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Perceptions of Faculty With Respect to Change at a Western Canadian College: An Exploratory Study

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Perceptions of Faculty With Respect to Change at a Western Canadian College: An Exploratory
Study

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

Publicly funded postsecondary education institutions are experiencing significant forces of change which have been exacerbated by the global pandemic. The results of this project indicate that leaders of those institutions in North America should engage their faculty to help their respective colleges or universities survive, and perhaps even thrive in these evolving circumstances. In this exploratory case study, the research participants (faculty in a small central Alberta institution) contributed interesting insights with respect to their perceptions of change and the need and urgency for change in the sector. In addition, they shared interesting perspectives with respect to several topic areas, in particular provincial governance and technology. They especially identified that the influence of technology, with respect to curriculum, teaching and learning and other aspects of institutional operation, was pervasive. Furthermore, I discovered that faculty in general may not be naturally inclined to contribute to their institution's change efforts, given their primary job responsibilities. However, it appeared that some members, generally those who had taken on leadership roles and/or additional education, demonstrated awareness of larger and far reaching aspects of the change forces impacting the sector. Thus, faculty members, when adequately prepared for discussions related to change, can enhance the welfare of their home institutions in these challenging environments. Thus, it may take some preparation by committed leaders to get larger portions of that constituency group to contribute to the larger organizational effort, but early indications are that the investment in those efforts are worthwhile.

Keywords: publicly funded postsecondary education system, exploratory case study, change, faculty perceptions, institutional survival

Preface

This dissertation is an original, unpublished work by the author, Laurent Joseph Gerard (Larry) Couture. Permission to proceed with this research was provided by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (Ethics ID: REB19-1295) on February 10, 2020 and Olds College on March 1, 2020. Permission from the CCFREB was extended on February 10, 2021.

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Also, thank you to my colleagues within the Ed D cohort. This experience would not have been nearly as enriching without you and our many shared experiences.

Thank you to my professors in the Ed D program, especially those of you who worked with me in a conventional face-to-face setting. Thanks (Dr.) Shellyann Scott for the positive initiation into the program (yes, Don, I include you in this note as well—it is hard to think about one of you without the other and your guest appearances in our class were much appreciated.) Also, thanks to both of you for the “barbie” at the end of our first session—that really helped to personalize the whole process. Thank you to Dr. Eugene Kowch for your guidance. To Dr. Tom Thompson, you were an inspiration in our class together and it was a great way to put a crown on the multiple years of working together.

On July 1, 2013, twenty years after I had completed my last credential, I began an incredible journey, by enrolling in the Master of Education program offered through the University of Prince Edward Island. At that time, I could not foresee that it would lead me to the pursuit of a doctoral credential. There is one moment, crystallized in time, which started that process. It occurred in the afternoon, on or about July 16, 2014, approximately halfway through the second week of that summer session. It happened in a class taught by Professor David

McCabe. Partway through class, that thought leaped into my consciousness; it stuck with me and could not be shaken. I am so grateful for that sudden flash of consciousness.

Dedication

I dedicate this publication to my wife, Loree, our children, Chantel, Rhett and Ryland, our granddaughter, Jerrica, our future grandchildren, and future generations in general. While the latter portion may sound a bit far-fetched, allow me to explain.

As I strive to complete the final third of my working career, it is ever more urgent that I try to leave this world better than I found it. In my lifetime, humanity has exacerbated climate change (global warming), reduced wildlife habitats and populations including the reduction of biodiversity (the extinction of species). Economically, Canadian citizens have empowered their governments to generate over a trillion dollars of debt—these are not the legacies that I intended to leave.

In my own unique and humble way, I am trying to contribute to a change in the general, political direction of the country. Through my teaching, I have hoped to help young “agribusiness professionals” and others to conduct their work and lives more effectively. As an environmental citizen, I have tried to reduce my footprint and model a lower impact lifestyle. And finally, through my research, I seek to contribute to a more cost-effective publicly funded postsecondary system. While I know that my lone voice will likely not be enough, I must add it to what may become a chorus urging provincial and federal governments to eliminate budget deficits and to tackle the debt problem that we have hoisted on our future generations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In a **gentle** way, you can **shake** the world.—Mahatma Gandhi

Many authors have identified that the postsecondary education sector is ripe for change; synonyms such as transition, transformation, alterations or similar terms, are used to indicate that the sector will not remain static; add a global pandemic to the mix, and the pace of change is likely accelerating.

In this study, I brought forward information that can assist leaders of publicly funded postsecondary education institutions in adapting to changes being experienced as well as to plan for future developments. In this chapter, I describe the foundational aspects of this research. By providing contextual considerations and some background information, the primary and secondary research questions are presented within the appropriate framework.

Early Situational Considerations

Faculty, an integral stakeholder group, have a key role in contributing to their institution's direction and effectiveness. However, extensive search through the literature and then careful examination of the material revealed little with respect to faculty perceptions of the forces impacting their livelihood. It seemed to me that there was a need for deeper and more extensive consultation, which sparked my curiosity with respect to the perceptions of faculty.

As a Canadian and provincial (Alberta) taxpayer and an instructor with more than 25 years of service in postsecondary education, I have experienced significant change to my employment circumstances. I sense that there is much more yet to come. As a master's student with the University of Prince Edward Island and now a doctoral candidate in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, I have been reading about postsecondary education systems for a number of years. I have been motivated by that information to ponder

future developments, including the challenges to be faced by the leaders of publicly funded postsecondary institutions. I aspired to develop stronger and deeper insights by conducting research and now enthusiastically share the new knowledge gained. I aim to add value to the ongoing discourse with respect to the future state of the postsecondary education sector. In this manner, I can perhaps positively influence institutional activities, which in turn may contribute to improving the fiscal situations of our governments.

In March 2020, the world began its battle with the COVID-19 global pandemic. The academic literature related to postsecondary education sector change and evolution had given little advance consideration to this particular factor. I had already begun the research described in my proposal when, on March 16, 2020, Alberta Health Services directed postsecondary institutions in the province to close their doors to students to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. Fortunately, after making adjustments which will be described in detail in Chapter 3, I was able to complete the collection of the needed data. I was almost in a position to compare pre-COVID-19 perspectives with those gathered after the institution's closure. Unfortunately, I had not been able to gather enough of the pre-closure data to conduct an appropriate comparison. More discussion of this topic can be found in Chapter 4.

Finally, as I will elaborate in Chapter 2, I had the privilege of learning from many scholars who offered significant thought with respect to the forces impacting publicly funded postsecondary institutions, and useful suggestions for how they should strive to adapt to those conditions. However, as I began this research, the paradigm presented by Barber et al. (2013) in their publication, *An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead*, stood well above the crowd. They stated that a “deep, radical and urgent transformation is required in higher education” (Barber et al., 2013, p. 3). They identified and described the components of a

successful 20th century university, then explained that “the traditional university is being unbundled” (Barber et al., 2013, p. 5), delivered in a variety of new ways and by a host of non-conventional providers in the 21st century. Essentially, their message was that institutions who fail to adapt to this new operating environment might be swept away (Barber et al., 2013, p. 67). I heeded their warning, and wondered if my colleagues felt the same way. That question was central to my thinking as I launched this research. In addition to the more formal objectives of this investigation, I would learn more about my colleagues and discover whether we shared common perspectives or not.

The new knowledge generated by this quest provided new insights and is a valuable contribution to the work of leaders of modern institutions of higher learning. The findings and recommendations provide suggestions for the development of strategies and plans to engage faculty in the change processes that must be implemented at their particular institution. Harnessing the minds and energy of this integral stakeholder group, leaders may increase the probability that their institution can successfully transition to the evolving operating environment. The institutions that capitalize on these efforts may not only survive in the face of challenge, they may thrive in a postpandemic 21st century.

Much of the material in this dissertation was written during the proposal development process, before the global COVID-19 pandemic struck. I have tried to maintain the balance between staying true to the original direction and perspectives of this research, while acknowledging the dramatic impact of the health emergency. Though I have finished writing this dissertation, the situation continues to evolve; thus, all aspects are somewhat contingent on events that have yet to transpire. Clearly, what we know as of the time of this writing is too significant to ignore; the damage to global, national, and provincial economies is already rivaling

that of the Great Recession in North America (Friga, 2020, p. 1). The impact on societies and on the postsecondary education sector will be massive, long lasting, and very hard to predict. More detail will be discussed and described in later chapters.

Several authors (Grajek et al., 2018; Petrie, 2014,; Scott & Dixon, 2008,; Wernick, 2006) informed us that rapid change is happening all around us and that the publicly funded postsecondary education sector is not immune to the forces driving that process. In part, fueled by technological innovation, local and national economies are being transformed and various industries are undergoing fundamental structural change. The postsecondary education sector needs to better respond to these unprecedented change pressures. If the results evident in other sectors of the economy are any indication, and if noted futurists are to be believed, the publicly funded postsecondary education sector is ripe for attack by change agents. Time is of the essence (Barber et al., 2013, p. 5).

The “conventional” system is being challenged in ways that it has never faced before. Sister institutions are extending their reach into new territory and distance providers are increasing their influence by harnessing improved learning management software and more effective communication technologies. In addition, new, unorthodox competitors are on the scene offering new formats, new credentials and drawing followers from the conventional paths (Barber et al., 2013,; Kolodner & Butrymowicz, 2020). Publicly funded postsecondary education institutions are having to compete for market share in a way that they have never had to before (Barber et al., 2013, p. 18). In addition, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in short-term chaos; early indications are that there will be long-term and irreversible effects.

While subject to the influences noted above, publicly funded postsecondary institutions are vulnerable to the expectations of an electorate as expressed through their representatives, the

ruling government of the day. Internationally and nationally, government funding for postsecondary education has been on a declining trend. Given the pre-pandemic debt and deficit situations of Canada's federal government and of the Alberta provincial government, local public sector education leaders should have been operating under the assumption of diminishing resources. Governments around the world invested heavily in trying to reduce the economic impacts of the pandemic; public sector financial situations are dramatically worse as a result of those investments. It is too early to be able to predict the next sequence of events, but if governments determine to strive to return to a position of fiscal balance, it will take significant budget cuts over multiple years to remedy the situation. While the focus of this report will be a central Alberta institution, the fiscal realities identified above are multinational in their context. More discussion and supporting details are presented in Chapter 2.

This dissertation is a product of a unique period of time. The proposal development and early research was completed pre-pandemic. The rest of the research and the communication of my findings are taking place while the pandemic still rages. I feel an urgent need to report these findings while they are current. I cannot yet fully assess whether we will be returning to near normal conditions in the near future or whether the situation that we are currently experiencing will be permanent. It seems that there may be some differences between the early portions of my data and the latter portions, but I did not collect enough information before the effects of the pandemic were felt to be able to compare and contrast my results. In a sense, my research straddled an important boundary.

Barber et al. (2013) in their publication, *An Avalanche is Coming*, went to great lengths to alert and educate the publicly funded postsecondary education community with respect to the challenges faced by the sector. They analyzed the sector's operating environment and identified

the components of the successful 20th century university. The unsettling part of their presentation begins when they describe that these components can be unbundled; in other words, they could still be offered as a comprehensive package, but they can now be offered singly or in smaller groupings. This possibility means that new delivery systems can be implemented and that the needs of students can be addressed in a myriad of ways, including by non-conventional providers. Therein lies a major source of competition for conventional providers (Barber et al., 2013, p. 32,; Schrumm, 2020, pp. 1–2). The authors suggested that those institutions that ignore those threats or fail to respond effectively to them may be forced to close their doors. They predict that not all institutions will be able to dig themselves out from under the “avalanche.” While these assertions may seem overly dramatic at first, the authors added credibility to their argument by describing some additional considerations to them. For example, it appears that there will always be room in their model for “the elite university,” (Barber et al., 2013, p. 55) but the membership in that category could be up for debate.

This research project provided deeper insight regarding how a select group of faculty perceive themselves within this context. While noting that the results of this study are not generally transferable to other situations, new knowledge that can assist leadership in engaging this vital stakeholder group is valuable. Astute leadership teams may consider building stronger alliances within their institutions as another strategy in facing the challenges ahead. These strengths could be reflected in the language and examples used to highlight the value propositions offered by their institution. Staying with the avalanche analogy a short while longer, these research findings may be the equivalent of building a shed to protect an institution from the avalanche itself or at least equipping personnel with shovels with which to dig out from among

the drifts of material. Either way, in light of the alternatives, investment in these efforts is well worth considering.

Problem Statement/Purpose of the Study

Leaders of postsecondary education institutions face many challenges in trying to negotiate a rapidly changing operating environment. Faculty, integral stakeholders, make significant contributions to the welfare of their specific institution(s). In this exploratory study, I hope to develop a stronger sense of the perceptions of individual faculty members, gain a greater appreciation for the diversity of those perceptions and to highlight the beliefs held in common. Comparing and contrasting those expressed thoughts against my own as well as those of established authors on the topic, when shared, may lead to deeper and clearer insights.

Research Questions

The central questions that I addressed during this exploratory study were:

- What are the perceptions of faculty in an Alberta comprehensive college with respect to the need for change in many aspects of the publicly funded postsecondary education sector?
- To what degree do these faculty see need for change and urgency of that change?

Research Approach

Qualitative information was gathered using a case study approach. The compiled and distilled results provided a single snapshot of the collective mindset at a single publicly funded postsecondary institution within a specified period of time. Analyzing the oral responses of select faculty members to carefully crafted questions brought forth new knowledge and insights with respect to several select aspects of the change discussion in the publicly funded postsecondary

education system. In this exploratory study, a stronger sense of faculty perceptions of the change process, the urgency with which they perceived that new measures must be implemented in a western Canadian context, and some of their ideas with respect to changes needed were collected.

Significance of the Study

In this study, I added to the discussion regarding the need for change in publicly funded postsecondary education systems. In doing so, I offered help to those in leadership positions by providing sharper insight into the perceptions of their faculty. In addition, I drew them into deeper consideration of the value elements in the postsecondary education sector. This deeper knowledge may assist in making better decisions and attracting wider support for the implementation of value adding processes that will contribute to institutional welfare. Potential improvement in institutional practices may attract the attention of government officials who, in turn, may improve departmental practices and/or help disseminate new practices to other institutions.

The results of this research project have the potential to:

- Assist leaders of publicly funded postsecondary education institutions to better understand the perspectives of members of their faculty and thus more effectively engage them in any change processes initiated by their institutions.
- Assist government decision-makers with investment decisions with respect to the publicly funded postsecondary education system.
- Assist faculty members and faculty associations to better communicate the manner in which they contribute to their institution's welfare.

- Assist a faculty member in better managing their career by having developed a deeper understanding of the change forces impacting their chosen livelihood.
- Assist the faculty member seeking a larger leadership role within the sector by helping them better understand the circumstances in their operating environment.
- Assist leaders of publicly funded postsecondary education institutions in more effectively navigating the challenging circumstances.

I acknowledge that these were ambitious objectives and, while acknowledging the limitations of the scope of this study, I strove to meet them to the extent possible.

The Researcher

I am well qualified to conduct this research due to my educational achievements and experience within the Canadian publicly funded postsecondary education system. As a committed lifelong learner, my extensive postsecondary education background includes training in the liberal arts, the sciences and business. I hold a Bachelor of Arts (Advanced), with a major in English and minors in History and Psychology, a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Saskatchewan. On July 1, 2013, twenty years after completing the Master of Business Administration in 1993, I began the pursuit of a Master of Education credential, from the University of Prince Edward Island. Upon graduation in July 2015, I still sensed the need for a deeper investigation of a number of important matters. This state of dissatisfaction motivated me to enroll in the Doctor of Education program, in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, specializing in Leadership in Postsecondary Contexts; I began those studies in July 2017.

With respect to my experience, I have served 24 years as an instructor at a college in central Alberta. I began at a small college in central Saskatchewan in 1987, staying until 1989

when the program in which I was teaching was discontinued. I then fulfilled a number of contracts with other institutions. In August 1997, I began the full-time position that I currently hold. I own a consulting firm and have participated in a number of entrepreneurial ventures. These experiences have supplemented my educational background, allowing me to teach a variety of business subjects, including entrepreneurship, innovation and leadership.

During my Master of Education program, I became more interested in researching aspects of the postsecondary education system. It was approximately halfway through that program when I realized that the business acumen and entrepreneurial mindset, developed based on my Master of Business Administration training and subsequent experiences, had prepared me for a deeper examination of the performance of the Canadian postsecondary system. After having read widely about the situation, I have determined that I am likely approaching the topic first and foremost as a taxpayer; my somewhat idealistic perspective would be to experience a reduction in the taxes that I pay annually while witnessing increasing effectiveness and efficiency in the publicly funded postsecondary education system. I would therefore have to label my perspective as generally neoliberal, though that would be somewhat simplistic and incomplete. My earlier liberal arts training would suggest that I consciously have a few utopian sentiments as well.

Significant time, energy and other resources were invested in the curriculum associated with the Doctor of Education program in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary in preparation for this project. The primary motivation for the work was intellectual curiosity and the anticipation of discovering new knowledge. While the content of the courses leading to this point in the program were helpful, I launched this research with no defined expectations.

The combination of my educational achievements, work and life experiences, and perspectives developed while working in the publicly funded postsecondary education sector have positioned me to conduct this research. As I discovered new insights, I willingly shared them for the betterment of *the system*. In this way, I hope to make a significant contribution to Canadian taxpayers and future generations of citizens.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Every research project is started within certain parameters. In this section, I describe the assumptions that I recognized, limitations that I imposed or acknowledged as well as key delimitations.

I began this project with the assumption that there is a need for improvement in Canada's publicly funded postsecondary education system. By focusing on one local situation in central Alberta and the responses from selected participants working in that institution, I sought to develop insights that might contribute to a better understanding of the larger national postsecondary education landscape. Furthermore, by capturing and analyzing that information, I planned to identify improvements that could be implemented in the publicly funded postsecondary education system, in Alberta in particular. I believed that those improvements could be implemented while reducing costs to the provincial taxpayer. I also believed that the parameters of this project were suitable to meet the requirements of this University of Calgary doctoral program in a reasonable time frame.

I recognized and accepted a number of limitations, with respect to this project. I fully acknowledge that the focus of this research is on the perceptions of faculty within a single central Alberta publicly funded postsecondary educational institution. The discussion is limited primarily to the interpretations of one individual on the perspectives expressed by a limited

number of individuals. I accepted that possibility that the analysis of participant responses might not yield insights. Furthermore, the variety of perspectives collected might not lend themselves to be categorized into thematic topic areas. Finally, lack of response from invited faculty members might reduce the quality of the data collected.

As researcher, I delimited this research in the following ways. I specifically chose to collect data from only one postsecondary institution. I determined that data would be collected from select and limited sources, namely from faculty members teaching at a single central Alberta institution. I also did not strive to expand the perspectives that might be applied to the situation. I delimited the perspectives applied to those of one individual and accepted that my perceptions were influenced by my gender, cultural and ethnic background, and life experiences.

Having acknowledged the assumptions, limitations and delimitations described above, I proceeded with the project.

Key Contextual Considerations and Definition of Terms

Before delving into a deeper examination of change issues as they pertain to Canadian postsecondary institutions, it must be noted that Section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, delegated the responsibility for “education” to the provinces. Thus, there is no “national system,” and the likelihood of one is remote. (In addition to the general statements made above, there are considerations as they relate to the governance of Canadian territories and the relationship between the Government of Canada and aboriginal peoples. Those aspects are noted here to demonstrate completeness of the national governance landscape, but will not be specifically referred to in the remainder of the report.) The following paragraphs further describe the complexities that emerged as deeper examination of *the system* and its components proceeded.

The terms *university* and *college* are used in a variety of contexts and thus are subject to multiple interpretations. While the majority of the literature sources reviewed focused primarily on *the university*, many often used the term *college* interchangeably and inconsistently; a few articles introduced the term *multiversity* in an attempt to capture the complex and often multinational influence of institutions. For the purposes of this study, the terms will be used within a Canadian context and, more specifically, as they are defined within the Alberta publicly funded postsecondary system.

Reference to Alberta's Post-secondary Education Act provides general definitions for the terms *university* and *college*. For the purposes of the Act, it defines a university as "a comprehensive academic and research university or an undergraduate university" (Government of Alberta, 2003, p. 12, Section 1.1 [u]). Instead of simply using the term *college*, the act defines *comprehensive community colleges* as institutions established under section 40 of the Act "or a public college continued under section 125.3 to be a comprehensive community college" (Government of Alberta, 2003, p. 8, Section 1.1 (f.1)). This excludes institutions referred to as technical institutes and other institutions referred to as private colleges. As of January 1, 2020, Alberta has eleven institutions referred to as "colleges," all of which are publicly funded (Wikipedia). The college where this study takes place fits within this category

Reference to the postsecondary education system is limited to those institutions that are publicly-funded. The choice to not focus on private institutions involved three primary considerations:

- 1) Information from private sources is generally less available than from public ones;

- 2) Some of those institutions are self-funded meaning that issues related to government funding levels will not apply in those instances;
- 3) Some private institutions were founded or continue to operate from a religious foundation; that factor cannot be duly considered in the context of this project.

Thus, public institutions, supported by government funding and accountable to taxpayers are the central consideration. These same institutions seem to be the primary focus of the Barber et al. publication and the blue ribbon panel report.

Finally, to further demonstrate the inconsistency of the use of these two fundamental terms, in Canada, the term *university* is or has been applied to as few as 64 institutions to as many as “120 or so” (Usher, 2018 p. 4). In Alberta, as of August 10, 2020, that number is eight (Wikipedia). The term *colleges* is used with even greater variance; “there are over 200 community colleges across Canada, all told” (Usher, 2018, p. 7). “Quebec’s college system is quite different from those in the rest of the country” (Usher, 2018, p. 6). “Alberta and British Columbia always had a slightly different model for community colleges (Usher, 2018. p. 6). These final points are used to further illustrate and foreshadow the challenges that are associated with attempting to draw firm conclusions that could be applicable to a national context.

With respect to geographical references, I have not been entirely consistent throughout the discussion, largely due to the literature sources cited. At times *global* considerations will apply to most of the known world, although often the author(s) are referring to *the developed world* usually including northern Hemisphere, primarily English-speaking countries in North America and Europe. When referring to North America, the United States and Canada will be the primary consideration; little if any reference to Mexico will be included. Finally, when discussing the Canadian situation, when referring to regions, western Canada will include British

Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; the Prairie provinces will be Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba only. When referring to a single province, it will be Alberta, unless otherwise specified. Little, if any reference to territorial circumstances will be made.

To facilitate clear communication, operating definition of the following terms are provided:

Academic staff member: An employee of the selected college appointed to faculty, as per the processes describe in the collective agreement between the College and its Faculty Association (Olds College, 2018, p. 2).

Gross domestic product (GDP): A measure of the value of economic activity within a specified jurisdiction.

Higher education: In Canada, also referred to as postsecondary education

Postsecondary education: Higher education

Precarious employment: A description of employment circumstances generally featuring temporary contractual agreements with fixed end dates, meaning that the contract holder is in a state of uncertainty with respect to their future employment prospects in the role.

Return on investment (ROI): A common business phrase used widely in a variety of contexts; commonly it is a measure of the economic benefits related to a specified economic investment, at a specific time or within a specified time period. Occasionally, reference to non-economic benefits are made within the context of the associated discussion.

Tertiary education: The branch of postsecondary education delivered by universities and colleges. It does not include the trades and polytechnics (Eaton, 2019, p. 2).

Value proposition: A statement or statements describing the benefits inherent in an experience, product or service. Inherent in this definition is that sacrifices are made in the pursuit of those benefits.

Barber et al. (2013) have identified 10 value proposition elements which form foundational reference points for much of this project. They provide definitions for each of those elements in their publication. Rather than repeat them here, they are listed in Chapter 2, along with modifications to those definitions that were necessary to provide an equivalent comparison within the chosen research context. They are briefly repeated in Chapter 4 for convenient reference.

Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I have provided the context and the rationale for the research that was conducted. The background and purpose(s) of the inquiry, the problem statement and research questions are stated. Finally, the significance of the study was described and the operative definitions, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations were outlined.

In Chapter 2, the foundation of literature upon which the research efforts were based are presented, including the identification of gaps or limitations in the existing material that could potentially be filled with this project.

In Chapter 3, the detailed research plan that was executed is described; this includes a description of how ethical issues were addressed and the steps by which validity and reliability were ensured.

In Chapter 4, the findings are presented and some preliminary analysis of those findings are communicated. As part of that analysis, sources of error were identified and discussed in an open and transparent fashion.

In Chapter 5, the results of the analysis of the findings, including the all-important conclusions that were drawn from this experience, are presented. Recommendations with respect to future potential research are made as well as for actions based on the new learning generated.

Summary

In this chapter, foundational elements for this research have been identified and explained. The primary and secondary research questions have been specific and the general approach to the research methodology has been outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following review of literature sets the foundation from which this research was launched. The topic areas covered in this review were purposefully wide and far-ranging; while my focus was on the state of the publicly funded postsecondary education sector and impending change within it, I could not fully anticipate which themes would arise from participant answers to open-ended interview questions. I prepared for several possibilities. The review also helped with the design of the data gathering instruments and the questions that were posed during the interview. In the end, the list of topics reviewed was probably too long and extensive, but it was better to be over than under prepared. The reference perspective gained during this stage of the project also contributed to a more acute perspective for analyzing the gathered data.

The discussion of research resources has been divided into the following topic areas for the following purposes:

- 1) to demonstrate an understanding of the general state of knowledge related to the general state of postsecondary education systems in the developed world, an identification of current challenges facing the sector, including factors contributing pressure for change, and a projection or two with respect to its future state,
- 2) while also identifying gaps or limited areas of understanding that may be bolstered through this research.

The discussion begins with a review of those topics listed above. The knowledge gained during this review allowed for a sharper focus in the creation of questions included in the data gathering instruments and in the conduct of the associated interviews.

After the initial research proposal was approved and during the data gathering process, this section was bolstered with a range of resources discussing the COVID-19 global pandemic

and its impact and projected impact on postsecondary education. As discussed in the introduction, the pandemic and resultant health authority directives were so unexpected, so sudden and so dramatic that, despite the late timing in this research process, ignoring those global events would have contributed to incomplete analysis, inferior conclusions and obsolete recommendations before the publication was ever approved. It was imperative that I prepare for skilled analysis of participant comments that were affected by this emerging theme.

Rationale for the Themes

In order for a discussion of the pressing need for change to the conventional publicly funded postsecondary education system to be relevant, a discussion of the forces driving that change must be presented. (This section was written pre-pandemic.) Petrie (2014) presented the words volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) to help describe the operating environment of the near future (Petrie, 2014, p. 8).

From a geographic perspective, some of these forces, for example technological change, are essentially global in nature. Some are national, such as the annual funding levels provided by the Canadian federal government, while provincial (Alberta) government support is also relevant to this discussion. Local issues are not significant and are thus excluded from further consideration.

Before considering future conditions, some historical perspective is necessary to understand the current state of the system. Wernick (2006) reminded us that a university “is an archaic institution and can claim to have a more or less continuous history over more than two millennia” (Wernick, 2006, p. 557). John Henry Newman, in a series of publicly presented lectures in May and June of 1852 as well as other writings, eventually collected in a two-part book entitled *The Idea of a University*, introduced a number of foundational considerations that

significantly influenced the evolution of the modern form of the institution. In particular, he presented and elaborated on three themes:

- 1) the nature of knowledge;
- 2) the role of religious belief in higher education; and
- 3) a defense of liberal education for university students . . . have had a lasting and profound impact on higher education. (Lanford, 2019, para. 1)

Wilhelm von Humboldt of Prussia is also credited with establishing a model for the rest of Europe with the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1810 (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). A key element modeled was combining the activities of teaching and research in the search for impartial truth (Anderson, 2010, p. 1). His influence led to the recognition of the pre-eminence of German institutions for most of the 19th century. In the 20th century, American institutions took the lead; the earlier concepts noted above were imported to serve as their foundational base (Anderson, 2010, p. 2).

The latter half of the 20th century featured massive change. Great Britain released the Robbins committee report in 1963, which captured the sentiment of the day and articulated four “objectives essential to any properly balanced system” (Anderson, 2010, p. 1). The overarching “‘Robbins principle’ [proclaimed that] university places should be available to all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment” (Anderson, 2010, p. 1). Furthermore, it espoused the following four principles:

- 1) Instruction in skills;
- 2) Promoting the general powers of the mind;
- 3) Teaching should not be separated from the advancement of learning and the search for the truth, and;

- 4) The transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship
(Anderson, 2010, p. 1).

