outlines a specific mechanism by which this process would occur.

There were suggestions of privilege for certain members, the perception of which

was linked to select individuals receiving potentially important information that others were not privy to or were delayed in receiving. Leader perceptions of communication ran contrary to those put forward by the members. It was suggested that hearing and communicating member concerns was important. Participant 5 stated “as a leader in the organization I try to let my subordinates know that their issue is my issue. So I take a tremendous responsibility and ownership for what happens in this organization ... I try to hear everybody’s needs and try to address everybody’s needs” (December 23, 2010).

Participant 2 noted that certain concerns about the ability of the organization to function were a direct result of communication issues, matters such as the “lack of direction and clear decision making” (August 3, 2010), that “Many of the issues arising from the growth of our organization and leadership have stemmed from a lack of effective communication [and] ... although there have been initiatives to make improvements, most have failed” (August 3, 2010).

*iii) Leader/leadership support*

The Table 4.13 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (iii) drawn from the data collected during interviews. A summary of findings for second order concept (iii) will be provided after the table.

Table 4.13 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (iii); research question one.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(iii) Leader/leadership support	<p data-bbox="673 472 1425 724">“I just got the feeling like the sky, I mean it sounds weird to say it, the sky is the limit. But I just felt this envelopment of support from everyone ... I [was] so new, and you know everyone was “if you need this. Whatever you need” ... support wise. Just don’t hesitate to ask. So, I just found it a very positive experience.” (Participant 6, December 1, 2010)</p> <p data-bbox="673 798 1425 1081">“And from the organization standpoint, I often had the view, or often got the sense, that what I thought mattered, that what other [members] thought, mattered ... our views were often drawn upon, so wasn’t always top down decisions ... it seemed like we often had input into what was going on ... from that standpoint too ... the leaders seemed like they had a handle on what it meant to make us feel like we belonged.” (Participant 30, March 15, 2011)</p> <p data-bbox="673 1123 1425 1302">“A lot of people talk about us in terms of us being privileged group of teachers. And I always say to them, no. We’re not a privileged group of teachers. Our organization treats us the way all teachers should be treated, and that’s with respect.” (Participant 7, February 4, 2011)</p> <p data-bbox="673 1344 1425 1480">“And in this organization, we certainly have the capacity and we do have people who do go out of their way to make sure that people are supported in doing things.” (Participant 1, August 2, 2011)</p> <p data-bbox="673 1522 1425 1743">“The biggest learning curve I’ve ever been on in my life is since I joined this organization. Because we learn from each other every day and that’s probably where most of my learning has come with the online environment. Is that if you got a problem, just send out an email and someone’s back to you.” (Participant 35, March 23, 2011)</p>

The perceptions of the members indicated an organization that provided support to the members through formal and informal leadership. The leaders were perceived as providing the necessary professional and material support to the members in order for them to do their jobs, as stated by Participant 23 who said, “In terms of our leadership and culture and how I perceive leadership ... I perceive the leadership as someone who’s got my back” (March 14, 2011). Support was perceived as being extended from informal leaders within the organization. The participants indicated that all members of the organization were seen to play leadership roles, specifically in supporting one another in the day-to-day operations of the organization.

The members looked to other similar organizations to compare the type and level of support provided to them by their organization, distinguishing their organization from others. Members made comparisons of their position and the level of support received, as noted by Participant 14:

I say it [support systems] would be unique to this organization because I haven't seen it when I've taught in [other] schools ... this organization is a group that, you know, if I'm stuck on something or I need something I don't really have to sit there and just ... I don't have to go through a lengthy process to, to justify the fact I need something, because the people who I work for, if I say, look, I need this, they will say, okay, I will see what I can do. That's always been the way they've dealt with it. I'll see what we can do ... we'll see what else we could do to make it work. (June 17, 2010)

Communication by leaders of their appreciation for members’ efforts was perceived as confirmation of leader support. Participant 13 said:

One of my most memorable points was a little thank you card I received from my boss this year ... [member reads card to interviewer] ... I think that says a lot. Not only about me but about how our management team feels about its employees. And I think that goes a long way ... it meant more to me than most of our formal emails ... it's that someone took the time to acknowledge what I do in this organization. (January 6, 2011)

Participant 33 suggested the impact that leaders played in enabling the members:

Leadership is everything, I believe. And I think leadership that enables is what we need to strive for. We all recognize as professionals that every leader, whether it's the leadership of this organization, the leadership within the various facets of the organization, whether it's your leadership as a teacher in a classroom, whatever it is you have to be to that clientele, to that membership, to that group that you serve, you have to be the enabler ... you have to be the believer ... and you in your role [you] have a ton of problems and a ton of stress. But that can't be the message that you communicate to your people. The message has to be about us and moving ahead and growing and enabling. (Participant 33, March 30, 2011)

There was an undercurrent in Participant 33's discussion that gave the impression of sending a message that there is a perceived standard that should, but was not being lived up to.

Participant 31 commented on the notion of respect as a value and lamented over his perception of the lack of support and value placed on some of the members, and he said:

You have to have an organizational leadership that is going to support you.

You've got to have that. And not only support ... not only support, but fight for you. And you don't see a lot of that going on. Or at least, you know, probably it is, but we're not aware of it going on. And that in itself is very, very important.

(March 15, 2011)

*iv) Leader/leadership influence on organizational culture*

Table 4.14 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (iv) drawn from the data collected during interviews. A summary of findings for second order concept (iv) will be provided after the table.

Table 4.14 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (iv); research question one.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(iv) Leader/leadership influence on organizational culture	<p>“I think it impacts the culture of it because I think there’s certainly a distance there; there’s a separation there ... that there’s not a real close relationship between the [leaders] and the teaching staff.” (Participant 28, March 9, 2011)**</p> <p>“Members of the team are often reminded of the good work they do and this form of praise tends to motivate us to maintain and exceed the expectations of management and ourselves ... recognition ... as a whole is appreciated.” (Participant 2, August 3, 2010)</p> <p>“I can only think of one, perhaps two, individuals who opted to leave the organization. So I think that speaks volumes of what it is our job is and how well we’re treated.” (Participant 3, December 1, 2010)</p> <p>“Creating a vision for the organization and getting that vision on paper so that other people in the organization can be made aware of it ... I think the role of the leader is to keep the membership on task, keep them focused on where they’re going.” (Participant 30, March 15, 2011)</p>

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
	<p data-bbox="675 359 1406 506">“Innovation was something that was really done ... there was support from the top down ... as much support as possible ... the culture was, let’s get her done ... and the support was there.” (Participant 5, Dec 23, 2010)</p> <p data-bbox="675 541 1406 646">“You could think of us as a culture that promotes ... empowerment amongst teachers.” (Participant 30, March 15, 2011)</p>

\*\* Note: Contradictory evidence

The findings indicated that leaders/leadership create culture by fostering a sense of closeness, respect, confidence, and trust in the members of the organization, by making the members of the organization feel valued, through being a vision setting leader, and by fostering a climate of innovation. Members also noted that changes in leaders/leadership had the potential to influence the overall culture that existed in the organization as stated by Participant 2 and Participant 30 who said:

We have had three different directors in the past nine years. The first director operated in a different political climate ... the director got to know the core of the staff quickly and appreciated the talent he had. He made things happen without being too concerned about the bureaucratic constraints. When he left, there was consternation ... and concern when a relative outsider with very limited administrative experience, and no experience in the government bureaucracy took over. There were signs and, in my opinion, of misguided attempts to implement ‘accountability structures’. The identity founded on trust was suddenly being threatened. The threat was short-lived because ... the director moved on and a

new director was hired. So leadership has an effect on culture and identity - definitely. (Participant 2, August 3, 2010)

Well, leadership turnover, I think, changes-it can change the culture somewhat. I'm just thinking now, we just had a prominent member of our leadership leave ... in terms of management, that can definitely have an impact on the way things are done. It can have an impact on perceptions, people's perceptions-are things being done better or are they being done worse? So that can definitely affect the culture. (Participant 30, March 15, 2011)

Review of document sources such as meeting agendas, policy documents and personal e-mail communications point to an increase in level of bureaucracy and more formalization of processes in the organization. This formalization was most notable in documents produced during and post 2004. As example, the focus of the face-to-face meeting agenda items prior to 2004 centered on members' professional learning activities with only two hours (one hour in the first day and an hour on the last day) devoted to administrative details. More recent agendas evidenced a shift away from member driven activities to activities focused on discussions of policy development, implementation of policies, budgets, and department of education initiatives. A more intensive focus on policy development and accountability was noted to have occurred after the loss and replacement of leader positions.

*v) Leader/leadership qualities*

Table 4.15 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (v) drawn from the data collected during interviews. A summary of findings for second order concept (v) will be provided after the table.

Table 4.15 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (v); research question one.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(v) Leader/leadership qualities	<p>“I mean, the way the leadership is going right now, for the most part I'm usually left alone and ... I'm trusted with what I do. At least I get that perception I'm trusted with what I do.” (Participant 14, June 17, 2010)</p> <p>“We all recognize as professionals that every leader, whether it's the leadership of this organization ... within the various facets of the organization ... have to be the enabler.” (Participant 33, March 30, 2011)</p> <p>“I think he's like an open receptive leader who would accommodate as much as he could ... I do feel he's a supportive person. I think that's really important.” (Participant 10, January 5, 2011)</p> <p>“You know, the man at the top obviously has to make decisions ...but I think based on advice from people, that he values their advice, I think decisions are made, and I don't think it's done in an autocratic way.” (Participant 11, July 14, 2010)</p> <p>“He is open to suggestions and input ... he's very respectful ... I think he wants [us] to feel respected and appreciated and valued.” (Participant 4, December 2, 2010)</p> <p>“And I've noticed significant ... differences now with the new administration ... I was hired under the old administration and I thought I had an understanding of [the culture] ... but now the reins are sort of being drawn a little tighter and there's ... more accountability, and I feel there's less trust right now.” (Participant 23, March 14, 2011)**</p>

\*\* Note: Contradictory evidence

The findings indicated that members described leaders/leadership in the context of personal descriptors, behaviors, as a function of the organization's culture and how the

members were treated by the leaders/leadership. Researcher notes indicate and confirm that formal leader positions have changed hands multiple times over the life of the organization, and each person assuming the leadership position demonstrated a leadership style unique to that individual. Organizational members reflected on the changes and shift in administrative focus and leadership style, and commented on the perceived impact of personal qualities on the culture of the organization.

Participant 1 made reference to qualities of the leaders when he stated “I think we have, as I said, very confident, competent administration” (August 2, 2010), in this case directly describing the leaders with the epithets *competent* and *confident*. Leader qualities were referenced as proficiencies that all members as leaders should possess. Participant 8 referenced the skill sets and leadership qualities that the members brought to the organization: “that ability to face the devil and be pretty confident” (January 10, 2011). Members commented on what was perceived as behaviors of leadership that enabled the members of the organization. Participant 4 said:

I think it’s the decision making that in turn lets teachers feel enabled to do things the way they want to do them. So if there are poor decisions being made, then it takes some of that enabling away from us. Therefore it’s crucial for the leadership team to be strong, to welcome input and to make sound decisions. (December 2, 2010)

Leader behaviors were viewed as exhibiting strength, and showing good decision making ability.

Members referenced the culture as a reflection of leader qualities that existed within the organization as a whole. Participant 33 stated:

It's about enabling you to do what you can do the best way that you can do it.

And I think that's a piece of the culture that people appreciate and that's probably why people work so hard to contribute to it ... you want to be able to do it the best way you can. And this is an organization that enables you to do that. (March 30, 2011)

An enabling culture was perceived by the members as existing within the organization.

The formal leaders' referenced soft and hard skills that they felt were reflective of their qualities as leaders, and mirrored some of the characteristics expressed by the members about leaders. Formal leaders noted their possession of communication skills; written and oral communication, the ability to use the tools of technology, and "the ability to listen carefully to what others have to say ... be aware of their interests, [to] be aware of what they [members] bring to the organization" (Participant 27, May 12, 2011) as individual strengths. This leader perception of personal qualities did run counter to the perceptions expressed by Participant 2 about the lack of leader communication and its implications to the organizational culture.

Formal leaders expressed the need to exhibit the qualities of empathy and diplomacy to be aware of "the issues they [members] have personally or socially [so as] not to negatively impact the organization ... be able to discern, being able to get along with people" (Participant 27, May 12, 2011). The leader noted the importance of identifying the mandate and priorities of the organization so that people understood the direction in which the organization was headed.

Members suggested that one of the roles of the leadership was to nurture the culture within the organization, as expressed by Participant 1:

The leadership role ... constantly growing and nurturing it [culture] along and it's certainly different at the inception because even the people in leadership weren't quite sure where this was going ... I think the leadership now needs to, not to maintain the status quo, but maintain what's been good about this so far and recognize it and keep more of it happening. Keeping communication going, which has always been a tough thing ... because we are not all sitting in the same room [or] able to go next door. (August 2, 2010)

### Findings for Research Question Two

Research question two asked what role the organizational members' perceptions of informal leaders, and self-as-leaders played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization. Table 4.2 shows the concept structure of the findings for research question two.

Table 4.2 - Organization of first/second order concepts and alignment with research question two.

First Order Concept	Second Order Concept	Overarching Concept (research question)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seasoned members likely to assume leadership roles</li> <li>Newer members look to the seasoned members for guidance</li> <li>Experience has developed confidence in self-as-leader</li> <li>Professional strengths of experienced individuals influences leadership ability</li> <li>Experienced members have a connection to the roots of the organization that is not shared by others</li> </ul>	(vi) The level of experience drives informal leadership	Impact of perceptions of self-leadership on Organizational Identity formation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members act when the situation</li> </ul>	(vii) Everyone has leadership potential	

First Order Concept	Second Order Concept	Overarching Concept (research question)
<p>arises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader ability inherent in the organization</li> <li>• Take charge personalities of members promotes informal leadership</li> <li>• Members do not have to be directed to act</li> <li>• Members see leadership enacted by others</li> <li>• Everyone can hold a skill set that enables leadership</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human resources are source of leadership strength and capacity</li> <li>• Culture of leadership supported in the organization</li> <li>• Formal leaders rely on informal leaders</li> <li>• Collective leadership is the strength of the organization</li> <li>• Department structure established to include informal leader input</li> </ul>	(viii) Culture of support and empowerment supporting informal leadership	

*vi) The level of experience drives informal leadership*

Three second order concepts were identified relative to research question two.

Table 4.21 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (vi) drawn from the data collected during interviews.

Table 4.21 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (vi) research question two.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(vi) The level of experience drives informal leadership	<p>“Nobody sits here holding all the cards and with all the answers. And that's probably our strongest feature I think is the expertise and leadership within the organization is distributed.” (Participant 25, June 22, 2011)</p> <p>“I think the seed is set now. The mindset is there, and the new people that are coming on are ... I mean they're looking to the older crowd about leadership and guidance in what they're doing. And I think they're getting it.” (Participant 11, July 14, 2010)</p> <p>“Members of this team have considerable experience in problem solving and research. If they don't know the answer they'll find it or help you find it day or night.” (Participant 2, August 3, 2010)</p>

*vii) Everyone has leadership potential*

Table 4.22 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (vii) drawn from the data collected during interviews.

Table 4.22 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (vii); research question two.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(vii) Everyone has leadership potential	<p>“I think we're all leaders, in a way.” (Participant 13, January 6, 2011)</p> <p>“I do see it as more distributed ... teachers are also strong enough and have leadership capabilities so that they can bring to, and have their suggestions heard and acted on ... not just the day-to-day leadership, but people who are willing to take charge and see beyond what we're doing now and into the future ... you know, there are people in this organization that show very, very strong leadership and are very inspirational.” (Participant 6, December 1, 2010)</p>

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
	<p data-bbox="678 323 1414 506">“I think everybody’s a leader in their own right. I think everybody in our organization is a leader. Some are more leaders ... greater leaders than others ... I don't think the culture is based on one leadership style. I think it’s based on the collective.” (Participant 11, July 14, 2010)</p> <p data-bbox="678 541 1425 724">“But you got informal leaders too ... there’s people that if a [controversial] topic comes up you can be sure that they’ll speak up and they’ll speak well about it. And not speak emotionally or not get people upset.” (Participant 18, July 24, 2010)</p> <p data-bbox="678 760 1425 1050">“We have a group of leaders [formal] who see themselves as facilitators ... who see themselves as providing opportunities; that's sometimes how they lead ... letting the informal leadership step forward ... It's great because the formal branch is not threatened by someone who's part of that informal leadership stepping up ... the formal and the informal work together.” (Participant 25, June 22, 2011)</p>

viii) *Culture of support and empowerment supporting informal leadership*

Table 4.23 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (viii) drawn from the data collected during interviews.