The Robbins-Oxbridge model also represented the very English idea that a university should be a community and that “the moral influence of residential life and social interaction outside the classroom were as important as formal instruction” (Anderson, 2010, p. 2).

Two major social influences which pressured changes to universities were the shift in political power from the elites to the middle classes and the rise of nationalism versus internationalism (Anderson, 2010, p. 3). In the 1960s, only approximately 4% to 5% of the university age group sought that level of education. By the 1980’s that number had risen to over 15%, which is often perceived as “the tipping point between elite and mass education” (Anderson, 2010, p. 3). As participation rates reached 40% to 50%, “The question arises whether the older university model was so bound up with elite education that it is no longer relevant” (Anderson, 2010, p. 3).

The passage of the Bologna Declaration, in 1988, “signed by the heads of most European universities” (Anderson, 2010, p. 4) marked another major milestone in the evolution of the modern global postsecondary education system. While distinctly European, the influence of the declaration was felt more widely, including here in North America. In addition, neoliberal thinking was beginning to influence the governance of the modern institution: “managerialism within the universities at the expense of academic self-government” would make universities “more responsive to outside pressures, from corporate funders, donors, and the media as well as the government” (Anderson, 2010, p. 4).

While Anderson (2010) focused on the evolution of university systems from a British perspective, Krucken et al. (2007) explored the concept of the multiversity. They studied the

tension between responding to global trends and national traditions. They noted that the term *multiversity* was first coined in 1963 (Krucken et al., 2007, p. 7). Their central argument was that “universities are best understood as historical, time-dependent systems that are strongly embedded in their own national and organizational histories” (Krucken et al., 2007, p. 8). This perspective allowed them to describe these complex institutions as having some shared standardized features while displaying diverse and localized elements. By engaging “global norms of universalism and empowered individualism” (Krucken et al., 2007, p. 9) they are able to describe universities as long-term success stories, as demonstrated by the unprecedented rise in enrolment since the 1960’s and the ever-growing number of subjects that can be studied.

Bok (2015) provided an American focused perspective to this discussion. He summarized his thoughts, after a long and distinguished academic career, in his book, *Higher Education in America*. His comprehensive discussion of the evolution of the system in the United States ranged “from the first colleges in colonial America to the more than 5000 ones that include” approximately 200 research universities, 700 comprehensive universities, 2000 four-year colleges, 1000 community colleges and more than 1300 for profit institutions (Romero, 2014, para. 1). Among the issues discussed, Bok addresses the fact that tuitions have been rising at a rate faster than the rise of inflation. His primary argument highlights the impossible dilemma created by legislators who act on “pervasive populism” (Romero, 2014, para. 4).which results in the careless cutting of taxes, while demanding that higher education institutions provide high quality education that is more accessible and affordable (Romero, 2014, para. 4).

In summary, the archaic institution known as *a university* has undergone significant change, over the course of several eras. That change accelerated during the latter half of the 20th century. In the 21st century, those change pressures continue to demonstrate the tension between

responding to global trends and national and local priorities. Neoliberal thinking and practices as reflected in increased usage of vocabulary such as *accountability*, *customers* and *university-industry relations* have become more commonplace.

The Impetus for Change and Possible Responses in the 21st Century

Globalization, demographics, and technological innovation are often noted as primary driving forces in the transformation of the publicly funded postsecondary education system in the 21st century. The trend of reduced annual government allocations often follows in any listing of forces driving change. Scott and Dixon (2008) described fundamental alterations and re-conceptualizations that are occurring due to increased globalization, the growing importance of technology in learning and other forces of change (Scott and Dixon, 2008, p. 1). They insisted that these are not “just the usual cyclical shifts that we are used to when, for instance, we are faced with a change of government at federal, state and or provincial level” (Scott & Dixon, 2008, p. 1). In addition, “over the next ten years, we will witness the exit of large numbers of faculty in the baby boomer demographic” (Scott & Dixon, 2008, p. 2). They asked the somewhat rhetorical question “have the walls of the ‘ivory tower’ been forever breached?” (Scott & Dixon, 2008, p. 2) then provided ample evidence to support a positive response to that question.

Barber, et al. (2013) in their publication, *An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead*, presented an unflinching perspective on the forces that are impacting publicly funded postsecondary education systems now and that may transform higher education on a global scale. They identified 10 elements of the value proposition currently offered by universities. Lawrence Summers, president emeritus of Harvard University, in the foreword of the publication, framed the discussion:

The fundamental question in *An Avalanche is Coming* is whether a university education is a good preparation for working life and citizenship in the 21st century or, more precisely, whether it will continue to be seen as good value, given the remorseless rise in the cost of a university education over recent decades. (Summers, 2013, p. 1)

This question is in the root of my research. In addition, the authors' ominous prediction is duly noted: "While some incumbents will thrive . . . others will suffer and some will go under" (Barber et al., 2013, p. 48). This is definitely a dramatic statement—is it overly dramatic? Is it unnecessarily alarmist? I asked myself these questions on numerous occasions as I considered their message and its implications. In the end, I determined that I preferred to be forewarned, to anticipate challenging circumstances before they occurred, thus increasing the possibility that they could be averted with proactive measures or addressed through effective strategies.

Barber et al. (2013) also introduced me to the contextual application of the concept *value proposition*; the term itself was not new to me, but its application to an examination of the components of a postsecondary education institution was. I reacted positively to this aspect of their publication due to my neoliberal tendencies and my business/market-oriented perspective, as described earlier in Chapter 1. They went on to identify what they believed to be 10 elements which represented the sources of value provided by a conventional university. Those elements are listed and described in more detail later in this chapter. While noting that they were presented in the context of an American university environment, there seemed to be enough potential value in using a framework based on those elements as a perspective to assist in analyzing the data collected from my research participants.

Grajek et al. (2018) supported this perspective by stating “the higher education business model is unsustainable” (Grajek et al., 2018, p. 41). “Technology has significantly disrupted almost every other major industry, and it is only a matter of time before it disrupts higher education” (Grajek et al., 2018, p. 52). In hindsight, I realized that I was interested in exploring the implications of these statements when I began the research, I was not prepared for how strongly my findings would support this line of thinking.

Another significant driver of change is the level of government funding being provided to postsecondary education systems. Bok (2015) captured some of the tension between traditional university and government funders: “public officials are impatient with academic representatives who constantly seek more money while resisting efforts to hold themselves more accountable to the society that sustains them” (Bok, 2015, Chapter 18, p. 2). Altbach et al. (2009) claimed that “21st century realities have magnified the importance of the global context” (Altbach et al., 2009, p. iv).

A number of authors have suggested that, due to the changing nature of their operating environment, universities are becoming more entrepreneurial. Hogan and Trotter (2013) attributed some of that change to massification and to the partial loss of monopoly on knowledge transmission (Hogan & Trotter, 2013, p. 79). If strategic planning by higher education institutions were to be viewed as an entrepreneurial exercise, they would attribute it to “a reaction to societal necessities or, at the very least, a reaction to national governments and stakeholders” (Hogan & Trotter, 2013, p. 13). That pressure will likely be exerted locally as well because the Blue Ribbon panel (2019) reviewing Alberta’s financial situation has recommended that the province’s publicly funded postsecondary institutions be expected to rely more on “alternative revenue sources” (Government of Alberta, 2019, p. 42).

The scope of this change is not limited to one country or one continent, as demonstrated in the research cited below, conducted in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Europe in general. Webber and Scott (2008) reported on the entrepreneurial activities of the faculties at two specific institutions, one in Australia (Curtin University of Technology) and the other in Canada (University of Calgary). “University revenues no longer come primarily from government. Rather, resources for teaching and research initiatives come from a combination of government, students, research grants, private sector funds, and industry partnerships” (Webber & Scott, 2008, p. 1).

I was intrigued by Kitagawa (2009), who presented a model for the development of viable entrepreneurialism and innovation within a university and then the development of partnerships with other universities and with industry in their region. He stated, “Universities now find themselves having to pay attention to many more ‘political centers’ than before as seen, for example, with research grants, assessments and teaching accreditation from transnational bodies such as the European Union, individual states and regional authorities” (Kitagawa, 2009, p. 66). “The search for new sources of finance to replace declining government funding for higher education may have been a strong imperative for universities in a number of Western economies to adopt ‘new managerialism’ and ‘entrepreneurialism’” (Kitagawa, 2009, p. 69). I was interested to see whether I would find evidence of these thoughts in the responses of those who agreed to be interviewed for my research.

I also wondered whether I would discover comments that reflected the perspectives of Chatterton and Goddard (2000). While acknowledging the powerful influence of globalization, they expressed the belief that universities might be more successful focusing on and serving regional needs. They argued that higher education needs to engage more with stakeholders and

establish mechanisms for regional supports. They perceived the new regional priorities to be skills, innovation and culture/community (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000, p. 482).

Shattock (2009) seemed to support that perspective, by discussing “the academic entrepreneur” (Shattock, 2009, p. 13) with respect to his/her contribution to regional issues. While limiting his discussion to European universities, his work described the theoretical foundations of the concept of entrepreneurialism in universities and its contributing merit within a knowledge society. The study also noted the demerits of entrepreneurialism and innovation in higher learning, attempting to project a somewhat balanced perspective. I realized that this perspective was rather advanced, but discovery of these thoughts among the responses of my participants would be rewarding.

Yokoyama (2006), studying British and Japanese institutions, noted five entrepreneurial types of universities. He noted their differences, and the following common elements:

- 1) a decrease of dependence on public funding (either out of necessity or by choice);
- 2) an increase in market-oriented activities and:
- 3) institutional changes including possible changes to governance and academic practices.

Yokoyama (2006) also noted an increase in managerialism (reliance on professional managers to make strategic decisions and administer the institution) also seemed relatively common (Yokoyama, 2006, p. 528). Altbach et al. (2009) and Bok (2015) reinforced that conclusion by indicating that those same pressures were being exerted in North American institutions as well.

McRoy and Gibbs (2009) offered general confirmation of the trend towards more entrepreneurial behaviour by universities and even attributed it to a cause: “it was no real surprise to find that, driven by business context pressures, the universities researched had

changed emphasis over the years and had adopted a more entrepreneurial outlook and business culture” (McRoy & Gibbs, 2009, p. 695).

Eastman (2006) proposed that the structure of the university of the future will reflect the funding priorities of government. Facing prolonged cutbacks in government funding, “if research funding is emphasized during the process of generating revenue, that part of the university’s operations will be emphasized over teaching; the opposite could also happen” (Eastman, 2006, pp. 79–80).

In summary, several researchers promoted evolving practices in the publicly funded postsecondary education system in response to a number of change factors. A number of these changes were labelled as entrepreneurial. Some of the change discussed seemed to support the perceived increase in managerialism. Three key questions considered for the duration of this project are:

- 1) Are these changes enough to effectively respond to the changing operating conditions in which these institutions find themselves?
- 2) Are faculty perceiving these changes?
- 3) If faculty are noting these types of changes, do they have an opinion about them, positive or otherwise?

The responses of participants were scanned with respect to these questions and concepts. Those responses that aligned with these perspectives are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The Canadian Postsecondary Education System

Canada’s postsecondary education system is young, relative to that of western European models. Not surprisingly, Canada’s system reflects the strong influence on its society that comes from the United States. It also features a strong British influence, not surprising given that the

country is a member of the British Commonwealth. Regional differences also reflect the history of Quebec, known as New France, before its capture by British forces in 1763. Canada's unique nature is reflected in its constitution, the British North America Act of 1867 (now called the Constitution Act) and the Constitution Act of 1982 (Government of Canada).

Eaton (2019) reminded us that “in Canada, higher education is decentralized, meaning that there is no federal system . . . higher education falls under the jurisdiction of each of the ten provinces and three territories” (Eaton, 2019, p. 2). Thus, since structures vary widely, drawing strong conclusions via comparisons must be done with caution. Eaton also stated that “in Canada, higher education is also referred to as postsecondary education” (Eaton, 2019, p. 2). One branch, tertiary education, refers to university or college and does not include the trades and polytechnics (Eaton, 2019, p. 2).

Usher (2018) provided us with an added description. He stated that, in Canada, the term *university* is or has been applied to as few as 64 institutions and to as many as “120 or so” (Usher, 2018, p. 4). In Alberta, as of January 1, 2020, that number was eight (Wikipedia). The term “colleges” is used with even greater variance; “there are over 200 community colleges across Canada, all told” (Usher, 2018, p. 7). “Quebec’s college system is quite different from those in the rest of the country” (Usher, 2018, p. 6). “Alberta and British Columbia always had a slightly different model for community colleges” (Usher, 2018, p. 6).

Within the Alberta provincial system, additional differentiation was implemented when the provincial government implemented a six-sector model in the Postsecondary Learning Act. The institution selected for this project was classified as a comprehensive community college, delineating it from the universities, polytechnic institutions and independent academic institutions, among others. Its tradition of having been part of a network of provincial

agricultural schools since 1912 remained at the core of its identity. By the time that it celebrated its centennial in 2013, its leadership had evolved to describing the institution as striving “to serve Canada and the world as an integrated learning and applied research community specializing in agriculture, horticulture, and land and environmental management” (Thompson, 2012, p. 7).

These distinctions were ever-present as I collected data and analyzed it. In addition to limitations associated with the chosen research method, the conclusions drawn and recommendations stated were crafted carefully due to these contextual conditions.

The Canadian and Provincial Fiscal Landscape

Annual expenditure in Canada by our federal and provincial governments on publicly funded postsecondary education is substantial. Furthermore, the federal government and most provincial governments were generating annual budget deficits and dealing with accumulating debt pre-pandemic. As mentioned earlier, the situation has gotten significantly worse.

Much of the information in this section reflects the situation, as reported in the early stages of production of this dissertation. That material has been left untouched to illustrate the state of conditions at that time, when conclusions were generated. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation provides a service which allows an individual to access up-to-the minute information with respect to federal and provincial debt levels; the debt levels reported here are current as of the stated date.

Canada’s fiscal situation has deteriorated rapidly since the onset of the pandemic. When I first started reporting on this matter, on or about June 20, 2020, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation debt clock reported that Canada’s federal government debt was approximately \$759 billion. Then Federal Finance Minister Bill Morneau had initially announced that he would present the federal government budget on March 27, 2020; the effects of the pandemic caused

him to postpone that event indefinitely. On July 8, 2020, a downscaled budgetary statement was issued. The announced projected deficit for the year was expected to be \$343.2 billion (Zimonic, 2020, para 4). That calculation reflected the creation of approximately \$212 billion worth of new programs, intended to buffer Canadians from the most painful effects of the economic shock experienced by adherence to public health directives, as well as a projected loss of \$81.3 billion in federal government revenues due to the downturn caused by the dramatic disruption of economic activity (Zimonic, 2020, para. 5). These measures quickly pushed the total federal government debt over \$1 trillion. As of May 3, 2021, Canada's debt has been reported as over \$1.1 trillion, with the debt growing at over \$1 billion per day.

The federal election held on October 21, 2019 yielded a Liberal-led minority government. While the future direction of this centrist to left-leaning government is unclear, it seems generally evident that current levels of deficit spending and accumulating levels of debt are unsustainable. Significant reductions in spending will be required as the national economy recovers.

The Alberta finance minister announced the 2020/2021 budget on February 27, 2020, projecting a \$6.8 billion deficit for the year. Response to the public health situation ensured that it would be many times higher than that initially announced figure. Early estimates placed it near \$20 billion (Dryden, 2020, para. 3). On February 25, 2020, the finance minister presented the 2021/2022 budget. He predicted a budget deficit of \$18.2 billion. As of May 3, 2021, the provincial debt was over \$99.5 billion (Canadian Taxpayers Federation).

As economic activity recovers to normal levels, the government may return to implementing the recommendations of a blue ribbon panel that it appointed to analyze the province's financial situation in 2019. That panel had been tasked to make recommendations for

getting the province back to fiscal balance. Among those recommendations were the suggestions that provincial postsecondary education institutions be prepared to rely more on tuition and alternative revenue sources and less on government grants (Government of Alberta, 2019, p. 42). The government also announced plans to introduce a new performance-based funding model for the sector. Implementation of that model was due to start on April 1, 2020, but postponed due to the effects of the pandemic (Nicolaidis, 2020, para. 1). While no specific date for the re-introduction has been announced, the Minister of Advanced Education Demetrios Nicolaides was quoted as saying that “He’s still committed to the approach and wants it in place for the 2021-22 school year” (French, 2020, para. 4). It was further announced that the consulting firm McKinsey & Company had been hired to “perform a review of the province’s postsecondary education system” (Consulting.ca (Canada), June 16, 2020, para. 1). Titled *Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs*, their report is scheduled to be released in the Spring of 2021. While several measures introduced in the initiatives described above may be referenced, the current state of affairs is dramatically different, which may call for new measures.

It is clear that current financial trends in Alberta and in Canada are unsustainable and that course corrections will need to be implemented. It is logical to assume that funding for the postsecondary sector will be impacted, as part of the shared burden, and that trend will likely continue for many years. Leaders of publicly funded postsecondary institutions need to prepare their entire academic community for that distinct possibility.

Identifying the challenges ahead is the relatively easy part of this analysis. Recommending and then implementing strategies to keep an institution out of, to borrow an image from the Barber et al. publication, the slide path of an “avalanche” is quite another. While every institution has its particular circumstances, and thus there is no one approach to the holistic

solutions that should be sought, it would appear that the most successful institutions are likely to utilize an all hands-on deck approach. Therefore, the full support of faculty would seem to be an important factor in that quest for success.

The Elements of Value

Barber et al. (2013) proposed a model featuring 10 components of a successful 20th century university. They stated that each of these contributed to the value proposition of an institution. They then suggested that each of those could essentially be addressed in isolation. In other words, the package represented by a traditional university could be “unbundled” and offered as isolated elements and or in a variety of combinations by new and non-traditional competitors. One of their core messages was that “The student consumer is king” (Barber et al., 2013, p. 10). They suggested that students have a greater variety of options to choose from, including options that were almost the exclusive territory of colleges and universities in the past. They further argued that those institutions that do not review and sharpen their delivery models might find themselves swept away by the “avalanche of change” that they predicted was in the offing. There was also a call for urgent action in their message.

The 10 components (value elements) of a traditional university were identified as follows: 1) Research, 2) Degrees, 3) City prosperity, 4) Faculty, 5) Students, 6) Governance and administration, 7) Curriculum, 8) Teaching and learning, 9) Assessment and 10) Experience. They were presented here in the order established by the authors. Careful analysis of that presentation order revealed that it appears that they determined that the first two elements, research and degrees, had extra importance or significance than the other eight; no other discernable sense of order could be established. The final listing may have been somewhat

arbitrary or simply a matter of convenience. Figure 1 was generated to provide a more convenient visual reference of their model.

Figure 1

The 10 Value Elements

Degrees	Research
Faculty	City Prosperity
Students	Assessment
Curriculum	Teaching and Learning
Experience	Governance and Administration

A closer examination of the definitions used by the authors for their value elements was needed to ensure accurate interpretation of the terms used; it also revealed that language used in a conventional university context was not always applicable to the college environment in which the research was conducted. The following considerations were noted:

- While the terms “professor” and “instructor” have similar meanings, the former is more commonly used at a university while the latter is more common in a college.
- The granting of degrees is largely within the purview of a university; in a college setting, certificates and diplomas are more commonly issued.
- University degree curriculums are generally delivered over four years; in college, two-year diploma programs are much more common.

- While the role of applied research has grown in college settings, research is generally associated with universities.

A summary of these and other differences are provided in Table 1.

Table 1*The Definitions of the Value Elements Described in Barber et al. and Variances Used*

Barber Value Element	Barber Definition	My Variant Definition
1. Research	Journal publications, reports, citations, and patents.	None
2. Degrees	Verification of time spent at institution and exams passed: brand value.	The college equivalent is certificates and diplomas.
3. City Prosperity	Economic and social of city and/or region.	None
4. Faculty	Professors and other faculty.	The college equivalent is instructors.
5. Students	Full-time and part-time students, often between the ages of 18 and 22.	In this study, much more consideration was given to full-time students than to part-time students, reflecting the college's typical student body.
6. Governance and administration	University leadership and board Admissions, fundraising, alumni services, maintenance and facilities.	A number of variances were included. First, reference is to college leadership and board. Leadership is also represented by terms like management, administration. More discussion in the report.
7. Curriculum	Individual subject-based courses adding up to a three- or four-year programme. Course content and syllabus prepared by faculty, textbooks and other reading materials.	From a college perspective, certificate and diploma programs last one or two years respectively. No other significant variances.
8. Teaching and Learning	Lectures, tutorials, seminars.	No significant variances.

Barber Value Element	Barber Definition	My Variant Definition
9. Assessment	Exams within and at the end of courses; dissertations at the end of a programme.	No significant variances.
10. Experience	Student organizations; cocurricular activities (such as debating, research competitions); extracurricular activities (drama, sports); work experience (internships, volunteering).	None

Note. Adapted from “*An Avalanche Is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead*,” by M. Barber, K. Donnelly, and S. Rizvi, 2013, p. 31. Copyright 2013 by Institute for Public Policy Research.

As stated earlier, I believed that the paradigm presented in *An Avalanche is Coming* is accurate and strongly related to it. The premises upon which the theoretical framework was built was consistent with those of other authors, most notably Petrie (2014). They also align with the stories of change that have impacted other industry sectors such as airlines and music publishing. The 10 components identified and analyzed, while clearly interrelated, are also distinct and easy to understand, even for a general audience. My enthusiasm for this model increased towards the end of Chapter 1, when the authors presented some of the challenges to the implementation of their vision. The recognition of barriers such as “the sheer power of incumbents” (Barber et al., 2013, p. 20) demonstrated that their perspective was realistic and balanced.

I am also aware that Barber et al. (2013) have their critics and I have read and considered several of those viewpoints. The most stinging comments comes from a group called the Followers of the Apocalypse (2013) who produced a video entitled, “*The Avalanche That Hasn’t Happened*,” which was first presented at a conference in Park City, Utah called Open

Education '13 (Followers of the Apocalypse, 2013, video). They recommended reading the document, but approaching it with the right frame of mind – when that was done, the publication should strike the reader as “wildly funny” (Followers of the Apocalypse, 2013, video). Lewis and Shore (2018) labelled the work as a “neoliberal assault on universities” (Lewis & Shore, 2018, pp. 1–2) and suggested that there were political motives behind the production of the report. Reed Scull (2013) provided the gentlest criticisms starting with “the scope of the paper is modest” and “rather than offer detailed recommendations for change, the authors intend to stimulate discussion on change in higher education by presenting their views and proposing possible directions in institutional responses (Reed Scull, 2013, p. 2). Finally, I explored the ideas of other influential authors in the field of postsecondary education sector change, Altbach et al. (2013), for comparative purposes. While I would characterize Altbach et al.’s perspectives as more conventional and mainstream than those of Barber et al. (2013), I could not find any direct criticism of the Barber publication and did note the use of several terms in common. On the surface, it would appear that there was common ground in the territory that each published work explored. There were few direct cross references between the publications. I accepted the possibility that, as I continued to work with and explore all components of the Barber et al. paradigm, I, too, would discover more of its limitations and additional points of disagreement. I also noted that the strong British perspective of the publication might have limited the usefulness of the transferability of the ideas to a North American/Canadian context.

I also became aware of two logic traps that could lead a reader to inaccurate conclusions. While the forces of change will impact publicly funded postsecondary institutions relatively equally, not all institutions will face the same risk to their existence. Secondly, no specific timelines were presented. The process described will likely unfold over an extended period of

time, though the impact of the global pandemic will likely accelerate the process, in some instances. When one reflects upon the potential impact to their personal career, s/he needs to consider the specific circumstances of their home institution in context with the stage of their career. Finally, local political forces often influence specific circumstances.

While all publicly funded postsecondary education leaders and administrators will want to carefully consider their role in value-creating activities, faculty are one of the value elements. Thus, it is likely that faculty actions, influenced by their perceptions, could be part of the competitive advantage of a leading-edge institution. For example, choices made with respect to delivery of curriculum can have significant impact on the value derived by students and contributes substantially to the students' overall experience in postsecondary education. Instinctively, it might seem self-evident that faculty contribute significant value to students. This perception was strengthened by Umbach and Wawrzynski through analysis of two national (U.S.) data sets in 2003. Not only were they able to report statistically significant results that indeed faculty mattered, they were able to share this conclusion:

that students report higher levels of engagement and learning at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students in experiences, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interact with students, challenge students academically, and value enriching educational experiences. (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2003. p. 2)

This powerful statement affirms the value added by the element labelled as faculty, and adds considerable commentary relating to the curriculum, teaching and learning elements.

Narrowing the scope of the discussion related to *curriculum* and *teaching and learning* involved conscious choice as well. First, the transmission of information will be left to others to

explore. Adding value to the student experience on this occasion involved terms like *engagement* and *higher-order cognitive activities*. These concepts likely involve the teaching of “human skills” (Pant & Baroudi, 2007, p. 124) and/or the more commonly referenced, essentially equivalent term, *soft skills*. Many aspects of curriculum involve the transmission of facts and concepts. Faculty responses, with respect to their perceptions of the relative importance between the delivery of facts versus a focus on soft skills, were interesting to review.

Pant and Baroudi (2007), Schultz (2008) and Andrews and Higson (2008) all acknowledged the importance of these skill sets, using slightly different labels for them from slightly different perspectives. As mentioned earlier, Pant and Baroudi (2007) referred to them as *human skills* and listed limited examples of what they meant - teamwork and group development (Pant & Baroudi, 2007, p. 124). They also identified adaptability, responsibility and teachability as desirable traits in a modern workforce, particularly one focused in the area of project management. Schultz made an effective case for the importance of teaching soft skills, even attempting to prioritize some over others, but stopped short of completing that argument. He seemed to promote communication skills above all others and provided a model which illustrated several elements within that skill set. Then, following the list of examples of soft skills that he did produce, he added the mysterious phrase “the list is by far not complete” (Shultz, 2008, p. 147). This statement provided incentive to search for a complete list, assuming that one exists.

Andrews and Higson (2008) added further testament to the importance of teaching *soft skills* in their analysis of graduate employability in a European context. They discovered a “remarkably homogenous” (Andrews & Higson, 2008, p. 420). set of similarities in the perceptions of both employers and business graduates with respect to the importance of these skills and competencies in the contemporary workplace in a knowledge-based economy

(Andrews & Higson, 2008, p. 420). However, similarly to Shultz (2008) and Pant and Baroudi (2007), they stopped short of providing a comprehensive list of those skill sets.

Two other sources of literature provided insight into potential additions to the consideration of soft skills. Duckworth (2016), in her book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, made a convincing argument for the development of *grit* as an essential ingredient of success. She argued that grit can be learned, “regardless of IQ or circumstances” (Duckworth, 2016, book jacket) and thus made the case that the entity which teaches this to students provides them with significant value. Furthermore, she stated that grit is what makes “high achievers special” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 8). Ruiz-Alfonso et al. (2018) added support to that argument by asserting that it is possible to “foster students’ passion” (Ruiz-Alfonso et al., 2018, p. 19). I was particularly struck by Ruiz-Alfonso et al.’s statement that “research on passion is really recent and, therefore, still scarce” (Ruiz-Alfonso et al., 2018, p. 19). If this is indeed the case, there seems to be opportunity to contribute to deeper understanding relative to this aspect of the teaching and learning experience. This new insight caused me to wonder if my colleagues would refer to these themes in their responses.

Additional Considerations: Soft Skills

As noted in the earlier section, the list of soft skills is likely incomplete. As such, perhaps entrepreneurial skills should be included in the listing. If universities are striving to be more entrepreneurial themselves, it might make good sense for them to train their graduates in this manner. This could provide a pool of qualified candidates to draw from to fill future vacancies.

According to Balderson and Clark (2011), entrepreneurs are idea-oriented; specifically, they are creative, flexible, innovative, independent and risk-takers. They think and plan with a long-term perspective and have a high ability to tolerate ambiguity and change (Balderson &

Clark, 2011, p. 42). This description would suggest the exercising and implementation of several soft skills.