Table 4.23 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (viii); research question two.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(viii) Culture of support and empowerment supporting informal leadership	<p data-bbox="673 1535 1425 1717">“Yes, I think we're encouraged. I think a lot of us are hired for our leadership skills ... it might be different for different people ... we all are given opportunities to demonstrate our leadership skills.” (Participant 4, December 2, 2010)</p> <p data-bbox="673 1753 1414 1894">“The influence that the formal and informal leadership have is monumental ... I can't separate between the two because they go hand in hand for me ... I see our formal leadership as taking the lead from the informal leadership</p>

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
	<p data-bbox="678 289 1284 317">and vice-versa.” (Participant 25, June 22, 2011)</p> <p data-bbox="678 359 1425 537">“No matter what role you play, you’re still an integral part of an organization. And whether you’re a training specialist, instructional design, or graphic person, everybody brings a different skill set but an important skill set.” (Participant 9, July 12, 2010)</p> <p data-bbox="678 579 1430 829">“We’re all leadership positions ... the human resource piece was always a strength of the organization ... we seem to have managed to hire individuals who are just good people ... we have a very strong professional enabled knowledgeable skillful group of individuals who seem to be committed to the organization, to do their best and to contribute their best.” (Participant 27, May 12, 2011)</p>

Members reported that leadership is not simply the domain of formal leaders, but that all members of the organization could and in many cases did exhibit leadership capacity. Members indicated that informal leadership emerged within the organization as a function of member experience, that the seasoned members were perceived to exhibit leadership traits. Members new to the organization, and even other seasoned members, relied on the capabilities of willing associates to show leadership. Members noted that the culture of leadership had been established within the organization, and that the experienced members accepted the role thrust at them to act when needed. Members noted that leadership extended from all facets of the organization. Participant 1 stated:

Leadership can come from anywhere in this [organization] ... I just think we have people with pools of knowledge, expertise ... people who are keen to still be pushing and as good as they are at what we’re doing now to becoming even better at what they do so that they can be a resource ... I’m hard pressed to think ... that I wouldn’t be able to find somebody in the organization who could help with ... lots of different things. (August 2, 2010)

Members also noted that informal leadership capacity was supported by the formal leaders of the organization, as suggested by Participant 4 who said, “Yes, I think we're encouraged. I think a lot of us are hired for our leadership skills ... it might be different for different people ... we all are given opportunities to demonstrate our leadership skills” (June 22, 2011). Members proposed that the informal leaders did not act based simply on permission, but that the informal leadership arose because of the inherent leadership strengths of the members. Participant 6 stated:

Anything that's happening in this organization is not because the top told us to do it. I do see it as more distributed ... Teachers are also strong enough and have leadership capabilities so that they can bring to, and have their suggestions heard and acted on ... so, more distributed ... not just the day-to-day leadership, but people who are willing to take charge and, and see beyond what we're doing now and into the future ... you know, there are people in this organization that show very, very strong leadership and, and are very inspirational. (December 1, 2010)

### **Findings for Research Question Three**

Research question three asked how the perceptions of the members of a virtual education organization of their professional identity, their ability to develop a professional identity, and the role their professional identity played in forming and shaping the organization's collective identity. Table 4.3 shows the concept structure of the findings for research question three.





Table 4.31 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (ix); research question three.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
<p>(ix) Organizational size, structure and degree of bureaucracy that occurred over time</p>	<p>“You know. It started out kind of, I’m not going to say an old boys club but everybody knew everybody; it was a small organization. And, it was easy to communicate informally because everybody knew everybody.” (Participant 2, August 3, 2010)</p> <p>“First when I started ... I seen (sic) the culture as, we were definitely leaders in technology and exploring new ideas and new ways to do things in the online environment ... I felt that was definitely a part of our culture and in terms of resources, I felt that we had access to high quality resources and [were] allowed to explore ... I felt that was a part of our identity ... that that was something that we could do, in terms of the innovative part of our organization. And I think that was an important part and it existed ... a lot more in the first couple years that I was teaching as opposed to now.” (Participant 23, March 14, 2011)</p> <p>“To be a part of that process was very exciting and to know that I was going to be involved in something that was provincial in scale and that this would be built upon ... but I was there at the beginning to help with the foundations of the development of the organization. And that was certainly very exciting and again very rewarding.” (Participant 31, March 15, 2011)</p> <p>“I think it gives everybody input into their department. It also gives a person a place to hang their hat ... But having a more rigid, a more formal department structure, it gets everybody a chance to meet once a month or so with their small department group and get some work done. And then the [department] leaders will meet ... sometimes once every week, sometimes once every couple of weeks, and bring any concerns and issues.” (July 12, 2010)**</p> <p>“I do feel part of the group. I do feel, I mean, within our [department] ... I feel closely linked to all of those guys ... we’re a close knit group. We work awesome together as a team and we constantly help each other out and I think that</p>

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
	<p data-bbox="678 289 1414 352">that's the strength of our [department], if I would say that much." (Participant 20, March 3, 2011)**</p> <p data-bbox="678 401 1414 646">"I think in some cases it can bring a bit of a negative kind of thing, that some kind of people may look at [department]s and say, well, you know, in order to get the newest or the best or the biggest or get those things, you have to be in a certain location. And in some ways, that brings a little bit of an, us-or a we/they kind of thing." (Participant 28, March 9, 2011)</p> <p data-bbox="678 695 1414 1304">"I believe issues arise when one group or one [department] or one section tends to either get a lot more attention or a lot more, for lack of a better word, chances to innovate than others ... we know it's right, it's okay for them to do it, but because we're not getting the same treatment, then we think that it's not fair ... I think those types of things we have to be very careful with as an organization, not necessarily keep picking the same people and same groups over and over again, to try things out or to do things or to ask for their opinions. Because I believe everybody needs to at least be given the perception that they're being treated fairly ... but when one group is being given an opportunity to do certain things and the other groups are not, or other individuals are not, and there's no communication as to why ... I think those things don't do anything to help the organization at all." (Participant 24, March 14, 2011)</p> <p data-bbox="678 1352 1414 1663">"Our [department] leaders – it's not really working out for me ... because I'm kind of outside of any particular [department] and if I have a question that's to be answered, mine is more like a management question rather than a [department] question, because of the nature of my type of work. I don't and I do go through the [department] structure because it's protocol but my power to be I feel comes from my management team." (Participant 13, January 6, 2011)</p>

\*\* Note: Contradictory evidence

*x) Regionalism and professional isolation*

Table 4.32 provides supporting quotations for second order concept (x), drawn from the data collected during interviews.

Table 4.32 - Supporting interview data for second order concept (x); research question three.

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
(x) Regionalism and professional isolation	<p>“On a professional level we have [departments] of people that are in the same physical location and you have the opportunity to interact with other professional people that others do not. We have some single sites. So professionally they’re a little bit isolated and that’s a problem that we – it’s not a huge problem, but it can be perceived as a problem because the person does not necessarily have anyone they can chat to about what they feel in their own professional practice.” (Participant 5, December 23, 2010)</p> <p>“I see more of probably, where maybe there might be certain areas, not geographically, but probably more so in subject areas because of the large numbers of individuals in some subject areas, it appears as though when they speak then, of course, administration listens ... You’ve got maybe six to eight members in a [department]. So they’re going to obviously fight for their agenda. That is natural.” (Participant 31, March 15, 2011)</p> <p>“Being spread over 17 and 18 different locations has been good for us. We’re in the thick of things in terms of keeping the pulse on what’s happening ... because we’re out there. We’re on the front lines. We’re not at [government house] or wherever, in a little corner away from things. We have our feelers and our fingers and our teachers and our programmers out in the field, right in among the school and the organization and whatever. That has been a really good thing. So, in terms of a decentralized model, in terms of location and personnel, I think that has worked to our benefit.” (Participant 9, July 12, 2010)**</p> <p>“For example, in my office ... we have twelve or fourteen members, and for the most part we are all [teacher]s and</p>

Second Order Concept	Representative Data
	<p>there is one member of the management team who is with us located ... and we have our own little bond, you know, as an organization within the larger organization of 30-plus [teachers].” (Participant 3, December 1, 2010)**</p> <p>“I guess mini organizations would probably sum it up pretty well. Even at our face-to-facer meetings you start seeing the mini subcultures. They start to I guess socialize with each other more so than the larger group, for the most part. I guess because again they share common interests and they have common things there. So again the smaller group closeness that was felt before has diminished somewhat because of again the larger numbers and the subcultures, I guess.” (Participant 32, March 18, 2011)</p> <p>“I think the clusters do have their own cultures. Because they’re contextually based. The clusters are usually composed of people from the region. So they are impacted by that region’s existence, that region’s culture. So are they competing with the organization? I don’t think so.” (Participant 27, May 12, 2011)**</p> <p>“I don't see the group being broken up by the those regions ... for the workings of this I don't see anything being regionally based.” (Participant 14, June 17, 2010)**</p>

\*\* Note: Contradictory evidence

Members indicated that the change in size and complexity of the organization that had occurred during their tenure had influenced their sense of professionalism and connection to the organization, as well as the level of status and responsibility they sensed that they had achieved within the organization. Members suggested that an increase in the number of organizational members impacted the ability to establish professional relationships, and that there was a sense of disconnect that was created by virtue of not being able to get to know the newer members. Members also noted that with size came structure in the form of departments, and that structure introduced inter-group competition, reduced communication between members and groups, and in some

instances, isolation based on role descriptions. Participant 30 indicated that the growth and change in size contributed to fragmentation, the development of cliques, and a loss of closeness between the members of the organization:

Let me put it this way, the more people you have, the more groups within that larger group, the more groups you're going to have within the larger group that will interact more or group together or you'll get a clique type group. So I think that there is a little bit of that and I think that as the organization gets bigger, you're probably going to see more of that. (March 15, 2011)

Not everyone felt that the growth contributed in a negative manner. Members suggested that there was still a feeling of awe when the group gathered at a face-to-face function. Participant 29 said:

It's been phenomenal to be able to be physically in the same building as these people. And I really feel like it's a team. I feel that it's just a phenomenal group of people. When we all get together and you see-like, I'm blown away all the time when I see what everybody can do. And I just feel really, really ... proud to be working with the group of people. (March 16, 2011)

The increase in organizational size was perceived as offering enhanced abilities to gain new perspectives and to grow as a professional, reflected in comments by Participant 19:

When you gain new members, you're gaining new insights. You're gaining new perceptions on things. You're gaining new talent ... sometimes when you bring in new members they already have the experience working elsewhere so that you incorporate those experiences into [the organization]. So any experience that you

bring into [the organization], it's an addition to the organization ... the old cliché is that ... the experiences that you add to an organization, for the most part, are good. So it just builds upon culture, builds upon the working relationship people have with the organization. (March 24, 2011)

Members related that the growth promoted a type of fragmentation and compartmentalization where shared common work roles defined the groupings, and that created disconnect between the various entities, reducing the level of interpersonal connection and collaboration that was common in the early organizational form.

Larger [department] structures also existed in the bigger regional centers and were perceived to provide greater opportunity for professional collaboration to those members who were (physically) located in those centers, as opposed to the individuals who were geographically separated from the regions and from their [department] members. This was recognized by Participant 5:

On a professional level we have [departments] of people that are in the same physical location and you have the opportunity to interact with other professional people that others do not. We have some single sites. So professionally they're a little bit isolated and that's a problem that we – it's not a huge problem, but it can be perceived as a problem because the person does not necessarily have anyone they can chat to about what they feel in their own professional practice.

(December 23, 2010)

Additionally members suggested that the isolation of the formal groupings had diminished the collegiality of the organization and the professional collaboration that used to take place. Participant 15 proposed:

So maybe for every growth ... there might be a counteractive move you can make to keep an identity. To keep a culture within a group, instead of the whole group, cause [sic] I've seen it change from a whole group kind of idea to a [department] idea ... and now, there's still interaction between the [department]s, but I used to know [emphasis] what the [other] people were doing ... what they do different this year than they did last year ... I don't know that now. I miss that, because maybe that's something we can incorporate ... maybe communication between [departments] has got to be strengthened somehow. Or more of these "I do this" type of sessions, but when the group gets larger, that's not as collegial. (June 2, 2010)

### **Summary**

The findings outlined in this chapter with respect to research question one, *what role has the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization*, indicated that members' perceptions of leaders and leadership influence was noted to be exhibited:

- In the confidence and trust in placed in leaders/leadership;
- In the leader/leadership communication exhibited in the organization;
- In the level of leader/leadership support shown to the organizational members;
- In the manner in which leaders/leadership influenced organizational culture, and
- In the members perceptions of leader/leadership qualities.

The findings outlined in this chapter with respect to research question two, *what role has the organizational members' perceptions of self as leaders and self-leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization*, indicated that:

- Informal leadership did exist within the organization and was recognized as being a function of experienced members independently assuming leadership in the organization;
- Informal leadership did exist as a function of the individual and professional strengths of specific individuals (those with take charge personalities), and
- Informal leadership did exist as a direct function of the strength of the culture of support and empowerment of the organization.

The findings outlined in this chapter with respect to research question three, *how do the members of a virtual education organization perceive their professional identity, their ability to develop a professional identity, and the role one's professional identity plays in forming and shaping the organization's collective identity*, indicate that that:

- Professional identity was impacted by changes in organizational size, structure and bureaucracy that occurred over time, and
- Professional identity was impacted by the regionalism and subsequent isolation that occurred as a result of an increase in organizational size.

Finally, the means by which the organizational members elaborated their perceptions of organizational identity was varied and emerged as references to i) external relationships between the organization and other entities such as government

departments, ii) as a function of the organization's structure, iii) through describing their thoughts on the organization's mandate and function, and iv) through descriptions of organizational identity that actually described reputation, organizational climate, culture, and image. Members, through their perceptions of the organization and its culture were able to directly provide descriptors of organizational identity.

Chapter 5 will provide an analysis, synthesis and discussion of the findings. Chapter six will provide a set of conclusions that extend from the findings, provide recommendations for future study, and conclude with some researcher reflections.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive single case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) was to gain a deeper and more rigorously evidenced understanding of how organizational members' *perceptions of professional identity and organizational leadership impacted the formation of organizational identity* in a virtual education organization. It was hoped that an examination and deeper understanding of organizational members' perceptions of leaders – both formal and informal leadership – and how member perceptions of leadership style would provide increased researcher awareness into whether leaders and/or leadership play a describable role in how organizational identity formation occurs in the organization in this study. Additionally, it was expected, by this researcher, that an examination and deeper understanding of the organizational members' perceptions of professional identity, and their abilities to develop recognizable professional identities would also provide awareness into whether individual identity characteristics play a role in organizational identity formation.

This research study used a descriptive case study design grounded within an interpretive sociological methodological framework, and the researcher collected data using semi-structured interviews, document collection, and researcher field notes. The study included 35 of 52 organizational members as participants. The data were analyzed using an iterative and ongoing process that began with researcher collection, reading, and coding of the first interviews, and then the researcher utilized a modified version of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of analysis. The constant comparative method involves the researcher cycling through and completing multiple

examinations of all data, stopping only when saturation (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is reached. Data were organized and reported in chapter 4 by research question. In addressing each research question data was presented grouped under first and second order themes that emerged as the analysis progressed. The study was framed and guided by three research questions:

1. What role has the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization?
2. What role has the organizational members' perceptions of self as leaders and self-leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization?
3. How do the members of a virtual education organization perceive their professional identity, their ability to develop a professional identity, and the role one's professional identity plays in forming and shaping the organization's collective identity?

Member responses to the above questions are detailed in the findings reported in chapter four.

What follows is an analysis and synthesis of the findings reported in chapter four. The reader should be reminded that the analysis of the data is limited to the level of the organization alone. Chapter 5 is organized into three section headings addressed by research question and subheadings that address the second order concepts associated with each question. The aim of this analysis is to provide a deeper, more inclusive understanding of those findings elaborated through the second order concepts. Researcher recommendations will follow the related analysis section for each second order concept. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the interpretation of the findings.

## **Findings for Research Question One**

Research question one asked what role the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership played in impacting the members' ability to shape and articulate organization's identity. The relationship between leaders and leadership style and the influence on organizational identity formation are not so well established in the literature. Still, there are connections that can be drawn from the results and analysis of the findings found in this study. The members' responses referenced five second order concepts that emerged relative to question one. The analysis for each second order concept will be presented next, and followed by an analysis and synthesis across the findings.

### *i) Leader/leadership confidence and trust*

The findings for research question one indicate that that the members' perceptions of confidence and trust in the leaders and leadership of the organization played a role in influencing their perceptions of the organization's identity. The perceptions of confidence and trust were enhanced when members experienced feelings of being valued by organizational leaders. The members conveyed a sense of pride and optimism about the organization and for those who lead. The sense of pride and optimism was related to that trust and confidence, and the leaders and leadership had earned this trust and confidence because of their actions toward the members of the organization.

The members' confidence exhibited for those who lead was reflected in a comment made by Participant 1 who said, "I think we have [a] very confident, competent administration. Because if they weren't, the paranoia ... you'd feel them" (August 2, 2010). Dirks and Ferrin (2001) suggested that a belief in the competence of the leaders of the organization, as well as the process of leadership, is integral to the level of

satisfaction and commitment experienced in the organization by its members. The perception of confidence is linked to the overall performance of the individuals and of the organization, that “when people have confidence they are willing to invest and it is the investment that leads to action that creates high performance” (Kanter, 2005, p. 22). The members indicated a willingness to invest in the organization as noted in Participant 29’s perceptions where she stated “when you know that your principal or your director ... is there to support you, you’d do anything ... you go the extra mile” (March 16, 2011).

Not all members had as high a level of trust or confidence in the leaders/leadership of the organization. Chapter 4, Table 4.11 noted the perceptions of female members that raised the issue of gender and negative perceptions of leader confidence and trust. The suggestion of gender bias was leveled, as was the perception of not getting a good feeling about those in leader positions. Female members also reported perceptions of not being taken seriously by the leaders of the organization, particularly where female member input into decision making was concerned. This was seen to contribute to a perceived reduction of value for female voice. The female members intimated a diminished sense of confidence in leaders due to this perceived bias. Seventy percent of the staff employed by the organization is male, 70% of the study participants are male, and all formal leader positions; present and past, have been held by males. Three females have occupied semi-formal leader positions as department heads. These positions, however, are semi-formal because they are not paid, designated positions as such and are occupied voluntarily. With the dearth of females occupying formal leader positions, indications of gender issues among female members, are not surprising.

The limited number of instances of gender-biased perceptions reported by the female members of the organization should not diminish the potential importance of this issue for the study of organizational identity formation. Yoder (2001) noted that male-dominated settings are generally uncongenial for women. There is a minority of female numbers in the organization, which is also represented as a minority in this case study. It is possible that the male dominated environment present in this organization unintentionally promoted a gender bias where leaders fostered a female uncongenial environment.

Perceptions of gender inequity influenced the perceptions of organizational identity of some of the female members of the organization in this case study. The social constructionist view of organizational identity assumes the determination of *who we are as an organization* as a function of the perceptions, insight and interpretations of what constitutes organizational identity referents by all members of the organization. There were female perceptions of inequitable treatment by formal leaders, which in turn induced a clouding of the perception of the organizations identity as a whole. Because gender identity is a cornerstone of self-conceptualization (McGowen & Hart, 1990) these gender equity perceptions influenced the female members' professional identity formation and impacted the affective or emotional connection of the female member to the organization. The individual self is considered, in part, to be a reflection of aspects of the organization, and aspects of the self-concept are defined by the perceptions of what makes them similar to others: the group. A member's social identity is a reflection of the organization's identity, and therefore, perceptions of inequity distance that person from the group, and ultimately, diminish their perception of organizational identity.