Good (2017) had a more extensive list of qualities that were desirable for the role of entrepreneur, generating an extensive questionnaire allowing an individual to tabulate a score based on their answers to questions related to their personal background, behaviour patterns and lifestyle factors. The theory was the higher the score, the more closely the individual's profile matched that of the "perfect" entrepreneur. Good noted as well that even a low score should not have been interpreted as discouragement with respect to seeking entrepreneurial ventures. He argued that there were three essential qualities: commitment, determination and persistence. Display of high levels of those attributes would overcome other potential weaknesses and might, ultimately, be the difference between success and failure (Good, 2017, p. 14). I noted that Good's reference to *persistence* was remarkably similar to Duckworth's description of grit. It also seemed to me that both of the aforementioned authors were referencing aspects of Ruiz-Alfonso et al.'s discussion of passion. Thus, being passionate seems to be an integral aspect of being a successful entrepreneur.

On March 31, 2020, after the initial literature review for this report had been completed and, in the midst of the global pandemic, the Conference Board of Canada released a report entitled, *The Future is Social and Emotional: Evolving Skill Needs in the 21st Century*. Essentially, this report added substance to the previous research findings, while introducing a new label for soft skills – *social and emotional skills (SES)*. The primary conclusion expressed in the report was that "It will mean changing the way postsecondary institutions teach and assess human skills to better prepare learners for work and help Canadian businesses grow" (Conference Board of Canada, 2020, para. 9). Furthermore, among the list of skills and

competencies that the Conference Board included under the social and emotional skills banner was *resiliency* which was further defined using the terms flexibility, adaptability and agility (Conference Board of Canada, 2020, para. 12). While additional confirmation of the worthiness of this research endeavor was not needed, it was gladly accepted as further evidence of the contemporary importance of this topic.

In summary, while the teaching of entrepreneurialism may be recognized as adding value, it may not be a top of mind topic. With respect to grit, there has been some emphasis from the vice president academic & student experience at the chosen institution. She periodically invited faculty to lunch with her and gave each Academic Staff Member that attended a copy of the Duckworth book. Careful reading of this publication was an additional step in the preparation for the work ahead for me, in addition to the other literature cited in this section. Finally, the assertions that *human skills, soft skills, social and emotional skills, grit, passion, resiliency* and their equivalents could be taught and enhanced with education resonated with me.

Delivering Value

Several researchers offered additional commentary with respect to change or potential changes in the publicly funded postsecondary education sector. Some expressed caution, others pushed for massive change. Denham (2005) expressed caution, “if the university becomes more and more a business, and hence, the equivalent of a private sector entity, it is feared that its focus on profit will make it ‘an island without social responsibility’” (Denham, 2005, p. 13). Kitagawa (2009) was more optimistic, “Entrepreneurial universities can create social capital through various mechanisms that can sustain and develop intellectual capital in their regions” (Kitagawa, 2009, p. 82). Webber and Scott (2008) noted an ironic aspect to the behaviours in the two institutions, one in Australia, the other the University of Calgary in Canada, that they contrasted:

While leaders demonstrated entrepreneurial capacity in sourcing international educational markets, the linkage between maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching (and reputation) and ongoing student enrolment (and associated increased revenue) did not appear always to be explicit to them in their strategic decision making and in the vision explicated to faculty. (Webber and Scott, 2008 p. 13)

Seigel (2006) challenged the academy to re-define its boundaries with courage and confidence and to interpret the situation as increased opportunities for universities, colleges and their faculty. He also tried to warn them that they should be prepared to re-conceptualize present institutional contexts, practices and students, in order to support the conditions necessary for innovation to take place (Seigel, 2006, p. 15).

Wernick (2006) argued that the change process is not finished. Despite the significant transformation which occurred in the latter half of the 20th century, universities need to evolve to meet the challenges of the 21st century; “the combination of globalization and cybernation will set the parameters for the next round of the university’s development” (Wernick, 2006, p. 557). Mirci and Hensley (2010) seem to support that viewpoint by proposing that 21st century educational leaders will need to think differently than those of the previous century - they will need to think systematically rather than bureaucratically (Mirci & Hensley, 2010, p. 9). Petrie (2014) supported most of these points, especially the need to think systematically (Petrie, 2014, p. 9). These statements suggest that a focus on value maximization may be appropriate and timely. In this process, it appears that almost every aspect of conventional systems will come under the microscope. For example, the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies added its support to this discussion by acknowledging that PhD programs need to rethink their core

attributes to thrive in the 21st century; “the purpose, meaning, and scope of the PhD are changing in response to profound changes in both the academy and society” (Academica, 2018, para. 1). In the first two of a series of reports to be released, discussion of the dissertation and comprehensive examinations concluded that universities need to recast these two major components to better reflect changing needs (Academica, 2018, para. 1). Bok (2015) added to this discussion, “graduate programs still concentrate on training students for research while doing far less to acquaint them with the growing body of knowledge about teaching and learning” (Bok, 2015, Chapter 18). Again, the forces of change in the 21st century are prompting the re-evaluation of essentially all aspects of tertiary education. In the process, publicly funded postsecondary institutions are expected to maximize the value of the limited public funds allocated to their operations while supplementing those resources with self-generated revenues and achieving fiscal objectives by careful control of expenditures. I looked forward to analyzing my data for reference to these concepts.

Conceptual Frameworks

Attempts to illustrate the central concepts of this project are made following this brief discussion. “Change” and “urgency” are rather abstract concepts and difficult to represent with a visual aid; therefore, the illustrations chosen highlight ancillary elements of the project. The first figure demonstrates the context of the current operating environment and of this project, in a series of nested circles. The role of faculty in the local chosen institution is represented within ever larger circles, representing the larger and wider contexts, including the global perspective. The second figure demonstrates that the literature reviewed for this project was deliberately wide and far-ranging; I had no way of knowing which themes would emerge from the collected data, so I overprepared. As the project proceeded to the data analysis stage, I hoped that certain themes

could be identified from among the respondents' answers. I also had to prepare for the likelihood that some topics would not emerge, or that I would not perceive them, despite a triangulated approach. I prepared to describe those themes in greater detail and in relation to academic literature. I looked forward to learning how closely actual responses align with anticipated themes.

The forces of change are challenging the existence of traditional publicly funded postsecondary education institutions. A logical response to this reality is to focus on the elements that add value to the experience of a student, to deliver well on those elements and to broadcast that strategy through focused messages.

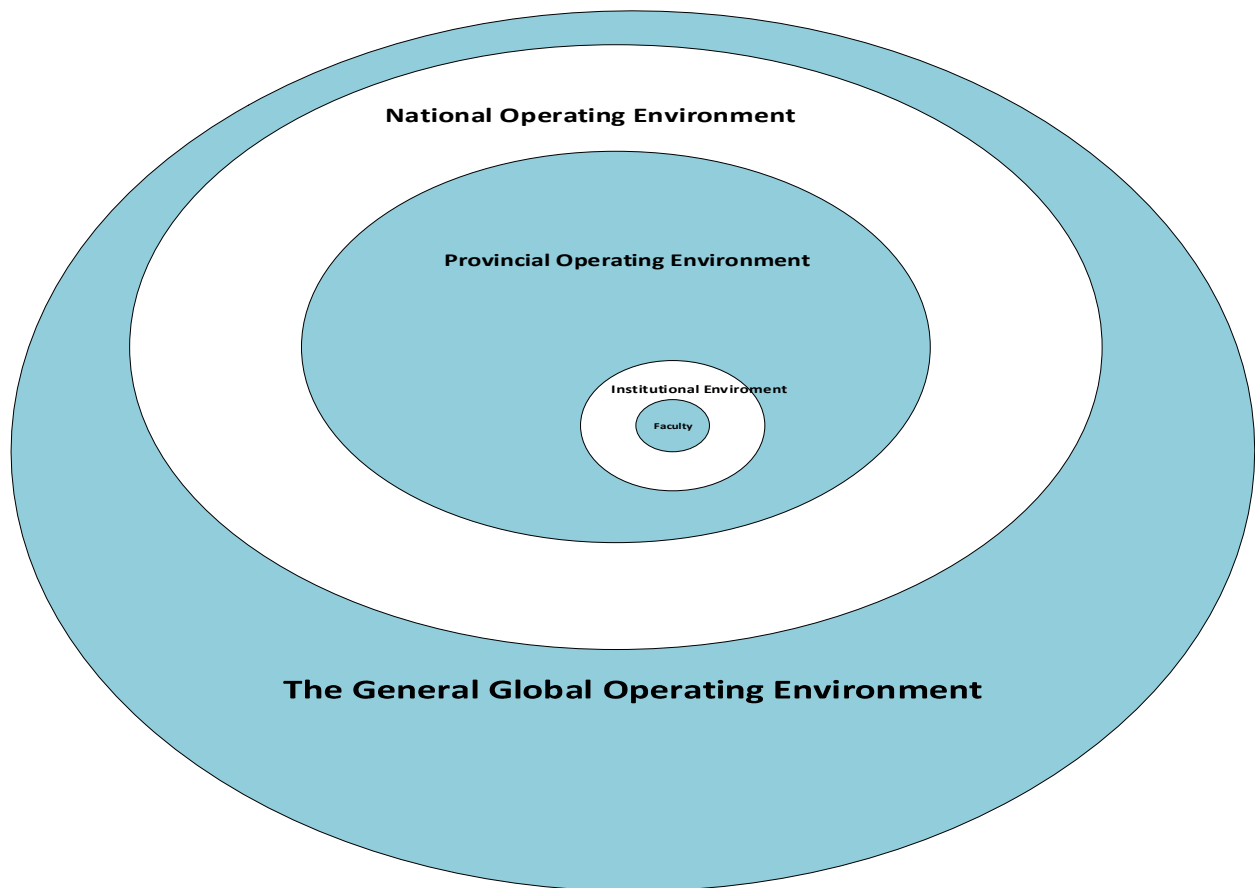
As noted in the Barber et al. (2013) model, faculty are one of the value-adding elements. Expanding on that point, an illustration was generated placing faculty at the target institution within the larger operational context. This illustration was expected to help support the discussions that would spring from the data analysis process; by being better able to represent my perspective. I hoped to be better positioned to collect my colleagues' perceptions and position them relative to my paradigm. In the search for meaning, the opportunity to compare and contrast could help with the discovery of shared meaning.

In Figure 2, faculty are being represented as a small circle within larger circles, the largest of which is a representation of the operational environment in which all publicly funded postsecondary institutions find themselves. The circles are not neatly proportional. In fact, the relative sizes are generally intended to demonstrate the relative sizes of each represented element, or at least demonstrate that the relative proportions of each circle are unequal. Thus, the model is far from neat and orderly; at best, the diagram is a general representation.

A second diagram was used to further illustrate the scope of faculty within the larger operating environment. That diagram conveyed that message by representing the larger element as an encompassing horizontal feature and faculty as a subset of that feature relating to it from below. It is a simplistic representation, focused on only two elements and ignoring the scope of the individual institution, the provincial context and any representation of national or international interests. It also supports the expectation that the data gathered during the interview process will likely only relate to a portion of the themes discussed in this literature review. Now that the process is complete, I am pleased at the breadth of topics and subjects that were explored. Since there was no way to predict which themes would emerge, I prepared for a greater and wider variety of topic areas.

Figure 2

The Role of Faculty in the Context of Various Operating Environments

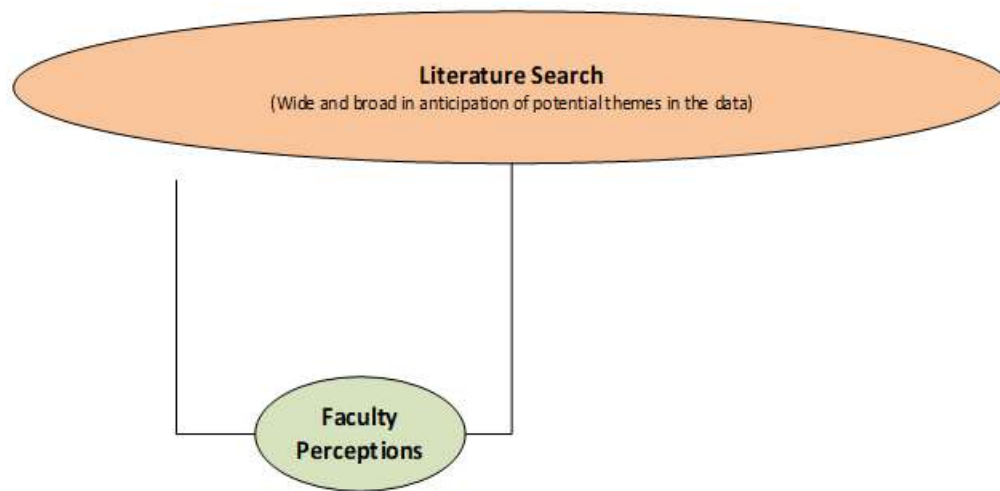


Note. The sizes of the circles are meant to be generally representative. They are not scaled proportionally.

As referenced earlier, a second graphic illustrates the approach taken during the literature search undertaken during the preparation of the research proposal. It was purposely wide, but it was also anticipated that some of the material gathered would not be referenced by participants in their responses. Unfortunately, the topics that would not be referenced could not be accurately anticipated. The results of the research proved that my initial impressions were correct. The graphic in Figure 3 provides an approximate visual reference to the relationship between the useful material and the extraneous information.

Figure 3

The Relationship Between the Literature Search and the Data to Be Gathered



Responding to the Global Pandemic

Postsecondary education institutions were not prepared for the announcement of a global COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. In Canada and Alberta, directives from their respective chief medical officers led to closures of all postsecondary campuses on or about March 15, 2020. Most institutions delivered the final few weeks of their winter terms via remote means. At the time of the writing of this dissertation, some phased re-opening of businesses and service centers was occurring, but access to most campuses was restricted to those providing core operations only. Many classes were being delivered on-line by instructors working from remote locations. Institutions announced plans for the fall term ranging from full on-line delivery to hybrid delivery to limited face-to-face delivery.

Academics and scholars are publishing a variety of articles in an attempt to help us all come to terms with this traumatic turn of events. In this section, I discuss selected articles that may have a bearing on the conclusions drawn from this project. Most of the articles are written from an American perspective, so care needs to be taken with respect to interpreting their

relevance to our Canadian and provincial perspectives. I have not included articles focused only on short-term repercussions in order to select ones that appear that they will continue to be relevant for an extended period of time; in reality, however, the current situation is so dynamic that my judgment may not be fully accurate. Finally, I have taken the unusual step of emphasizing the dates on which cited articles were published. In this way, I illustrated the evolution of thinking over a relatively short period of time.

On March 31, Hill (2020) described three phases to the postsecondary education system response to the pandemic:

- Phase 1 - “put everything on Zoom and worry about details later” (Hill, 2020, para. 7).
- Phase 2, still part of the emergency response, - Hill identified a growing acknowledgement that remote teaching and learning is “materially different than online education that had been thoughtfully designed” (Hill, 2020, para. 7).
- Phase 3 - likely to be implemented in Fall 2020 - “there is a reasonable likelihood that many schools will remain with online delivery” (Hill, 2020, para. 7).
- Finally, he introduced a Phase 4 acknowledging that the emergence of a new normal would likely take longer than his initial time line and expressed thoughts covered.

Hill also referred to the work of Alexander, who coincidentally released a book in January 2020, exploring the challenging futures of colleges and universities. In a follow-up article, published on March 31, 2020, Alexander discussed how COVID-19 had turned the downhill slide into an avalanche (Alexander, 2020b, title). Clearly the use of the term “avalanche” caused me to think of the Barber et al. (2013) publication.

Steele provided some of the clearest messaging with respect to the longer-term future; on May 14, 2020, he published an article called Schrodinger’s Semester, in which he told us that

“we must plan for online delivery throughout the upcoming academic year. Any other announcement is just wishful thinking” (Steele, 2020, title byline). He then referred to an article entitled “The End of the Pandemic,” Part 5 of a five-part series discussing the strategic implications of COVID-19. Rather than focus on the short-term, this article looked further into the future and described the pandemic as “probably THE defining formative event for Gen Alpha,” (eduvation, 2020, p. 6) those individuals born between 2010 and 2025.

Several authors tried to view the major disruption of higher education as an opportunity to transform it and make it better than ever. The Royal Bank of Canada’s Schrumm described the Canadian-based multinational financial institution’s perspective in the article “*How the COVID-19 crisis can help transform higher education*” released on June 1. Friga tried to end his rather gloomy March 24, 2020 article, *The Great Recession was bad for Higher Education. Coronavirus could be worse* with the phrase, “this is the opportunity of a lifetime for enacting positive change in higher education” (Friga, 2020, p. 9). Latham and Braun added a sense of urgency and drama to the discussion with the provocative title of their June 1, 2020 article, *It’s Now or Never* They added to the discussion in this project with the statement, “College leaders seeking to survive and thrive in a post-pandemic environment have no choice but to reassess and redefine their value proposition” (Latham & Braun, 2020, para. 1).

Another set of articles represented the full spectrum of current thinking, much of it presented in somewhat dramatic fashion. At one end of the spectrum, Paxson, president of Brown College, made a rather emphatic statement with her April 26, 2020 article, *College Campuses Must Reopen in the Fall. Here’s How We Do It*. At the other end of the spectrum was Tierney in his May 11, 2020 article, *Preventing the Collapse of Higher Education*, in which he argued as emphatically as Paxson that “the option of students returning to campus in the fall is

not viable, regardless of economic implications” (Tierney, 2020, para. 1). Essentially his argument was that the short-term benefits of immediate reopening were not worth the long-term risks to the system and to the health and safety of individuals, particularly faculty, in the system. He stated that the under 25 population, while “least likely to become sick with the coronavirus . . . are most likely to flout requests to stay indoors, wear masks and avoid public places” (Tierney, 2020, para. 3). (As the scientific community learns more about the coronavirus, it appears that its impact on younger populations is more extensive than thought, on the date of publication of this article.) He also stated that a significant proportion of tenure and non-tenure faculty are over age 55 and/or immunocompromised and should not be expected “to come to campus until 2021” (Tierney, 2020, para. 4). And finally, he argued that “without constant testing of the people on our campuses, we do not know what we are combating” (Tierney, 2020, para. 4).

Walsh brought forward the most dramatic perspective encountered during the entire period of this research project, late in the process. He interviewed Scott Galloway, a professor of marketing at the New York University Stern School of Business, and published the results on May 11, 2020 in Higher Education. In the stream of new information that I received in that relatively short period of time, I did not immediately read the article. Once I gave it attention, I was shaken. Galloway predicted that “hundreds, if not thousands, of brick-and-mortar universities will go out of business and those that remain will have student bodies composed primarily of the children of the one percent” (Walsh, 2020, p. 2). Galloway envisioned that “the post-pandemic future . . . will entail partnerships between the largest tech companies in the world and elite universities” (Walsh, 2020, p. 2). This cooperation would allow those universities to “expand enrollment dramatically by offering hybrid online-offline degrees” (Walsh, 2020, p. 2)

which would essentially crowd out the lesser lights, so to speak. These predictions essentially supported the proposals made by Barber et al. (2013), but were bolder by several degrees.

Bowen in his May 19, 2020 article brought us back to a sense of balance by asking if higher education is asking the right questions in the midst of this crisis. He correctly argued that during such times, “people are prone to focus on the tactical, but what we know already suggests we should be thinking longer term and for greater disruption” (Bowen, 2020, para. 1). The following assessments were astute:

COVID-19 is an ambiguous threat. We do not know how long it will continue, and we certainly do not know how it will change people’s behaviour. This is not the time to stay the course and downplay the threat. Hope is not a strategy.

(Bowen, 2020, para.6)

And “what we know already suggests that we should be thinking longer term and for greater disruption” and “if you are hoping that waiting will make complexity any clearer, it will be a long wait” (Bowen, 2020, p. 10).

Change Leadership

Buller (2015) published the definitive authority with respect to guiding the leaders of publicly funded postsecondary education leaders into and through any change process that they might wish to initiate or have inherited, regardless of the state of progress. His book, *Change Leadership in Higher Education: A Practical Guide to Academic Transformation*, is true to its title. I was influenced during my first reading of it, and returned to it repeatedly during this project. After I had communicated my major findings, I further realized that the way for the leaders of those institutions to implement my recommendations was to engage the organic leadership approach advocated by that

author. Essentially, the core message that he delivered was, “if you want to improve an outcome, don’t spend your time thinking about the outcome itself. Spend your time improving the culture that produces the outcome” (Buller, 2015, p. 217).

That insight then had me consider the characteristics of publicly-funded postsecondary institutions, principally in Alberta. Could the conclusions drawn from the chosen institution be transferred to others in the province? This institution was small, especially in comparison to the province’s universities. It was smaller than most other colleges as well, and had a proud tradition of specialized service, predominantly in the agricultural sector. As stated on the book jacket of the publication produced to celebrate its first one hundred years of service, “for a century, Olds College has been the pre-eminent model of practical agricultural education in western Canada (Potyondi, 2012, book jacket). It had a distinct image and brand, as well as strong institutional traditions. These traditions were reflected, in part, in the generally harmonious labour relations which had existed between institutional management and its Faculty Association.

In addition to anecdotal evidence, a review of the past decade of results from the annual climate survey administered by the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA), revealed that Olds College consistently rated in the top three institutions with respect to participation rate and generally reported climate results. As president of the Olds College Faculty Association from 2012 - 2016, I also had the pleasure of providing some of the most positive reports to ACIFA’s Presidents’ Council, in sharp contrast to those provided from sister institutions. For example, I would report on new programming and new partnerships that were being established, while other associations were reporting about the number of grievances that had been filed or were

in progress and/or the stalemate being experienced during the latest round of collective bargaining. Thus, leaders seeking to implement the recommendations presented in Chapter 5 might need to account for differences in organizational culture and in relations between faculty and management between their home institution and Olds College.

Summary

At the beginning of this literature review, the case for the need for change to the postsecondary education system was made. A variety of global forces are challenging publicly funded postsecondary education institutions to evolve from some of their original mandates. Traditional institutions are being challenged to focus beyond self-perpetuation. Instead of being repositories of knowledge and intellectual capital, they are increasingly being expected to contribute to regional, national and international economic development. They must also prepare the next generation of students for a wide range of jobs and careers. In addition, reductions in government funding are causing these same institutions to take on more entrepreneurial behaviours. Forecasts for the future seem to indicate that the forces that precipitated those behaviours will grow more intense and urgent.

This project began with an interest in discovering how faculty, one of the principal stakeholder groups within these institutions, perceive these change pressures. A wide-ranging literature review was conducted, in anticipation of themes and topics that faculty might raise. There was no anticipation or preparation for the global pandemic that took hold in March 2020. A significant number of new articles were identified and studied while the research stage of this project began; while the original paradigm in the approved proposal has not changed, preparation for an expanded discussion including elements of the pandemic was prudent.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.—Nelson Mandela

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe the chosen research methodology and associated design. Several factors were considered in arriving at these decisions. The primary and secondary research problems obviously influenced these choices. The literature described in Chapter 2 provided a foundation from which this pursuit of new knowledge was launched. As described by Richards and Morse (2007, as cited by Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), these considerations contributed to “research study methodological congruence” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 27).

General Research Context

As described in Chapter 1, this study sought to assist leaders of publicly funded postsecondary education institutions to adapt to the dramatic changes forecast to impact their sector. The stakes are high; those institutions that do not make the necessary adjustments could cease operations. Faculty are an integral stakeholder group and I believe that they must contribute to their institution’s efforts to adapt to the evolving circumstances for there to be a successful outcome. I wanted to learn if my colleagues shared similar views and, if they did, the degree to which our paradigms shared common ground. This exploratory study gathered those perspectives and conducted a disciplined analysis. Key themes would be identified. The 10 value proposition elements proposed by Barber et al. (2013) were an important but not exclusive framework and reference perspective.

As the doctoral student and principal researcher for this project, I read widely and reflected deeply on these topics. Then came the time to gather the thoughts from my colleagues. I

was interested to learn whether someone whose subject expertise is in animal science or agronomy, had taken the time to think about the larger publicly funded postsecondary education sector and the forces acting on it. I looked forward to identifying and analyzing their thoughts.

The literature review was purposefully wide and far-ranging in preparation for the data that my interviews would generate. Thus, in addition to the Barber et al. (2013) model, I prepared for possible references to the role of faculty adding value to the educational experience of their students (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). I also explored the teaching of soft skills as another aspect of the value proposition (Andrews & Higson, 2008,; Pant & Baroudi, 2007,; Schulz, 2008). In addition to the generic list of soft skills often noted, I made the effort to seek skills that are not on most lists, including the demonstration of *grit*, *entrepreneurialism*, and *passion*. These were some of the themes that were sought during the review of instructor responses, especially during the latter stages of analysis.

In choosing to use a semistructured interview approach, I planned to capitalize on the fact that qualitative research methods are “open and emergent, rather than rigid” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 37). If the interview and/or written questions caused confusion, minor edits were made on an as-needed basis.

Research Setting

This researcher, currently a doctoral student in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, is also an instructor at a central Alberta college. I have completed 24 years of instruction at that institution. The data for this project were collected from invited faculty members, starting in early March 2020. In the early stages of the research proposal, it was proposed that the invited faculty would be teaching in an agricultural diploma program. That meant that the initial target group would consist of 15 and 20 individuals, most from within one

of four academic schools. The first round of invitations was sent to 19 individuals. As planning progressed, circumstances dictated that modifications needed to be made and that the list needed to be expanded. The institution reorganized its academic structure, effective January 1, 2020, reducing from four to three schools and allocating programs differently than in the past; that meant that faculty initially selected for invitation to participate in this project ended up in different schools from the initial structure. Low responses to my initial and repeated invitations to participate caused me to expand my invitation list beyond the initially selected sample.

I do not believe that the changes implemented had a significant impact on the research methodology nor any of my findings. At this small institution, it is common for faculty to teach in more than one program. Secondly, the focus of my research evolved from its original inception. In the early versions of the proposal, I was considering the exploration of common cultural perceptions among faculty, which meant that targeted participants from a particular program was an important consideration. The more general focus of the final version of the proposal meant that a more generalized sample would be appropriate. Finally, the early low response rates meant that the invitation list had to be expanded in order to achieve saturation.

The Research Method

An exploratory case study approach was selected as the best way to find the answers to the research questions posed. It is a qualitative research method which allows for the exploration of “any phenomenon in the data which serves as a point of interest to the researcher” (Zainal, 2007, p. 3). Furthermore, as described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), “qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 27). This method is superior to other potential variants such as an autoethnographical method, using case study. This

choice allowed for the focus to be on the perspectives of the research participants rather than on those of the researcher. It also allows for an exploration of a greater variety of phenomenon, rather than limiting itself to the investigation of culture, which is often a characteristic of ethnographic approaches. As per Creswell and Guetterman (2019), the final product is not “a holistic cultural portrait of the group that incorporates participants’ views (*emic*), and definitely minimized the incorporation of the researcher’s views (*etic*)” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 32).

The case study method is also superior to a mixed methods approach in this instance. While a mixed methods approach was initially attractive to my “pragmatic” nature, as influenced by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005, p. 375), it was determined that the case study approach would better keep the focus on the qualitative nature of the information gathered. As a “pragmatic,” I was not overly concerned whether my chosen method was principally qualitative or quantitative; it was determined that limited quantitative analysis would be conducted.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) went on to further describe the case study approach as “an intensive description and analysis of a bounded social phenomenon” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 31). They further helped me determine that I wished to exercise the single instrument variation and that “transferability” should be my goal rather than generalizability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 31). I also noted that, ideally, my data would come from multiple sources, including, but not limited to “document review, observation, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and critical incidents” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 31). In hindsight, with the onset of the pandemic, I was pleased that I had relied entirely on interviews, but I was also mindful of the limitations that were inherent in that decision.

I launched this approach with enthusiasm, while heeding some key statements from Yazan (2015), Yin (2014), Merriam (1998) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), among others. While each of these authors, contributed important considerations to this research project design, Yazan's review of seminal work by Yin, Stake, and Merriam (1998) helped me see the variation of perspectives with respect to this method and the various practices that could be used within it. He stated that while case study is one of the most frequently used qualitative research methodologies, it still does not have a legitimate status as a social science research strategy (Yazan, 2015, p. 134). He also warned that it is not uncommon for emerging researchers to become confused in applying that method (Yazan, 2015, p. 134). Finally, he warned of a "multiplicity of approaches and a contested terrain marked by a variety of perspectives" (Yazan, 2015, p. 150). Baxter and Jack (2008) and Baskarada (2014) helped to provide fuller perspectives on these approaches. Baskarada strongly promoted Yin's six stage case study process (Baskarada, 2014, p. 3), while Baxter and Jack provided a valuable contrast between Stake's and Yin's approaches (Baxter & Jack, 2008, pp. 544-545). Unfortunately, both were silent with respect to Merriam's perspectives.