The purpose of this study was not to delve into gender related leader/leadership issues so it is unknown how pervasive the issue of gender inequity is in the organization, but its existence as a reality for some female members suggests that it is a more deeply embedded issue than revealed by this researcher.

**Recommendation 1a:** Formal leaders in the organization should maintain an awareness of the ratio of female to male members in the organization, be cognizant of the implications of gender to cultural assumptions of the organization concerning communication, and the issues of leader capacity and how females enact their roles as leaders in the organization.

The findings of this case study suggest that members' confidence and trust in leaders/leadership was mitigated by the perceived leader support provided to the members in risk taking, leaps of faith, and innovative practice. The leader support directly and indirectly influenced the level of innovative practice, that the leaders were perceived to support the risk taking, and that the members had a level of trust in the leaders and leadership. The role of leaders and leadership in innovation is "the creation of a system conducive to trust" (McKnight, Choudbury, & Kacmar, 2002, p. 127) that is supportive of innovativeness. The members indicated their perceptions that not only were the leaders supportive, but the leaders were actively involved in this innovation, that it was promoted and supported at the leadership level; as Participant 18 said, "But even better ... they're involved [emphasis] and that's even better! So that they're actively involved in thinking 'What can we do?' and 'How would you do that?'" (July 24, 2010).

The findings of this case study further suggest that the members' self-perceptions directly influenced their perceptions of the organization's identity. Members viewed

themselves as innovators and risk takers and they saw the organization as supporting an innovative culture, and of having an organizational identity defined by that innovation. The members considered themselves part of an innovative organization, and member comments suggested that there was a degree of commitment of the members to the organization. The organization's identity was suggested using a referent to their own identity, evidenced in the perceptions of themselves as confident and trusting innovators and risk takers. The members used a sensemaking process to develop their understanding of the organization; using retrospect to frame the culture of the organization and acting on the social cues to inform their own view of the organization, and through that process used the identity referents to "collectively construct what characteristics are central, distinctive, and enduring" (Ran & Golden, 2011, p. 420) to the organization. The collective practice "influence[d] how they [came] to perceive and interpret their organization" (Lerpold, Ravasi, Van Rekom, & Soenen, 2007, p. 84).

**Recommendation 1b:** Formal leaders in the organization should periodically review the organization's mandate and initiatives, in consultation with the organization's members, to identify and report on innovative practices in the organization, and to receive input from members that fosters new and innovative practice.

*ii) Leader/leadership communication*

The findings for research question one suggest that communication between the members and leaders played a role in influencing the members' positive and negative perceptions of being connected to the organization. Positively, an organization is perceived as being open when it fosters communication and is inhabited by formal

leaders who foster that level of communication. In turn this openness influences the members' perceptions of the distinctive features of the organization. The features are evidenced by organization that fosters open and equitable communication, and subsequently, impacts the organization's identity.

Also, negatively, members indicated that the levels of communication with leaders and leadership in the organization was lacking. Members cited a perception of isolation from the organization attributed to a lack of awareness to what was happening because the members were not being informed. The perception of being voiceless and of not being listened to by formal leadership was perceived as contributing to a reduced sense of morale. Members also reported the perception of inequities in information sharing, that some members were being provided with information while other members were not given that privilege.

Perceptions of leader communication created issues within the organization under study that influenced the level of trust or not between leaders and members. And, there appears to be a disconnect between what some members reported as a high level of trust and confidence in leader communication, and what is then reported as perceptions of a communication structure that is lacking. There was a level of disconnect between how the members perceived the communication structure within the organization and how it was perceived by the leaders of the organization. The members' perceived a communication structure that was lacking, was closed, and was ineffective. Members' perceptions ran counter to the perceptions of formal leaders who suggested that communication was open and that all members' issues were heard and dealt with by the leaders. (see comments by Participant 5, second order concept (ii) in findings chapter 4). Regardless, the

communication issues had implications for the organization and its members in that it has created a sense of isolation, and again, a sense of degree of inequity of treatment for some members. Members' perceptions indicated that the communication issues also fostered a level of friction between those who felt they were in the know, and those who felt that they were being left out of the communication loop.

There are two rationales for the disagreement between leader and member perceptions which are as follows: (1) the perceptions of communication disconnect are being reported by members who are physically separated or removed from the larger cohorts of individuals, and the organization at large. Members did report feeling isolated from the entire staff, as noted by Participant 12 who said, "Those in isolation, like myself ... and many around the province, need to feel more connected in terms of being part of that staff ... any organization that is removed by distance has to have, first and foremost, a way that every person within that organization feels part of it" (July 22, 2010).

Participant 21 also reported that the isolation caused a reduction in the sense of collegiality and reduced his sense of connection to the organization. Participant 21 said, "the sense of collegiality. That's very important because otherwise, as a distance education teacher, if you're working in isolation all the time, you kind of lose touch with things. You lose touch with reality as much as anything else" (March 24, 2011). These were members who worked in geographic isolation and who provided negative perceptions of communication. It is conceivable that the physical isolation did contribute to perceptions of being disconnected from the communication structures of the organization, or that the communication structures as they existed, did not work for those members in meeting their communication needs. And, (2) the perceptions of

communication disconnect and the perceptions of communication isolation may be typical for organizational members who are less physically isolated but sense a communication distance from leaders or other organizational members. Members did report feeling a sense of disconnect and separation from the formal leaders. Participant 22 noted, “we have a [leader] at the top [and] the perception is a bit of isolation there” (Participant 22, March 25, 2011), contributing to communication isolation. Comments by Participant 24 suggested that he did not feel physically or geographically isolated, but he did sense and could not understand the communication breakdown and why he couldn’t access information, “I’m not getting the isolation ... there’s got to be a reason for that ... why I’m not getting information” (March 14, 2011). Moreover, of course, there is the sense of communication isolation and distance that was reported by the female members. Each of the three instances above point to a sense of isolation, that have contributed to the negative communication reported in the above paragraphs, that the level of communication was impacted by a sense of disconnect with the leaders/leadership.

There was evidence of at least four communication processes that were established within the organization to enable member-to-member, and member-to-leader communication and information sharing. First, examination of the organization’s website did show that web-based tools were in place to relay information to members. Communication, in that respect, was passive and intended to push out general news items that impacted the organization and other information pieces that impacted a wide range of stakeholders. Second, there was document evidence where e-mail directions for distribution of information clearly delineated how members were to respond to questions and issues. The e-mail instructions show that communications were pushed out from the

formal leaders to the members over a list-server and through e-mail communications. The information forwarded through this channel tended to be generic items that dealt with day-to-day operational issues and were primarily passive distribution/receipt of information. The e-mail and the listserver could be accessed by all members of the organization. Third, there was documented evidence that programs' staff tended to publish internal e-mail documents that addressed specific policy and operations issues, providing a mechanism by which all members received information. However, this communication route required the active opening and perusal of the documents. This suggests that e-mail or other electronic communication items could have been deleted from the members' inbox or overlooked, and information not received. Last, frequent staff and department meetings were held where issues and concerns could be put forward and addressed by members of the organization. Agendas for these staff meetings were forwarded to members in advance of the meeting and requests for agenda items extended to those members. The department meetings were exclusive to the designated department leaders, but covered topics that were passed to those leaders from the department members. The four processes cited above do lend credence to the assertion that some level of communication was enabled in the organization, even though member perceptions suggest otherwise.

Members suggested that the level of authentic communication between leaders and the members was not adequate. Members suggested that keeping them in the loop was necessary but that they desired a more personal and authentic connection that went beyond general information dissemination, that they sought communication that indicated that leaders had a vested interest in the members. Participant 29 said:

[leaders perform] keep in the loop type things ... [but need to] ... just touch base with people and see how they're doing ... I think maybe a little bit more communication and informal communication, not always formal communication at face-to-face meetings. I know geography prevents [the leaders] to be visiting everybody ... but sometimes it would be nice to I guess just a bit more, maybe even, a bit more contact, whether it be virtual or face-to-face" (March 16, 2011).

The issues of communication isolation and isolation in general are problematic for virtual organizations (Cascio, 2000; Kirkman, Rosen, Gibson, Tesluk, & McPherson, 2002), but can be rectified by leaders who "communicate with all team members [and] not just a few" (p. 87). In this case study the leaders were seen to disseminate information but that there were discrepancies in how and when that information was relayed to the members. Members also indicated that the communication did not support an authentic line of communication between leaders and members, and that they still sensed a distance, and of aloofness in the leaders. Being viewed as a communicator "provides the leader with the reputation of not being aloof and of being accessible [and] available" (p. 45).

Yammarino (1994) also noted that these leader communication behaviors are particularly important to followers who are at a distance so that they can "know that they have the [leaders] support and commitment for their actions" (p. 45).

To summarize, organizational identity formation was impacted by the members' perceptions of communication issues. Dhalla (2007) proposed that communication isolation removes and potentially distances the members from the organization's strategic initiatives, and they are potentially unaware of the "activities, mission, practices, goals and values, which are key indicators of organizational identity" (p. 257). The leaders are

responsible for communicating the organization's activities, mission, practices, goals and values to all members, to engage organizational members so that "they feel connected to the organization and thus strongly identify with its goals and strategy" (Prati, McMillan-Capehart & Karriker, 2009, p. 412). Leaders are also responsible for providing a channel of communication for the members to address their issues and concerns.

**Recommendation 2a:** Leaders/leadership should periodically review the communication structures and processes of the organization to ensure that information is being distributed in an equitable and effective manner to all members.

**Recommendation 2b:** Leaders/leadership should actively engage and connect with the members of the organization, particularly those who are geographically isolated within the organization, to insure that information is being exchanged, to show an affective connection, and to diminish the potential for feelings of communication isolation.

*iii) Leader/leadership support*

The findings for research question one indicate that the members' perceptions of leader/leadership support influenced member perception of organizational identity and organizational identity formation. Members' perceptions of leader and leadership support suggested that:

- The needs of most organizational members were attended to;
- That sound decision making by leaders tended to enable and support the members, and

- That strong informal leader support was situated within the organization and enabled by formal leaders and leadership.

The members' perceptions of creative license and innovation that were referenced in prior sections were a product of the support engendered by the leaders of the organization for the members. The members' perceptions reported on in previous sections indicated that the members had trust and confidence in the leaders, and the leaders, in turn, had a reciprocal trust and confidence. The members' perceptions of being supported and enabled by the leaders, and perceptions of a leader established climate of risk taking were evident. Leader support (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, and Kramer, 2004) is one aspect of influencing and maintaining a creative environment, and members' perceptions of leader behaviors that enable that support can invoke strengthened perceptions of those leaders.

The members perceived a level of support from leaders and indicated that they looked to their experiences with other schools prior to working with this organization, and to their perceptions of the culture of the parent organization; the department of education, as a gauge of how well they were supported by the leaders/leadership. Self-categorization (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) processes are implicated in organizational identity formation where the social identity, and the individual perceiving them as belonging to a group based on a set of comparative characteristics, is extended to the collective group identity characteristics, also known as the organizational identity. The members reflected on and compared their organizational experience; who they are, through a comparison with their experience in the school system prior to being employed by the current organization. The members' perception of the level of leader support that was afforded them; their in-group characteristic, was developed in part as a function of

comparison to the support afforded members in other organizations, as described by Participant 7 in Table 4.13, chapter 4. The individual's perception of leader support was reflected as being a characteristic of the organization, and was interpreted as a characteristic of the organization's identity.

The reflections on leader support provided above speak to the issue of organizational identity change and its associated complications. The members noted that the organization went through several periods of leadership transition, as well as organizational growth. As noted in Figure 4.2, chapter 4, the majority of the participating members in this study lived and worked through those organizational changes. There would be the opportunity for member comparison of how things had existed over time, what organizational life and culture was like at punctuated periods of time, and particularly, how the type and level of leader support had evolved during those transition periods. This would have implications for the members' perceptions of organizational identity over time, and the organizational change had brought organizational identity change as well.

Balser and Carmin (2009) noted that organizational change can prompt an identity threat when events within an organization happen that change the conditions or organizational situations, and those changes challenge the perceptions and beliefs of the organizational members as to what constitutes the organization's identity. Members indicated that the change in bureaucracy, size, and structure of the organization had changed their perceptions of the type of support afforded to them as informal leaders. Members suggested that early leadership had relied on them and supported them as

decision makers, but that had now changed, that they no longer perceived being supported in that informal role. Participant 31 stated:

We have been frustrated over the years in that a lot of things that have occurred, have occurred without our input in the decision making process ... as we've grown larger, that becomes more and more evident, because ... it becomes more of an administrative or an assistant administrative role to make those decisions for you ... whereas initially, starting out, we were making the decisions. (March 15, 2011)

The diminished ability to be involved in decision-making was viewed by members as a way of disempowering them. Disempowerment was construed as an internal threat to the members' individual identity and to organizational identity.

The perception of being devalued, though, is not necessarily indicative of the organization's culture or identity as whole. The limited references to a diminished role and diminished support were put forward by long standing members of the organization. As with any organizational growth, things change, and the roles and responsibilities of the members change as well. It is the willingness of the members to embrace the change that is of interest. As Burke (2002) suggested, there are stages that members go through when faced with organizational change, and that change impacts organizational members in different ways, and not all members react to change in the same manner. Resistance to change is one result of that organizational change. The reporting member in the instance cited above, provided the perception of not seeing a lot of support from leadership going on, of not being aware of that support. The member may well be exhibiting what Burke (2002) termed political resistance, which occurs when members stand to lose something

of value such as power or status. The perceptions that were reported by members point to a loss of decision-making status as well as the loss of a level of power achieved from being relied upon by the early organization's formal leaders. The growth of the organization had dictated an evolution in how things are done. The feeling of being devalued was the by-product of a member looking back on what was, reminiscing for those days, but is not necessarily a reflection of the organizational members' perceptions as a whole, or an indicator of the organizations identity as a whole.

To summarize, organizational identity formation was impacted by the members' perceptions of leader/leadership support. The members elaborated perceptions of a strong sense of organizational belonging because of the support, and that the members were well supported in their jobs as educators. Members also reported perceptions of being enabled by their leaders, and that they perceived their own organization as having a distinct identity through comparisons of leader support of members in other organizational entities. Negative perceptions of leader support were attributed to member political resistance to the change that occurred in the organization over time, and are not be indicative of the organization's identity as a whole.

**Recommendation 3:** Leaders/leadership should provide ways for members to reflect on and maintain an awareness of the history of the organization, and to focus members on the current and future culture and identity of the organization.

*iv) Leader/leadership influence on organizational culture*

The findings for research question one suggest that leader/leadership influence on organizational culture impacted the organizational members' perception of organizational identity and organizational identity formation. Unlike organizational identity which

delineates who we are, organizational culture defines how the organization functions, and defines the set of shared assumptions that guide the behaviors and actions of the organizational members (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and has been described as “the social glue that holds an organization together” (Trevino & Nelson, 1999, p. 207).

Organizational identity is a reflection of the organization’s culture where the *how* of culture defines the *who* of identity.

The members’ perceptions suggest that leaders did have a positive influence on the culture in the organization. The members provided perceptions of leader praise, motivation, the setting of expectations, the creation of organizational vision, and of directly fostering a culture of innovation and risk taking. However, there were other influences at play on the organizational culture. The organization has a rich history, and as Participant 2 noted, many of the individuals recruited to start the current organization were in mid-career, capable and expert educators, and their inclusion strongly influenced the way the early organization was shaped and how it was operated. Participant 5 also noted that “the amount of people that came over from the Legacy model in the early years of [the organization] would have had more of a direct impact on the way that they did things” (December 23, 2010). The early organization witnessed a considerable leadership influence from the members as well as the formal leaders. The relatively small size of the organization (~15 members) in its infancy (2000-2001), and the early organizational conditions necessitated that there was a shared level of expectation setting by the members, for the members and for the organization, that innovation and risk taking was supported by the leaders, but that it was also driven by the members.

Parker (2000) argued that leaders have a direct influence on the establishment of culture but that “all groups should be encouraged to shape the organization” (p. 229). The early culture of the organization in this study would have witnessed the cultural influence as being skewed more to the organizational members’ end of a continuum rather than to the direction of the organizational leaders, predominantly due to the minimal level of organizational complexity. However, as members did note, as the organization became more complex and the association with the department of education increased, and the organization became subject to the bureaucracy and policy that is part of the department. Participant 2 said, “Assimilated was the word I was looking for, we’ve sort of become assimilated into the Department of Education, and as a result, more subject to the rules and protocols that ruled that for years and years and years” (Participant 2, August 3, 2010). A result of this assimilation has been a shift from a member directed culture to one more controlled by leaders and by protocols.

The leader-centric culture posed problems for the members and the organization as a whole and was seen as having a negative influence on the organization. The emergence of leader driven centrality was influenced by: (1) an intensified demand for the services of the organization, (2) increased size in organizational membership, (3) expansion of the number of curriculum departments, (4) an expansion of the services and roles of the organization, (5) more overlap in the relationship between the organization and the department of education, and (6) the creation of policy and bureaucracy in the organization. A more centralized authority structure developed over time and a tendency to more unilateral decision making by leaders. And, because the organization was considered to be a division of the department of education, there was an increasingly

strong association and influence from the department of education. The influence of the relationship with the department in the early years was diminished because of the intervention of the leader of the time who worked to shield the organization from the effects of its standing as a division.

The strengthening of the relationship with the department of education influenced an escalation in the coordination and alignment of organizational policy and politics with those of the department. The organization is bound by the legislation that governs education in the province, but where the organization had been distanced from the department in its early years, it had operated under its own set of rules. As time wore on, the relationship between the two entities strengthened, and the rules, regulations and policy governing the department itself began to influence the operations of the organization. The bureaucracy of the department was seen to have crept into the organization and it was seen by members to be limiting decision making and the ability to move forward, as noted by Participant 28 who said, “the director should not have to get permission from anybody above him ... that’s a big issue ... I think that bureaucracy just ... gets in the way of common sense. And there’s a problem with that” (March 9, 2011).

The department of education policy filtering into the organization was viewed as troublesome because of the perception that the department policy was not seen as being congruent to the mission and operations of the organization, and that those in the department who were delivering the policy did not have a grasp on the implications for the organization. Participant 25 said, “I know that policies have come down through the department of education and our director ... I do know that he's caught in the crossfire

lots of times where he sees where we're coming from ... I don't know that those above our organization understand how we operate” (June 22, 2011).