Initially, likely due to my "pragmatic" nature, I was drawn to the references to Stake's work, because he seemed to provide the most fluid structural guidelines and seemed a sharp contrast to the strong positivistic views of Yin. However, it was noted that Merriam (1998) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) provided more of a middle ground between the other perspectives. After careful review of the table in Yazan's article comparing and contrasting the three approaches, I accepted Yazan's assertion that "the novice researchers who are planning to conduct an exclusively qualitative case study would make more use of the descriptions and

guidelines provided in Merriam's text, along with Stake's rendition of triangulation" (Yazan 2015, p. 147). It seemed like wise advice.

In summary, despite developing a deep appreciation for the contributions of Yin to the development of the case study method over an extended period of time, his apparent positivistic perspective seemed inconsistent with the underpinnings of this project. Stake seemed at the other end of the spectrum. Merriam and later Merriam and Tisdell seemed to locate themselves in the comfortable and sensible middle ground. The ontological, epistemological and axiological considerations are discussed in the following section.

Additional Rationale for the Chosen Research Approach

As identified and explained in the previous section, the case study method was deemed to be best suited to provide answers to the research questions that were posed. In this section, the primary ontological, epistemological and axiological considerations are discussed.

With respect to my epistemological perspective, I was attracted to powerful statements made by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and adeptly summarized and restated by Yazan (2015). They reminded me that, from an interpretive/constructionist perspective, there are "multiple realities" (Yazan, 2015, p. 12) and that reality is "context-bound" (Yazan, 2015, p. 12). In addition, Merriam (1998) stated that "one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured as in quantitative research" (Yazan, 2015, p. 202). Furthermore, I considered Yazan's (2015) five common options for the contemplation and then expression of new knowledge: experience, reason, authority, intuition and active construction. I chose to rely primarily on reason, with some use of intuition and some

reliance on my extensive experience. It seemed that I was well prepared for the challenge that I had chosen.

The discussion with respect to ontological considerations, (questions about existence and being), began based on the assumption of a generally normal state of circumstances. Denzin and Lincoln provided the foundation for further discussion by presenting a chronology of eight historical moments of qualitative educational research from 1900 to the present day. As per their model, we are in a period, identified as having started in 2016, labelled “uncertain, utopian future” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 44). They also presented a five figured worlds of qualitative inquiry developed by Kamberelis et al. that was influential in helping me position myself appropriately. According to this model, my work best fit within the figured world 5—working ontologically to remap the real (post-qualitative; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, pp. 1248–1249). Denzin and Lincoln also noted that their heuristic inclusion of post qualitative is “a relative newcomer to the scene” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 1250). Referring specifically to case study methodology, Schwandt and Gates (2017) quoted Yanow et al. (2008), identifying “two very broad, distinct (although, at times, related) paths,” (Schwandt & Gates, 2017, p. 623) interpretive orientation and critical realist orientation. My ontological perspective seemed best described within the latter category.

Axiological (what is right) considerations for this project were substantiated through the pursuit of ethics approval from both the University of Calgary and Olds College. This chosen research method allowed me to express my values and my beliefs with respect to what was worth knowing, and what I believed merited further or deeper understanding. I accepted that, as a doctoral student, I carried responsibility to maintain the integrity of the research process and that I must continue to earn public trust as I carried forward my processes. It also meant a lot to me

that my colleagues would put their faith in me by agreeing to participate in the research and through their candid and honest responses to my questions. The ethics approvals served as important symbols of the quality standards to which I adhered.

I trusted my perception of reality, especially after the extra reflection encouraged by Parchoma's work (2014). I accepted that it is only one of multiple perspectives and thus was not overly concerned with the validity of my analysis and conclusions. The richness of my life, academic and professional experiences allowed me to draw and express insights that other researchers would not be able to do. However, I remained open to having my perceptions challenged by new information.

In summary, as I conducted this research using the qualitative research method referred to as the exploratory case study, I was mindful of several of its inherent characteristics, inconsistencies and, at times, contradictions. I was highly conscious of the spectrum of epistemic perspectives of the most influential advocates of this method. At one end was the highly structured, positivistic approach represented by Yin while the constructivist, existentialistic perception presented by Stake seemed to be at the opposite end. I am more comfortable near the middle, relying on the direction and perspectives of Merriam (1998) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). They acknowledged that reality is a social construct, that there are multiple interpretations and that "what really intrigues qualitative researchers is the way that people make sense of their world and their experiences in this world" (Yazan, 2015, p. 137).

Research Sample and Data Sources

The primary source of data for this project was the oral responses provided by selected faculty members from a western Canadian publicly funded postsecondary education institution. Permanently appointed, full or part-time individuals who intended to teach at least to the end of

the 2019-2020 academic year were invited to participate. Temporary or contract instructors were not solicited for the following reasons:

- 1) They had limited exposure to institutional activities, including knowledge of its strategic direction and current initiatives.
- 2) Due to the temporary nature of their assignment, they had little opportunity to be exposed to the greater postsecondary context, including involvement in the local faculty association,
- 3) Again, due to the temporary nature of their assignment, they likely did not participate in ACIFA,
- 4) And finally, they likely did not register in any significant professional development opportunities, including but not limited to attendance at conferences.

As stated earlier, the number of initially eligible participants was estimated to be between 15 and 20 individuals; in the first round, nineteen individuals were invited to participate. Due to the low response rates, the invitation list was expanded to 37; from that list, one ineligible individual unfortunately accepted the invitation to be interviewed. Once my error was discovered, I apologized to the individual, thanked him for his time and interest and ended the interview. Thus, my reported findings will be based on the remaining 36 invited participants. Fourteen interviews were conducted in order to achieve saturation.

Data Collection Process

The primary purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the data collection process. Detailed results will be provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

Data collection consisted of semistructured face-to-face interviews with participants who accepted the invitation to contribute. The last of the ethics approvals was received on March 1,

2020; the invitation process started soon after with the first interview being conducted on March 10, 2020. I planned to complete data collection by the end of April 2020.

I produced a letter of invitation (see Appendix A) and a consent form (see Appendix B), implementing format and wording suggestions from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB). Also, as per CFREB direction, the letter of invitation was emailed by an arm's length third party. A colleague from my cohort graciously agreed to take on that role. She then collected individual responses and notified me of their receipt via my University of Calgary email address. Then, using that same address, symbolically separating my research role from my collegial role, I welcomed the participant to the research project, suggested an interview date and time and included a copy of the required consent form for their review and signature. The consent form detailed the primary objectives of the project, the benefits that might be gained from participation, expectations of the participant, relevant information about the researcher, and contact information for follow-up questions. A reply to the invitation was requested within one week of the invitation being initiated.

The plan was modified for three reasons, two of which were not anticipated during the proposal preparation phase:

- 1) the initially low response rate
- 2) the arrival of the global pandemic
- 3) Alberta Health Services directives.

In the first week of recruitment, only one positive response was received. Fortunately, there were no negative responses; the invitation had likely been ignored. The 5.3% response rate was significantly below the anticipated 80%. Thus, a week after the initial round of invitations was sent, reminders were issued to all non-respondents from that candidate pool. Five additional

positive responses were received within 24 hours of the reminder; no negative responses were received, but the participation rate was still only 31.6%.

Four interviews were initially scheduled, while one of the respondents asked that an interview not be conducted until the end of April, so no specific date was set for that event. Three face-to-face interviews were conducted, before the impact of the coronavirus pandemic was felt on our campus. Directives issued by Alberta Health Services, on or about March 15, 2020, led to a closure of our campus to students and the implementation of social distancing measures. One potential interviewee asked for a postponement of our appointment, which of course was granted. Another potential interview went ahead, because we were able to implement social distancing measures to our mutual satisfaction.

Our college intended to re-open to students on Monday, March 23, 2020 by resuming instruction using entirely online means. My personal courses needed immediate and urgent action to be ready for that transition and, I surmised, that those of potential research participants were likely in a similar state. Therefore, out of necessity and due consideration, I suspended my research activity for an unspecified period of time.

Before I could resume my research, I had to figure out how to conduct interviews in our newly imposed operating environment. Fortunately, in the interim, a sixth interview respondent had come forward and he was willing to experiment with me. Thus, on March 24, 2020, I was successfully able to meet remotely with him using Google Meet. I was also able to implement a skeleton Google Doc file (essentially a document with my barebones questions on it) which would replace the Google Slides presentation that I had prepared for the face-to-face interviews. Finally, we were able to use the “Voice to Type” feature in Google Docs to capture his interview comments. Unfortunately, it was discovered that he was ineligible to be a participant in the

project (he was not yet an appointed Academic Staff Member), and thus his responses could not be included in the data set. His assistance, however, was instrumental in helping me modify my procedures for future implementation.

The period of interrupted time turned out to be six weeks. The Winter academic term at the institution ended on April 24, 2020. On April 27, 2020, I requested that the remaining thirteen members of the original list be invited, for a third and final time, to participate. An additional six names were added to that list to fill spots vacated by the previous six respondents. This round of invitations yielded only two more positive responses; I resumed interviewing on April 30. Further details will be discussed in Chapter 4.

After a successful interview, I sent each participant a personalized thank you message.

The Interviews

Semistructured interviews were conducted to collect the information necessary to answer the primary and secondary research questions. A set of 15 questions was produced; for details, please see Appendix C. One strength of the semistructured format was that it allowed for flexibility. As the interviewer, if I perceived a need to ask for more detail in a response and/or if a response generated additional questions in my mind, they could be asked, as circumstances warranted. That is exactly how they were used; for example, one respondent used the expression “downward spiral”; I used the opportunity to ask what was meant by that choice of words in that specific context.

One hour had been set aside for these interviews and the time was sufficient in all cases. The time allotment also allowed me to review the participant’s responses on the signed consent form with them, before proceeding. This important step served four purposes:

- 1) it helped to set a professional tone for the interview,

- 2) it confirmed that I had interpreted the participants accurately,
- 3) it gave the participant an opportunity to express a change of mind, if one had occurred, and
- 4) it comforted the participant, inviting them to settle in for the interview itself.

The interview was divided into four sections for ease of presentation as well as to provide a logical order for the participants' responses. In the first section, basic demographic information was collected, including confirmation that the individual was a permanently appointed Academic Staff Member of the selected institution. In the second section, information about the participant's perceptions with respect to the state of change occurring in postsecondary education sector was collected. As part of this section, the individual was asked to relate an experience or experiences that they had personally witnessed or experienced during their time as an instructor in the postsecondary education system. In the third section of the interview, the individual's perceptions with respect to the urgency of the need for change was explored. Finally, in the fourth section of the interview, the participant was asked whether they wanted to return to an earlier question in the interview and/or if they wanted to add any information to any of those questions or change their answers to any of those questions. Once a participant indicated that they had nothing further to add, nor did they want to change any response, the interview was concluded.

As positive responses to the invitation to participate were received, interview times were scheduled. I discovered that the ideal pacing for me was to schedule two interviews one and a half hours apart; that generally allowed me to conduct the interview, edit the transcript immediately after the interview and still have time to prepare for the next interview. I conducted three interviews in one day on only one occasion, but discovered that the volume of information

gathered to be nearly overwhelming. Please refer to Appendix C for a complete listing of the questions used in the semistructured interviews.

Data Analysis

Early steps in the data analysis process were started before all interviews were completed. Early themes and patterns began to reveal themselves after six interviews had been conducted.

The transcripts were produced with the use of the “Voice to type” feature in Google docs. The preliminary transcript, produced during the interview process was quite accurate but did contain errors. I edited those inaccuracies, usually right after the interview was concluded.

As mentioned earlier, I began to detect some similar themes and topics after six interviews. From that point forward, the next interviews seemed to strongly support that initial impression. By the time that eleven interviews had been completed, I was pretty sure of the primary themes. I had a long weekend between interviews which allowed these perceptions to incubate. The next three interviews conducted early the following week strengthened those perceptions. Saturation had been achieved.

The Compilation Process

The answers to the four demographic questions were relatively short and easy to compile. For example, the answer to question number four asked the participant to confirm that they were a permanently appointed Academic Staff Member at the institution under study, which required only a Yes or No answer. Furthermore, a “Yes” answer was required for the interview to proceed. There were several other questions that could be answered with brief statements, such as yes or no, positive, negative or a mixture of the two. Thus, the analysis related to those questions was quick and easy - essentially, the number of Yeses and Nos were counted. For question #13, where participants were asked to provide a rating of between one and ten, it was hoped that all

participants would be fully compliant and simply provide a number; then, it would be possible to calculate and report a simple average of those results.

The most challenging aspect of this process was identifying key themes and relationships in the responses to the open-ended questions (principally questions #6 and #10) and in the additional comment that often accompanied some of the other responses. I relied on three methods to triangulate my findings: I outline them briefly here and provide more detail in Chapter 4:

- 1) The first method I refer to as “organic” as essentially it sprang from my perceptions, unaided by other means; that meant that I relied on my own interpretation of the information to generate the first set of results.
- 2) Then, I used the Barber et al. model as a framework to help me confirm my initial impressions as well as to discover additional themes.
- 3) Finally, I learned to use a qualitative data analysis software program called NVivo to further assist me in the theme identification process, as well as to help me compile and tabulate excerpts from the interviews which would further help me substantiate and support the illustration of the identified themes.

The significant preparation undertaken ahead of time and the review of literature were integral to the success of these processes.

The detailed findings are presented in Chapter 4 and the conclusions are in Chapter 5. As I anticipated before the process was launched, I experienced a range of emotions from disappointment to deep satisfaction during the course of the project. Fortunately, I am happy to report more of the latter than the former.

The Role of the Researcher

I had a central role in this project. My skill and behaviours as the interviewer influenced the data collection process. That influence was demonstrated both in terms of volume of data and the accuracy with which participant comments were collected and transcribed. Despite my best efforts at objectivity, there was occasion, especially during the interpretation stage of this project, where my perspectives and opinions are likely included. (I acknowledge that, despite my best efforts at preparation and at reflection with respect to my paradigm, perceptual blindness has likely prevented me from achieving a fully accurate appreciation of it.) My knowledge, experience and maturity allowed me to capably, albeit imperfectly, do the work. While remaining open to perspectives other than my own, I relied principally on my interpretation of the data gathered. A select piece of computer software, NVivo, was also used to support my perceptions. Careful preparation provided significant value to this process, especially in the identification and categorizing of themes.

Self-reflection is an integral part of my personality. Building on the theoretical foundation established within qualitative research methods, I noted that reflexivity on the part of the researcher was an essential ingredient to the success of the approach. The doctoral work conducted to this point helped me find my research voice. In closing, while initially not comfortable with the responsibility for the interpreting the results, after significant consideration, I firmly committed to the process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval from the University of Calgary was received on February 10, 2020, and renewed on January 28, 2021. Permission from the chosen publicly funded postsecondary institution was received on March 1, 2020. The first round of emailed invitations to participate

were sent to targeted participants shortly afterwards. Once a positive response to an invitation was received, it was acknowledged as quickly as possible. In that response, a date and time for an interview was proposed and a copy of the pre-approved consent form was sent with a request that it be completed and returned. Pre-pandemic, participants were invited to bring their completed form with them as they reported for the interview. After implementation of the Alberta Health Services directives and the modification of interview processes, they were asked to return a signed copy of the form via email. Data collection (the scheduling of interviews) started shortly after positive responses to the invitation to participate were received. The first interview was conducted on March 10, 2020.

While I knew all of the faculty members interviewed and I was privileged to hear and read their answers, their identities are being kept confidential, as per the terms agreed to on the consent forms. Four participants agreed to let their names be used. Three chose a pseudonym, known only to the two of us. I had also prepared a list of randomized numbers in advance, and issued those, if that was the stated preference. Eight participants were issued numbers; one participant had both a pseudonym and a number.

While the processes described above provided all of the information that I needed to complete the project, I had a contingency plan to fill data gaps that may have appeared during the course of the project. I was prepared to conduct supplemental document review and one or two interviews with key individuals with additional important information. Luckily, I did not need to engage that aspect of the plan. I was also fortunate to not encounter confidential information, which had not been anticipated within the circumstances discussed here; therefore, I did not have to explore how to handle that information by further examining applicable policies, procedures and/or best practices.

With respect to the interviews conducted, the interviewee had the purposes of the interview clearly explained before the session began and was asked for permission to record the session. Interviews would not have proceeded without receipt of a signed consent form; fortunately, that measure did not need to be exercised, in this instance. My standard procedure was to acknowledge receipt of the signed form, and briefly review its contents with the participant, especially the section related to how they wish to be identified. I listened carefully to their wishes and would have quickly made changes to our agreement should they have expressed a change of mind; I was not comfortable that I had the formal authority to proceed with the interview until it was clear from that consultation that the participant was ready to proceed. Now that the data collection and analysis portion of the project has been completed, the recordings and transcripts are being kept as per the terms of the Conjoint Faculties Ethics Review Board. They will be destroyed after the prescribed waiting period has expired.

Trustworthiness

Several measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and subsequent analysis were implemented. A number of researchers (Merriam, 1998,; Thomas, 2014,; Yazan, 2015,; Yin, 2012) stated that triangulation is one of the most important strategies to demonstrate internal validity, but Merriam and Tisdell (2016) took this one step further stating that in postmodern research, we crystallize (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 245). They quoted Richardson's (2000) assertion that the world is approached from more than just three sides. While I accepted that perspective, I was not necessarily able to demonstrate its application through my procedures, on this occasion.

The primary means of ensuring trustworthy results were the careful preparation of transcripts and the achievement of saturation. Reference to the Barber et al. list of 10 value

proposition elements was an important reference directly pulled from the literature review. The use of the NVivo software was another important contribution to meeting these objectives. Every effort to minimize researcher bias were implemented in the conduct of the interviews and subsequent transcriptions. Finally, strict adherence to best practices throughout contributed to a quality final product. As summarized by Yazan (2015), the explanation of the investigator's position with regards to this study, the disclosure of researcher bias, and the use of thick description are other tangible ways that the due care and attention expected from a competent researcher has been demonstrated (Yazan, 2015, p. 150).

Summary

In this chapter, the general plan for the collection and analysis of data to allow for the successful completion of this project was communicated. The research context and settings were described. Extensive discussion of my epistemological, ontological and axiological perspectives supported the choice of research method and initial aspects of the data collection, compilation and analysis were presented. As I prepare to present the detailed analysis, findings and conclusions in Chapters 4 and 5, I am pleased to be able to note that the quantity and nature of the material collected was sufficient to allow me to draw conclusions with respect to the primary research question and its sub-components. In communicating those results, I am closer to achieving my objectives of adding to the discussion regarding the future state of postsecondary education systems by exploring faculty perceptions with respect to the need for change in the system. I am confirming one of my initial assertions that, as one of the stakeholder groups with leadership responsibilities within the system and within their respective institutions, their perceptions of the need to change and the urgency with which change may be needed, may play a significant role in securing the welfare of their institution. In the face of the potential

“avalanche,” predicted by Barber et al (2013), their ability to better contribute value to the student experience may contribute to a brighter destiny for their institution.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of the data collection process. A total of fourteen interviews were conducted which allowed for saturation to be achieved. The global COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the planned process. Three interviews were conducted pre-lockdown, between March 10 and 17, 2020. Then directives from Alberta Health Services shut down all face-to-face instruction at the institution. Instructors were advised to work from home as best possible, and then implement measures in order to resume teaching activities on March 23, 2020, via remote means, for the remainder of the winter academic term. Due to this massive disruption to the instructional activities of my colleagues, and of my own course deliveries, I decided to postpone research activities for an undetermined period of time. I was ready to resume my role, following the completion of the final exam period. I also judged that my potential research participants would be receptive after that time as well. Thus, I asked that another round of invitations be sent on April 27, 2020. I was able to complete the next eleven interviews between April 30 and May 19, 2020.

Research Settings

A room, leased by the Faculty Association, was booked for the purposes of conducting the face-to-face interviews. It was a comfortable, neutral site which also featured access to an projection unit. This equipment allowed me to project a Google Slides presentation of the interview questions, to provide visual assistance to the interviewee.

I was able to conduct the three face-to-face interviews in that setting before the Alberta Health Services mandated shutdown. By the time the third interview was conducted, we had already received social distancing guidelines; fortunately, the room was large enough to meet those guidelines and the participant was willing to be interviewed under those circumstances. A

fourth interview had been booked, but that participant asked for a postponement, which was granted. All interviews conducted between April 30 and May 19 were conducted using remote meeting technology and software, in this case Google Meet. I ran those sessions from my office, while the respondent participated from a location of their choosing.

Instead of audiotaping interviews, which had been the initial plan, other technology was accessed. In fact, the term “audiotape” seems inaccurate, because the initial plan was to use audio recording devices which captured the information electronically. I did use that process twice early on, and believe that my transcription of that information was no more accurate than the following procedure. The software chosen was Docs, another part of the Google suite of programs. A Google Doc option, “Voice to Type,” was tested and found to be highly satisfactory for the capture of the verbal responses of participants. Generally, I estimated it to be accurate in the 90% range, and the speed at which it could capture that verbal information was much faster than my ability to type it ever would have been. Through careful and attentive listening, I was able to edit the raw information captured to assemble a highly accurate transcript.

Projecting the PowerPoint slides used earlier in the face-to-face interviews would have yielded marginal value and that practice was thus discontinued. Instead, I was able to share a document, with a skeleton of the questions, with the participant which served a similar function, while allowing for a more accurate capture of their comments in relation to the question(s) posed. With some simple instruction, each participant was able to help me with the data collection process by positioning their cursor below the appropriate question, turn on the recording feature when they were ready to supply an answer, turn off the recording feature at the end of their answer and thus contribute, in a comfortable manner, to the pacing of the interview. Immediately after the interview was finished, I changed the sharing setting to take away the

participant's ability to edit or access the document. That measure allowed me to ensure that the integrity of the information would be maintained by preventing the possibility of their choosing to change any material after the fact.

By the time that I signed off with the participant, I already had a generally accurate transcript, with their responses clearly associated with the appropriate questions. As soon as possible after the interview, I edited the transcript, relying on my attentive listening skills, and notes that had taken during the session. With practice, I became more proficient with the process.

Participation Rates

Nineteen participants from the initial target group were invited to participate on March 2, 2020. Initially, only six of these responded (32%), including one individual who was not qualified to participate and who should not have been included on the original list. Clearly, participation rates were much lower than the anticipated 80% level.

Once research activities were resumed, a final reminder to those on this list who had yet to respond was sent on April 27, 2020. Six names were added to the list to fill the spots vacated by the initial respondents, resulting in an additional three respondents. Finally, a set of twelve names were added to the list on May 7, 2020; again, resulting in an additional three responses. Then, due to some "snowballing" by a respondent, three invitees from the initial list responded positively to the request to participate.

I had hesitated to apply the contingency plan initially expressed at the research proposal stage; the concept of "snowballing" was explored but it was determined that the plan adjustment that I had in mind did not fit the strict definition of the term. Upon consulting my supervisor, I learned that there was more room for discretion within my options. I was beginning to consider implementing the practice, but the introduction of the Alberta Health Services guidelines with

respect to the pandemic interrupted the process. When research activities resumed, it was clear that I needed the extra assistance in attracting participants.

In summary, a total of 36 participants were eventually invited to participate, including one individual who should not have been contacted. The participation rate from the remaining 35 was 40%, essentially half the initial estimate.

The teaching backgrounds of the participants was drawn from a group teaching a particular agricultural program at the institution. This choice was made during an early version of the research proposal. At that time, I had considered looking for cultural elements in participant responses based on the fact that they taught in a particular program. As the proposal evolved, the invitation list was expanded. The definition of agricultural programming was expanded to include horticulture and agricultural technology. As the list was expanded yet again, and as I realized that the aforementioned cultural dimension was no longer a significant factor in participant selection, faculty from general business and hospitality and tourism were also solicited. Ironically, it was one of the hospitality and tourism instructors who was the most successful at snowballing, making a significant contribution to the success of this project.

Participant Identification

During the consent seeking process, participants were asked whether they would allow their names to be referenced within the study, whether they either wanted to choose a pseudonym or have one assigned to them, or whether they wanted a unique identifier number assigned to them. Four individuals (Brenda Bauer, Bertrand Bickersteth, Keith Friedlander and Laurie Newsham) were comfortable with allowing me to reference them by name, three participants provided their own pseudonyms (Hank, Erin and Olds Faculty 1) and eight individuals were assigned unique identifier numbers known only to themselves and me. The total is fifteen

because one individual provided both their pseudonym and asked for a unique identifier number. Initially, I generated a six-figure number, prefixed by “0011” and then assigned the rest of the digits in a semirandom manner known only to myself. Later, it was determined that this system was unnecessarily complex and contributed to awkwardness for the reader. A new simplified system was established, that, while still using numbers, would be spelled out as words. Thus, those participants requesting unique identifier numbers are now referred to as One, Two, Three, etc. In hindsight, I possibly should have given more consideration to the final reader of this report. Settling on one system might have reduced the risk of reader confusion and fatigue.

In addition to these important measures to respect individual participant wishes and to respect their confidentiality, the following two measures were implemented:

- 1) reference was made most often to grouped information and
- 2) I am using the prefix “they” in its newly defined singular form on occasion to further reduce the identification of gender when reporting the findings.

In hindsight, I would implement a simpler and more streamlined process from the beginning.

Sources of Error: Interviewing and Transcript Preparation

Despite my best efforts and, as with any research project, error occurred throughout the process. In this section, error during the interviewing and transcript preparation stages are discussed. Later in the report, a description of the challenges encountered during the data analysis process will be described. In Chapter 5, a few thoughts are shared as a reminder of the interrelationships between a number of the thematic areas.

Starting with the interviewing process, I reflected on the challenges related to effective interpersonal communication. I realized that my respondents and I might interpret certain words and terms differently from each other. Interview performance may have been influenced by the

time of day and our respective states of mind at that time. I also noted that my interviewing skills improved as the project proceeded. Errors that I made in the early stage and inconsistencies in my delivery were eliminated or reduced over time. Due to the semistructured nature of the interviews, my choices to deviate from the prepared script and the occasions during which I asked for greater detail and/or more examples were arbitrary. During the analysis stage, I discovered occasions when I should have pressed for more information.

While my best efforts were exercised in the production of the transcripts, there were a few instances where I could not decipher the material collected, nor could I recall the participants' exact words. Being human, I made other minor transcription errors as well.

In summary, despite the presence of a variety of types of errors to varying degrees, I believe that the data set produced was of a very high quality and sufficient to support the drawing of the following findings and conclusions. It must also be remembered that participant responses were top-of-mind, one-time sharing of perceptions based on subject matter for which they had essentially had no opportunity to prepare. It is possible that were the conditions different, several aspects of those responses may change. These statements do not reduce the validity of the data gathered, but they do identify limitations within the processes.

Theme Selection Processes

In the following sections, I use the terms *topic areas* and *theme* relatively interchangeably; while there are slight differences in their definitions, there is considerable overlap. I tended to use the term *topic area* to refer to single words and/or short phrases related to a particular subject. The term *theme* was usually used to refer to a longer phrase or string of phrases that seemed to be describing a central thought or some related thoughts. It also became clear at this stage of analysis that I was relating the term *theme* with the single word or short

phrase value elements in the Barber et al. framework. The discussion in this paragraph is intended to communicate that my thought process evolved beyond thinking in those limited terms. Although every attempt was made to use the new terms as consistently as possible, slight variances should not detract appreciably from the central messages. Initially, I attempted to report my findings with the terms *themes* and *subthemes*; following this reexamination of the terms, the labels were changed to reflect the material in this paragraph.

Three approaches were used in the identification of themes. As outlined in Chapter 3, I termed the first approach *organic*, because like organic food for example, the process I used was entirely natural and unaided by artificial means, characteristics that are often associated with the production of organic foods. Essentially, after carefully listening to candidate responses and careful transcription of those responses, I identified the topic areas that were perceived to be most frequently discussed. It took about five interviews before the first semblance of topic areas began to emerge. During the next six interviews, consistent results became more pronounced. Thus, by the time the fourteenth interview had been conducted, I was sure that the four most prominent streams of thought had been revealed and that saturation had been achieved. In no particular order, the following topic areas emerged: students, curriculum, provincial funding and technology. There was also a large and ambiguous “other” section. I was quite confident that deeper analysis, as well as the use of the other two analysis approaches, would reveal additional topics and the major themes. I am pleased to report that the additional analytical work helped to confirm the initial topics, identified above. More detailed discussion related to these four topics is found later in this chapter.