There was also a sense that the hierarchy at the department level was beginning to assume a greater role in providing direction to the formal leaders, and was influencing the culture of the organization. There was member confusion over exactly what role and direction the organization was now supposed to take. More importantly, there was concern over who would be driving that change in direction. With the perceived influence of the external entities on the organizations culture, especially the implementation of policy that was being transferred from that bureaucracy, the members were concerned the external influences were also shifting the direction that the organization was taking? The concern over identity was reflected in comments made by Participant 22 who in commenting on the organization’s identity said:

I don't know if [the organization] has a clearly labeled identity ... I think it is a multi-faceted organization ... we are separate from but also integrated deeply into the department [of education] ... the perception of the members is that we are bureaucratic ... We mirror the department. (March 25, 2011).

The organizational change resulted in an increase in the leader coordination of the organizational complexity, a reduction in member control, and introduced elements of confusion to the organization. The members who were with the organization during its early beginnings and who saw themselves as pioneers, as contributing to the foundations that gave rise to the modern form of the organization, were concerned over their perceived diminished role and reduction in member control. The more experienced and long term members saw the influence that they had enjoyed during the early organization

slipping from their hands, and the role that they had played as leaders and decision makers now relegated centrally and solely to the formal leaders of the organization.

The participating members did elaborate perceptions that indicated an organizational culture that had strengths and weaknesses. Cultural strength, as Weese (1996) posited, is important to organizations that “possess a decentralized organizational structure and offer employees a high degree of position autonomy” (p. 199), as with the conditions under which the study organization operated and operates as a virtual organization. One of the cultural strengths of the organization was perceived to be its innovative practices. However, the members intimated that the bureaucracy that was creeping into the organization was tending to temper the culture. Participant 2 said:

I don't know if I should say it or not, but I think sometimes, innovation and exploration can be hampered by the bureaucracy, by the need to follow protocol ... now that we're a more entrenched organization ... there's more eyes upon us and the ability I think to go out there and be innovative, take chances and so on, it's a little bit more tempered. (August 3, 2010)

The leaders were perceived to have contributed to the cultures formation but there were perceptions of a loss of control by the members, a developing distance between the leaders and members, and a perceived weakening of key aspects of the culture of the organization. The effect on the organization in this case study was to weaken the effectiveness of the organization's members. Even though there were perceptions of leader support for innovation, the levels of support over time were seen to have been reduced, impacted by a shift in a culture that was beginning to parallel a more bureaucratic organization; the department of education. The leaders were taking action to

formalize some of the processes in the organization and were perceived as the implementation of accountability measures. This caused the members to tend to step back. They were less inclined to act independently, and less inclined to step forward and take charge of initiatives. Feelings of mistrust emerged in members. Leaders saw the increase in bureaucracy as a natural response to the increased expectations and demands of the public for accountability of government bodies (Participant 27, May 12, 2011). The members were suspicious of that layer of accountability, viewing it as diminishing their overall influence in the organization.

In summary, the cultural aspects of the organization distinguish and significantly impact the organizations identity. This was evidenced by the gradual shift over time from a member controlled culture to one where control was being centralized to the formal leaders. The organization's culture was being influenced by entities external to the organization, and that influence was beyond the control of the organization's members. Over time the organization established more bureaucracy and cultural control was shifted away from the members. It went from a situation where members perceived themselves as being leaders, decision makers, risk takers, innovators, and giving their organization similar accord, to a situation where others were deciding who they were as an organization. Diminishing the members' control of cultural aspects of the organization only served to weaken the members' perception of organizational culture and identity.

One outcome of the leader-centric organization was that an imbalance was affected over time between leader and member control of organizational culture and identity where leaders assumed the control as opposed to a shared control that existed in the early organization. Leaders must lead, and members look to those leaders for vision,

to support the culture, to support them in their roles as informal leaders and decision makers, and to enable them as contributing members of the organization. However, members need to feel that they also contribute to and affect some control of their organization. It is up to the leaders, in consultation with the members of the organization, to establish that balance. The control of cultural change can be shared, with leaders enabling the members to assume a modicum of control through leader trust and confidence of those members in decision making and shaping the shared assumptions of the organization, and in essence, shaping the members' construction of organizational identity.

**Recommendation 4:** Leaders/leadership should empower and enable members by establishing processes that actively engage the members in shaping the organization's culture through leader – member balanced input and decision-making, and in doing so strengthen the members' shaping of the organization's identity.

v) *Leader/leadership qualities*

The findings for research question one indicate that members' perceptions of leader/leadership qualities influence members' perceptions of organizational identity and organizational identity formation. In essence, leadership style is at the core of research question one: *What role has the organizational members' perceptions of leaders and leadership played in forming and shaping the identity of the organization?* Embedded in each of the above four previous sections are indirect references to sets of qualities that have been used to describe leaders and leadership. Second order concepts focused on (i) members' perceived leaders as exhibiting levels of confidence and trust; (ii) members'

perceived quality leader/leadership support; (iii) and (iv) members' perceived leader/leadership communication impacted organizational culture.

Although the intent was not to look specifically for references to leader qualities, the focus was on leader role and influence, the members' perceptions of leader qualities, and the superlatives describing those qualities, did emerge in the context of discussions with the members. In many cases, the descriptors of the members paralleled the language that is used to describe attributes of contemporary leadership models in the literature; roles elaborated as within the transactional leadership model, transformational leadership model, and the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM). The perceptions of the members of leader and leadership qualities described characteristics of leadership that could be used to deduce the models of leadership at play in the organization

The changes in formal leadership that had taken place in the organization over its twelve years of existence impacted elements of the organizational culture, and influenced the members' perceptions of leader qualities. Curry (2002) posited that as leaders come and go they affect the organization's identity because departing leaders take away, and arriving leaders bring with them, aspects of leadership styles that impact organizational culture and identity. The early leaders of the organization were seen by the members to be open and made things happen without a lot of bureaucratic interference. The culture was not perceived by the members as being restrictive and the organization's members were afforded a lot of freedom in what they did. A change in leadership witnessed the arrival of leaders that operated in a more autocratic fashion, and attempted to implement accountability structures, and that was seen by the members to threaten the culture of

trust that had been established. The leadership style impacted the cultural conditions of the organization and, in effect, influenced the organization's identity.

The variety of lengths of time that the individual members were employed with the organization created multiple views of leader/leadership quality. The time period during which the member came to work with the organization tended to change the type of descriptors provided in the members' perceptions in this study. The legacy members; those with greater than six years of experience with the organization, described leaders differently than those members with less than six years of experience. Those leaders who had served during the early years of the organization from 2001 to 2005 were seen to be open and receptive to member input, were perceived to be accommodating, and were seen to shield the members from external influences such as those that emanated from the department of education. The members noted that they early leaders made things happen without being too concerned about the bureaucratic constraints that might have been imposed (Participant 2, August 3, 2010). The organizational members were given near carte blanche freedom to make decisions regarding the delivery of their programs, were looked to by the leaders to suggest, purchase and trial innovative technology that improved the delivery of the educational programs, and were frequently consulted by leaders to provide advice and opinion about the directions that the organization would take. As Participant 1 indicated about the early days of the organization, "early on, it was like the great wild west ... it was more of a maverick ... it was a work in progress ... it was uncharted territory." (August 3, 2010). The leadership style of the leaders at that time suited that organizational milieu in that the leaders were visionary, innovative, and risk-oriented, and they acted as mentors, advisors and coaches to the members. The attributes

used by the members to describe those leaders are similar to those used to describe transformational leaders. Transformational leaders mentor, provide support, accepts individual differences, are change agents, and promote strong ties between the leaders and the members.

There is a disjoint that exists between the perceptions of leaders by legacy members and the perceptions of leaders by newer organizational members, and accounts for some of the contrast in perceptions of leader qualities. The members' perceptions of the organization's current leaders and their style of leadership are in opposition to those used to describe the leaders of the early organization. Current leaders are seen by some to be supportive but there are elements of the organization that view the leaders as ineffective, somewhat autocratic, and more focused on accountability structures and bureaucracy. They are perceived to be enablers but in contrast, some of the female members of the organization view the leaders as exhibiting gender bias and that they do not enable the females.

The cultural conditions described by the study's members at punctuated periods in the life of the organization exhibit aspects of three organizational cultural types described by Cameron and Quinn (1999), (i) Clan, (ii) Adhocracy, and (iii) Hierarchy. Clan cultures are:

Typified as a friendly place to work where people share a lot of themselves ... is like an extended family with best friends at work. Leaders are thought of as mentors, coaches ... the organization is held together by loyalty, tradition, and collaboration [and] ... commitment is high. (p. 5)

Adhocracies are:

Characterized as a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative workplace. People stick their necks out and take risks. Effective leadership is visionary, innovative, and risk-oriented. The glue that holds the organization together is commitment to experimentation and innovation. The emphasis is on being at the leading edge of new knowledge, products, and/or services. Readiness for change and meeting new challenges are important. The organization's long term emphasis is on rapid growth and acquiring new resources. (p. 5)

Hierarchy type cultures are evidenced:

as a formalized and structured place to work. Procedures and well-defined processes govern what people do. Effective leaders are good coordinators, organizers, and efficiency experts. Maintaining a smooth-running organization is important. The long-term concerns of the organization are stability, predictability, and efficiency. Formal rules and policies hold the organization together. (p. 5)

The perceptions of a loose and open leadership observed to have existed prior to 2004 conform to the clan and adhocracy culture types described by Cameron and Quinn (1999). Clan cultures support a strong members' voice and the focus of leadership is to empower the members. The adhocracy culture characterizes an environment built on risk taking and creativity. Hierarchical cultures are formalized and structured that have formal rules and policies governing the organization. Based on the description of the culture over time provided by this study's members, the organization examined in this study experienced the transition from and through cultural types similar to those noted above.

Seventy-five percent of the organizational members that participated in this case study had better than six years of experience with the organization, and would therefore

have witnessed and lived through any cultural transitions. Members tended to look back through the history of the organization and reference the early cultural conditions, often speaking favourably of a type of clan/adhocracy environment that existed. These reminiscences reflected the members' perceptions of culture and identity that had existed in reality for those members. Members appeared to long for that culture that gave them the conditions to embrace the organization, to build its culture, and to influence the future direction of the organization. Those same members decry what they see as currently existing as a more repressive, hierarchical organizational culture. The shift in culture was reflected in the comment by Participant 31 who, when queried on his perceptions of what the organization looked like then and now, said, "I do see it [current structure] as a hierarchical approach. And I think that we're seeing that more now" (March 15, 2011). And again, in reflecting on the growth of the organization and its change in the culture of support and camaraderie, Participant 32 noted "It's different than when we started out in the beginning, no doubt about that" (March 18, 2011).

The current organizational culture reflects an amalgam where remnants of the legacy culture co-exist with aspects of the current culture, creating a tension between members' perceptions of what actually constitutes the culture of the organization. The differing organizational cultures that existed over periods of time gave rise to varying organizational identities over time. The issue of a change of leader/leadership style constituted a shift to a cultural milieu reflecting that leadership style, a cultural milieu stored in the memories of the organization's members. The culture was fluid, evolving, and tied to a specific period of time in the history of the organization. The description of that organizational culture changed depending on the longevity of the individual with the

organization. The legacy members described an organizational identity that portrayed the organization as highly innovative, involving risk takers, which included the members of the organization, along with the leaders of the organization, as co-movers and shakers of the organization, and where members considered themselves as direction setters. Current organizational identity is described as having elements of the early organization, but primarily as being reigned in, as being where leaders are less effective as communicators, as an organization where bureaucracy has set in, as having more autocratic leadership, and as moving to a more entrenched, hierarchical entity.

Multiple perceptions of organizational identity over time will continue to exist because the legacy members still operate under the assumptions of the culture that was in effect when they started working with the organization, and those assumptions do not always agree with the cultural assumptions of more current members. The legacy members exert an influence on the newer members in respect of passing on the fundamentals of the culture and identity to those who enter the organization. This legacy influence will diminish as legacy members leave the organization, and the organizational culture and identity will be supplanted by the cultural and identity assumptions of the current members. However, legacy influence will never disappear because today's newer members will become tomorrow's legacy members, carrying on the cycle of legacy influence forward.

The cultural assumptions held by the members account for some of the disparity in the descriptors of leader quality provided by the study participating members, as well as accounting for the disagreement between perceptions accounted for by participants of leader trust and confidence, communication, support, and the creation of culture. Legacy

members would bring with them the wealth of knowledge and experience of the early organization, the challenges that were solved, the cultural assumptions of the early organization, and their experiences as informal leaders that were given under the various formal leaders over time. They would also have the benefit of hindsight and comparison of what was with what is today. The cultural knowledge of the newer members would be relegated to their current experience and would be greatly contrasted with the legacy members. The perceptions of leader trust and confidence would be predicated on the members' knowledge and understanding of the organization, and members would have contrasting and potentially conflicting leader viewpoints, as well as perceptions of how and why the organizational culture is thusly comprised. The perceptions of the members shift related to how the leader is perceived at maintaining the culture. The leader-culture connection was reflected in how the organizational members viewed the leader and what qualities they perceived the leader as possessing.

**Recommendation 5a:** Leaders/leadership should engage all members of the organization in a periodic exploration of perceptions of change that the organization has undergone, and to explore the aspects of leadership as they are perceived to exist, in order to provide members the opportunity to reflect and locate the organization's identity in the context of an evolving organization.

**Recommendation 5b:** All new organizational members should be engaged in a professional learning process where they can gain insight into the leadership, culture and identity of their organization.

This section presented the analysis and synthesis of the findings elaborating the influence of leaders and leadership on organizational identity formation. The findings

suggested that perceptions of organizational identity formation were shaped by the members' perceptions of the various influences of leaders and leadership on day-to-day organizational life, and in turn, reflected in the organizational members' daily experiences in the organization. Member perceptions of leader confidence and trust, gender equity, leader communication, leader support, leader influence on organizational culture, and leader qualities contributed to the members' experience with the organization. Organizational identity formation occurs as a result of the members' sensemaking, defined by those experiences. This next section will elaborate the analysis and synthesis of the findings from chapter 4 of the possible relationship between distributed leadership and organizational identity formation.

### **Findings for Research Question Two**

Research question two asked: What role does the perceptions of the organizational members of informal leadership play in forming and shaping the identity of the organization writ-large? Responses to this question sought to advance understanding of member perceptions of informal leadership, and to try to understand, from their perceptions, how informal leadership influenced their views of the organization, and specifically how it impacted organizational identity formation. Informal leadership was recognized as (i) being a function of seasoned and experienced members independently assuming leadership in the organization, (ii) as a function of the individual and professional strengths of specific individuals – take charge personalities, and (iii) as a direct function of the strength of the culture of support and empowerment by the leaders and leadership of the organization.

*vi. The level of experience drives informal leadership*

The findings for research question two indicate that members' perceptions of informal leader/leadership experience influenced members' perceptions of organizational identity and organizational identity formation. The generational experience of the members of the organization was a determining factor in who assumed informal leader roles. The informal leaders influenced the culture of the organization, influenced members' perceptions of the organization, and filled an important role in acting in the stead of formal leadership when that leadership was seen by members to be distanced or absent.

The term distributed leadership has been used interchangeably with informal leadership. Distributed leadership models (MacBeath, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane & Orlina, 2005) suggested leadership as being more than a single, overarching influence in an organization and was a function of leadership practice that emerged based on a situational context. The informal leader skill sets of the individual met the leadership need at that moment and the member possessed the skills and tools to address the specific situation (Spillane, 2006). Other conceptions of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2003; Yukl, 1999) have described distributed leadership in the context of collective or shared action where leadership is "shared amongst a number of colleagues or peers" (Gronn, 2002, p. 655). Distributed leadership, in the context of this case study, was taken to mean individual action and response in a specific situation.

The perceptions of the study members indicated that members looked to the "experienced" individuals in the organization for informal leadership, and suggested that they witnessed the willingness of experienced members to take leadership roles.

Participant 25 said, “I guess in the informal leadership we see people stepping forward all the time ... as a new leader steps forward with a new idea, a new suggestion, or some sort of change. The other leaders say, yeah! Again, it is that idea of no one feels pressed down and everybody feels lifted up” (June 22, 2011). This recognition of organizational members as informal leaders occurred because the informal leaders “demonstrate[d] characteristics and behaviors that fellow members interpret as enabling the group” (McIntyre & Foti, 2013, p. 47). Desirable leader characteristics such as spontaneous communication, a sense of the historical context for the organization, and filling a technology support gap, were not as evident in formal leaders and so necessitated the members looking to informal leaders to fill those roles. The members indicated negative perceptions of formal leader distance, and perceptions of communication isolation from leaders. The dispersed nature of virtual organizations, as Joshi, Lazarova, and Liao (2009) noted, invokes a reduced sense of identity due to the “lack of physical proximity, shared context, and spontaneous communications with team members” (p. 249). It is conceivable that the organizational members looked to informal leaders for leadership and guidance, and to fulfill their sense of connection to the organization where a perceived connection with the informal leader was a substitute for a connection to a formal leader.

Informal leadership evolved as a function of legacy membership, and as a function of the members’ perceptions that the legacy members hold the cultural keys to the organization. Legacy members were perceived to be those members who have been tenured with the organization for longer periods of time. The members’ perceptions suggested that experienced members held the fundamentals for the organization, that they

carried the cultural memories that were passed to the newer organizational members. The legacy members carried the legacy culture and, therefore, were looked to for leadership in setting the understanding of the fundamentals. Participant 23 noted:

I find that with newer people coming in, there's less, there's a lesser understanding of the fundamentals and what we were, say, when the organization started originally ... [member references two individuals that have left the organization] I miss [member 1's] input. I miss [members 2's] input ... I respected [them] so much. And I constantly sent information off to them and asked for their opinions and I know there are people in our organization that I can still rely on, but that was two major pieces that we had in our [department] that are now gone. (March 14, 2011)

Newer members looked to more experienced members for understanding of the current and legacy culture of organization. These understandings were seen by the newer members as evidence of informal leadership.

Not all members looked to the legacy members to model the organizational culture. Newer members reported that the expectations of long standing members did not agree with what the newer members saw as a reasonable set of behavioral expectations for organizational members. Some newer members reported that the expectation of many of the long standing members was that the work life took precedence over life in general, that organizational members should be on constant duty. This cultural assumption did not reflect well with newer members who believed that the work and personal life should be separated, that one should "punch their workday and ... go home to another life"

(Participant 24, March 14, 2011). The cultural expectation imposed by the long standing

members was further described by Participant 24 who said, “I believe that culture is there ... I believe that there’s a few people in the organization that feel you should be on call pretty much 24/7 and I don’t know if that’s really necessary” (March 14, 2011). This clash in understanding of organizational culture served to establish multiple separate views of the organization and affected differing perceptions of the organization’s identity.

Most members perceived that the strength of the organization was the experience of the members that worked with the organization. Members that had been with the organization for long periods of time would have had the opportunity to experience several leadership changes and to work in a culture that was influenced by those leaders’ style of leadership. The experienced members had a deeper understanding of the organization than those that were recently hired into formal leadership positions. The experienced members would have had a deeper and richer understanding of the organization’s culture, and would, therefore, be looked to as leader and for leadership. The cultural understandings of the legacy members, those fundamentals referred to by the members, influenced the members’ perceptions of the organization’s culture, and as an extension, influenced the formation of organizational identity.

*vii. Everyone has leadership potential*

The findings for research question two indicate that the member’s regard and understanding of what constituted leader capacity was extended to all members of the organization, influenced members’ perceptions of the type of culture that was established in the organization, and subsequently the perceptions of organizational identity. The perceptions of the members suggested recognition of leader qualities in other organizational members that reinforced their belief that everyone in the organization had

informal leadership. The members acknowledged the qualities and influence that formal leadership bore on the organization's culture and identity, but also acknowledged that leadership extended beyond the formal level and was distributed throughout the organization, and that all members had the opportunity to lead given the conditions that allowed that leadership potential to emerge. Wenger (2000) described this type of distributed leadership as numerical action leadership which is the sum of the multiple actions of all members in an organization, and where leadership is dispersed among many (Miller, 1998).

The emergence of a distributed, informal leadership was the result of two study organizational attributes. First, by nature of being part of a virtual organization, the organizational members are dispersed. In many instances the members worked alone in a single location, geographically dispersed across vast distances. This geographic dispersion created instances where individuals were isolated and would have created a dependency upon their own ingenuity to solve problems or to generate solutions to day-to-day issues on the fly. Participant 5 said:

In the early days of the organization, in the early days without policy, people said, oh, that needs to be done, let's do it in this way ... it might have been two or three [members]. It might have been four or five, it might have been one. I'm going to do it – hey I see a need and I'm going to fill it. And this is how I'm going to do it. I'm going to be highly creative. I'm going to be highly innovative and I'm going to go about doing it ... and they did whatever they felt that could suit their needs and the management at that time tried to support them as much as they [could].

(December 23, 2010)

Given the lack of attrition or loss of members over the life of the study organization, it is highly likely that the members referenced above would still be employed by the organization today. Their existence in the organization would imply that they would still be exerting the creativity exhibited early in the life of the organization, and would be exhibiting informal leadership, exhibited and implicit in their assumption of responsibility. The isolated members were supported where possible but an expectation early in the life of the organization was that they could assume leadership in their day-to-day existence.

A second reason for the emergence of a distributed, informal leadership was that the early organizational form, specifically the first five years of the organization's existence, was ill defined and evolving. The organization's members at that time would have been showing leadership by collectively assisting with designing the processes and procedures by which the organization operated. Participant 2 described the dynamic conditions under which the organization functioned and the focus on charting the way through the unknowns:

It was more of a maverick. It was a work in progress ... it was uncharted territory. We were doing something that we felt was fairly unique in the developed world. And we were trying to find the right tools. Well, first of all we were out there looking for tools to do the things we wanted to do. (August 3, 2010)

The leadership would have been established as members took charge of the innovation that established the methods and procedures that would be used in the organization. The expectation during the formative years was high, as is suggested by Participant 2 who said, "There were always technical and spatial challenges to overcome, and giving up

was never an option. Each member was expected to contribute and, regardless of individual views and philosophies, each person's views were respected" (August 3, 2010).

The early organizational conditions called for a collaborative type of work. There were smaller numbers of members who were expected to keep a new and emerging organization afloat and operating. Leadership, in this light, was situational and contingent on the pressures that forced the leadership to emerge in the first place. However, this type of experience is useful to an organization as it wends its way forward through expansion and change. The lessons learned from the past are carried over as member experience and can inform decisions made today. In this way, the informal leadership can assist the organization in growth and development. The experience can be put to use. There are also additional benefits in that (a) the informal leadership experience of the legacy members can model informal leader behavior for newer members, and (b) are in existence to be called upon if and when the situation arises. The organization, by virtue of moving forward, will encounter problems and issues where that experienced legacy leader may be able to act, and as with the early organizational experience, assist in facing the challenges of the organization.

Organizational identity extends from the members perceptions of who they are as individuals and by extension, who they are as an organization based on those identity referents. The members saw themselves as informal leaders, saw their peers as leaders, and witnessed a culture where that leadership was supported and encouraged by formal leaders/leadership. The perception of members as leaders translated to an organizational

identity referent describing the members *as* leaders and, therefore, influenced the organizational identity formation.

**Recommendation 6:** Leaders/leadership should capitalize on the leader capacity of the members of the organization and encourage and enable all organizational members to assume leader roles in the virtual organizational setting.

*viii. Culture of support and empowerment supporting informal leadership*

The findings for research question two indicate that empowering the members of the organization influenced members' perceptions of organizational identity and organizational identity formation. The members of the organization had reported a level of trust and confidence in the formal leaders/leadership, and acknowledged the existence of an informal leadership cohort that encouraged member empowerment. The existence of trust and confidence in the leadership is a pre-requisite for empowerment (Kane-Urrabazo, 2006) and empowerment contributes to a sense of member value. There were indications of leaders' not valuing female members, and of legacy members not feeling valued or of being provided decision-making authority and of being disempowered. The general consensus of the members was that the organization and leadership placed value on the members' capabilities and their individual responsibility, and formal leaders were perceived to foster the leadership behavior in members, for them to act as leaders and to show leadership in the organization.

The perception of being part of a participative organizational climate and culture, and of being empowered, impacted some of the members' perceptions of organizational identity formation. Other members' perceptions were of being disempowered and disengaged from the organization. The action of empowerment lies primarily with the

leaders, and in this case study, the leaders' perceived focus on other issues separate from the issues of the members, contributed directly to the sense of disempowerment.

Empowerment involves giving the members of the organization influence and control over the events of the organization. This type of leadership was seen to be evident in the early organization. However, current organizational culture was viewed as being more autocratic, and that leaders controlled the events of the organization. Members also indicated that the leaders were seen to be absorbed in issues that removed them from the daily workings of the organization, that the leaders were drawn in directions that removed them from the day-to-day life of organizational members. Those perceptions concerning empowerment directly reflected on the members' elaboration of who the members were as an organization. Instead of seeing an organizational identity referent of an empowered organization, the reverse was true.

**Recommendation 7:** Leaders/leadership should actively work to confer levels of power and decision making authority and empowerment for all the organization's members.

### **Findings for Research Question Three**

Research question three asked how the members of a virtual education organization perceived their professional identity, their abilities to develop a professional identity, and the role that professional identity played in forming and shaping organizational identity. Response to this question sought to deepen understanding of the members' perceptions of professional identity and identity formation and to try to understand, from their perceptions, how that professional identity and identity formation influenced their views of the organization, and how it impacted organizational identity

formation. The findings indicated that member perceptions of professional identity and professional identity formation was impacted by changes in (i) organizational size, structure and bureaucracy and, (ii) by regionalism and subsequent isolation that occurred as a result of an increase in organizational size. An analysis and synthesis of these findings will be presented in the next sections.

*(ix) Changes to Organizational size, structure and an increase in the degree of bureaucracy that occurred over time*

The findings for research question three indicate that the members' perceptions of changes in organizational size, structure, and bureaucracy over time influenced members' perceptions of organizational identity and organizational identity formation. The members perceived that the growth in size of the organization had contributed to an increase in professional and emotional distance between members. The members did note that there were instances where individuals had been hired within the organization but that the members were completely unaware of those individuals until they were encountered at a face-to-face meeting. The employment and existence of the new members had never been communicated to the organization as a whole, nor had the role of the new hires been elaborated within the organization. Participant 1 stated, "it's kind of hard when you're at the table and you don't really know who so and so is and why they're at the table ... we've had a couple instances of that in the last couple years. People are not really sure how folks are connected because it's [the organization] getting bigger" (August 2, 2010). The presence of newer members was not always understood,

and their role and purpose in the organization was not clear or provided to the members, other than through a brief introduction.

Neglecting to make members aware of the new individuals created several issues. First, it essentially isolated the new individual from the organization and left them without the benefit of member support, or the ability to engage in some understanding of the culture or identity of the organization. Second, it contributed to a type of fragmentation within the organization. And third, it reinforced the deficiencies that members were experiencing with communication between leaders and the membership of the organization.

The isolation created due to size impacted the members' ability to establish connections and to develop interpersonal relationships. Ohlen and Segesten (1998) noted that professional identity as a self-concept emerges and is shaped as a function of the personal and interpersonal relationships developed during professional identity formation. Even though the members are virtually connected to many members through e-mail and other electronic communications, a member being alone and having the feeling that they are a member of an organization of one promotes a sense of distance from the organization as a whole. That lone member is effectively distanced from the culture, the cultural influences, and the organization's identity. The organization in this case study isolated several members. This was not by design but as a result of the members' physical placement when they were hired during the expansion of the organization. The members were separated from the organization, placed alone in communities and left without a sense of affiliation or connection with the organization. The members' perceptions indicated that the organization did not exist in the same sense

for the member as it did for those who were connected to larger cohorts, and that their connections to the organization were limited or shallow, and they were in essence, alone.

The longevity of some members with the organization can explain the perception of size and professional isolation issues. Members did raise comparisons of current organizational context with the earlier organizational context as noted by one long-standing member, Participant 28:

Culture wise ... the culture has changed from ... initially when you start and it's a small little organization ... and it's more of a family kind of a group ... then, the culture has changed from that to, it's still got a family feel to it but it's not as tightly knit as it was at one point in time ... I do think that it has shifted the culture a bit. And in some ways, it's good, in other ways, it may be a little bit of a topsy turvey ... because in some ways you want to get back to that real family.

(March 9, 2011)

Sharing in the early organization was constituted as a function of the members' informal communication within the old boys club referenced by Participant 2. Exploration was a large part of their culture and the members easily distributed the new knowledge within the family like assemblage of individuals.

Langan-Fox and Tan (1997) referred to a bus metaphor to show the levels of cultural buy-in and resistance to change by organizational members, and there were three levels: (i) those who are on the bus, (ii) those who have one foot on the bus, and (iii) those who are not on the bus. Langan-Fox and Tan (1997) noted that all three cultures exist in any cultural transition. The desire to maintain the early organizational culture was perceived by members to be impeded by the growth of the organization. The inability of

the members to accept this growth and change, to waver in getting on the bus, explains the members' perception of issues existing within the organization.

It was evident in this organization that there were varying levels of cultural buy-in with newer members accepting the current culture as the norm. However, there was reluctance by legacy members to buy into the change that was occurring and that some of those members were not willing to get on the bus. The reluctance can be attributed to the legacy members' knowledge and experience of what existed culturally as compared to what now existed. Many were not satisfied with how the current leaders led the organization, how decision making and communication was handled, and were less enthused about how professional learning was being imposed. In the early years of the organization legacy members were reliant on the excitement of discoveries by their peers and the informal sharing and learning that occurred with this innovation. The more recent organization began to rely more on formal professional learning, and these were inherently more structured and planned. As well, the direction and content of these sessions was now being determined by others with lessened member input. The members were consulted but were not as integrated into the planning and delivery as they had been in past years.

Professional identity, as King and Ross (2013) noted, is constructed through professional interactions and the relationships that develop between people. The department structure was somewhat insular as it separated the organization's members into curriculum distinct, various sized groups of individuals. Members were now perceived as being isolated from the group as a whole. The channels of communication

were directed upward through the department structure. This, as suggested by Participant 30, limited the interaction and created a perceived level of disconnect:

I think sometimes there's a disconnect between [departments] ... I think there's a little bit of a disconnect there sometimes and I guess it stems from the fact that everyone considers their subject area [department] to be ... the most important ...

I don't think everyone's always pulling in the same direction. (March 15, 2011)

Furthermore, the creation of the department structure was perceived as creating a sense of competition between organizational members.

The competition between departments can be explained as a result of in-group favoritism. In-groups, those who had a common curriculum and were assigned together in a common department would naturally compete for the resources that best supported their group. The early years of the organization didn't witness this type of competition as the organization was the group. Resource allocations were distributed on an equal basis.

However, as the organization grew, the need for putting like-minded individuals together created cohorts with similar wants and needs, and also enabled strength in the numbers.

The larger groups would naturally favour the advancement of their own department's agenda, not necessarily at all costs or to the detriment of others, but the members would

be vocal in advancing their issues and concerns to the leaders, as well as vocally

soliciting for resources for their members. In effect, the department became an

organization within an organization. It can also be said that a department centric culture

formed as did a department specific identity. Access to professional development

resources was seen to be inequitably distributed and that certain departments, generally

those with higher numbers of members, tended to receive opportunities and treatment that

other departments did not receive. Even though the intent in the creation of the departments was to raise the status of all voices to an equal level, the end result was that some, due to sheer size, emerged as a stronger entity.

The department format didn't work for all members, as was indicated in some of the perceptions shown in Table 4.31. There were dissenting views among members about the ability of the department structure to serve the needs of some members, and suggestions that placing members in these groups further fragmented the organization. In some cases the curriculum groupings did not have multiples of members, and a catch department was created for these disparate groups of individuals. Even though there were common issues relative to pedagogy, assessment, and other policy items, members noted that there was little in common between the curriculum areas and this caused problems. Members noted that the curriculum concerns for one group were not significant for others, leading to a level of tension because members felt that their issues were not being represented in the same manner as the larger department groupings.

Formal leaders did suggest that the department structure actually functioned to increase, rather than decrease, communication and collaboration, in the organization. However, the leaders' sense of department effectiveness was tempered by their assumption that because they were communicating with all department leaders, that all voices in that department were being heard. This was an assumption of fallacy because as members indicated, their concerns were not always being put forward and in some cases, and because of the lack of commonalities between the department members, the members felt little affiliation with the department.

The perceptions of the organizational members suggested that organizational size influenced the changing role that they played in the organization, emphasizing that the earlier organizational leaders and organizational forms had fostered the input and influence of the members in shaping the organization. This role influence had diminished over the years as the organization grew and structure and bureaucracy had increased. Epstein (1978) suggested that professional identity was the “process by which the person seeks to integrate his (sic) various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences into a coherent image of self” (p. 101). Decreasing role responsibility influenced some of the members’ perceptions of professional identity.

However, the organization was destined to change and to grow due to the increased demand for its services. Along with that growth emerged an additional pressure of differentiated roles for the organization. The innovation that was fostered by the early members began to be bred out into the education system as a whole, contributing to the creation of new role positions within the organization. The increase in demand for programming increased the demand for new course offerings, new teachers, and new resource development. These, too, spawned the creation of additional roles within the organization. The resistance to change exhibited by some of the members was symptomatic of looking back to an era gone by, and refusing to look forward to the potential and future opportunities presented with the organizational growth and expansion.

**Recommendation 8a:** Leader/leadership should ensure that the mentorships are established between existing organizational members and the new members to allow for professional interaction, and to establish the professional connections

that contribute to newer members understanding of the culture and organizational identity of the organization.

**Recommendation 8b:** Leader/leadership should work with organizational members to establish processes and structures that enable connections and communication between internal department structures, and work with organizational members to establish similar processes and structures that enable connections and communication between organizational members and external department members.

**Recommendation 8c:** Leaders/leadership should work with the organizational members to create formal processes by which professional learning, innovation opportunities, and resources are open to all organizational members and opportunities to access are based on member and other identified needs.

*(x) Regionalism and professional isolation*

The findings for research question three suggested that the development of regional cohorts and the perceived sense of professional isolation had significance to the creation of over-all organizational professional identity. Compartmentalization was perceived by some of the members to have positively impacted the organization by extending the organization's reach into a number of regions and providing a connection between the organization and those regions that might not otherwise exist. Some members also noted that having regional groupings was positive because it appeared to strengthen the professional and personal bonds and the culture within that region.

Conversely, compartmentalization was perceived by other members to disadvantage those who did not work in one of the larger cohorts by diminishing the opportunities for professional growth and interaction afforded to those members. The sense of professional and personal distance felt by non-regional members was noted by Participant 23 who said:

In terms of the social interaction and how you would communicate with a co-worker during the day how you could just drop into their office and see what they're doing or just make a quick joke or at recess with someone or at lunch with someone, or ask for a ride home or something like that. It seems so simple, but these things, I don't get to do. (Participant 23, March 14, 2011)

Professional identity, as Coldron and Smith (1999) noted, is created through the interactions of individuals with other individuals in the workplace, and through the knowledge of the professional relation to others in the social space of the organization. This is not the sole means of establishing professional identity but comparison of one's professional self; professional socialization (Roberts, 2000) with others contributes to an understanding of how the profession works.

The members' perceptions of being excluded from making professional connections due to their geographical location were valid observations. The organizational growth had contributed to the creation of several large regional cohorts but there were still isolated pockets where individual members worked alone, or regions where two or three members worked together. The larger regional offices afforded those members the opportunity to connect on a daily basis with their peers, and to avail of informal professional learning that was a product of conversations with members who

taught in similar curriculum areas. Proximity, although not a guarantee of establishing a professional identity, certainly contributed to increasing the opportunity for professional interaction. Single members were forced to rely on the periodic formal meetings, or on virtual communication tools to connect to the outside world. Participant 8 noted that the virtual tools served a purpose and could minimize the issue of distance, but that physical separation was still a disadvantage. As he said, “The fact of the matter is it’s a lot easier to have a chit chat with somebody over a water cooler than it is over an email ... I do find that I feel a little disconnect from the staff members” (January 10, 2011). That sense of disconnect contributed to an ability to interact professionally with the members, and impacted their professional identity development. The members perceived isolation as a cultural referent, and an indicator of organizational identity.