The second general approach was directly related to the considerable influence of the Barber et al. publication, *The Avalanche is Coming*, on my paradigm entering this project. As

introduced in Chapter 2, a framework for the identification of potential themes was the 10 value proposition elements proposed by those authors. For convenience, they are restated here (in the order presented by the authors): research, degrees, city prosperity, faculty, students, governance and administration, curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment, and experience. Early in the analysis process, I discovered that two of the earlier topic areas were a perfect match: students and curriculum. Components of four other topics (faculty, governance and administration, teaching and learning, and assessment) could be identified to varying degrees.

As the analysis proceeded, I discovered that a closer examination of the definitions used by the authors for their value elements was needed to ensure that my interpretation would be accurate. I determined that there were several considerations; the detailed discussion related to those considerations can be found in Chapter 2, including a summary in Figure 1.

The third approach to the identification of themes was the use of qualitative analysis computer software. Initial investigations of possible programs revealed approximately 20 options, 11 of which were proprietary and nine free and open (Wikipedia, May 26, 2020). I was encouraged by my local Information Technology Department to explore the free options. I settled on one called Compendium, but after installing it and attempting to use it, it was discovered that the most recent version had been released in 2014 and relied on additional software that was now considered obsolete and prone to being hacked. At that point, I decided to abandon the use that software.

I then sought access to one of the proprietary pieces of software, NVivo, as it was available for free to University of Calgary students. In order to use the software effectively, I stripped down the original interview transcripts to their most essential components. All interview questions and my comments were removed from the file. All closed-ended answers that could be

easily analyzed directly were removed. *Nodes* representing the four topic areas that I had identified and six of the ten Barber elements (noting the overlap of two themes, students and curriculum) were created. At this point, I determined that four of the Barber elements, research, degrees, city prosperity and experience, were not sufficiently represented in the data set to warrant further investigation. As new, potential themes were identified, additional nodes were created; two items were added, *leadership* and COVID-19. Also, a feature called sentiments was discovered; essentially, it allowed for the tracking of comments that were considered to be positive as well as those deemed to be negative.

In summary, with the modified data files, the creation of nodes and the identification of the sentiments feature, all components necessary for the analysis using the NVivo software were in place and ready to access. Furthermore, as a safeguard, I ensured that I had an untouched backup copy of the original transcripts, should a problem occur during the conversion process. Fortunately, there was no need to access that copy.

The NVivo analysis process helped in the discovery of findings and the generation of conclusions in three major ways:

- 1) Through the process of loading the information into the software and identifying components for deeper analysis, my organic perceptions of the information contained in the data set were strengthened. My initial perception of key themes was reinforced as I became even more familiar with the data.
- 2) NVivo allowed me to substantiate my organic perceptions; the software has three particularly useful features that I engaged to support my initial impressions:
 - a) it counted the number of files in which a particular node (topic area) was discussed;

- b) it counted the number of instances in which clips of that theme are collected in a node and,
- c) it compiled the comments clipped for easier access during the report writing stage.

While none of these features were overly powerful, each added a dimension to the analysis.

- 3) The systemic and clean presentation of a summary of the analysis allowed me to visualize the results in a manner which I could not have done as easily without the tool.

One limitation of the software was that most of the features described were still fully in the control of the researcher. I sought to engage a feature or features that might have conducted a search for key words and/or patterns in the data, but I was not able to do that. Another limitation was that any error that I made as the researcher translated directly into those results. There did not seem to be any search engine capabilities that might have contributed to a more automated search.

One positive feature of NVivo was discovered accidentally during the data analysis process. I inadvertently started to re-analyze a file that had been done the day before. I began to notice, as I was adding comments to a node, that the running count was not increasing, as per normal. Closer inspection of the situation revealed that I was attempting to add evidence that had already been captured and accounted for. Gratefully, there were some built-in means to prevent duplication.

NVivo also had a way of clearly identifying the root source of the information gathered during the coding process. Furthermore, it calculated the size of the snippet as a proportion of the individual file and reported that as a percentage. The former feature was useful as detailed

respondent comments were quoted in the later sections of detailed analysis. The latter feature was nice, but contributed little else other than reminding me that most snippets were 2% of the document or less, which incidentally was consistent with my intent.

In summary, NVivo was particularly well suited to assist in the process of theme identification as it related in particular to the two purely open-ended questions, *Describe some of the change in the postsecondary education sector that you have personally witnessed or experienced*, and “*What do you predict will happen in the foreseeable future?*” as well as the commentary that accompanied the other nine questions. NVivo helped me in identifying potential additional themes, *leadership* and *COVID-19*. NVivo also allowed me to tally positive and negative sentiments. Through the use of the three approaches described in this section, I was able to approximate triangulation, a significant consideration in ensuring the trustworthiness of the resulting conclusions.

Initial Analysis of Semi Structured Interviews

In the following section, preliminary results from the interviews are reported. (A copy of the interview can be found in Appendix C.) The 15 interview questions were divided into four sections:

- 1) Four closed-ended questions seeking demographic information;
- 2) Six questions, four of which were relatively closed-ended, two of which were entirely open-ended, inquiring about participant perceptions with respect to the current state of change within the postsecondary education system;
- 3) Three questions, all generally close-ended, exploring participant perceptions with respect to the sense of urgency with which change needed to be implemented; and

- 4) Two questions in a final section asking participants if they wished to return to any of the previous questions in order to add to or change their responses.

The latter section was a way of ensuring that participant thoughts and perspectives had been captured as completely and accurately as possible. I note freely that I was inconsistent as an interviewer with respect to where the information captured in this last section was placed in the transcript. At times, I captured the information directly in section four, with the associated question(s). At other times, particularly later in the process, when the interviewee had control of the cursor, I encouraged them to record that additional material directly related to the question and/or thought which they wanted to expand. Fewer than half of the participants chose to exercise the option of adding to their answers. There was not a single instance of a participant wanting to change or delete an answer. In one instance, the respondent essentially answered the two questions in one response. Despite these inconsistencies, I believe that the impact on the data analysis process was negligible.

Participants were not asked to engage in any preparation for the interviews. The general sense of the nature of the questions was only provided on the consent forms that they were asked to sign. The diversity and range of responses could not be accurately anticipated. Due to the semistructured nature of the interview, it could reasonably be expected that I might ask follow-up questions, seeking further detail in support of a comment and/or clarification of the meaning of a comment. It could also reasonably be expected that some gaps in the information and/or areas lacking clarity would only be discovered after the interview was over. Finally, an interviewee might provide more in one of their responses than I might have anticipated and as such start answering part of a question before it was asked. In my judgement, and in most cases, the interviewee was allowed to continue without interruption. Every effort was made, during the

analysis stage, to identify comments which more logically belonged in a different part of the interview, include it in that section, and give it due consideration. To this end, it seems that the qualitative analysis software was particularly valuable. I acknowledge the likelihood of some error due to this complexity. However, I still believe that capturing the information when it was presented was better than interrupting the respondent's train of thought.

In summary, the answers provided for the four demographic questions that were close-ended and generally easy to analyze. Those results will be reported in the next section. The answers to the open-ended questions will require more extensive discussion later in this chapter. For now, I describe that analytical approach that I took to one of those questions, number ten "What do you predict will happen in the foreseeable future?" I noted that there was a way to categorize answers to this question, and later to others, by separating them by answer length. I came up with three categories: long (ten lines of text or more), medium length (4 – 9 lines of text) and short (3 lines of text or less). Thus, in the early stage of analysis of question number ten I was able to separate one short answer from, six medium length answers from seven long ones. I did not know whether this form of differentiation would lead to better analysis and then deeper insights, but believed that it might help me review the data more skillfully. Table 2 provides a more detailed listing of the judged length of responses to the open-ended questions.

While the judged lengths are approximations, and the categories chosen were also relatively arbitrary, they did provide a better scope of the amount of data collected during the interview process. Obviously, there was no correlation between the length of an answer and the quality of its content. Also, there was no formal assessment of the quality of responses.

Table 2*Length of Answers to Specific Interview Questions*

Question number	Number of responses (<i>n</i>)	Short	Medium	Long
5	14	7	6	1
7	14	2	4	8
8	14	4	6	4
9	14	1	6	7
10	14	1	6	7
11	14	4	5	5
12	14	1	10	3
13	14	3	6	5
14*	9	5	1	2
15**	9	2	3	4

* Not all answers to this question were compiled in this section, due to interviewer inconsistency.

In one instance, the answer to question 14 was combined with the answer to question 15.

** Not all answers to this question were compiled in this section, due to interviewer inconsistency. In one instance, the answer to question 14 was combined with the answer to this question.

Basic Demographic Information: A Preliminary Overview

The interview began by asking participants a few basic demographic questions: how long they had been teaching at the specific institution, how long they had been teaching in postsecondary education in general, and the names of any other institutions at which they had taught, if applicable. Finally, participants were asked to confirm that they were indeed a permanently appointed Academic Staff Member at the institution selected for this project. An affirmative answer to that question was needed for the interview to proceed and/or for the data collected to be included. Unfortunately, one invited participant who accepted the invitation to interview did not meet this criterion and that interview had to be stopped at this point.

The following calculations, based on the information provided by the pool of qualified participants, is not intended to be detailed quantitative analysis; the “averages” calculated will be used later to help provide general points of reference and general descriptors with respect to individual participant profiles. To assist the reader in better understanding the individual characteristics of participants, I have described a few of their basic demographic characteristics as “below average,” “average,” or “above average,” while maintain confidentiality.

The group of respondents featured a total of 152 years of teaching in this particular institution, averaging 10.9 years per individual. The range of teaching experience was from 2.5 years to 22 years. With respect to teaching in the postsecondary education system as a whole, that value rose to 232.5 years, increasing the average to 16.6 years per instructor. The range related to this question was from 2.5 – 24 years. Overall, this was an experienced group of instructors.

I made the following observations as they related to the postsecondary education instructional experience that these respondents had gained at institutions other than the local one:

- 1) one international and one American institution were on the list,
- 2) some Ontario universities and colleges had been listed, and
- 3) several Alberta colleges were also mentioned, including a number of references to

Red Deer College and Bow Valley College in Calgary.

The gender makeup of the participants was eleven male and three female. The estimated age range was from thirty-five to sixty-five. While no average age was calculated, it is estimated that the average age would be slightly above fifty, given the general age distribution of respondents. This was an older group of respondents. There would appear to be a strong correlation between the average age and the average years of instructional experience.

Initial Perceptions of the Current State of Change Within the Publicly Funded Postsecondary Education System

Six questions were asked in this section of the interview. Four of the questions had the potential to have short answers. The following discussion will report on those results first. Two of the questions were purposefully open-ended, asking the participants to describe some of the change in the postsecondary education sector that they had personally witnessed or experienced and asking them to predict what will happen in the foreseeable future. Those responses are discussed in detail near the end of this section.

All fourteen respondents indicated that they had experienced change over the course of their postsecondary education career. Two individuals indicated that they had experienced different kinds of change. One of those went on to differentiate between change that was driven internally versus change that was driven by factors external to the institution. They further went on to differentiate change based on additional criteria. They separated change that was driven by policy from change that they considered under the term *improvement*. Finally, there was some description of change as expressed through remaining current, which some respondents linked to changes that might be made to curriculum. Another participant described change based on some of their relatively traumatic personal experiences, generally due to a change in leadership at the institution where they were serving at the particular time. They perceived some or all of that change as having negatively impacted their employment prospects there. Until that change in leadership, it appeared that they were on track to achieve tenure; afterwards, the prospects of achieving that objective seem far less certain. In their words, “there was an expectation on my part that working in postsecondary would provide me, as a public service employee, with a great deal of certainty, and ironically, I haven't felt like that's been the case.”

All respondents were then asked to describe change that they had personally witnessed or experienced. Four strong topic areas were identified by analyzing those responses; they are curriculum, students, government funding and technology; a fifth topic area, titled *other* captured those relevant items that did not fall into one of those four streams. Each is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Related themes are discussed in Chapter 5.

Initial Perceptions of the Sense of Urgency With Which Change Must Occur

In this section of the interview, questions #11 to #13, participant responses with respect to their perceptions related to the term *urgency* were collected and analyzed. As mentioned earlier, the nature of each of these three questions could be considered essentially close-ended, but many respondents chose to elaborate on many of their answers, with or without my encouragement. I believe that this was a desirable outcome and contributed significantly to the quality of the data set. The 10 point scale used in question #13 also allowed for some elementary quantitative analysis, such as averaging and provided additional context to the responses provided in questions #11 and #12.

Belief That Change Must Occur

All 14 respondents to question #11 expressed a belief that change must occur within the publicly funded postsecondary education system. At least two of the answers were conditional. The most reluctant respondent, One, stated, “only, if required.” A second respondent, Five, initially answered “not really,” but the longer they presented their answer the more the answer changed. In fact, halfway through the response the individual stated, “Thinking about it more carefully, I guess yeah, in order to continue to be sustainable, postsecondary does need to change.” A third respondent, Erin, added that the change needed was “more internal, without maybe too much government direction.” Two other affirmative answers were accompanied with

the following comments: Laurie stated that “all across North America . . . there is less money to be given out to postsecondary institutions” and Olds Faculty 1 shared their perspective that “the cost of postsecondary education in Alberta is too high.” Ironically, that last comment is strikingly similar to comments of the Minister of Advance Education in notes captured from his meeting with the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Associations on April 30, 2020 in which he is quoted as stating that same fact on at least ten different occasions. (ACIFA Newsletter, Spring 2020, pp. 10 - 16) The blue ribbon panel report of August 2019 also provides substantive evidence of this fact (Government of Alberta, 2019, pp. 39 - 43).

The Amount of Change That Is Believed Must Occur

Question #12 followed the previous question with a request to assess that amount of change that was believed was needed; for this question, respondents were provided with a range of descriptors from which to choose: little, moderate, or substantial. They were also invited to use their own descriptor, if they preferred.

No respondent used the word *little*. Four chose the term *moderate*. Two chose to identify the zone between *moderate* and *substantial*. Seven respondents used the term *substantial* in their answers.

Several respondents added important qualifiers in their answers. Respondent Three added the term *measured* to their descriptor *moderate*; they added “it can’t be rushed.” Respondent One, who had earlier expressed the most reluctance to note that change was necessary, qualified their answer of *moderate* with “as much as necessary.” They noted a changing economy, and that changes in technology were happening, changing “peoples” [I interpreted, in this instance, that they were referring to students]; they added “there is no crisis.”

Among those respondents who used the term *substantial*, Respondent Four added the term *extreme*. Olds Faculty 1 added, “at a minimum substantial” and then later added “I should probably use more powerful words,” but then did not do so.

A few respondents differentiated between the types of changes that they perceived were needed and, thus, in their answers to this question, applied different qualifiers to each type. For example, respondent Hank identified three types of change needed and applied the labels of *minimum*, *moderate*, and “100, potentially more” respectively. Bertrand used the terms “substantial, and not so substantial, necessary” as he related to his differentiations. Finally, Keith identified that while he used the term *moderate*, he added the following elaboration “even though I think that the need for change is great, reconsidering the priority of quality of instruction and the sustainability of teaching staff.” In hindsight, it became clear that I likely did not completely understand the full dimension of this answer; my best interpretation is that while Keith believed that there is a substantial need to improve the quality of instruction and to strive to sustain teaching staff, in other aspects of the system, he believed that there is less need for change, leading to an averaging in the *moderate* zone. This was an instance where I should have asked for clarification.

In summary, essentially half of the respondents provided an answer of substantial or more, two others replied “moderate to substantial,” and four were clearly in the moderate range. Thus, the overall general average was at or near the substantial point.

The Urgency of the Need to Apply Change

Respondents to question #13 were asked to provide their answers to this question by choosing a number from one (no urgency) to ten (representing immediate need for change). Their answers varied widely, ranging from a low of two to a high of 11. Only two responses were below the

midpoint (five). Three respondents answered “seven,” and three others responded with either a 7.5 or between seven and eight to create the largest cluster of answers. If one were to try to generate an “average score, based on this scale, an approximate number would be 7.36. However, that generated value would only be identifying one minor aspect of the whole discussion. The distribution of ratings and the accompanying commentary explaining the assessed rating need to be taken into account to fully understand the perspectives expressed by the participants.

Table 3 presents the cumulative distribution of the answers to Question 13 (“On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing no urgency and 10 representing immediate need for change, how urgent do you believe is the need for change in the postsecondary education system?”) showing the groupings using numbers and text.

Table 3

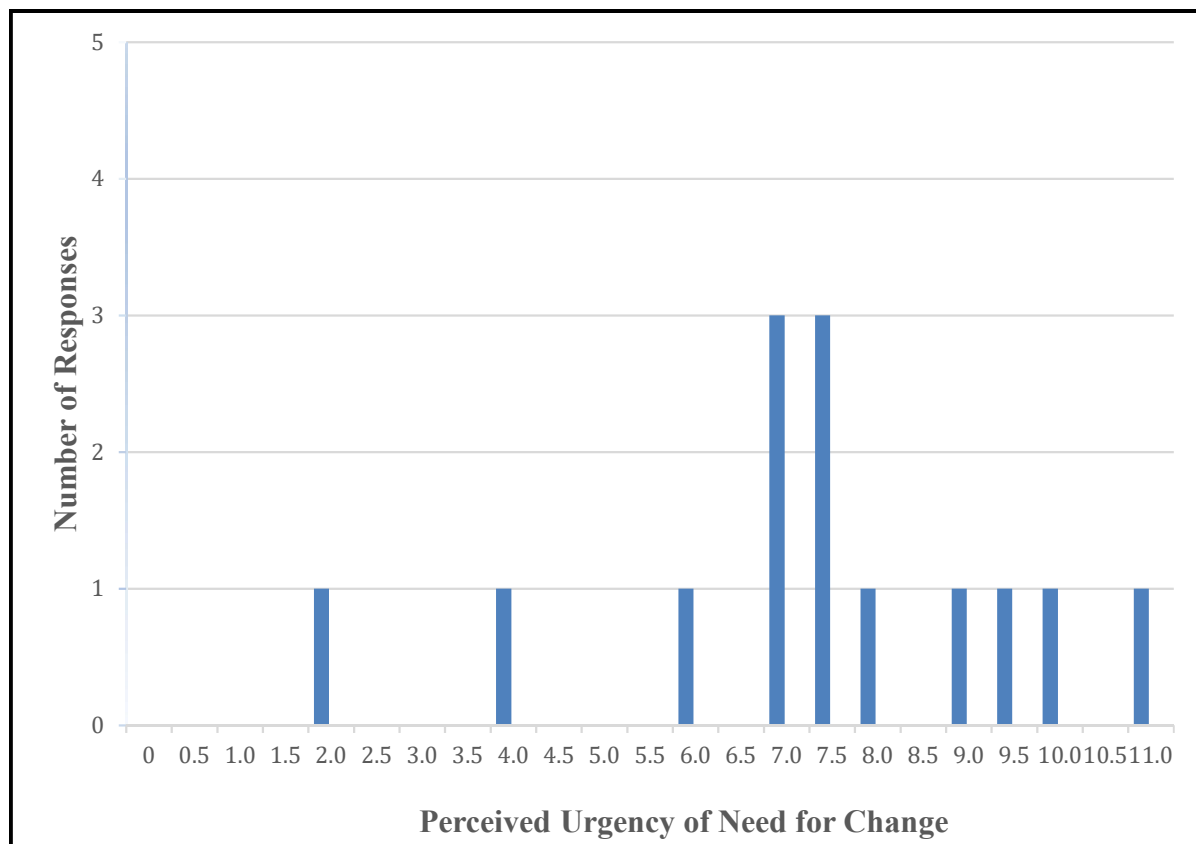
The Distribution of Answers to Question 13

Rating	Number of Responses
1	None
2	One
3	None
4	One
5	None
6	One
7	Three
7.5	One response. Two other responses “between seven and eight”
8	One
9	One
9.5	One response “between nine and ten”
10	One
11	One

Figure 4 provides an illustration, which helps the reader appreciate the relative perspective of those same responses visually. The reader's eye is directed to the relative frequency of answers of 7 and 7.5, as well as the frequency of answers above that range as compared to below it. In general, it is clear that the research participants recognized the need for change and that that need was relatively urgent. Further and more extensive discussion of this point is presented later in this chapter.

Figure 4

The Distribution of Answers to Question 13



Some important qualifying statements were made along with some of these ratings. Respondent One qualified their rating of “two,” with “long-term sectoral change needs to be well thought-out.” Respondent Five supported their rating of “four” with “we should evolve as our

external environment does.” They also made it clear that they did not want to choose the midpoint (five) of the scale. Their answer would either be above the midpoint or below it to provide a clearer indication of their perspective on the issue. Erin qualified her “six” with “enough change to keep up with industry and technology.” Brenda added to her “seven” with “we are fortunate to be always looking forward and providing new and better opportunities for students.” Bertrand added to his 7.5 rating that his perspective was that we should “show them [students] the way and then allow them to make choices from there.” Keith added to his rating of “eight,” stating that there is “urgent need, but not at crisis point yet.”

The Major Topic Areas Identified: The Preliminary Process

In this section, I describe the process by which I first identified some of the potential themes. As stated earlier, I chose to use a process by which I simply relied on my own judgement, independent of theoretical frameworks; I have used the term *organic*, to describe this process because it was entirely natural and unaided by artificial means, characteristics that are often associated with the production of organic foods.

It is important to consider the sequential order in which the interviews were conducted. Three interviews were conducted before the disruption of activities due to the global pandemic and associated public health directives. These were conducted between March 10 and 17, 2020. Then, eight interviews were conducted between April 30 and May 15, 2020. The final three interviews were conducted on Tuesday, May 19, 2020.

My perceptions of the topic areas and core themes evolved with each interview, especially, if I had time to reflect on what I had heard in between events. I had a significant amount of time between March 17 and April 30, 2020, to think about the results from the first three interviews. A gap between May 1 and May 11, 2020, allowed me to reflect on the contents

of the first five interviews; it was likely during this lull that I began to sense the fuzzy parameters of this project. The long weekend between May 15 and May 19, 2020, was also an important time period which allowed for additional reflection on the data gathered. By then, I had completed eleven interviews and was in a position to consider whether saturation had been achieved or not. My initial thoughts with respect to that question were that I had achieved it, but I was happy to be conducting three more interviews, which helped me confirm that perspective much more firmly.

The First Three Interviews

Interviews with Respondent Four, Hank, and Erin were held between March 10 and March 17. In the following discussion, key statements by each individual are highlighted. Reference to gender in this section will be inconsistent; in cases where the individual is obviously male or female, “he” and “she” will often be used. In cases, where the label applied shields their identity, the label “they” will be used as extensively as possible.

Respondent Four set the initial tone. They were slightly younger and less experienced than the group average, but set a powerful tone related to what was perceived as “the commoditization or corporatization of postsecondary institutions.” They strongly expressed the belief that the change that they had experienced to date was negative and perceived an urgency with respect to the need to change the “trajectory” from treating students as “bums in seats” and as “customers and postsecondary institutions themselves as “factories.” The following short paragraph captures the full essence of their perspective:

I feel that some of the change that I have experienced has reduced that to administrators looking at dollars and cents; it appears to me to be a function of necessity although I would not necessarily consider that a positive change when you look at the fundamental

aspects of a postsecondary institution. Again, if the goal is to turn postsecondary institutions into money makers, then I suppose that it depends within the lens by which you want to view that, but again from a foundational, the pillars or principles of a postsecondary education are negatively impacted by purely capitalistic drivers of a postsecondary education.

With respect to their perception of the urgency of the need for change, I believe that they wished to demonstrate a strong emphasis, because when asked to rate their sense of that urgency, on a ten-point scale, they responded “a 10 or an 11.”

They further expressed concern with respect to their perception that “a career as a college or university instructor is going away.” Their perception of the future involved more “contract instructors resulting in less stringent and less quality programming and institutions graduating students and retaining them just for the money and not necessarily on industry quality.”

Overall, Respondent Four supported their responses with a lot of passion. The amount of that emotion seemed to rise as the interview proceeded, but subsided at the end. When asked if there was a desire to revisit any questions or to add any other information to previous responses, the respondent seemed satisfied with the experience.

The second respondent, Hank, was slightly above the average age of the group and was one of the most experienced instructors in the group, at least in terms of working at this institution. They were able to provide more of a longitudinal and historical perspective with the evolution of the institution, its curricular processes and some commentary on the evolution of students over that period of time.

A key part of the discussion with this respondent was a detailed description of the major changes in curriculum and course structure which occurred between 2005 and 2010. Before that

time, courses ran daily, in one- or two-hour blocks, adding up to 35 or 70 credit hours. Students were often in class six hours a day in “either lecture or lecture/lab combinations.” Once the curricular transition process had been completed, classes were measured using a model more closely aligned with that of other postsecondary institutions. The standard course was considered worth three credits and it would consist of 150 hours of learner time, including an expectation that some of the time that would be invested outside of the classroom. Typical class delivery would consist of 3 three hours of weekly time in a classroom, over a fifteen-week period, with the rest of the time outside of class. If labs were considered as part of a course, the amount of independent study expectations was reduced. Instead of one hour a day for five days of the week, a typical class was now offered one hour a day three days of the week or one- and one-half hours at a time twice a week, similar to many university models.

A key topic of the discussion with Hank was that there was an overall need for less administration and fewer policies and this was illustrated in at least three different ways:

- 1) The processes to achieve program approval. It was their perception that the approval process before the turn of the century “was friendlier than what was a decade later.” It was also their perception that approval processes implemented by the Department of Advanced Education continued to be more cumbersome than the ideal.
- 2) Too much management. It was argued that “we need less middle management and arguably even a little less senior management.” With respect to middle management, the perspective was even more specific and negative; it “isn't always productive. It's not always viewed positively and, in some ways, it kills enthusiasm and drives out great ideas, good ideas and leads to stagnant kinds of productivity.”

- 3) Students, modern learners are more independent than in the past. In hindsight, it appears to me that the discussion with respect to this topic was incomplete. Initially, I interpreted these comments to mean that fewer policies were needed to guide the learner experience at the institution. Upon further examination of the comments, it appeared that the point was really about a change in learner expectations due to changes in life experiences, such as a change in parenting style. The most significant change brought on because of “their exposure to technology, their exposure to different social platforms.” I believe that the argument was that the modern learner is more independent, because they have access to more technology than in the past and that they are proficient in using it. This instance was one occasion, when I should have sought clarification of the intended message.

In summary, Hank seemed to paint a landscape involving more technology, more cumbersome administrative processes and more government oversight.

The interview with Erin was conducted on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, on the second day after the institution had been closed to students. Both of us were only vaguely aware of the implications of recent developments, but we knew that social distancing was an important and fundamental concept. Fortunately, the interview room that had been chosen for the purpose was sufficiently large and spacious enough to allow us to proceed.

Erin was slightly younger than the average age of the participant group and had significantly less direct postsecondary instructional experience, than the average; however, she had significant experience in support roles which allowed her to make contributions that were far more valuable than one may have anticipated by simply looking at her years of instruction.

A key trait that Erin displayed and expressed throughout the interview was “optimism,” but it was interesting to note that, on several occasions, she tempered that optimism with some

sobering observations of the current state of the provincial publicly funded postsecondary education system and during her predictions of future events. She equated provincial funding decisions with expressions of the perceived value of postsecondary education in this way, “As much as I want to be optimistic, I think that, dealing with the political environment and the budget that we are being forced to work within, I think that will unfortunately cause maybe a devaluing of our postsecondary system.” While Erin noted that part of her perception was based on the relatively recent election of a new United Conservative Party government, “obviously, being a conservative government, they're going to be less free with how they are spending the money in the budget,” it did not seem to me that they were limiting this point to only this present regime. And, at the time of this interview, neither of us had any inkling of the upcoming government decisions that would essentially triple the size of the budget deficit to help offset the economic and social damage to be inflicted by the pandemic.