The metaphor of social capital and the members’ ability to access social capital is relevant to the discussion of professional identity development. Social capital (Bourdieu, 1985) is broadly defined as an asset that develops as a result of an individual’s ability to form relationships or to create networks of connections (Leana & Van Buren III, 1999). Members noted perceptions of: (a) losing connections and closeness between organizational members, (b) of having limited interaction, connection with others, and feeling a disconnect, (c) decreased role responsibility that resulted in feelings of being less connected to the organization, and (d) feelings of isolation from the organization and its members. Common to these perceptions is the acquisition or potential to acquire social capital.

Creating the knowledge store of social capital implies the ability to create the professional and personal connections to do so. Chiu, Hsu, and Wang (2006) suggest that

social capital develops along three specific dimensions: (i) structural, (ii) relational, and (iii) cognitive where “the structural dimension ... is manifested as social interaction ties, the relational ... is manifested as trust, norms of reciprocity and identification, and the cognitive ... is manifested as shared vision and shared language” (p. 1873). Leaders are implicated in establishing the conditions necessary for developing the dimensions of social capital.

Additionally, having leaders/leadership that actively promote and foster a culture of trust and promoting a shared vision through collaboration and communication with the organization’s members, can set the cultural conditions where members feel they are able to access and build the professional relationship and connections; the cultural capital, necessary for their professional identity. These conditions influence professional identity development, but also impact member awareness of the culture which sets the conditions for organizational identity formation.

**Recommendation 9a:** Leaders/leadership should ensure that those members who are geographically isolated, or those members who are not located in larger regional cohorts, are afforded opportunities for professional interaction, either face-to-face or virtual, to foster professional connections and to help establish a stronger organizational connection.

**Recommendation 9b:** Leaders/leadership should engage in an ongoing professional learning process to actively understand their individual leadership style and the potential implications of that style in influencing the organizational members’ abilities to establish professional identity.

The changes to organizational size, structure, and bureaucracy, and the perceived professional isolation that occurred as a result of perceived exclusion from the organization, influenced organizational identity formation. As previously noted, the professional identity of an organizational member is an individual role and social role that the member assumes. The professional identity of the members would be seen to characterize the organization's identity. Members' perceptions of their professional identity, and their ability to establish a professional identity, would be seen to influence the organizational identity formation.

### **Summary**

The findings of this case study, gained through analyzing the perceptions of the members of the organization, revealed much about the organization, its culture and identity. Several lessons were learned from this study. First, leadership style and behavior influenced the way that the organizational members perceived the organization. Leaders influenced the members' perceptions of confidence and trust placed in them as leaders, and in particular, the level of influence that their behaviors and leadership style had on the female perceptions of organizational culture and identity. Leaders were perceived as impacting the degree of innovation occurring in the organization. The level of leader communication influenced members' perceptions of fairness and equity, and impacted members' feelings of connection to the organization. Leaders and leadership style were perceived to influence the level of engagement experienced by the members of the organization.

A second set of lessons gathered from the findings was that the existence of informal leadership in the current organization was due in part because of the experiences

of legacy organizational members who carried their cultural assumptions forward over the life of the organization. The findings also indicated that informal leadership contact with, and support of the organization's members played a role in substituting for formal leader contact where that formal leader connection was not perceived to be available to the members of the organization. And, the ability of the members to act in an informal leadership capacity was perceived as influencing the organization's culture and identity.

Last, the findings of this study showed that the change in organizational size and bureaucracy established a sense of separation and distance between the members of the organization, influenced the sense of professional connection between the members and the organization, and impacted the willingness of the members to buy in to the organization's culture. The increase in organizational size had also introduced a level of regionalism due to the establishment of regional cohorts of organizational members. The compartmentalization of the organization was perceived to limit the ability of organizational members to access professional social capital, caused professional isolation, and impacted the members' perceptions of organizational culture and identity.

Several conclusions can be drawn based on the findings of this case study. These will be presented in the next chapter along with some recommendations for future research arising from this study.

## **CHAPTER 6: SOME NECESSARY CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY, THIS RESEARCHER, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The purpose of this descriptive single case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) was to gain a deeper and more rigorously evidenced understanding of how organizational members' *perceptions of professional identity and organizational leadership* might *impact* the formation of *organizational identity* in a virtual education organization. It was hoped for, by this researcher, that an examination of, and subsequent understanding of, organizational members' perceptions of leaders, both formal and informal, and their leadership style might provide awareness into whether leaders and leadership play an impactful role in how organizational identity formation occurs. Additionally, it was expected, again by this researcher, that an examination and understanding of the organizational members' perceptions of professional identity, and their ability to develop professional identity, might also provide to the research literature an awareness of whether individual identity characteristics, and professional identity formation played a role in overall organizational identity formation. What follows are some research evidence-based conclusions and some recommendations for future research that extend from this case study.

### **Conclusions Drawn from this Case Study**

Several immediate learnings have emerged as a result of completing this research case study. The most obvious are those that have developed as a result of the analysis of hundreds and hundreds of pages of data in the pursuit of responding to the three research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. These research learnings including the

experience and knowledge that I have gained as a researcher from undertaking the research process, and the experience and the knowledge that I have gained, reflexively, about myself as a researcher and, finally, what I have come to understand about my organization and myself as an organizational member are noteworthy. These are the learnings I will be unwrapping in the following sections.

*What has been learned from posing the three research questions?*

The drive to undertake this research project was borne out of a compelling desire by this researcher to gain a deeper, more encompassing understanding of what was happening in an educational virtual organization; or, more specifically, what was happening in an organization to which I had been a member from its initial start. Over the years, I developed a sense of intrigue as I observed what was happening around me on a day-to-day basis. What had initially captured my attention and prompted the act of engaging in this study as a doctoral graduate student was my amazement at how a group of individuals distributed across a vast geography could come periodically together as an organization and behave as a cohesive group. Seemingly, this diverse and geographically separated membership, when brought together, somehow, showed evidence of a rudimentary understanding of who they – who we – were as an educational organization distributing virtual learning. As time progressed based on these observations of life of this specific organization, the questions that I was mulling over came to include a desire to understand how leaders and leadership were involved in that membership demonstrated identity formation. Additionally, as the organization expanded and grew, it became clear that there were other factors at play here in terms of identity formation such as professional identity that was coming to bear. It was this thought and reflection over

the years that tempted me to take on the role of researcher. The research at hand for me then guided and was the impetus for the design of the three research questions that were developed. This awareness and curiosity was the driving force in enticing me to engage in this research project.

The question, then, as this study continues, becomes ‘what was learned?’ Several pragmatic outcomes and understandings are evident from the findings of my research, as well as coming from actually doing this study. These are:

- First, from the findings I learned that leadership is highly dependent upon followership and that leadership does not exist without the understandings of those who choose to follow. Leadership, in and of itself, does not exist without a second individual to witness and observe what those who lead do. Leadership is highly contextualized and the myriad of influences are evident in the observing members’ organizational and personal lives that, in turn, deeply influence the organizational and professional identity formation and sustainability contexts. The members of this organization, or followers, saw leadership as being exhibited in a number of complex, highly contextualized and often contradictory manners. Those members who had been with the organization for many years, and who had the knowledge of the early organizational culture, had contrasting views from more recent members of what leaders and leadership in the current organization looked like. I also learned that followership, in this case, was gender based, and that gender had implications for how the female members perceived male leaders, and how they perceived their own leader capabilities – real and potential – in the organization.

- Second, I found that the members' perceptions of professional identity, organizational culture, and organizational identity reside in an amalgam of referents that are difficult to isolate as a function of a single impactful influence such as organizational leaders/leadership. Trying to tease out an organizational member's understanding of leaders and leadership invites the complexity of trying to interpret all of the influences that subsequently influence that member's understanding. Organizations and organizational life are complex, and the experiences of those who are members of the organization reflect that complexity as a function of location, and the relationships that have been built, as well as the amount of time served as an organizational member, and the perceptions of roles and responsibilities, and a host of other intricately embedded factors. The complexity of the organization was reflected in the voices of the individuals as they divulged their own understandings of culture and identity. That individual experience further taught me that the understanding of organizational identity is distinctly individual as well as that no two members see the organization in the same light and, therefore, organizational identity as a function of members' perceptions is multifaceted.
- Third, I found that that organization leadership is not simply defined by the formal appointment of someone as "leader". Leadership comes in many forms and arises as a result of a diverse set of organizational situations and contexts and the leader's qualities. Leadership goes much farther than branding a person with a title and conveying a style of leadership on that person. Leadership also ebbs and flows and it is contingent upon the willingness of members, for whatever

reason, to acknowledge an individual as leader. Members look to those whom they trust and perceive confidence in for leadership. Informal leadership, in this organization, was as deeply embedded in membership perceptions, and was as essential to the organization's overall identity as was the formal leadership. The findings of this study suggested that the informal leaders might well be as critical a component as the formal leaders in influencing the members' perceptions of organizational culture, and in influencing organizational identity formation.

- Fourth, I found that organizational change as witnessed in change in organizational size and complexity has varying implications for the organizational members. One critical impact of change for the members of the organization in this study was that fragmentation, compartmentalization, and regionalism negatively impacted the members' abilities to develop professional identities, and influenced their perceptions of the organization's culture and influenced the organizational identity formation. The members perceived that increasing organizational size, increasing bureaucratic structures, and issues associated with compartmentalization and regionalism impacted their abilities to create professional connections, and that size, structure and regionalism introduced a sense of professional isolation.
- Last, the overarching problem posed in this research study was to try to understand how organizational identity formation occurred. The research questions were designed to gain an understanding of *who* the members perceived they were as an organization, and to try to define the organization's identity based on that understanding. However, implicit in the understanding and the

answering of *who* was the recognition and understanding by the members of *why* they existed to begin with, which was, for all intents and purposes, to elaborate the purpose of the organization. All other questions flowed from the responses to the question of organizational *why*. The members deciding who they are as an organization can only be entertained when they have a firm understanding of why the organization exists as an entity. The culture, processes, and very core of the organization are dictated by answering that question of why the organization exists in the first place and why does it need to continue to exist. The members past history, their experiences with the leaders, their perceptions of their capacity as leaders and decision makers, the various types of isolation, and where they were located all contributed to the members ability to answer the question of why. So, a finding that is critical to organizations such as this virtual education organization is that they *must* engage in dialog and conversation, and that they must have the organization wide conversations that are necessary to draw out the understanding required to elaborate the “why” of their existence. That understanding is critical in order to evolve forward and be a productive, responsive and sustainable organization. Understanding where you come from, and understanding the complexities of the now and knowing where you are, are all integral to being able to look forward as an organization, and to understanding first, where we are headed, and second, who we are as an organization, and ultimately why we exist as a sustainable organization.

*What has been learned from doing the research?*

I decided to use a case study methodology grounded in the interpretive qualitative paradigm to conduct this research study. The use of case study provided a tool that was designed to delve into and investigate a highly contextualized, complex issue in a real life situation. However, simply choosing a research design did not guarantee that the data would flow freely; or, that analysis would follow a prescribed route governed by the methodology, and that the interpretive understanding would magically appear. An important lesson that I learned in using a case study approach is that research is a messy business, and that the researcher must be willing to invest heavily. The research methodology gives the prescribed plan of attack, but the actual battles are won through persistence, elbow grease, and a great deal of time poring over and digesting what was said by the study's participants, and then working diligently to interpret and report what was said.

Most importantly, the use of case study has taught me, the researcher, much about the idea of truth and absolutes. The underlying basis of interpretive case study research is that the researcher is looking to understand and interpret what is happening in a study situation. The understanding is derived from the gathering of data, the analysis of that data, and interpretation of data, which lives mostly in the thoughts and perceptions of others. My major researcher realization was that, first and foremost, there is no one single truth. All the participants had opinions that were valid and relevant to his or her lived experience contexts. The key to engaging in attempting to do rigorous research is to seek out the reasonable-ness of each person's opinions or perceptions and to cross reference one person's perceptions as a response to a common question with other

participant responses and the context itself and then to faithfully interpret and report what was represented as verifiable and evidentiary data.

*What has been learned about myself?*

As I indicated above, engaging in research, as a graduate student, in a place where one works, is a messy business! Such study requires a personal grit and tenacity to stay with the methodological processes, especially when faced with a mountain of data that seems never ending, or the writing edits and re-edits of edits that appear to be endless, or when faced with the other endless chores that defines being a student and a researcher. However, taking the researcher role made me realize that as a person, I do have the tenacity to stay the course, and that I have grown enormously as an individual over the life of this research study. Conducting this research study also taught me something about myself as an organizational member. It taught me that I have a deep and abiding respect for those who work in the organization, for the leaders and the followers, for the rich history, and for the promising future. Most importantly doing this research has taught me that I am committed to this organization, that I take the successes and failures personally. In addition, that my personal commitment is to insure that I can and will do whatever possible to assist in moving this organization forward, in whatever capacity that I am charged to hold. Be that as a researcher, as a possible leader, or simply as an engaged organizational member.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This researcher recommends that based on the findings of this study and the study's limitations that further research should be carried out to gain a more complete

understanding of organizational identity formation in virtual organizations – especially those focused on education. The following studies should be considered:

1. This study did not recruit nor include the input of stakeholders of the organization that were not directly employed by the organization. The researcher chose to focus instead on the organizational identity perceptions and purposely excluded data that might elaborate three related topics that might influence identity formation: organizational image, reputation, or individual identification. Gaining the voices of other stakeholders might provide a richer understanding of factors influencing organizational identity formation.
2. This study did not include the perceptions of legacy leadership on organizational identity formation. Future study that includes those voices might present a better understanding of how organizational identity formation is influenced by those who are tasked with the creation of the foundations of the organization.
3. This study did not exhaustively examine the issue of gender. Gender issues arose as a side issue and were included in discussion but not intensively investigated. Future study might examine the role that gender has on organizational identity formation.
4. This study chose an interpretive sociological methodological framework. It is conceivable that examining organizational identity formation in a virtual education organization through other philosophical lenses may yield a deeper understanding of the construct.

5. The researcher chose single case study design to implement this research.

Using a multiple case comparison may yield additional information on organizational identity formation.

### **Researcher Reflections**

My purpose in this study was to gain an understanding of the influence of organizational members' perceptions of formal leadership and informal leadership on organizational identity formation, and for me to seek understanding of how perceptions of professional identity and professional identity formation impacted organizational identity formation. My hope is that the findings and conclusions may provide pause for thought for those who work in this or other such organizations, to cause the members of such organizations to reflect on the organization and its workings, and to stimulate organizational members and leaders to create a better understanding of their organization's identity. The deeper that I probed into the organizational life through the perceptions of those who function in the organization the greater my awareness of the intricacy that surrounded (i) organizational life, and (ii) organizational identity formation. It was through the generosity of the organizational members of the organization of this study in willingly and openly providing their thoughts and perceptions that this researcher could glean some level of understanding. It is my hope that this study in some way contributes to a further opening of the door to conversations within and across organizations that results in the unwrapping and deepened understanding of the incredible complexity of organizational identity.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, K., Hean, S., Sturgis, P., & MacLeod-Clarke, J. (2006). Investigating the factors influencing professional identity of first-year health and social care students. *Learning in Health and Social Care*, 5(2), 55–68.
- Aguilar, J. P., & Sen, S. (2009). Comparing conceptualizations of social capital. *Journal of Community Practice*, 17(1-2), 424-443.
- Ahuja, M. K., & Carley, K. M. (1999). Network structure in virtual organizations. *Organizational Science*, 10(6), 741-757.
- Albert, S., Ashforth, B. E., & Dutton, J. E. (2000). Organizational identity and identification: Charting new waters and building new bridges. *The Academy of Management Review*, 25, 13-17.
- Albert, S., & Whetten, D. A. (1985). Organizational identity. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 7, 263-295.
- Albert, S., & Whetten, D. A. (2004). Organizational identity. In M. J. Hatch & M. Schultz (Eds.), *Organizational identity: A reader* (pp. 89-106). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Alvesson, M. (2011). *Interpreting interviews*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Alvesson, M., & Empson, L. (2008). The construction of organizational identity: Comparative case studies of consulting firms. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, (24)1, 1-16.
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 629-644.

- Amabile, T. M., Schatzel, E. A., Moneta, G. B., & Kramer, S. J. (2004). Leader behaviors and the work environment for creativity: Perceived leader support. *The Leadership Quarterly, 15*(2004), 5-32.
- Arnold, S. J., & Fischer, E. (1994). Hermeneutics and consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 21*(1), 55-70.
- Arregle, J. L., Hitt, M. A., Sirmon, D. G., & Very, P. (2007). The development of organizational social capital: Attributes of family firms. *Journal of Management Studies, 44*(1), 7395.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *The Academy of Management Review, 14*(1), 20-39.
- Ashforth, B. E., Rogers, K. M., & Corley, K. G. (2011). Identity in organizations: Exploring cross-level dynamics. *Organization Science, 22*(5), 1144-1156.
- Au, Y., & Marks, A. (2012). Virtual teams are literally and metaphorically invisible: Forging identity in culturally diverse virtual teams. *Employee relations, 34*(3), 271-287.
- Bailey, D. M. (1997). *Research for the health professional: A practical guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company.
- Balser, D. B., & Carmin, J. (2009). Leadership succession and the emergence of an organizational identity threat. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 22*(2), 185-201.
- Barbulescu, R., & Weks, J. (2007). Why do managers talk about identity? In L. Lerpold, D. Ravasi, J. van Rekom, & G. Soenen (Eds.), *Organizational identity in practice* (35-49). London: Routledge.

- Barbuto, J. E., & Cummins-Brown, L. (2007). *Full range leadership*. Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press – Lincoln Extension.
- Barry, Christine A. (1998). Choosing qualitative data analysis software: Atlas/ti and Nudist compared. *Sociological Research Online*, 3(3). retrieved September 10, 2008, from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/3/4.html>.
- Bartel, C. A., Wrzesniewski, A., & Wiesenfeld, B. M. (2012). Knowing where you stand: Physical isolation, perceived respect, and organizational identification among virtual employees. *Organization Science*, 23(3), 743-757.
- Bass, B. M. (1999). Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 8(1), 9-32. DOI:
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). Transformational leadership and organizational culture. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 17(3), 541-554.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 181-217.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2004), 107-128.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.