When asked to predict what might happen in the foreseeable future, this optimistic individual continued along a similar train of thought. She hoped that “postsecondary education doesn’t get pigeonholed into just career preparation or just academic research.” But given current circumstances, Erin predicted that the public would see it as more of the former rather than the latter, “as much as I agree or disagree with it.”

Finally, Erin expressed more faith in the value of change, “if the postsecondary institutions are given the autonomy to be able to decide what's right for them, with the students they know that are coming and the industries that they serve, that we should be able to decide how we're run internally” than “without maybe too much government direction.”

With respect to rating the urgency of the need for change, she gave it a six, “enough change to keep up with industry and technology and advancements within industry.” But Erin also

suggested that we should be striving for balance, asking “Are we changing just for change, or if things are working, especially more internal processes and policy procedures, within our own walls, if things are working, why change?” In this way, she perceived that institutions should be “a bit more proactive, rather than reactive, so I put it maybe a little bit more than the half.”

After conducting these first three interviews, I was beginning to get a general sense of the range of topics and themes that might ultimately emerge, though the role of the provincial government in shaping the system and the impact of funding provided by that government was certainly discussed in all three situations. Each perspective presented added interesting dimensions to the forum, but little consensus had emerged at this time.

The In-Between, Almost Forgotten Interview

An interview conducted on March 24, receives little attention in the rest of the discussion, but it served an important purpose with respect to helping me adapt to the new operating environment brought on by the pandemic. Ultimately, this interview was cut short, because it was discovered that this faculty member had not yet been permanently appointed to their role and thus did not meet the criteria established for this project; but, their willingness to work with me as I experimented with new technological tools and new interviewing processes is noted here and was highly appreciated. I also appreciated their interest in the research topic and the support I was offered on a personal level.

It is important to recap the circumstances and the changes in the teaching and learning environment between March 16, 2020, and the date of the interview to further put this event and the states of mind of both the interviewee and the interviewer into proper context. Essentially, we reported to work on Monday, March 16, 2020, to learn that the institution was “closed,” and that classes would not resume until a week later, March 23, 2020. Resumption would only be done

using “remote means” and, to the degree possible; faculty were being encouraged to work from home. The period between March 16 and the 23rd was to be used by instructors to transition their instructional methods and materials to adjust to these new circumstances.

I was only moderately familiar with how to conduct meetings via Google Meet; this interview helped me become more familiar with the process and helped me see that I could continue to conduct my research via this medium. Secondly, I had developed a slide presentation to guide the discussion in the formerly face-to-face contexts; preparing for this interview caused me to realize that that visual aid would no longer work. I then created a skeleton Google Docs document in which I listed the questions and created spaces in which to enter the responses. I also experimented with the Docs feature “Voice to Type,” as a way of collecting participant responses efficiently. This brief episode proved that it could be a viable procedure.

Despite the discovery that this participant had been mistakenly invited to participate in this project, this attempted interview helped to establish the procedures that would be used for the remainder of my data gathering stage and proved that the technological tools that would be engaged were suitable for their intended purposes. The extra practice contributed to a more highly skilled approach to future interviews.

Interviews Four and Five

I intended to resume interviewing respondents on May 1, 2020 but Respondent Two expressed a willingness to be interviewed on April 30, 2020, so I adjusted accordingly. I was able to schedule another interview before the end of that week; participant Six, who had originally agreed to an interview on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, then asked for a postponement and accepted a new time on Friday, May 1, 2020.

Respondent Two was slightly older than the average age of participants, had slightly less experience instructing at our home institution than the average, but had average or above average instructional experience due to their time at another Alberta institution. Early in their responses, the tone for much of this discussion of the changing roles of faculty, especially relative to institutional administration was set, “I believe that there has been a downloading of administrative tasks to the faculty and program level. I believe that there is also a move to be somewhat top-heavy with senior administration and less support given to a program or instructor level.” Later in the interview, two other key statements related to the topic are made: “One of the changes that I have seen over a number of years and across institutions is that there seems to be a propensity to hire contract, part-time or temporary full-time but not permanent full-time positions in the faculty realm” and “I think faculty are getting burnt out and it's going to be difficult to retain good quality instruction in postsecondary.”

A second theme identified from the responses provided related to students, “I believe students come to postsecondary less prepared and to a degree not having independent learning skills. That's to say that they are somewhat spoon fed prior to coming to the college or postsecondary level.” This general statement was supported by more specific examples of support being provided to two specific groups of students: younger students and international students. “Younger students tend to want deadlines extended, accommodations made, and typically are more self-centered than students in the past” and “there is a move to international students and the desire by management to have accommodations made at almost all costs for them.”

Finally, Respondent Two made a couple of miscellaneous statements which only registered with me late in the analytical process. The first of these related to curriculum and

teaching and learning, “Teaching and learning should be about education, not just curriculum.” The second statement was a comment on the contributions of faculty, “Faculty play a far larger role in the lives of students than simply delivering competencies.”

Respondent Six was about average with respect to all demographic dimensions of this project: age, instructional experience at our home institution, and overall instructional experience.

In sports, there is a reference to a flat performance when an athlete or a team performs poorly, usually because of poor preparation or a lack of emotional commitment. In hindsight, I believe that I was “flat” on this occasion. I missed several opportunities to ask for additional detail in support of the answers provided. In part, the energy was low as the interview was held on a Friday afternoon. Secondly, I attribute a key part of my poor performance on my mistaken belief that, since this was my fifth interview, I was well versed in delivering the questions. Upon reflection of my performance during this interview, I determined I would not repeat these mistakes. I prepared well and fully for the remainder of my interviews.

Overall, this interview with Six was short, direct and almost clinical. While all questions were well answered, much of the discussion was without elaboration; for example, when asked about predictions for the foreseeable future, the response was, “In the future, I think the funding models will change. Postsecondaries will be required to raise more funds internally, I expect student tuition to go up and I expect delivery models and program delivery to have to change to adapt to this.” While there are several strong points here, I missed the opportunity to probe and ask for examples related to “delivery models” and “program delivery.” Another example of a well-crafted answer came earlier in the interview, when the respondent was asked to discuss some of the changes in the sector that they personally witnessed or experienced. Their opening

sentence was a solid well-organized thought, “For the most part, change has revolved around funding models, leadership styles and organizational goals.” I could have asked for elaboration on any of those three items, but did not. I am left with curiosity with respect to examples of changes in leadership styles and organizational goals that were witnessed and/or experienced.

In summary, I was pleased to have resumed my data collection process, after the self-imposed six-week hiatus in response to the pandemic. After these five interviews, preliminary topic areas related to students, curriculum and provincial funding had become apparent to me. I also noticed that, despite my intent to not involve the value elements as proposed by Barber et al., their strong influence had impacted me. That should not have been much of a surprise as reading their publication was the single biggest influence on choosing to conduct this research and the design of this project. My perceptual blindness with respect to the topic of “faculty” remains one of the biggest surprises identified later in the analysis process. It is however, an example of my efforts to perceiving the data that I was collecting with few preconceived notions.

Interviews Six to Eleven

Nine interviews were scheduled during the week of May 11–15, 2020. Three participants later asked to reschedule their time slots; thus, those three interviews were scheduled on Tuesday, May 19, 2020 after the Victoria Day long weekend. In retrospect, though I was initially annoyed at needing to reschedule those interviews; it turned out to be a fortunate turn of circumstances. The amount of data gathered from the six interviews that week was substantial; the full data set of nine interviews would likely have been overwhelming. The time for reflection over the long weekend was critical in helping me come to terms with the fact that I was at or near saturation. I was able to start my day on May 19, 2020 with the perspective that I was testing my saturation point rather than in the midst of adding more mind-numbing data.

Brenda was the first interview of the week, followed by Respondent One, Keith, Olds Faculty 1, Respondent Five, and Laurie.

Brenda was likely above the average instructor age, had less instructional experience at the institution than the average, but had more overall instructional experience than the average, because of having taught for a considerable amount of time at another central Alberta location. I perceived two strong topics during the interview with Brenda: students and curriculum. She set a strong early tone with the statement, “When I began teaching, the curriculum was driven by textbooks.” She followed, a few sentences later with, “The expectation of students was that they would show up, take notes in class and perhaps do some additional readings, review questions and homework. And that all quizzes and tests would be based on information available in the textbook.” Later, I wondered if some of her comments might have fit more closely into the teaching and learning or assessment streams of thought.

Brenda noted some changed expectations with respect to faculty, in particular the expectations of higher credentials,

I see a higher level of education required for teaching positions, whereas in the 1990s some programs would allow master’s degrees. I see more of a switch to PhDs. . . . In addition, I see a greater support for professional development as it pertains to the focus on teaching and learning rather than subject matter.

Finally, some change with respect to students was noted, for example, “in some ways we’re allowing students to graduate who maybe don’t have the necessary skills.” Concerns regarding meeting student learning needs, prompted some wondering about whether technology and associated tools might reduce learning effectiveness, “we still have students that would do well learning by taking more notes, but the expectation they have is that they’ll be able to see all

the resources in PowerPoints and articles that we are posting on our learning management systems.”

In summary, Brenda featured a very locally centered set of responses, very much focused on the classroom and associated environments.

Respondent One, similar to Respondent Six, was also about average with respect to all demographic dimensions of this project: age, instructional experience at our home institution, and overall instructional experience. That said, their fields of study were significantly different: the former being a scientist, while the latter’s experience was in business.

Respondent One’s educational background was revealed in a number of the examples cited during their responses. For example, their perspective related to change was conveyed in a manner perfectly consistent with their field of training:

I’m going to use a biological example: there are aspects of an organism that have not changed through millions of years of evolution, because it works. The circumstances under which it works still remain; however, should those circumstances change, then that particular adaptation is no longer beneficial and may negatively impact the survival of that organism. I look at society the same way; if the process and policy actions are effective within the current context, there is no need to change for the sake of change. Change is necessary when circumstances demand it or dictate it; so, changing things because you are bored is a waste of time; changing things because they are needed to stay relevant, effective, efficient, successful, then that is good. So, it can only be positive if it is for the good, if it is to adapt to a changing environment or it is to improve that's good; why change is negative change can only be negative if it's imperfectly executed or was never required in the first place.

Respondent One went on to relate some aspects of change to the political ideology of the “current political ruling party in Alberta” and described the current pace of change “in my mind, reckless.” They also commented on:

a recent change wherein, overall, the sector is meant to be for personal enrichment and educating citizens so they can be productive citizens to one with a more mercenary or venal focus on work skills and not so much on personal enrichment or the betterment of society. On a broader sense, it has become more mercenary, in an economic sense.

As can be noted from the selected examples, the vocabulary that they used to describe the situation as they viewed it were vivid, evocative, and relatively dramatic.

Keith’s profile was closer to that of Respondent Two than most others; while he was likely slightly younger than the average age of participants, and had slightly less experience instructing at our home institution than the average, he had approximately the average total instructional experience. Unlike Six, his experience had been gathered in central Canada rather than at another Alberta institution.

During this interview, the sense that I was approaching saturation emerged. For example, early responses focused on technology and the associated changes:

The first area of change that I can think of, is the use of online learning systems like Moodle and Blackboard. When I first began teaching in postsecondary, there was no requirement to use anything like Blackboard or Moodle and then it phased in gradually. There was an expectation that I would post some of my materials on Blackboard, and we were all taught how to login to use it. From there, the uses of those systems grew, so it became, sometime in the last five or six years, an expectation that all of my students’ grades would be posted there, and that other materials in class would also be posted there.

Also, there would be content specifically for the online environment. That's one big change.

The second part of the discussion related to faculty: “Another big change that I've seen in my time in postsecondary has been the use of contract staff for teaching. I began my career as contract staff and they were used quite heavily at that time, but I think that it has increased the ratio of contract staff to full-time faculty.”

The third part of his response is generally self explanatory:

The last change that I think of is the emphasis away from lecturing and on what I first was introduced to as “flipped classrooms,” the idea that good instruction in postsecondary does not involve lecturing to your students, but involves creating interactions and trying to get them to learn the material on their own time, so that you can have a more interactive classroom experience. There has been a much greater emphasis on that compared to when I first started teaching.

Much of the rest of the discussion focused on adding to the points raised in these early excerpts. There was a sense of urgency with respect to the implementation of change, with a rating of 8 out of 10, but a clear statement that “I don't think we've reached the crisis point yet.” The most urgent change needed was “there needs to be an increase in funding from government,” with further specification that it be spent on “staffing” and less on “administration and building facilities.”

In summary, two distinguishing features of this interview stood out for me. The first was the general calmness of the participant; I believe that it contributed to my comfort during the interview. Secondly, his answers were extraordinarily well-organized. It seemed that I could

easily understand his messages and the associated logic. I looked forward to analyzing his transcript for the themes that would emerge.

The next interview was with Olds Faculty 1. Overall, their demographic profile was also about average in all aspects; he was close to the average age of participants, had slightly above the average of the experience instructing at our home institution, but only approximately the average total instructional experience.

This respondent covered a wide variety of topics over the course of the interview. Early points included the increase in faculty workloads noted and the intrusion of technology into a faculty member's delivery methods; the institution "has adopted an online learning platform and is basically forcing instructors to change their delivery models; this has been quite significant and quite a challenge." He also commented on the change in the faculty to non-faculty ratio, referring to it at one point as a "downward spiral." With respect to projecting future developments, he expressed a number of thoughts:

to begin I would say I see an impact on postsecondary funding, with performance-based metrics, which will have probably a very immediate negative impact, due to lack of understanding changes to institutional structures to accommodate performance-based funding without adequate change management. I would attribute that to the government more than anything. I see programs, courses, delivery models and basically educational quality in the postsecondary sector being negatively impacted in the short-term. This has nothing to do with COVID-19. More specifically to changes that this government has made, I actually believe that, in the foreseeable future, once this change has occurred, I actually see postsecondary in Alberta shrinking, meaning that there will be less program

offerings through all institutions. . . . I see the cost of adult education increasing exponentially.

With respect to his predictions, “specific to faculty, I see the foreseeable future to be a time of incredible unrest.” He commented on the “transition from faculty associations to unions” and the possibility that the provincial government might allow for raiding to occur as soon as 2022, with the descriptor, “if that occurs I would definitely foresee chaos in this sector.”

In summary, Olds Faculty 1 commented on predictable topics while adding detail to the data set collected to this point. His involvement in the local association as well as the provincial body was also apparent through the responses provided.

Respondent Five rated below average on all basic demographic scales used in this project; they were slightly younger than the overall average and had been instructing for a shorter period of time at the institution than most in this participant pool, but had additional instructional experience from other institutions, which raised them into the “average” range.

Their experience in the postsecondary education sector had been markedly different, thus far, than their initial expectations, “before I entered the postsecondary world, there was an expectation on my part that working in postsecondary would provide me, as a public service employee, with a great deal of certainty, and ironically, I haven't felt like that's been the case.”

They attributed most of the change that they had experienced thus far to:

changes in leadership, and those changes in leadership have had direct implications on my employment. Specifically, I have been in situations where I felt that I was going to be permanently employed and then a sudden change in leadership has occurred, where a new leader comes in, has a different plan, is following different directives, and has a different

view of where they want to take programs. That has caused a few relatively traumatizing setbacks that I wasn't really prepared for.

Part of the reason was stated as, “I guess I understand why this happens because our field is so dependent on government funding.”

As the interview proceeded towards conclusion, it became clear that Five was aware of the degree of change occurring, with and without the impact of COVID-19, but also seemed to struggle to add specifics beyond the earlier personal examples supplied. The following statement seems like an appropriate way to end this portion of the discussion, “we need to acknowledge fundamental changes that are happening in our little world that surrounds us and we need to reconsider everything that we do.”

The week ended with Laurie who was close to the average in age, but above the average in instructional experience at our home institution, and thus also above the average total instructional experience.

While acknowledging that he had experienced “large amounts of change” in their time at the institution, he was quick to add “but at a pace much slower than my experience in the private sector . . . much quicker . . . than here, even at our nimble college.” With respect to the pace of change, his response was “Definitely increasing, definitely and not just because of COVID-19; That's really accelerating some of the changes, that I think was already accelerating before.”

In attempting to share his perspective of the future state of postsecondary education, he identified an important potential inconsistency, “I predict a big push into more on-line teaching, and we're going to see a lot of the classroom hit, the typical face-to-face interaction that so many of us cherish, is going to disappear” followed shortly by, “I think there's going to be a bigger push for trades as well trades education; that I think conflicts with the push to teach online,

because so much of our trades teaching is actually hands-on, and that's how it gets taught the best.” No solution to this dilemma was presented.

Laurie was also able to demonstrate the impact of leadership roles on his perspective when relating the government funding situation here in Alberta to the larger context, “I think that postsecondary institutions all across North America are facing; there is less money to be given out to postsecondary institutions, so I think that we're going to that it has to change in order to be able to deliver high quality products.” When asked what he meant by “less money,” he was quick to clarify, “a smaller percentage of the tax base.” It was clear to me at the time that he was speaking with respect to funding from the provincial government; in hindsight, I wished that I had explored whether he was referring to funding from the federal government as well.

This respondent ended their contribution to this project with a strong note of determined action, with an associated strong sense of positivism which resonated with me,

I've been exposed to thinkers that are well above who I normally would communicate with and interact with; I think the need for changes is much more obvious to them. I'm going to call it “the outside world” or “the private world” or the world that we are trying to provide good training for; I think that, if we're going to do that and do that effectively, then we need to get on that and that's why I think there's a need for some of that, sooner than later.

As stated earlier, the amount of data gathered during this week was substantive. I clearly had the sense of what an “average” faculty member would likely say in the course of their responses to my questions. Over the long weekend, my mind sifted and sorted the various bits of information collected and a relatively clear, strong framework became visible. I looked forward to beginning the next week with the intent of confirming this perception.

The Final Three Interviews: Confirmation of Saturation

On Tuesday, May 19, 2020, interviews were held with Respondent Eight, Bertrand and, finally, Respondent Three.

Respondent Eight had been one of the first positive responses to my invitation to participate in this research, but at that time had indicated that they could not be available for an interview until at least the end of April. Once contacted again in early May a date and time were set, only to be postponed again—this seemed to be a case of “third time lucky.”

Early in the interview, their responses referred to a number of items in a short period of time; for example, in describing change that she witnessed or experienced, within a few sentences, they made references to:

changes in curriculum, . . . diversity within the classroom, . . . changes in administration and styles of administration, . . . changing institutional values, . . . increases in policy, . . . an increase in competition between institutions for FLEs [Full Learning Equivalents], . . . formats of programs change, . . . budgets go up and down, . . . ratios of administration or leadership to faculty or support staff, . . . an increase in administration and leadership in areas like human resources, . . . support services have grown considerably. I've seen when an institution goes from having a nurse and a visiting doctor to having multiple nurses, several counsellors, and a massage therapist. I've seen an increase in attention to mental health [and] an increase in active participation and an increase in the voice of the faculty association.

Although the topics areas were consistent with the data set collected thus far, the additional detail was welcomed.

When looking forward to future developments, Respondent Eight shared what I perceived to be a bold perspective:

We will still be doing the same thing or the outcome will be the same, but the process in which we get there, I think will forever be different going forward. Certain fundamental things in the case of postsecondary won't change, but I certainly think in order to not change, we're going to have to forget some of the mental models and paradigms like a two-year diploma or a four-year degree or a certain age group and age of a learner, location. With technology, all of those things that I think we're on the brink of massive disruption, not necessarily a negative, but we're going to have to be really open to how that's going to happen.

They continued to add to this perspective:

I think at one time postsecondary was considered a status or a luxury; I see it becoming even more commonplace and it is which, for the most part, it is now which is great. I see more distance learning, I see technology continuing to be a crucial part of learning, i.e. learning without borders, with fewer buildings, with less attention paid to location, real estate. I'm not sure about the social aspect of it; you know that used to be the postsecondary, the university, the college experience. I think that will still be there, but it will just look different. I think there's going to have to be a concerted effort for people to learn to socialize in their learning, but I'm optimistic about how students will develop their team learning or social learning abilities through technology. I think it's going to force them to become more communicative; otherwise, they'll just simply be wandering on their own, if they if they don't, because the traditional campus, the traditional residence provides that by virtue of, you know, the walls of a building that desk in a

room, the teacher at the front of the classroom and so without giving it much thought there's a bit of a community there. So I think after just going to have to go into maintaining and developing learning communities, but I think there is potential for those communities. They may even be stronger in the future, because the effort will have to be made as opposed to it being a given.

It seemed to me, based on this set of expressed thoughts, that Eight perceived “a brave new world;” however, it did seem that they only considered that to be possible because of the state of technology available to us.

With respect to their perception of implementing that change, an interesting analogy was shared:

We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I think the challenge will be identifying what needs to be changed and then figuring out how we're actually going to transition our institutions to that change. I don't think the change is going to affect the learner, that much. I think it is going to be existing enterprises that are going to have the challenge of identifying and learning how to enact it.

In summary, this interview with Respondent Eight confirmed that a general set of topic areas had been firmly established, that saturation was near or had been achieved and added some interesting detail to the data set.

Bertrand was estimated to be near the average age of the pool of participants, was below the average when it came to institutional instructional experience, but above average for overall instructional experience, much of it gained in international locations.

This interview was likely the longest of the entire set, with the responses to several questions featuring length and multiple parts. No new topic areas were extracted from this data; most of the length of the interview could be attributed to long and detailed supporting examples.

Two significant topic areas that rose to the top of the list were related to students and technology. A subtheme introduced early was related to faculty; I use the term “subtheme” in this context because it seemed that “faculty” was discussed in passing when the response was focused on other aspects, as illustrated by this opening statement, “I would say the first and most obvious change has been in the way that we [faculty] deal with our students, and how they see education.” He went on to discuss how, over time, it seemed that the concept of education had changed to being a product rather than a “general service” and then described the role of faculty as, “we just have to do whatever it is that we're supposed to do to help them achieve this product that they want to have.” He suggested that this transition started “somewhere around 2005ish,” when “a kind of corporate mentality began to sneak its way in.”

Bertrand went on to discuss changes brought on by technology. He provided several lengthy examples, as well as describing some of the impact on teaching and learning brought on incorporating it into our classroom environments. In addition, he commented on its influence in practically every aspect of our everyday lives:

A third change that I've seen, it's an obvious one, and it is technology. Technology has changed vastly since I began, and it has changed how we teach vastly, and I think that all of these three things I'm talking about are actually connected; they have separate parts definitely, but there are connections between them and one huge connection I see is that, because of technology, students do tend to see education like a product. They are very used to having their gratification satisfied instantaneously - they want a song, they can

just go to Spotify, press the button instantly, they want to buy something then go to Amazon, it gets delivered to them instantly. If they don't know something, go to Google, get the answer instantly; they are not used to the process of thinking through, of testing, of trying, of researching, of recognizing the validity of sources, of comparing different levels of sources. In all those things that were second nature to us, as we had to do them instead, they just want to get it now and if they're not getting it now, they think there's something wrong with us or sometimes they think there's something wrong with them, which is also a problem. That is one way in which I see technology kind of linking to the whole product, coddling instead of educating; another thing that I see is that it has impacted how students absorb information. When I first started teaching lecturing was the norm; you would stand up at the podium, you would pontificate for the students would take notes, and then using the information they got from those notes, they would have some sort of assessment, or they would come and ask you questions or something like that. Now what I find is, not only can I no longer just lecture, and obviously there are problems with just lecturing anyway, and that's good that we learned that, but not only can I not just lecture, but I have to repeat myself when I lecture because they are not really tuned in the way they used to be. And I have to do other things than lecture, like I have to do some kind of game; I do things in class that holds their attention.

This important set of statements with respect to technological and andrological transitions was supported by an even more detailed example, but there is no need to further elaborate at this time.

Late in the interview, Bertrand made another interesting statement when he lamented that perhaps some of the change that had been implemented may not have been in students' best interests:

We are not doing our students service when we don't allow them to make their own mistakes and to explore failure, and to become comfortable with understanding that it is not the end of your life, that you can find a way through it. In fact, what we should be helping to teach them in their education are things like resilience and grit and innovation, which involves repeated attempts and things like that. I think that the whole coddling thing, unfortunately, takes away from that, so that failure for the students is traumatic and anxiety-inducing and all of those things.

It was great to hear the references to *resilience*, *grit*, and *innovation*, but they were isolated and solitary, far from reaching theme, subtheme or topic area status.

In closing, Bertrand added substance and detail to the data set, but no additional topic areas or themes.

Respondent Three was featured in the final interview for this project. They were slightly older than the general average and had slightly more instructional experience than the average, all of it gained in the host institution.

He started his responses touching on two themes, technology and funding. He would come back to the subject of technology on several more occasions, providing a number of different examples of tools with which he tried to equip their students, "making my students go during the summer using apps, cheap GPS apps, to map and pull information into Google Maps." He also labelled himself as a bit of an innovator when it came to new applications, "there are more and more tools out there that I can access, and it's finding what's applicable and what's not

applicable - so you crash and burn a lot along the way, but that's just my nature.” This perspective was further accented, in the response to the question that followed, “From my perspective, change is good. I mean like, I believe that if it ain't broke, break it.”

In looking towards the future, Respondent Three became a bit more pragmatic in acknowledging “the financial challenges are really at the forefront right now,” and this statement was made acknowledging the COVID-19 pandemic, but also noting that the situation before the pandemic had hit was not much different in this regard. While accepting the challenging situation, when expressing his perspective with respect to how much change must occur, Respondent Three chose the term “measured” as a descriptor closely equivalent to “moderate.” The following statement appropriately captures the intent of the use of that term, “There's got to be a measured approach; it can't be rushed, although time is always such an important factor, but administration and all of us stakeholders, faculty, industry, you know when we're starting to move towards some of these changes, we have to address them in a in a timely manner; we can't just linger and navel gaze.”

He ranked the urgency to act as “around 9 or 10” on the ten-point scale and justified his rating this way, “In the political world that we are in right now, . . . we have to be ready to mobilize and adapt to what our current government is going to be basically dictating to us . . . we have to become more proactive in lobbying our stakeholders, so industry, students or faculty to really cast the light on our sector in the government, because between healthcare and K to 12, we kind of get lost in the shuffle.”

The above seems to be an appropriate statement to use as an ending for the discussion of extracted comments from individual participant interviews. In the next section, I present a

compilation of participant demographic profiles before going on to more deeply analyze the data collected.

Summary of Participant Demographic Profiles

In the following short section, a few summary comments are made with respect to the demographic characteristics of the pool of participants interviewed for this project. Table 4 is a quick compilation of the demographic profiles of the entire group of respondents.

Table 4*Detailed Participant Demographic Profiles*

Participant	Age (relative to average)	Gender	Institutional instructional experience (relative to average)	Overall instructional experience (relative to average)
Bertrand	Average	Male	Below	Above
Eight	Average	Female	Above	Above
Hank	Above	Male	Above	Above
Six	Average	Male	Average	Average
Keith	Below	Male	Below	Average
Erin	Below	Female	Below	Below
Five	Below	Male	Below	Average
Four	Below	Male	Below	Below
Brenda	Above	Female	Below	Above
Three	Above	Male	Above	Above
Two	Above	Male	Below	Above
One	Average	Male	Average	Average
Olds Faculty 1	Average	Male	Average	Average
Laurie	Average	Male	Above	Above

Table 5 is a pooled summary of respondent demographic profiles.

Table 5*Summary: Participant Demographic General Profile*

Criteria	Relative to respondent pool average
Age	Slightly above 50 years
Gender	Eleven male, three female
Instructional experience (at institution)	10.9 years
Instructional experience (overall)	16.6 years

Note. $n = 14$.

As referenced above, Table 5 provides a pooled summary of the demographic profiles of the participant pool. The combination of Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate that there was a good range of ages and instructional experience among participants. They represent strong evidence that supports the trustworthiness of the findings.

It is believed that the pool of participants that chose to participate in this project was generally representative of the faculty contingent ($n = 65$) at the institution. The detailed analysis in this section confirms the results of the preliminary analysis conducted earlier while adding the expected substance and detail. In general, these were mature, experienced and well-educated individuals. They expressed many interesting thoughts and perspectives in a relatively short period of time. In the next section, the results of deeper analysis of their comments and their thematic components is reported.

The Major Topic Areas Identified: Detailed Discussion

As I prepared to report these detailed findings, I reflected on some perspectives that were considered in the implementation of the process described. I identified and listed three key considerations:

- 1) I reminded myself of the relationship between topic areas and themes. I had and continued to presume that the themes would build naturally on the topic areas. In other words, the topics were the core components of the resulting themes.
- 2) The themes were essentially retrospective in nature. They captured faculty perspectives as of the date of their interview, developed during their career in the publicly funded postsecondary education sector. Only one question invited them to share their expectations of the future. Thus, it was possible that those respondents might change their perspectives at any time.

- 3) As I prepared to articulate my perspectives, I reminded myself to remain open to evolution in my thoughts, in other words, to remain adaptive and open to the perspectives of others, in particular, my respondents. It was possible that as I reviewed the data on a few more occasions, additional insight might be gained.

It appeared that the four topic areas that I identified organically (students, curriculum government funding and technology) were predominant. The NVivo analysis process helped me identify that those terms were used specifically in at least ten of the fourteen respondent transcripts and were mentioned at least twenty to twenty-four times, indicating more than one mention per transcript. A fifth topic, faculty, emerged with the assistance of the NVivo software; the term was also used in at least eleven situations and had at least twenty-eight mentions. The largest surprise was that the element “governance and administration” was identified in eleven files with at least thirty-six mentions; deeper exploration of these results indicate that I treated this category as a bit of a catch all; for example, when the role of the provincial government was mentioned, but without reference to financing, I put it into this category. Concepts like *management*, *leadership*, and reference to policy and procedure were also captured here. As I began this analysis, I deemed it useful to refer back to the definition used by Barber et al. (2013). For convenience it is restated here: “university leadership and board. Admissions, fundraising, alumni services, maintenance and facilities” (Barber et al., p. 31). Clearly the material that I captured did not match that definition. By substituting the term *college* for *university* and focusing on *leadership*, I justified that some of the captured comments were applicable. That also helped me realize that I should not have established a separate *leadership* category. Table 6 illustrates the full and complete listing of the nodes that were created in NVivo and the number of items that were captured within each. It is important to note here that, if anything, the number

of items captured is likely lower than the actual amount contained in the data set; I freely admit that this was a source of error during the analysis phase. The benefits of attempting to repeat the process were not worth the cost.

Table 6 provides an overview of the results of the detailed analysis, using the NVivo software. The terms *files* and *references* are standard NVivo terminology; I substituted the term *transcripts* for *files*. The reader's attention is also drawn to the sharp differentiation which occurs between topics six and seven. I strongly believe that an attempt to repeat the data analysis process would not have materially bridged that gap. The discovery of missed items would likely have maintained it or even widened it. Thus, I used the natural break that occurred between topics six and seven as important evidence in support of the topic areas that I included in my final analysis versus the ones that I excluded.

Table 6

Frequency of Captured References

Theme	Number of Transcripts	References
Governance and Administration	11	36
Faculty	11	28
Government Funding	11	24
Students	11	23
Technology	11	22
Curriculum	10	20
COVID-19	4	5
Teaching and Learning	3	4
Leadership	1	1
Assessment	1	1

Again, Table 6 shows the clear delineation between the top six “topic areas/themes” and the remaining four on the list. An attempt to repeat the comment capture process would not have

made any substantial difference in these results. No other potential themes could be drawn from the data set. As demonstrated, attempts to capture references to some of the other 10 value proposition elements of the Barber model yielded few results. Both *assessment* and *teaching and learning* were captured in three or fewer transcripts, with four or fewer references. A likely explanation is that comments related to those topics were embedded in the discussion of *curriculum* and, at times, were simply not explicit enough to be identified on their own. The interrelation between *teaching and learning* and other elements seemed especially problematic.

Reference to the term *leadership* was made on a number of occasions, but again, usually within the concept of governance or administration. Respondent Two made the most specific comments with respect to the differences between *managing* and *leading*, and essentially triggered the thought that perhaps I should start to track leadership comments specifically. Regrettably, as shown in Table 6, that was not a fruitful venture. Neither were the references to concepts such as *grit*, *passion*, *soft skills* or *entrepreneurialism*; they simply were too few and infrequent. Despite all of the preparation that was done during the literature review process, essentially these concepts were not top of mind with respondents, save for a couple of occasions: Bertrand referred to “grit” once and Brenda referenced “critical thinking” on one occasion. There was no reference to the other individual items and no other additions to these singular comments.

Finally, while COVID-19, the pandemic, or other related terms were stated in some of the responses, they were not mentioned enough times to rise to the status of a major theme. Clearly the global challenge had become a point of awareness for most respondents, especially those interviewed after the Alberta Health Services directives were implemented, but there were simply not enough articulated comments to warrant fuller and deeper investigation as a stand-alone theme.

Therefore, the detailed discussion below will focus on six topics: students, curriculum technology, government funding, faculty, and governance and administration. Note that I did not refer to them as themes, because as described earlier, I do not believe that the information that I captured in the governance and administration category constitutes a theme consistent with my modified definition of the Barber et al. element. I also reemphasize the clear delineation between these topics and the four remaining items; the former set consists of at least ten files and at least twenty specific captures, while the latter grouping consists of four or fewer files and has five or fewer references. Even accounting for some underreporting, there clearly is not enough material to warrant further analysis. Thus, at this stage, support for my initial organic perceptions of four themes was strong; the element *faculty* warranted further examination, and the sheer amount of material referencing governance and administration warranted a separate discussion section as well. As my analysis of the material in the topic area of governance and administration continued, I realized that a significant reexamination of my original framework for this area would be in order. That topic is the subject of further discussion later in the chapter.

Students

Specific reference to the student topic area was made by at least 11 respondents at least twenty-four times. Additional analysis has revealed that comments can be grouped in three subcategories (in no particular order):

- 1) more students being ill-prepared to start postsecondary education,
- 2) increased diversity of students, including more international students but also students with a wider variety of learning needs which require more accommodations, and support, and

- 3) students with different learning styles and expectations attributed, at least in part, to their increased use of technology in all aspects of their lives.

At least two participants, Bertrand and Hank, discussed students in detail, but from very different perspectives. Bertrand seemed to be discussing an increased dependency on the part of the student, talking about the increased need to “coddle” students; he provided detailed examples of doing that; in his words, “when I first started teaching, it was seen as ridiculous to coddle students . . . if I looked at myself today from in the past . . . looking at me today, I would call myself a coddler today. I would be shocked.” Conversely, Hank shared his perception that students were more independent than they were in the past, while at the same time raising some caution flags, “some of them are looking for the quick answer, . . . quick response, and their attention spans have changed;” he attributed these changes to “their exposure to technology, their exposure to different social platforms” and noted that “it has changed a bit of the attitude about priorities towards their responsibilities and learning.” Another participant, Eight, identified increased diversity in the student body.

In summary, of the 23 comments analyzed, five of the captured comments supported the subtheme of students being ill-prepared for postsecondary, seven comments referred to the increased diversity of students, including international students and students with a wider variety of needs and 11 comments discussed the change in students attributed to their increased use of technology. Two comments did not fit in any of these categories and two comments touched on two themes at once; one comment referred to the ill-preparedness and diversity while the other referred to ill-preparedness and expectations.

Curriculum

At least ten respondents made specific reference to “curriculum.” While noting that I likely missed some specific references in participant responses, I collected at least 20 snippets to demonstrate that this topic area was substantial.

In reviewing the detailed comments, I was reminded of the wide and general definition provided by Barber et al. and I also noted the similarity and potential overlap with their definition of *teaching and learning*. I paraphrased the curriculum definition to make it more closely suited to my college environment: individual subject-based courses adding up to a one or two-year programme, course content and syllabus prepared by faculty, textbooks and other reading materials. I am not entirely clear what Barber et al. meant by the term *course content*. In turn, their definition of teaching and learning was “lectures, tutorials, seminars” (Barber et al., p. 31). Again, I was not entirely able to differentiate between these items and *course content*.

Further analysis of the commentary on curriculum revealed that many of the comments were general; at least 11 comments were of that nature; three of those were so general that, upon more critical examination, it could be determined that they were not referencing curriculum at all; for example, I am now asking myself, “What did Respondent Three mean when they said, ‘There’s the nice to haves and there’s a need?’” At least the other eight comments included the word curriculum, but nothing else.

With respect to the remaining nine specific comments, terms like “flipped classrooms” and “blended learning” were captured. Laurie referenced “micro credentials.” Brenda specifically discussed how the curriculum that she delivered was moving away from being driven by textbooks, to a more outcomes-based approach. Hank provided a detailed explanation of the change in program delivery that had occurred over his long-time involvement with the

institution, referencing the time period from 2006 – 2009, though I believe that he likely meant a slightly more extended time period, as per my recollections and records. Many respondents discussed the changes in presentation, including a reduced emphasis on lecturing and an increased use of computer presentation software replacing overheads. Several respondents also linked the increase in online delivery methods due to pandemic and many predicted that this would likely continue into the foreseeable future. Several references to the use of a learning management system were made, including a memorable comment from Olds Faculty 1 when they stated that the adoption of an online learning platform “is basically forcing instructors to change their delivery models.”

In summary significant discussion of curriculum change was presented and the connection, including some potential overlap with the “teaching and learning” theme is noted. This noted interconnection is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Provincial Funding

Provincial funding was the next topic area to be analyzed in more detail. At least 11 respondents had made specific reference to this thematic area at least 24 times.

Most respondents demonstrated an awareness of the connection between levels of funding from the provincial government and operations at the institution. In addition, they identified that the level of funding was dropping and would likely continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Projections of future funding were essentially pessimistic. Several references to cost-savings and cheaper delivery models were made. Erin noted that she saw a connection between the perceived value of postsecondary education and funding levels. Despite designating herself as “generally optimistic,” and reflecting that perspective in many of her other answers, she

pessimistically predicted that there would be “a devaluing of our postsecondary system,” essentially accompanied by reduced budget allotments.

At least four respondents called for an increase to provincial funding while at least as many simply referred to “the funding issue,” without elaboration. I did not choose to probe further with respect to those comments; in hindsight, I wished that I had attempted to determine the level of analysis that supported those comments. For example, were they simply being descriptive of the situation as they perceived it. Or, were they simply expressing what they believed to be a normative state in this province. It is too late for me to determine the level of analysis in support of those comments. The statement made by Three seemed to be the most dramatic of them all when they said, “we have a formidable foe in the government.” That pronouncement was the most critical of any comments received with respect to this topic area.

Another realization that I made late in this process is that the respondents demonstrated little to no awareness of the funding contribution from the federal government. That set of results can be easily explained; while provincial government funding is announced prominently through both public and internal channels, federal funding is delivered to the province through a series of transfers, which often receive little to no public mention. Furthermore, while there are some conditions placed on how these transfers can be spent, since education is a provincial responsibility

Technology

At least 11 respondents had made specific reference to this topic area at least 22 times. This thematic area was pervasive and was expressed using several key terms such as “learning management systems,” “PowerPoint,” and “online learning.” Many respondents discussed how their own presentation style had changed to incorporate the use of technology. Respondent Three

admitted to enjoying the experience of pioneering the use of some technology, identifying that crashing and burning occurred on occasion. Yet, they persisted in trying to get their students using many online resources including YouTube, Google Maps, “cheap GPS apps,” and others. Due to the impact of the pandemic, a number of respondents identified their increased use of Google Meet or Zoom in response to the transition to online instruction.

Laurie noted that “communication, I think, is much more refined due to the technology involved.” Bertrand identified the change in behaviours during meetings, “we can be on the device looking at the agenda and then quickly going off to another screen and doing our email quickly, doing something else very quickly, so our attention is not quite as focused as it was before.” He further identified an interesting dichotomy; on one hand technology made us feel more distant from each other, while on the other it meant that when we did interact with each other, it was on a more “human” level.

Faculty

This topic area emerged as the biggest surprise for me. My early analysis did not recognize the frequency and extent of the commentary related to this theme. In hindsight, it seems that this result should have been anticipated; was this one of my perceptual blind spots? As mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter, at least 11 respondents made specific reference to this theme on at least 28 occasions.

The comments related to this theme were wide-ranging, but three subthemes which stand out from the rest were the decreasing attractiveness of the job, including an increase in precarious employment, higher workload, an increasing frequency of burnout, and a change in the administrator to faculty ratio (in other words, more administrators relative to the number of faculty). Laurie lamented, “there’s been a change in the influence that faculty have on

direction . . . there's been a change in less control for faculty to help guide the institution." I cannot help but note the consistency between these comments and the discussion in literature with respect to a rise in managerialism in the sector (Kitagawa, 2009; Yokoyama, 2006).

Governance and Administration

Deeper exploration of the content captured under this topic area reinforced my initial impression that I had used this category as a bit of a catch all. In part, that would account for the 36 comments from at least 11 respondents in this node, the largest set of results.

Reference back to Barber et al.'s generally inadequate definition of "university leadership and board" suggested that I should not have included reference to provincially mandated change, independent of funding, in this category. Upon reviewing the excerpts selected and removing 14 which are fully and wholly attributed to government, the number of captured comments fell into the same category as the other themes. Had I included those comments with the government funding comments in a theme simply titled "government" that category would have had 38 responses and have been the most substantive of them all.

Two other sets of references to government need to be highlighted here, before leaving this portion of the discussion. While not ready to consider them prominent enough to be considered themes, they are duly noted:

- 1) a number of respondents lamented with respect to what they believed to be the "commoditization or corporatization of postsecondary institutions." Four said it best and most eloquently, but Erin added an interesting elaboration; she identified government funding levels as a reflection of how postsecondary education is valued; while identifying the current government as conservative and thus "going to be less free with how they are spending the money in the budget," she also extended her

interpretation of their actions as “maybe a devaluing of our postsecondary system.”

Four was most concerned with respect to this trajectory and espoused that the urgency of change to that form of thinking to be very high “a 10, an 11” (on a scale of ten).

- 2) With respect to other governance issues, several respondents identified an increase in management, particularly in “more layers of middle management” or “top heavy with senior management.” A few respondents demonstrated awareness of the provincial government’s recent initiative towards implementing a performance-based funding model and commented on the likely increase in the need for reporting with respect to whether an institution was meeting its performance metrics or not.

A few respondents made the distinction between leadership and management and administration. While the commentary was limited and the concepts were difficult to differentiate from each other, Respondent Two stated an interesting perspective, “leadership involves building relationships and I think relationships are less important in today’s management.” In an environment in which we were socially isolating to combat the pandemic, this comment struck me particularly hard.

Data Analysis Challenges: Theme Identification and Support

It was necessary to exercise significant personal discretion in the identification of topic areas and in the collection of snippets of participant comments to illustrate that particular topic and later the associated theme. My use of NVivo was helpful in collecting some numerical data. It helped me identify the number of files in which a particular theme was discussed. I was able to tabulate an approximate number of times that particular theme was referenced within a file. Unfortunately, several potential sources of error are recognized. Mitigating practices are discussed below but I acknowledge that, despite my best efforts, a number of mistakes emerged.

Three approaches (organic, Barber et al. model and NVivo) to analyzing respondent comments were used extensively, but it is still quite likely that potential pieces of supporting evidence were missed:

- 1) Each transcript of an individual interview was carefully reviewed and key portions of responses were highlighted.
- 2) A larger data file was created and each respondent's answers which corresponded to a particular question was grouped with all of the others. Each collection of associated answers could then be reviewed all at one time. That file, however, grew to be 49 pages long and text heavy, thus creating a situation where a piece of information could be missed.
- 3) The third approach was associated with the NVivo analysis. As snippets of information were being captured in the NVivo data files, they were being compared to the items identified in the earlier stage. This comparison improved the likelihood that the same evidence would be identified on both occasions and that an item missed during one process was likely captured in the other. This methodology allowed for the building of stronger results due to the complementary processes. Consideration was given to additional reviews of the data, but the additional investment of time and energy could not be justified. In other words, a cost-benefit analysis suggested that any additional gain would be marginal.

Another challenge addressed during the topic/theme identification and support process also involved another exercise of personal discretion. I had to determine when to count a particular item and, at times, to which topic area to allocate a comment. For example, several uses of a particular word like "technology" in a participant's answer was likely to be counted

only once, unless there was a significant new point made after the original capture. A statement like “online tests for students” could be allocated to any or all of three themes: assessment (tests), technology (online) and/or (students). A statement could have been interpreted as a comment in passing and not included in any of the tabulated results.

In general, two guiding principles were applied:

- 1) A comment needed to be substantive enough to be considered illustrative of a topic area/theme. Thus, for example, the phrase “online tests for students”, if presented in isolation, was likely not included in the tabulated results. However, if it were part of a more substantive comment, such as new technology used in institutions or student activities in a typical day, the clip might be included in one topic area or the other.
- 2) The second guiding principle relates to cautious interpretation of results based on number of tabulations. No attempt was made to count each and every reference; the tabulated results only provided a bit of insight with respect to multiple references to a topic area/theme within a particular response. In my judgement, multiple mentions by a participant was a general indication of their perception of the importance of that topic, which would then be further examined with respect to theme. That was the full extent of the depth of my analysis; I did not perceive value in further dissection of participant comments. While the number of occurrences recorded were strong general indicators of the priority of topic areas, and subsequently themes, they were only approximately accurate by consistently underreporting actual references. There would only be marginal value in trying to conduct a recount.

In summary, despite the challenges and discretionary practices described, I have strong confidence that the general conclusions and findings of this project are valid. Essentially,

triangulation has been achieved through the use of personal interpretation, interpretation against an established framework drawn from literature (the Barber elements) and the use of the NVivo software.

The data collected under the element *governance and administration* was the most challenging to accurately interpret and to use in the analysis. Several references were made to the role of the provincial government in providing direction and resources to the local institution. Should *provincial government* be included in this term? The terms *administration*, *management* and *leadership* were often used; eventually I decided to interpret them as interchangeable terms and to include them all in this category. I note, however, the inaccuracies that may have resulted from this assumption.

NVivo Feature - Sentiments

One of the NVivo features discovered later during the data analysis phase was termed *sentiments*. Essentially there were two categories within this section of the program: positive and negative. Interestingly, the positive section had two subcategories somewhat positive and very positive, while the negative choice had no such distinctions.

I used the category enough to note that I had captured many times more negative comments than positive and I did not use the additional distinctions within the positive section at all. I contemplated doing a more complete analysis, but realized that the results would not change substantially. Overall, I perceived that the tone of the comments in my data set to be significantly more negative than positive. That realization caused me to ask myself the following questions and generate the associated brief answers:

- 1) Were my interview questions slanted towards negative answers? I do not believe that they were.

- 2) Was a negative mindset an aspect of my researcher bias? That is possible (perceptual blindness), but not readily apparent.
- 3) Was this an accurate reflection of current and projected future circumstances? Quite possible – yes.

I discuss aspects of these questions further in the primary conclusion section in Chapter 5.

Summary

Fifteen themes grouped into six separate topic areas emerged from this stage of analysis. In Chapter 5, I present those full and complete results along with my conclusions. While a substantive list of themes had been discovered, questions were raised with respect to their relation to each other and to the primary topic areas with which they were associated.

As important as it was to identify the key themes, several possible topics that may have arisen did not. *Entrepreneurship* and related concepts were never mentioned. *Passion* was not articulated. *Grit* was mentioned only once, though elements related to it such as perseverance were touched on in passing. Finally, with respect to *soft skills*, only “critical thinking skills” were mentioned on a single occasion. Thus, the literature review conducted in preparation for these items turned out to have been wider than necessary, confirming earlier references to that point. While more discussion with respect to the following question will be conducted in Chapter 5, some early questions raised by these preliminary findings makes me think about the questions asked during the interview. Should I have included more questions? Should I have included reference to some of the terms listed above or was I still comfortable with the generalized approach that I had chosen? My preliminary conclusion is that I was comfortable with the interview content, but I refer back to the concept of “multiple realities” as expressed by Merriam and I accept that my perspective is only one of many (Yazan, 2015, p. 137).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world. —Robin Williams

The purpose of this chapter is to present the major findings and conclusions of this research. These are based on an extensive description and detailed analysis of the data set gathered and presented in the previous chapter. I will share those results and make recommendations for further research.

General Statements with Respect to Findings

As I had anticipated and then described in earlier chapters, these results are presented with a range of emotions. In general, the findings were somewhat surprising and definitely enlightening. The low participation rate was disappointing, but the quality of the discussion with those who agreed to participate was positive and of high quality. I feel closer to those colleagues who chose to share their insights with me. I have confirmed that we have all experienced significant change while working within the publicly funded postsecondary education system, much of it collectively. We also seem to share a sense that more is needed, whether we are ready to embrace change or seek it. Perhaps, after I have reflected on the final conclusions from this research, I can, in my own humble way, contribute my enhanced perspective to better assist our home institution's leadership team in guiding the institution.

A key general finding, based on the results of this project, is that further attempts to study faculty perspectives using the same methodology and under the same circumstances should be ascribed low priority. In general, faculty seem more concerned with local conditions and factors, and in many cases, have not broadened that perspective to larger scale environments. The lack of a broad focus does not mean that soliciting faculty perspective with respect to these issues is not worth the time and energy investment. In fact, the opposite perspective will be presented.

However, a different approach and additional measures, including some orientation, are likely needed to generate greater benefits from that work, than was realized on this occasion.

It does appear that some faculty may have a greater aptitude for this topic than other colleagues. For example, I was curious with respect to the perspectives of those individuals who taught in a subject area that was significantly different than my own. In my proposal, I had mentioned animal science or agronomy as two of those areas, but was unable to attract any instructors with that subject expertise to participate. The result was that my questions relative to this point remain generally unanswered. However, is there a conclusion that should be drawn by analyzing the characteristics of non-participants?

It did appear that those participants who had experience in faculty leadership roles seemed to be able to express awareness of more big picture issues than those individuals who had not had that exposure, or whose exposure had been in the distant past. The nature of the leadership role did not seem to be a factor that leadership experience could have been with the local faculty association, as representative on the College Board of Governors and/or as a representative on the provincial body, ACIFA. On at least three occasions, participant responses demonstrated that they had studied the change process as it applied to the postsecondary education sector, likely during the pursuit of graduate studies.

Finally, deeper analysis of these results raised questions with respect to the possibility of transference of conclusions, due to the unique characteristics of the chosen institution. There was a growing realization that that factor had not been fully considered.

Specific Findings

The following points are the specific findings from this project:

- 1) In general, faculty are ill-equipped to discuss large, global publicly funded postsecondary education system issues.
- 2) Select faculty, for various reasons, were able to contribute more to the discussion with respect to the larger picture, and future direction of the sector as a whole. In part, perhaps they had a greater aptitude for that topic. Leadership experience in faculty associations or graduate education may also have exposed them to more discussion of those issues.
- 3) Faculty members interested in seeking administration/leadership roles should prepare for those roles by deeply studying the forces of change impacting the sector.
- 4) While the Barber et al. 10 element model still holds some value with respect to understanding the change forces impacting publicly funded postsecondary education, new dynamics resulting from the global pandemic should be the impetus for revisiting previous assumptions and beliefs with respect to the sector. In other words, the “new normal” will likely be different than the former one.
- 5) The dramatic changes in general economies, social and cultural practices, and other elements of an institution’s environment have increased the possibility of the emergence of new operating and business models.
- 6) Fiscal pressures on publicly funded postsecondary institutions may become so significant that those institutions able to fully engage their faculty in the adaptation process may experience a competitive advantage in their efforts to survive, or even thrive, in these transitional times.

- 7) Current conditions are changing so quickly that these conclusions may become invalidated in a relatively short period of time.
- 8) Some topic areas and themes that I had anticipated and prepared to analyze essentially did not materialize in participant responses. There was the occasional, almost random comment; the term *grit* was mentioned once, and, with respect to *soft skills*, one respondent mentioned “critical thinking skills.” There were no mentions of *entrepreneurship* or related concepts.

Preliminary Conclusions

The following are a few concluding statements that can be made with respect to specific conditions related to this study:

- 1) Research Setting: It does not appear that the research setting or the change in research setting partway through the data gathering stage were significant factors in the results. Participants seemed equally comfortable whether in the selected room or via remote means. The choice of software, Google Meet, was also well received.
- 2) Basic Demographic Information: It is believed that the participants were generally representative of the faculty contingent at the chosen institution. Despite earlier impressions that perhaps more males than females from the list of invitees accepted the opportunity to be interviewed, deeper analysis proved that to be a misconception. I also now believe that the approximate average age of the participants (slightly over 50) and their approximate average teaching experience at the institution (16.6 years) is generally representative of the faculty group in this institution as a whole. With respect to their other postsecondary education experience, diversity in those experiences was noted, including within Alberta and in other jurisdictions.

- 3) Perceptions of the Current State of Change within the Postsecondary Education System: All 14 respondents indicated that they had experienced change over the course of their postsecondary education career; thus, the concept of change is familiar to them experientially and in some cases, through advanced academic study.
- 4) Belief that Change Must Occur: All 14 respondents expressed, to varying degrees, a belief that change must occur, within the publicly funded postsecondary education system. When asked how much change should occur, half the respondents said “substantial” four chose the term “moderate” and the remaining three chose the zone between moderate and substantial. Thus, the collective opinion was closer to substantial than it was to moderate.
- 5) The Urgency of the Need to Apply Change: On a ten-point scale, with ten representing maximum urgency, the ballpark average of responses was near 7.5. Faculty seem to recognize that change is inevitable; in fact, they seem to express that it should be actively sought and/or incorporated into an institution’s operations as soon as possible.
- 6) Topic Areas and Themes Identified: Following a triangulated analysis of the data, six topics emerged as warranting deeper examination. That analysis confirmed that my organic identification of the topics of students, curriculum, and technology were significantly represented in the participant responses. Screening the data relative to the Barber et al. ten element value proposition model, brought forth two additional expressed streams: faculty, and governance and administration. Analysis using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software helped to further confirm those five topics areas, but raised the possibility that a modification should be made to my organic list:

I had earlier identified *provincial funding* as a separate topic, but the NVivo capture of comments in the *governance and administration* node helped me see that the material in the governance and administration category should be reduced to those items related only to the institutional level. Any references to the role of the provincial government should be moved into a larger and more generic *provincial government* topic, with the *provincial funding* content. Thus, I determined that the final number of topic areas should remain at six, and that reconstituting two of them would be a more accurate representation of the data collected.

- 7) Themes: Two or three themes were identified related to each topic area. A full depiction of the core aspects of these themes is provided in Table 7. A full articulation of the themes follows after them.