- Bergiel, B. L., Bergiel, E. B., & Balsmeier, P. W. (2008). Nature of virtual teams : A summary of their advantages and disadvantages. *Management Research News, 31*(2), 99-110.
- Bettis, P. J., Mills, M., Williams, J. M., & Nolan, R. (2005). Faculty in a liminal landscape: A case study of a college reorganization. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, 11*(3), 47-61).
- Bligh, M. C., Pearce, C. L., & Kohles, J. C. (2006). The importance of self- and shared leadership in team based knowledge work: A meso-level model of leadership dynamics. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 21*(4), 296-318.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Boeije, H. (2002). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality and Quantity, 36*(4), 391-409.
- Bouchikhi, H., Fiol, C. M., Gioia, D., Golden-Biddle, K., Hatch, M. J., Rao, H., Rindova, V., Schultz, M., Fombrum, C. J., Kimberly, J. R., & Thomas, J. B. (1998). The identity of organizations. In D. A. Whetten & P. C. Godfrey (Eds.), *Identity in organizations: Building theory through conversations* (pp. 33-82). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). Forms of capital. In J. C. Richards (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.

- Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1), 83-93.
- Brown, M.E., & Gioia, D.A. (2002). Making things click: Distributive leadership in an online division of an offline organization. *Leadership Quarterly*, 13(4): 397–420.
- Burke, W. W. (2002). *Organizational change: Theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Burrell, G, & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis*. Gateshead: Athanaeum Press Ltd.
- Cameron, K. S., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). *Diagnosing and changing organizational culture*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman.
- Campbell, D.T., & Stanley, J.C. (1966). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Skokie, IL: Rand McNally.
- Cascio, W. F. (2000). Managing a virtual workplace. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 14(3), 81-90.
- Cavaye, A. L. M., (1996). Case study research: A multi-faceted research approach for IS. *Journal of Info Systems*, 6(3), 227-242.
- Chemers, M. M. (2007). Leadership effectiveness: Functional, constructivist and empirical perspectives. In D. Van Knippenberg and M. A. Hogg (Eds.). *Leadership and power: Identity processes in groups and organizations* (pp. 5-17). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Chiu, C. M., Hsu, M. H., & Wang, E. T. G. (2006). Understanding knowledge sharing in virtual communities: An integration of social capital and social cognitive theories. *Decision Support Systems*, 42(), 1872-1888.
- Clark, S. M., Gioia, D. A., Ketchen, D. J., & Thomas, J. B. (2010). Transitional identity as a facilitator of organizational identity change during a merger. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(2010), 397-438.
- Clegg, S. R., Rhodes, C., & Kornberger, M. (2006). Desperately seeking legitimacy: Organizational identity and emerging industries. *Organizational Studies*, 28(4), 495-513.
- Close, P., & Raynor, A. (2010). Five literatures of organization: Putting the context back into educational leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 30(3), 209-224.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in community. In the series, *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 249-305. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education (5<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Coldron, J. and Smith R. (1999). Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 31(6), 711-726.
- Conger, J. A. (1999). Charismatic and transformational leadership in organizations: An insider's perspective on these developing streams of research. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 145-179.
- Conger, J. A., Kanungo, R. N., & Menon, S. T. (2000). Charismatic leadership and follower effects. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21(2000), 747-767. DOI:

- Conrad, C. F. (1978). A grounded theory of academic change. *Sociology of Education*, 51(April), 101-112.
- Corley, K. G., Harquail, C. V., Pratt, M. G., Glynn, M. A., Fiol, M. & Hatch, M. J. (2006). Guiding organizational identity through aged adolescence. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 15(2): 85-99.
- Cornelissen, J. P. (2002). On the 'Organizational Identity' metaphor. *British Journal of Management*, 13(3), 259-268.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design : Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Curry, B. K. (2002). The influence of the leader persona on organizational identity. *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, 8(4), 33-42.
- Dani, S., Burns, N., Backhouse, C., Kochhar, A. (2006). The implications of organizational culture and trust in the working of virtual teams. *Proceedings of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers -- Part B -- Engineering Manufacture*, 220(6), 951-960.
- Denzin, N. (1988). *The research act (rev. ed.)*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. K. (1994). *The Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Dhalla, R. (2007). The construction of organizational identity: Key contributing external and intra-organizational factors. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(4), 245-260.
- Dionne, S. D., Yammarino, F. J., Atwater, L. E., & Spangler, W. D. (2004). Transformational leadership and team performance. *Journal of Organizational Change*, 17(2), 177-193.
- Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2001). The role of trust in organizational settings. *Organizational Science*, 12(4), 450-467.
- Dutton, J. E., & Dukerich, J. M. (2004). Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation. In M. J. Hatch and M. Schultz (Eds.), *Organizational identity: A reader (pp. 183-222)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dutton, J. E., & Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(2), 239-263.
- Dye, J. F., Schatz, I. M., Rosenberg, B. A., & Coleman, S. T. (2000). Constant comparison method: A kaleidoscope of data. *The Qualitative Report*, 4(1/2).
- Epstein, A. (1978). *Ethos and identity*. London: Tavistock.
- Firestone, W. A., & Martinez, M. C. (2007). Districts, teacher leaders, and distributed leadership: Changing instructional practice. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 6(1), 3-35.
- Fjermestad, J., & Hiltz, S. R. (2000). Group support systems: A descriptive evaluation of case and field studies. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 17(3), 113-157.

- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Foreman, P., & Whetten, D. A. (2002). Members' identification with multiple-identity organizations. *Organizational Science*, 13(6), 618-635.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gerring, J. (2004). What is a case study and what is it good for? *American Political Science Review*, 98(2), 341-354.
- Gioia, D. (1998). From individual to organizational identity. In D. A. Whetten & P. C. Godfrey (Eds.), *Identity in organizations: Building theory through conversations* (pp. 17-31). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Gioia, D. A., Price, K. N., Hamilton, A. L., & Thomas, J. B. (2010). Forging an identity: An insider-outsider study of processes involved in the formation of organizational identity. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(1), 1-46.
- Gioia, D. A., Schultz, M., & Corley, K. G. (2000). Organizational identity, image, and adaptive instability. *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 63-81.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1965). Discovery of substantive theory: A basic strategy underlying qualitative research. *American behavioral Scientist*, 8(5), 5-12.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researches: An introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc.
- Grabowski, M., & Roberts, K. H. (1999). Risk mitigation in virtual organizations. *Organization Science*, 10(6), 704-721.

- Gronn, P. (2002). Distributed leadership. In K. Leithwood, P. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp.653-696). Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Hatch, M. J. (1997). *Organizational theory: Modern, symbolic, and postmodern perspectives*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (1997). Relations between organizational culture, identity and image. *European Journal of Marketing*, 31(5/6), 356-365.
- Hatch, M., & Schultz, M. (2002). The dynamics of organizational identity. *Human Relations*, 55(8), 989-1018.
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2004). The dynamics of organizational identity. In M. J. Hatch & M. Schultz (Eds.), *Organizational identity: A reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. London: Routledge.
- Helliwell, J. (2001). Social capital, the economy and well being. In *The Review of Economic Performance and Social Progress, the longest decade: Canada in the 1990's I*(2001), 43-60.
- Hendry, L. B. (1975). Survival in a marginal role: The professional identity of the physical education teacher. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 26(4), 465-476.
- Hertz, R. (1997). Introduction: Reflexivity and voice. In R. Hertz (Ed.), *Reflexivity and voice* (pp. v11-xviii). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Hogg, M. A., & Abrams, D. (1988). *Social identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hogg, M. A., & Terry, D. J. (2000). Social identity and self-categorization processes in organizational contexts. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 121-140.
- Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), 255-269.
- Holtz, B. C., & Harold, C. M. (2008). When your boss says no!: The effects of leadership style and trust on employee reactions to managerial explanations. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 81(2008), 777-802.
- Jägers, H., Jansen, W., & Steenbakkens, W. (1998). Characteristics of virtual organizations. In P. Sieber & J. Griese (Eds.), *Proceedings of the VoNet Workshop: Organizational virtualness* (pp. 65-76). Bern, Switzerland: Stämpfli AG.
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., & Leidner, D. E. (1999). Communication and trust in global virtual teams. *Organization Science*, 10(6), 791-815.
- Joshi, A., Lazarova, M. B., & Liao, H. (2009). Getting everyone on board : The role of inspirational leadership in geographically dispersed teams. *Organization Science*, 20(1), 240-252.
- Kahai, S. S., Carroll, E., & Jestice, R. (2007). Team collaboration in virtual worlds. *The Database for Advances in Information Systems*, 38(4), 61-68.
- Kane-urrabazo, C. (2006). Management's role in shaping organizational culture. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 14(3), 188-194.

- Kanter, R. M. (2005). How leaders gain (and lose) confidence. *Leader to Leader Journal*, 35(Winter 2005), 21-27. Available online:  
<http://www.hesselbeininstitute.org/knowledgecenter/journal.aspx?ArticleID=44>.
- Kelliher, F. (2005). Interpretivism and the pursuit of research legitimization: An integrated approach to single case design. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methodology*, 3(2), 123-132.
- Kendall, J. (1999). Axial coding and the grounded theory controversy. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 21(6), 743-757.
- King, N., & Ross, A. (2004). Professional Identities and Inter-professional Relations. *Social Work in Health Care*, 38(2), 51-72.
- Kirkman, B. L., Rosen, B., Gibson, C. B., Tesluk, P. E., & McPherson, S. O. 2002. Five challenges to virtual team success: Lessons from Sabre, Inc. *Academy of Management Executive*, 16(3): 67-79.
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.
- Kurland, N. B., & Egan, T. D. (1999). Telecommuting: Justice and control in the virtual organization. *Organizational Science*, 10(4), 500-513.
- Langan-fox, J., & Tan, P. (1997). Images of a culture in transition: Personal constructs of organizational stability and change. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 70(3), 273-293.
- Leana, C. R., & Van Buren, H. J., III. (1999). Organizational social capital and employment practices. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 538-555.

- Lee, A. S. (1991). Integrating positivist and interpretive approaches to organizational research. *Organizational Science*, 2(4), 342-365.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2001). *Practical research: Planning and design*. (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Lerpold, L., Ravasi, D., van Rekom, & Soenen, G. (2007). Identity construction. In L. Lerpold, D. Ravasi, J. van Rekom, & G. Soenen. (Eds.) *Organizational identity in practice* (pp. 79-86). London: Routledge.
- Li, J., D'Souza, D., & Du, Y. (2011). Exploring the contribution of virtual worlds to learning in organizations. *Human Resource Development Review*, 10(3), 264-285.
- Lipnack, J., & Stamps, J. (2000). *Virtual teams: People working across boundaries with technology*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Macbeath, J. (2005). Leadership as distributed: A matter of practice. *School Leadership and Management*, 25(4), 349-366.
- Maitlis, S. (2005). The social processes of sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(1), 21-49.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Martin, J. (2002). *Organizational culture*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? *Educational Researcher*, 17(2), 13-17.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2002). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. In A. M. Huberman & M. B. Miles (Eds.), *The qualitative researcher's companion: Classic and contemporary readings* (pp. 37-64). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Mcgowen, K. R., & Hart, L. E. (1990). Still different after all these years: Gender differences in professional identity formation. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 21*(2), 118-123.
- Mcintyre, H. H., & Foti, R. J. (2013). The impact of shared leadership on teamwork mental models and performance in self-directed teams. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, 16*(1), 46-57.
- McKnight, D. H., Choudhury, V., & Kacmar, C. (2002). Developing and validating trust measures for e-commerce: An integrative typology. *Information Systems Research, 13*(3), 334-359.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from *case study research in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merriman, K. K., Schmidt, S. M., & Dunlap-Hinkler, D. (2007). Profiling virtual employees: The impact of managing virtually. *Journal of leadership and Organizational Studies, 14*(1), 6-15.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Drawing valid meaning from qualitative data: Toward a shared craft. *Educational Researcher, 13*(5), 20-30.
- Miller, T., & Boulton, M. (2007). Changing constructions of informed consent: Qualitative research and complex social worlds. *Social Science and Medicine, 65*(11), 2199-2211.
- Mills, M. R., & Bettis, P. J. (2006). Organizational identity and identification during a departmental reorganization. In V.A.Anfara, Jr. & N. T. Mertz (Eds.), *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research* (pp. 73-84). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Mills, J. H., & Weatherbee, T. G. (2006). Hurricanes hardly happen: Sensemaking as a framework for understanding organizational disasters. *Culture and Organization*, 12(3), 265-279.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 1-19.
- Nederhof, A. J. (1985). Methods of coping with social desirability bias: A review. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 15(3), 263-280.
- Nixon, J. (1996). Professional identity and the restructuring of higher education. *Society for Research into Higher Education*, 21(1), 5-16.
- Noordegraaf, M., & Schinkel, W. (2011). Professional capital contested: A Bourdieusian analysis of conflicts between professionals and managers. *Comparative Sociology*, 10(2011), 97-125.
- Oakley, J. G. (1998). Leadership processes in virtual teams and organizations. *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, 5(3), 3-17.
- Ohlen, J., & Segesten, K. (1998). The professional identity of the nurse: Concept analysis and development. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 28(4), 720-727.
- Oksanen, T., Kivimäki, M., Kawachi, I., Subramanian, S. V., Takao, S., Suzuki, E., Kouvonen, A., Pentti, J., Salo, P., Virtanen, M., & Vahtera, J. (2011). Workplace social capital and all-cause mortality: A prospective cohort study of 28 043 public-sector employees in Finland. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(9), 1742-1748.

- Olesen, H. S. (2001). Professional identity as learning processes in life histories. *Journal of Workplace learning, 13*(7/8), 290-297.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2006). Linking research questions to mixed methods data analysis procedures. *The Qualitative Report, 11*(3), 474-498.
- Parker, M. (2000). *Organizational culture and identity*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Parker-Follett, M. (1941). Power. In L. C. Metcalf & L. Urwick (Eds.), *Dynamic administration: The collected papers of Mary Parker Follett* (pp. 95-116). London: Sir Isaac Pittman & Sons Ltd.
- Payne, G., & Williams, M. (2005). Generalization in qualitative research. *Sociology, 39*(2), 295-314.
- Pearce, C. L., & Barkus, B. (2004). The future of leadership: Combining vertical and shared leadership to transform knowledge. *The Academy of Management Executive, 18*(1), 47-59.
- Pearce, C.L., & Conger, J.A. (2003). All those years ago: The historical underpinnings of shared leadership. In C. L. Pearce and J. A. Conger (Eds), *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership* (pp. 1-18). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Phillips, D. C. (1987). *Philosophy, science, and social inquiry*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 137-145.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*, 1-24.

- Prati, L. M., McMillan-Capehart, A., & Karriker, J. H. (2009). Affecting organizational identity: A manager's influence. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 15(4), 404-415.
- Ragin, C. C. (1999). The distinctiveness of case-oriented research. *Health Services Research*, 34(5), 1137-1151.
- Ran, B., & Golden, T. (2011). Who are we? The Social Construction of Organizational Identity through Sense-Exchanging. *Administration & Society*, 43 (4), 417-445.
- Rapp, A., Ahearne, M., Mathieu, J., & Rapp, T. (2010). Managing sales teams in a virtual environment. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 27(3), 213-224.
- Raghuram, S., Garud, R., Wiesenfeld, B., & Gupta, G. (2001). Factors contributing to virtual work adjustment. *Journal of Management*, 27(3), 383-405.
- Ravasi, D., & Schultz, M. (2006). Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(3), 433-458.
- Roberts, S. J. (2000). Development of a positive professional identity: Liberating oneself from the oppressor within. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 22(4), 71-82.
- Rodrigues, S., & Child, J. (2008). The development of corporate identity: A political perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(5), 885-911.
- Rowley, J. (2002). Using case studies in research. *Management Research news*, 25(1), 16-27.
- Rowold, J., & Heinitz, K. (2007). Transformational and charismatic leadership: Assessing the convergent, divergent and criterion validity of MLQ and the CKS. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(2007), 121-133.

- Sandelowski, M. (1993). Rigor or mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited. *Advances in Nursing Sciences, 16*(2), 1-8.
- Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Scott, S. G., & Lane, V. R. (2000). A stakeholder approach to organizational identity. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 43-62.
- Seale, C. (1999a). *The quality of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Seale, C. (1999b). Quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5*(4), 465-478.
- Searle, J. H. (1995). *The construction of social reality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Shamir, B., House, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1993). The motivational effects of transformational leadership: A self-concept based theory. *Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences, 4*(4), 577-594.
- Sim, J. (1998). Collecting and analyzing qualitative data: Issues raised by the focus group. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 28*(2), 345-352.
- Slay, H. S., & Smith, D. A. (2011). Professional identity construction: Using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities. *Human Relations 64*(1), 85-107.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretive phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 53-80). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Spillane, J.P. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
- Spillane, J. P., & Coldren, A. F. (2011). *Diagnosis and design for school improvement: Using a distributed perspective to lead and manage change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Spillane, J. P., Diamond, J. B., & Jita, L. (2003). Leading instruction: The distribution of leadership for instruction. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 35(5), 533-543.
- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(1), 3-34.
- Spillane, J. P., & Orlina, E. C. (2005). Leadership as distributed: A matter of practice. *School Leadership and Management*, 25(4), 349-366.
- Stake, R. (1994). Case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (pp. 236-247). London: Sage Publications.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224-237.
- Stogdill, R.M. (1974). *Handbook of leadership: A survey of the literature*. New York : Free Press.
- Stryker, S. (1968). Identity salience and role performance: The importance of symbolic interaction theory for family research. *Journal of marriage and the Family*, 30. 558-564.
- Tajfel, H. (1972). Social categorization (English translation of “La Categorization Sociale”). In S. Moscovichi (Ed.), *Introduction à la psychologie sociale: vol 1* (pp. 272-302). Paris : Larousse.

- Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C. (1985). The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Thurlow, A., & Mills, J. H. (2009). Change, talk, and sensemaking. *Journal of Organizational Change*, 22(5), 459-479.
- Trevino, L. K., & Nelson, K. A. (1999). *Managing business ethic : Straight talk about how to do it right*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Van Eeden, R., Cilliers, F., & van Deventer. (2008). Leadership styles and associated personality traits: Support for the conceptualization of transactional and transformational leadership. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 38(2), 253-267.
- Van Epps, G. (2008). Relooking unit cohesion: A sensemaking approach. *Military Review*, 88(6), 102-110.
- Van Tonder, C. L. (2006). Below-the-surface and powerful: The emerging notion of organizational identity. *Organizational Development Journal*, 22(2), 68-78.
- Van Wynsberghe, R., & Khan, S. (2007). Redefining case study. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6(2), 1-10.
- Voss, Z. G., Cable, D. M., & Voss, G. B. (2006). Organizational identity and firm performance: What happens when leaders disagree about “who are we?”. *Organization*, 17(6), 741-755.
- Walsh, I. J., & Glynn, M. A. (2008). The way we were: Legacy organizational identity and the role of leadership. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 11(3), 262-276.

- Wang, Y. S., & Huang, T. C. (2009). The relationship of transformational leadership with group cohesiveness and emotional intelligence. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 37(3), 379-392.
- Weese, W. J. (1996). Do leadership and organizational culture matter? *Journal of Sports Management*, 10(2), 197-206.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. London: Sage Publications.
- Weick, K. E. (2001). *Making sense of the organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Weick, K. E. (2009). *Making sense of the organization: The impermanent organization* (v. 2). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organizational Science*, 16(4), 409-421.
- Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization*, 7(2), 225–246.
- Whetten, D. A. (2006). Albert and Whetten revisited: Strengthening the concept of organizational identity. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 15(3), 219-234.
- Whetten, D. A., & Mackey, A. (2002). A social actor conception of organizational identity and its implications for the study of organizational reputation. *Business and Society*, 41(4), 393-414.
- Wiesenfeld, B. M., Raghuram, S., & Garud, R. (2001). Organizational identification among virtual workers: The role of need for affiliation and perceived work-based social support. *The Journal of Management*, 27(2001), 213-229.
- Yammarino, F. K. (1994). Indirect leadership: Transformational leadership at a distance. In B. M. Bass and B. J. Avolio (Eds.), *Improving organizational effectiveness*

*through transformational leadership*, (pp. 26 – 47). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Yoder, J. D. (2001). Making leadership work more effectively for women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), 815-828.

Yukl, G. (1999). An evaluation of conceptual weaknesses in transformational and charismatic leadership theories. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 285-305.

Zaheer, S., Schomaker, M., & Genc, M. (2003). Identity versus culture in mergers of equals. *European Management Journal*, 21(2), 185-191.

**APPENDIX A: LETTER APPROVING STUDY**

March 2, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re: Request by Eric C. Nippard, currently enrolled as a doctoral student with the University of Calgary – Ed.D. – Leadership**

I have reviewed the proposal entitled “*Organizational Identity Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study*”, that outlines his intended research in xxxxxxxx. I have also had opportunity to discuss this proposed research with Mr. Nippard. I am pleased to provide permission for Mr. Nippard to undertake this research study, contingent upon ethics approval.

Please forward any questions or concerns you may have to me at [XXXXXX@XXXXX.XX](mailto:XXXXXX@XXXXX.XX).

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX

Assistant Deputy Minister

Education

/ms

## APPENDIX B: SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER

### [Copy of Letter to be Sent to Members of Organization]

**Subject:** Research Participants Needed

This message is sent on behalf of Eric Nippard, doctoral candidate in the Graduate Division of Educational Research, University of Calgary.

-----  
Dear Organizational Member,

I am a doctoral candidate in the educational leadership specialization at the Graduate Division of Educational Research, University of Calgary. I am looking for a wide range of participants for my case study research of organizational identity, which is the subject of my dissertation. Input from members that have been associated with the organization for various time periods is necessary to gain an understanding of identity development. The Assistant Deputy Minister of Education xxxx xxxxxx, is aware of my research plans and has agreed to support my efforts.

Through your participation, I wish to understand how: a) the members of a virtual organization perceive their professional identity, and the role it plays in shaping the organization's identity; b) gain insight into what role leadership is perceived to play in shaping the identity of the organization; c) understand how the perceptions of organizational identity differ between the leadership and other members of the organization, and, d) understand how, or whether, the organization's culture and identity changed over time.

At this point in the research, organizational identity will be generally defined as answering the question: who are we, and who are we becoming as an organization? Knowledge and information generated from this study may help other virtual organizations, organizations in general, and the research community at large. Should you be interested in being a participant in my study, your participation would initially require approximately ten minutes to complete the attached consent and personal information forms. If you are selected to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview with me, preferably outside of your work setting. The interview will last approximately one and a half hours, and you will have the opportunity to review your answers once they have been transcribed. Interview questions will focus largely on the structure, culture, and your experiences in the organization. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time, without penalty. All information and data will be handled as confidential and anonymous.

My hope is that the information gained from your participation will benefit XXXXXXXX and other organizations as they develop and grow. If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the attached consent and personal information forms and mail them to me in the enclosed self-addressed, postage paid envelope.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Eric Nippard  
Doctor of Education Candidate  
Graduate Division of Educational Research  
University of Calgary  
Tel: (709) 643 2703  
Fax (709) 643 6023

Dr. Pamela Bishop  
Associate Professor, Educational Leadership  
Graduate Division of Educational Research  
University of Calgary, EdT 1004,  
2500 University Drive NW,  
Calgary, AB,  
CANADA T2N 1N4  
Tel: (403) 220 3183  
Fax (403) 282 3005

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

### Informed Consent Letter for Teachers

**Research Project Title:** Organizational Identity  
Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study

**Investigator:** Eric C. Nippard

**Informed Consent Form**  
**Graduate Division of Educational Research**  
**University of Calgary**

Consent to Take Part in Educational Research

**TITLE:** Organizational Identity  
Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study

### **1. Information to individuals regarding participation in the study of the development of organizational identity**

#### **Dear Participant:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study *Organizational Identity Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study*. This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you require more details about the contents of this letter, or require information not included here, please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

You are invited to participate in a study on the development of organizational identity in the context of a virtual organization. The purposes of this study are to:

- a) understand how the members of a virtual distance education organization perceive their professional identity, and the role it plays in shaping the organization's identity,
- b) gain insight into what role leadership is perceived to play in shaping the identity of the organization,
- c) understand how the perceptions of organizational identity differ between the leadership and other members of the organization, and,
- d) understand how, or has, the organization's culture and identity changed over time.

This study may benefit you by providing a more thorough insight into the culture of your organization. No monetary remuneration or employment advantage is anticipated through participation in the study. No compensation will be provided in kind for participation.

The study is being conducted by Mr. Eric Nippard, a Doctor of Education student of the University of Calgary, and it has been approved by the **Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board** (CFREB). This

study has also been approved by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Education - Department of Education, who is responsible for the operation of the government department under study. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (e.g., the level of risk encountered in daily life).

Your participation is **voluntary**. If you decide to read to the end of this information, you may then decide whether you wish to participate or not. Should you decide to participate, you will be asked sign the consent signature form which is attached.

**You are not committed to participate for the duration of the study, and you may withdraw at any time.** The data collected through your participation up to three weeks after you begin participation in the study will not be retained or incorporated into the study results. However, requests for withdrawal of data after three weeks cannot be entertained, and data collected from individuals that withdraw after three weeks will be incorporated into the final document. You will be asked to provide consent to the publication of comments related to the study in anonymous format, in part or in whole, in subsequent research reports and papers. Although it is impossible to guarantee that individual participant identities will not be revealed, every effort will be undertaken to insure anonymity. In no case will responses from individual participants be identified. All data will be pooled and published in aggregate form only.

No individuals will be identified in the research and each participant will select a pseudonym of their own choosing. When any direct quotes are used, participants will be referenced by the pseudonym of their own choosing, and a space will be included for this purpose. The organization will also be identified in any writing by a pseudonym.

Responses will remain confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and his supervisory committee. All transcripts and electronic documents will be stored in a secure location. They will be stored and used only to author the final dissertation, and will be destroyed after December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

## **2. What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

As a participant, you may be asked to participate in three of the following four phases of data collection, which are:

**Phase 1:** Your involvement in phase one is not required. The data collected from phase one is in the form of documents and historical artifacts (memos, e-mails, memorandum of understanding). You **may** be asked to provide input or comment on issues which arise from the analysis of that data.

**Phase 2:** Your involvement with phase two will be limited to completing an **online** questionnaire that examines your perceptions of the organization, how leadership contributes to identity formation, how the organization is grouped or structured, the types of hierarchical influences on identity development, your feelings of the strength of the Organizational Identity, and generally, what you think, feel, and perceive your organization to be. This questionnaire consists of forty-one Likert type responses that will take approximately thirty minutes to complete

**Phase 3:** Your involvement with phase three will be limited to completing an Organizational Culture Inventory which is an assessment of the culture of your organization, at a specific point in time, based upon

your responses to a series of questions. This inventory will take approximately forty-five minutes to complete.

**Phase 4:** In this phase you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration. This interview will investigate your thoughts and feelings about your organization, and your involvement in that organization. The interview will be hosted outside of regular school hours and are scheduled for March - June, 2010. This will be an opportunity for you to present all significant details of your experience that are based on your association with the organization. Follow-up questions that examine divergent lines of thought and/or provide clarification of responses to questions may extend the interview beyond the 90 minute mark. The interview questions will be directly related to the goals of this research. The interviews will be recorded using video and other electronic digital means and transcribed into digital electronic text format for data analysis at a later time. A second follow-up interview may be requested of you once the first round of interviews has been completed. These will take place between September and November of 2010.

All data collected from the interviews, once transcribed, will be returned to you for review for a time period of two weeks, during which you will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcript, and the context of your comments. Comments and or revisions of the transcript cannot be entertained after the two week period.

### **3. Storage and Protection of Data:**

To protect your privacy, the digital recordings will be stored in a directory on an encrypted, password protected server. The server area will only be accessible to the researcher, his supervisor, and the network administrator who maintains the server. However, recorded files will only be accessed by the researcher and his supervisor. The transcribed data will be stored on the same server in text document format. Any and all electronic data will be stored on secured computers in a password protected area. Professionally trained persons will perform any transcription for the purposes of providing printed documents. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality contract that stipulates their obligations in reviewing your interview audio recording and transcribing the information into an electronic file. After December 1, 2015, the researcher will destroy all electronic and paper versions of collected data in their possession. Any hard copy data will be stored in locked cabinets that are only accessible by the researcher. All data will be held until December 1, 2015 and will be subsequently destroyed; paper data will be shredded, electronic data will be deleted, and any contents or artifacts contained on server hard drives erased.

I will request permission to interview you in a face-to-face meeting which would be arranged and mutually agreed upon to be hosted on two occasions between March and June, 2010. In the event that a face-to-face meeting cannot be scheduled, a secure, online synchronous meeting room called Elluminate™ Live will be used to conduct the interview.

You will be consulted ahead of time to set up appropriate and suitable times, dates, and a location for interviews.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. There is no remuneration for participating in this study. You will not experience any negative consequences to your position of employment based on your participation or lack thereof.

#### 4. Dissemination of Findings

Findings will be presented to your organization, and to the Department of Education - in written format. All participants involved in the study will remain anonymous in the final report or in any other form of presentation of research results. All collected data will be shared in a final report format to inform an Education Doctoral program from the University of Calgary to be published upon completion and acceptance of the final report. The data may also be used as a source of information for publication in peer-reviewed journals, or conference proceedings.

#### 5. What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Data collected could include:

- Audio digital recorded interviews with you.
- Audio/video recorded interviews with you.
- Researcher notes during interviews
- Data extracted from questionnaires completed by you.
- Data extracted from the Organizational Culture Inventory

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please examine the signature page provided and place a check mark on the corresponding lines that outline your wishes for consent.

#### 6. Who should I contact for further information?

If you have further questions about this study or your participation, you may contact either or both of the following individuals:

- **Principal Investigator, Mr. Eric Nippard:** (709) 643-9826, or by email [eric.nippard@nf.sympatico.ca](mailto:eric.nippard@nf.sympatico.ca)
- **Dissertation Supervisor, Dr. Pam Bishop:** (403) 220-3183, or by email [bishopp@ucalgary.ca](mailto:bishopp@ucalgary.ca)

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary, Calgary, AB. If you have ethical concerns about the research, (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Ethics Resource Officer (Research Services, ERRB Building, Research Park) at (403)220-3782.

I agree to take part in this study:

_____	_____
Signature of participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of witness	Date

**To be signed by the investigator:**

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

---

Signature of investigator

---

Date

---

Telephone number:

### **Research Approval**

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Eric C. Nippard  
709.643.2703  
[enippard@ucalgary.ca](mailto:enippard@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Dr. Pam Bishop  
403. 220 3183  
[pbishop@ucalgary.ca](mailto:pbishop@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact:

Russell Burrows,  
Senior Ethics Resource Officer,  
Research Services, University of Calgary  
(403) 220-3782;  
e-mail [rburrows@ucalgary.ca](mailto:rburrows@ucalgary.ca)

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

## APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Research Project Title:** *Organizational Identity Formation in a Virtual Education Organization:*

*A Case Study*

**Investigator:** Eric C. Nippard

### **Teacher Participant Interview Protocol**

**Graduate Division of Educational Research  
University of Calgary**

#### Introductory Remarks

Thank you for assisting me with the research study involving your understanding of how the members of a virtual distance education organization perceive their professional identity, and the role it plays in shaping the organization's identity. I have twelve guiding questions which may lead to clarification or additional questions based on your responses. The type of questions being asked will assist me in gaining an understanding of your experience and perceptions, and how organizational identity is established within an organizational context.

The information you share will be transcribed by a hired third party who is in no way associated with your organization, nor with the education system as a whole. The responses will then be coded and categorized in a written format presented in a final dissertation report to be published by the University of Calgary. Your identity will be reflected as a pseudonym rather than your real name and every effort will be taken to protect your identity. Additional questions based on information shared in the interviews may be addressed in a second interview.

**For the purposes of this interview, any reference to the word “organization” is specifically referring to the context of your distance education organization.**

We will now start with the guiding questions. Please feel free to stop me at any time and ask for clarification.

#### **Guiding Questions**

1. What types of skills and knowledge do you bring to the organization?

2. I would like for you to take a few minutes and think back to when you began working with the organization. Could you describe one or two of the most memorable experiences (positive or negative) that come to mind?
  - a. What made these experiences so memorable and,
  - b. What did it demonstrate to you about the organization?
  
3. Can you tell me about the way your organization is structured or organized? This might refer to the hierarchy, authority structure, power distribution, or any other structures on which you wish to elaborate?
  
4. Let's turn now to your own relationship with [name deleted] Can you describe how you feel about what it means to be a member of this organization?
  
5. I have provided a definition of the word culture to you on a separate sheet. Please take a few minutes and read the definition. To paraphrase that definition, culture is defined as a pattern of shared assumptions and values, or "how things are done around here". How would you describe the culture within your own organization?
  
6. Take a few moments and assume that you have a responsibility to supervise and provide orientation to a new organizational member. Can you describe for me what you would tell the member who begins work with the organization?
  
7. The membership of an organization is not static, it can and will change as time passes. Would you provide your thoughts on the impact that losing or gaining members might have on the culture of your organization? These members can include teachers, technical support, senior leadership?
  
8. How or has the culture of your organization changed or shifted over time, or since you have joined the organization?
  - a. Can you briefly elaborate on any event or events that might have impacted that change?
  - b. How has it affected your personal identity within the organization?
  
9. Organizational climate refers to the working conditions within the organization? Thinking about your own experiences with [name deleted], please describe what you consider to be the organizational climate?

10. Organizational identity has been described as answering the question “Who are we, and who are we becoming, as an organization”? If you were questioned by someone external to the organization, would you describe how you might explain [name deleted]’s organizational identity to them?

11. Would you elaborate on the role that leadership might have in influencing the culture and identity of the organization and can you comment on the impact that a change in leadership might have on that culture and identity?

12. Assume for a moment that you have been given the opportunity to take on any role within your organization for one year and you have been given the task of changing the organization in some way. Take a few minutes and think about the role that you would assume. What might the role be, and what change(s) would you try to implement while in that position?

13. Were you associated with distance education prior to the emergence of [name deleted]? If yes, then:

- a. Would you be able to describe your understanding of the history and evolution of distance education in this province? What were some of the critical junctures in that history?
- b. Do you know of any documentation or artifacts that might be in existence that chronicle the development and history of the organization?

14. Please take a few minutes and think about what you might consider to be the characteristics of an ideal distance education organization. Can you describe that organization to me?

15. We have come to the end of our interview questions. Is there anything else you would care to share with me about your experiences with the organization?

## APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**Research Project Title:** *Organizational Identity Formation in a Virtual Education Organization: A Case Study*

**Investigator:** Eric C. Nippard

Dear Transcriber:

Thank you for agreeing to transcribe the digital audio recorded data collected from research participants provided to you in the attached zipped file. Please take the time to read this carefully.

You will be privy to discussions and comments that are of a highly personal and sensitive nature. Any and all information disclosed in the interview is to be kept absolutely confidential by you as a hired transcriber. The individual participant digital recordings will disclose information regarding research participants' experiences with their organizational work place. Your role is to transcribe the disclosed information taken from the audio recordings in an electronic version, in a word-for-word format. Once I have confirmed receipt of the transcriptions for each participant, you will be instructed to return or destroy the individual participant data files, erase all electronic data, and shred all existing paper copies.

### Signatures – Written Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand the information provided to you about your role as a transcriber in this research project, 2) agree to perform your role with absolute confidentiality and respect for the participants, and 3) destroy all digital and paper versions of transcribed materials upon instruction from the researcher.

Transcriber Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation as the transcriber, please contact:

Eric C. Nippard  
709.643.2703

[Eric.nippard@nf.sympatico.ca](mailto:Eric.nippard@nf.sympatico.ca)  
[enippard@ucalgary.ca](mailto:enippard@ucalgary.ca)

**A copy of this consent form should be kept for your records and reference.**