Table 7

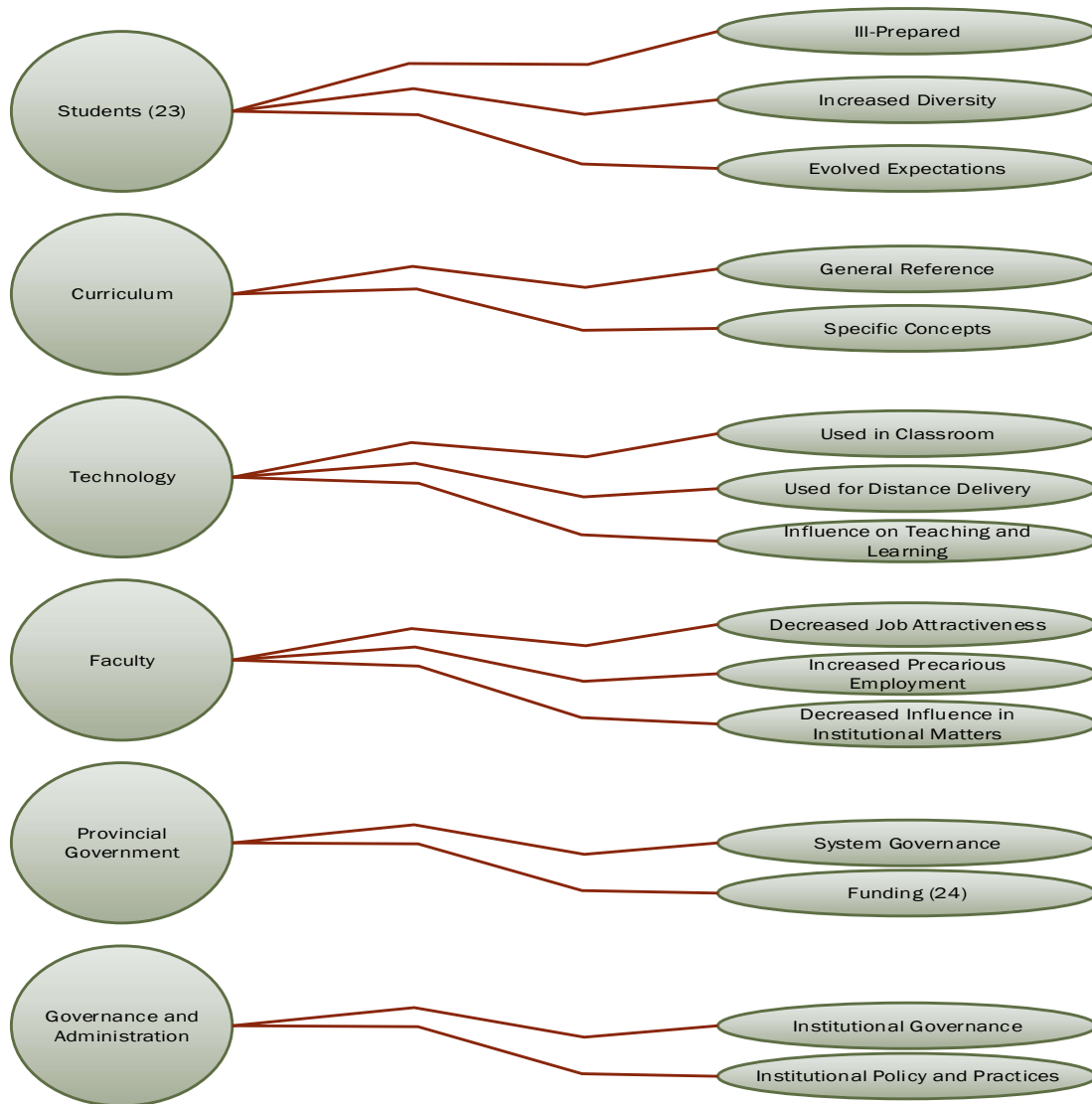
Topic Areas and Themes

Topic areas	Themes
Students	Ill-Prepared Increased Diversity Evolved Expectations
Curriculum	General Reference Specific Concepts
Technology	Used in the Classroom Used for Distance Delivery Influences Teaching and Learning
Faculty	Decreased Job Attractiveness Increased Precarious Employment Decreased Influence in Institutional Matters
Provincial Government	System Governance Funding
Governance and Administration	Institutional Governance Institutional Policy and Practices

Figure 5 is a visual presentation displaying the six topic areas that were identified through analysis of the data collected as well as associated themes:

Figure 5

Topic Areas and Themes Identified



Full Articulation of the Themes

Fifteen themes emerged from an analysis of the data collected in the course of this research project. They are presented below, clustered by topic area:

- a) Students: Three themes were identified as they related to this topic. Research participants repeatedly shared their perceptions that students were generally not as well prepared for postsecondary education study as in the past, there was increased diversity among the student population and that the expectations of current students had evolved or were different than the expectations of past students.
- b) Curriculum: Two themes related to this topic were identified; some responses spoke of general change to curriculum over time and several specific examples of change or need for change to curriculum were captured. Many of the comments referred to changes to delivery models or methods, oftentimes with a reliance on new technologies.
- c) Technology: Three prominent themes related to this topic area were identified. Many specific and general references were made with respect to the changed or increasing use of technology in the classroom; discussion with respect to the distance delivery of classes was captured; utilizing technology contributing change in the way teaching and learning were evolving due to the increased use were described.
- d) Faculty: Three themes related to this topic area became apparent after detailed analysis of the data. Research participants identified that the role of a faculty member was becoming less attractive; in other words, there was decreased job attractiveness. They also cited their perception that employment as a faculty member appeared to be becoming increasingly precarious. Finally, several respondents shared their perception that faculty members appeared to have a decreased role with respect to institutional matters.

- e) Provincial Government: Several respondents described their perceptions of the role of the provincial government in terms of managing the postsecondary education system. Respondents identified that the provincial government was significantly impacting the way that the system was being governed. They felt that proposed changes that had been announced or that were rumored to be on the way would have additional impact on the state of the system. Most respondents demonstrated a clear understanding that the provincial government could influence the state of the system simply by maintaining or altering the amount of funding provided as well as the manner in which funding allotments were or could be determined.
- f) Governance and Administration: Related to this topic area, respondents identified generally that institutional governance shaped and influenced local operating conditions and that those influences were further communicated and shaped through specific institutional policies and practices.

The full list of the 15 themes succinctly, irrespective of topic area, is as follows:

1. Students seem less prepared for work at the postsecondary education level than in the past.
2. There is increased diversity in the student population.
3. Student expectations of their postsecondary education experiences have evolved from past expectations.
4. In general, curriculum has evolved in response to evolving conditions.
5. Specific aspects of curriculum have evolved in response to new opportunities and tools.
6. There is an increased use of technology in the classroom.

7. Technology has aided in distance delivery of curriculum.
8. The availability of new technology and technological tools has significantly changed the way that teaching and learning are occurring.
9. The role of a faculty member has become less attractive.
10. Work as a faculty member has become more precarious.
11. Faculty members have less influence in institutional matters than in the past.
12. It is broadly recognized that the provincial government's role has shaped and influenced the postsecondary education system.
13. It is broadly understood that being funded from the provincial government has shaped the system and specific institutional characteristics and will continue to do so.
14. Institutional governance decisions determine local conditions.
15. Local conditions are further shaped through specific institutional policy and practices.

Interrelationship Between Themes

A tremendous amount of time and energy was invested in dissecting participant responses, to capture and separate specific comments in order to then communicate the themes listed above. Ironically, however, much respondent discussion highlighted the interrelatedness of many of these themes, demonstrating that the exercise of separation and identification might have been of limited value. Closer examination of Figure 5, and reflection on participant comments led me to explore a different perspective. I began to see clearer connections between students and curriculum and between faculty and students. The factor “technology” seemed to be the most pervasive of all: yet, ironically, it seemed to have received the least discussion in the literature and change models that were studied before the project began. While the model chosen in Figure 5 was helpful in assisting with the visualization of project results, it left me dissatisfied.

Consideration was given to the use of a Venn diagram to help illustrate interrelationships. It was determined that any such diagram would have several overlaps and was likely to add confusion to the discussion rather than clarity. I continued to reflect on participant comments as I explored a possible new illustration.

The words of two selected respondents continued to reverberate with me, as I continued to ponder theme interrelatedness. Bertrand and Two seemed particularly adept at expressing these interrelationships in direct and relatively succinct manners; for example, Bertrand linked technology, student expectations and his perception of their corresponding perspective of education, using these words:

Technology has changed vastly since I began, and it has changed how we teach vastly, and I think that all of these three things I'm talking about are actually connected; they have separate parts definitely, but there are connections between them and one huge connection I see is that, because of technology, students do tend to see education like a product. They are very used to having their gratification satisfied instantaneously - they want a song, they can just go to Spotify, press the button instantly, they want to buy something then go to Amazon, it gets delivered to them instantly. If they don't know something, go to Google, get the answer instantly.

Respondent Two connected faculty, curriculum, teaching and learning, and governance/administration/management when they made the following prediction of the foreseeable future:

I think faculty are going to be asked to do more work, be assigned heavier workloads, have their time off eroded, be provided with less time for good and

solid preparation, and will be subject to more and more top-down decision-making that may or may not be in the best interests of classroom and student learning and teaching, but will be decided on because of financial considerations that management determine.

These are two shining examples of the interconnectedness between the themes and an important reminder of the somewhat arbitrary nature of classification systems.

Additional Contextual Considerations

In preparation for the final stages of discussion, attention needed to be given to those factors and features that might or were likely to be considered limiting or complicating aspects of any attempts at generalizability and/or transferability. Key factors discussed below include the size and scale of the chosen institution, its general history, as well as the labour relations history between its management and its faculty.

The institution is small; with a faculty contingent of approximately 65, supplemented by some temporary and contract instructors numbering approximately 15, the entire faculty of the college may be smaller than some university departments. Despite being organized into three different academic schools and scattered in various buildings on the campus, the opportunity for the faculty to feel like members of a common body is high. The opportunities to serve on the Executive of the Faculty Association and/or on committees are also ample, from a proportional perspective. The small size also increases the opportunities to interact with several members of the institution's leadership team and to develop relationships on a first name basis.

Celebrating its centennial in 2013 was a significant opportunity for the institutional community to come together in a number of signature events over the course of that year. While no formal measurement of the benefits derived from those activities are publicly available,

anecdotal evidence suggests that those who were employed at the institution and who participated experienced enhanced feelings of engagement. For example, I have several treasured memories and mementos from that year.

Finally, an institution with a generally positive record of labour relations between their faculty association and institutional management may be better positioned to engage that good will than one which has experienced opposite circumstances. At this institution, the Faculty Association has been negotiating on behalf of its members since 1978, largely without incident. As president of the Association from 2012 – 2016, I oversaw the negotiation process in 2015. The institution has experienced few grievances. Every year ACIFA conducts an annual survey collecting feedback with respect to various elements which impact institutional climate. This institution has tended to consistently be among the top three in terms of participation rates and general scores. For example, this institution's participation rate on the 2020 survey has been reported as being 85% (personal communication, February 26, 2021). I can further attest to the relatively positive climate at this institution as a result of the four years that I sat on ACICA's Presidents' Council as part of my role as local association president.

In closing, these additional contextual considerations demonstrate that, if the profile of another institution is significantly different than the one chosen for this project, leaders of that institution will have to give extra consideration to the implications of those differences. Particularly problematic situations may be presented in large institutions with a diluted identity and stormy relations between administration and its faculty association. The leader intending to launch a change process may have to allow for extra time and investment in building the "culture of innovation" promoted by Buller (2015) (p. 236).

Late-Stage Analysis and Commentary

Upon reflection, it is clear to me that my *organic* attempt to identify early themes in the research data had been strongly and irrevocably influenced by my reading of *An Avalanche is Coming*. As much as I attempted to perceive and approach the data with fresh eyes, I could not. The 10 value elements described in that publication became part of my perceptual filter. The perceptual framework was reinforced during the literature review process, as I was researching topic areas in anticipation of what respondents might say. I was partially successful in setting aside part of that list and that is how I can explain that I was perceptually blind to themes relating to faculty.

Secondly, with respect to the topic areas identified, their order of presentation from the beginning of the data reporting process was arbitrary. Little thought was given to the implications of the order in which the topic areas were presented and subsequent themes identified and communicated. As the set of research findings became increasingly clear, the question of presentation order needed to be reviewed and reexamined.

Given that order was an important and relevant consideration, I chose a presentation order early during the analysis phase and it was used consistently from that point. A strength of that decision was a more orderly presentation allowing the reader to better follow along. One drawback of that decision is that it may have given a false sense of priority to some topic areas/themes over others. For instance, the themes related to students are no more important in this discussion than those related to faculty, provincial government, or any others, but it may have appeared differently.

The presentation order of the topic areas/themes did not reflect the number of references to each item. With reference to the count of items reported from the analysis conducted using

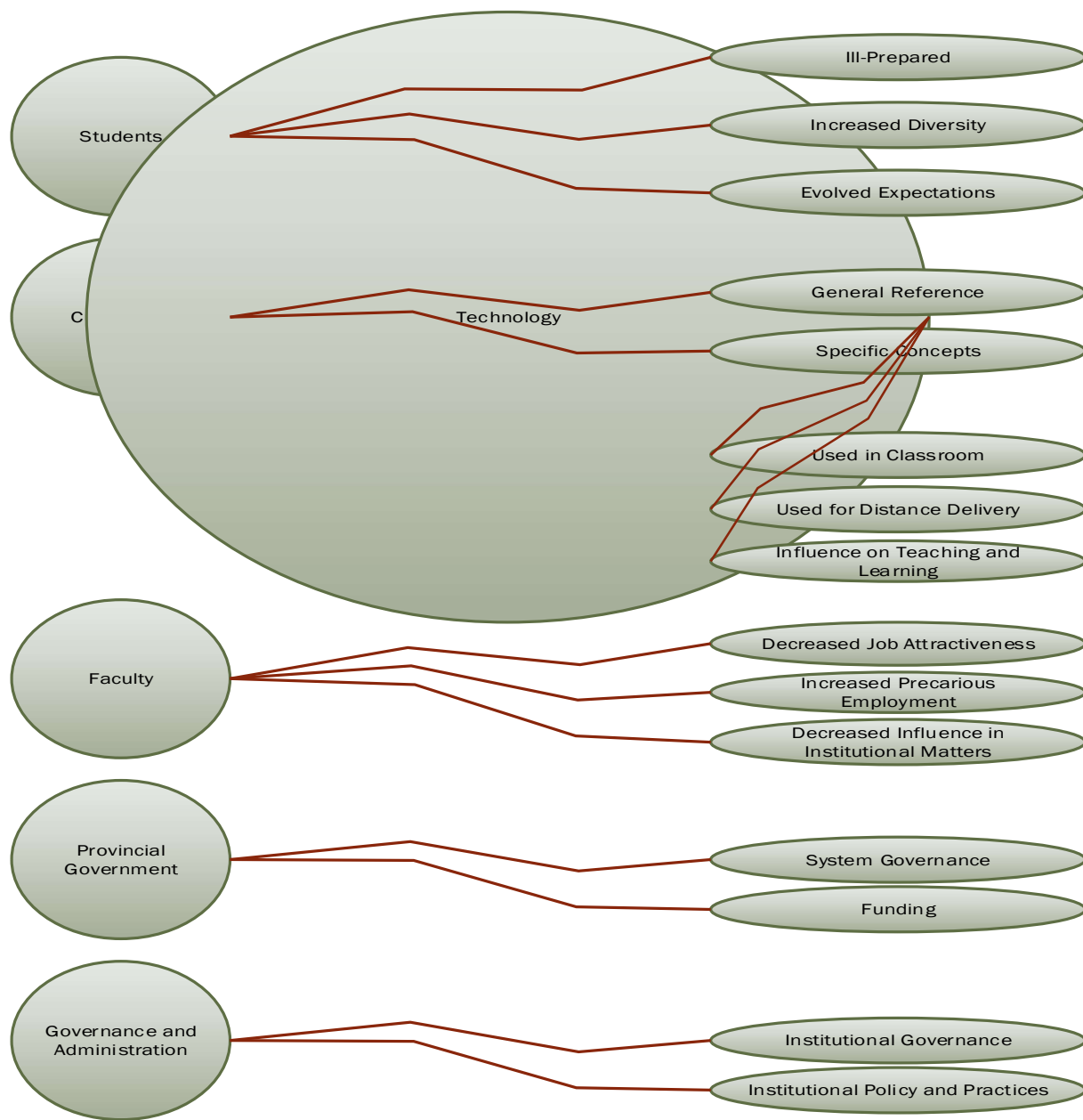
NVivo, governance and administration should have been moved to the top of the list and curriculum should have been moved to the number six spot. The number of NVivo references were never intended to be used for that purpose. They were useful in helping to determine the most frequent references and thus the final number of topic areas to be included in the final results reported earlier. They helped identify a sharp demarcation between topic area six (curriculum) and topic area seven (COVID-19), contributing to my conclusion to limit the number of topic areas reported to six. However, and as more fully discussed earlier in Chapter 4, the somewhat arbitrary manner in which bits of data were compiled within each topic area were recognized as incomplete and, as such, small differences such as the number of captured references to technology (22), students (23) and government funding (24) could not be appropriately used to differentiate the relative importance of those three themes. Furthermore, closer examination of the 36 references captured under the governance and administration label helped me determine that a portion of those references would be better captured in the provincial government topic area and were more closely related to the provincial government funding theme that had emerged. The remaining references were more closely associated with institutional policies and practices. Therefore, the governance and administration topic area was narrowed to refer only to the individual institution.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the interrelatedness of topic areas. As I approached the end of this analysis and reporting process, it occurred to me that one of the topic areas (technology) indeed was larger and more pervasive than the others. In Figure 5, I had represented each of the six topic areas in circles of equal size, inadvertently communicating that I perceived each to be of equal importance. I now recognized that technology and its associated themes should be given more prominence. I realized that the technology circle should be several times

larger than first presented, because of its influence on the changed expectations of students, on changes in curriculum, and with respect to how teaching and learning has changed and will likely continue to evolve. Furthermore, while distance delivery models and methods have existed for a long time, current technological equipment and software allows the educational community to engage in previously unknown ways. Figure 6 illustrates this enhanced understanding.

Figure 6

Topic Areas/Theme Chart Redrawn Showing Revised Insight



The global pandemic and resulting rapid transition to distance delivery methods serves as further strong illustration of the previous point, with respect to the impact of technology. I was able to convert my classes relatively easily to utilize those methods, to transition the data gathering activities for this research relatively easily, and to continue my doctoral studies by communicating with my supervisor and supervisory committee with minimal interruption. I defended these research findings via virtual means. I still prefer in person communication, when

circumstances allow, but accept that these technological wonders have provided a reasonable second option for us.

The realization of the pervasiveness of the technology themes caused me to reflect on the perspectives expressed by Grajek et al. (2018). I noted that my research findings supported their assertion that technology was “disrupting” higher education (Grajek et al., 2018, p. 52).

However, given the circumstances brought on by the global pandemic, I also had a sense that technology had a role in saving the system, at least in the short-term.

The prominent nature of the discussion with respect to institutional governance and administration as well as the direct influence of the provincial government served as reinforcement of “managerialism” that Kitagawa (2009), among others identified and described (Kitagawa, 2009, p. 69). Unfortunately, I was not able to identify significant evidence of the recognition of entrepreneurial institutional activity as discussed on one form or another by Chatterton and Goddard (2000), Webber and Scott (2008), or Shattock (2009). However, the words of Wernick (2006) came to mind at this stage of analysis. He had indicated that, despite the essentially two millennia of evolution of “the university,” including the dramatic transformation which occurred in the latter half of the 20th century, universities needed to prepare for the next round of evolution, which he named “hypermodern development” (Werner, 2006, p. 563). Despite his dramatic terminology, I suspected that even Werner had not factored a global pandemic into the scenarios that he foresaw.

In closing, I take a moment to wonder what the future might hold. At the time of this writing, it appears to me that some features of our new learning and teaching environment may take permanent hold. If and when it is safe to resume face-to-face instruction more broadly, I ponder which features will persist and how all parties in our educational communities will

perceive “the new normal.” It will be interesting to revisit this research report in the future, with the advantage of retrospect.

Major Conclusions

Noting the limitations of an exploratory case study of a small scale, the following more generalized conclusions are stated, with the appropriate degree of caution:

- 1) Decisions made by provincial governments with respect to administrative systems and funding levels will be primary determinants of publicly funded postsecondary education systems in Canada.
- 2) Faculty can be significant contributors to the fortunes of their home institutions, if allowed to participate and if certain pre-conditions are met.
- 3) Technology is a pervasive and transformative change force which will continue to contribute to the evolution of new institutional business models, curriculum delivery systems, teaching and learning processes, and communications between all parties.
- 4) The COVID-19 pandemic is a global scale change event whose impact has yet to be fully determined and will likely be felt for an extended period of time.

These conclusions are presented in order that the leaders can give them due consideration as they consider implementing one or more of the following recommendations or that they can reach their own conclusions with respect to next steps to take.

Recommendations

Based on my findings and conclusions, the following recommendations have been generated:

- 1) To replicate or scale up the circumstances of this study is not recommended. Instead, a larger scale study, likely involving action design methodology, should be conducted to

generate results that are more transferable. A research team involved in a multi-institution study would be able to generate the most valuable information.

- 2) Engagement of faculty in an institutional change process should continue to be pursued. However, leaders committed to involve their faculty in that process must be prepared to invest resources in training and educating those key stakeholders with respect to global conditions and change forces. That investment would yield a valuable return from key stakeholders.
- 3) Given the dynamic nature of the current operating environment, due to the global pandemic, further study of this topic area should be delayed until some degree of stability and “normality” is achieved. At that point, a new study should be launched to capture the new learning that has emerged.

At this stage, leaders of publicly funded postsecondary institutions are reminded of the change principles espoused by Buller (2015), “spend your time improving the culture that produces the outcome” (Buller, 2015, p. 217). In other words, invest the time, energy and other resources as soon as possible, even if the exact change scenario is not immediately apparent. Once, a challenge presents itself, a prepared institution is likely to respond more effectively than one which has not made early investments.

Additional Discussion and Areas for Future Research

While several important insights were captured and articulated over the course of this project, a number of important questions remain unanswered and new ones have emerged. In the following categories, I outline some of the most prominent items.

Participation Rates

Participation rates were much lower than had been anticipated; instead of the 80% target rate, 40% was achieved. This rate was achieved after engagement of a technique referred to as “snowballing,” where participants who enjoyed the process contacted colleagues who might or might not have been invited to participate and nudge them to participate in the study. Possible questions and/or explanations generated by these results include:

- Is the general state of modern research? Is it becoming increasingly difficult to capture the attention of potential participants and, in turn, to encourage them to engage in the process?
- Those faculty contacted were perhaps simply not interested in talking about this topic. In general, faculty perhaps are not interested in talking about this topic.
- Some of the faculty contacted may not have been interested in contributing to my efforts.

Biological Sex, Gender Identity, and Other Demographic Considerations

Although biological sex and/or gender identity were never considered in the generation of the participant lists for this research, a review of the list of invitees revealed that more men than women were invited to participate, excluding the individual later discovered not to be eligible for this study. A total of 36 participants were invited, 27 men (75% of the total) and nine women (25%). Initially, there was an impression that men were more interested in the topic, given that 11 of the respondents were male (79%), and only three (21%) were female. However, given the proportion of invitees, this response proportions seems consistent with the sample. “Could it be that men are more interested in this topic than women?” Based on the findings of this exploratory

study, the preliminary answer would seem to be “no,” but further research would be needed to fully address this question.

It could be demonstrated that the invitees were generally older and of limited cultural diversity. How would a different set of demographic factors influence results? How would a younger more diverse group of participants perceive the situation?

Participant Perspectives

With respect to those faculty members that self-selected into the project, does this action reveal anything with respect to their future career prospects/aspirations? Were the people drawn to participate more inclined to be interested in this topic than the “average” faculty member? Is this an indicator of career path? Should a faculty member interested in advancing into a management/leadership role take a deeper interest in this topic area? These are questions of interest, but no answers are apparent from this initial and limited set of results.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, there is some indication that faculty members who took on leadership roles above and beyond their core duties seemed to have greater awareness and knowledge of issues beyond their home campus. Individuals who took on leadership roles such as serving on the College’s Board of Governors, serving on the executive of the local faculty association, and/or participating in the provincial association of faculty associations tended to take a broader view of the situation than the “average” faculty member. This is not a stated conclusion, simply an observation based on the extremely limited amount of data. It raises some interesting, potential research questions for the future: Is this observation valid or is it an aberration? If there is validity to exploring this avenue, is the wider, more global perspective more a result of personal interests/aptitude or is this more attributable to the

duties/responsibilities of the roles held? The challenge of isolating the various possible factors and then attributing potential weightings to each seems to be a worthwhile pursuit.

The Global Pandemic

The global pandemic was never considered during the design and approval processes that were used in generating the proposal which initiated this research. Three of the 14 interviews were conducted before the Alberta Health Services directives significantly impacted research procedures and/or before the impacts of the pandemic became top of mind considerations for the researcher and subsequent participants.

Under ideal conditions, it would have been fortunate to have had more pre-COVID interviews to compare and contrast with the later set. As it turned out, there simply was too little pre-event data to support a compare and contrast analysis of two sets of data.

It is also likely that, with the benefit of hindsight, the limitations of the second set of data will become increasingly apparent. Because it was gathered in the early stages of the event, I anticipate that it simply could not address the full impact of the biological and medical challenges presented by the pandemic. Furthermore, the resulting changes to societal practices and thus institutional responses cannot be intelligently assessed at this time. Thus, this report is the product of a particular place and time and significant portions of it may become obsolete in a relatively short period of time. Once some degree of stability and certainty returns to the teaching and learning landscape, academics will have a significant amount of work, generated by the need to understand a changed operating environment.

Concluding Thoughts

Dr. Anna Beukes, President of ACIFA helped me put this entire discussion into context, when she stated in her message to the membership in the Spring 2020 newsletter, Faculty

Circuit: “As instructors, we (rightfully) focus on our teaching and our students. We can, at times, lose sight of the big picture” (personal communication, December 2020). I had never quite perceived the situation from this perspective, but the results of this project are an undeniable confirmation of that statement and, in hindsight and retrospect, seem perfectly logical. Dr. Beukes goes on to argue that because of the aforementioned perspective of the majority of instructors, organizations like ACIFA and the Canadian Association of University Teachers have to supplement that focus and lobby on behalf of their greater interests.

The findings that those individual faculty members who had held governance and/or leadership roles in addition to their core functions proved that they were more likely to demonstrate “big picture” awareness in their responses. These results are also consistent with my personal paradigm; as an instructor with a focus on entrepreneurship, innovation and other related human relation and general business perspectives, I have an aptitude and a disposition towards “big picture thinking.” I have supplemented that perspective with additional education and experiences. Thus, these findings are congruent with my perspectives and add depth of understanding to them.

Operating from this perspective does not mean that the faculty body are ignorant with respect to the larger issues or that the current state of thinking should be maintained or reinforced. In fact, I state that it means exactly the opposite. In his book, *Change Leadership in Higher Education*, Jeffrey Buller lays out a strategy of implementing “organic leadership” as the key to successful academic transformation. In simple and fundamental terms, he argues that academic leaders must change the way in which they interact with their stakeholders (Buller, 2015, p. 217). In more detail, and I am sure that he was including faculty when he stated, “In order for change leadership to be effective, they [academic leaders] have to help people come to

grips with the idea of change, see the benefits in it, and embrace a culture of innovation, not just a culture that endures innovation” (Buller, 2015, p. 217).

The results of this research demonstrate that, by and large, faculty already appreciate that there is a need for change, many of them either see the benefits of potential change and/or are actively seeking it and, thus, at least two of the pre-conditions for success may already be significantly abundant. The missing ingredient is likely *leadership*; this finding should be exciting to the academic administrator desiring to lead transformation. If change leadership is somewhat like gardening, as Buller asserts, and the first part of leading change is preparing the soil (improving the culture), at least in the limited circumstance investigated in this project, conditions appear to be fertile for innovative change to be planted (Buller, 2015, p. 217).

Thus, the primary conclusion from this research project is that the leader of a publicly funded postsecondary education institution who wants to help their institution and its members survive and thrive in the chaotic conditions anticipated even before the global pandemic struck, must implement organic leadership and all of its components. That leader must engage all stakeholder groups, in particular faculty, in navigating the uncertain and ambiguous conditions in the present and foreseeable future. While unable to provide the reader with a contrast of pre-pandemic conditions with the current state, there is no question that the findings of this project were amplified by the emergence of the first wave of the pandemic. Despite being unable to foresee, potentially unfolding complications, the fundamental conclusions of this project should be able to withstand many of those forces. The “snowshed” has been built and the members of the institution have been provided with the tools to dig themselves out of the avalanche, as per a key original objective of this project. Finally, contributing to the evolution of the publicly funded

postsecondary education system may yield additional benefits for provincial and/or national taxpayers, in the long-term.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Olds College Faculty Member,

Please accept this letter as an invitation to participate in a research project being conducted by L.J.G. (Larry) Couture, Doctoral Candidate, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.

The working title of the project is “Perceptions of Faculty with Respect to Change at a Western Canadian College: An Exploratory Study. The primary objective of this study is to gather the perceptions of an important leadership stakeholder group, faculty, with respect to their perceptions of the need for change in postsecondary education and the urgency with which that change should happen.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to attend a semistructured interview, which will last for one hour or less. No preparation is needed. Your choice to participate or not will not affect your employment at Olds College.

There are several benefits to participating:

- 1) You will be assisting with the process of generating new knowledge.
- 2) You will have the opportunity to share opinions and perspectives on topics that, while directly related to your job, are not normally discussed in the course of daily activities.
- 3) You may enjoy the experience.
- 4) The discussion may help generate insights that may be valuable to you with respect to management of your career.

- 5) The new knowledge generated may assist postsecondary education leaders as they manage change processes within their institutions. As an exploratory study, the results may provide guidance with respect to larger scale investigations.

Please respond to this e-mail invitation within one week of its receipt. If your response is negative, thank you for giving it consideration and you will no longer be contacted with respect to this project. If your response is positive, you will next be contacted to schedule a face to face interview time. (The interview location will be on the Olds College campus.)

You will be asked to sign a permission form before the interview starts. All face-to-face interviews will be audio recorded and transcripts of those interviews will be produced to assist in the data analysis process. Written information and audiotapes will be stored in a safe locked location. Electronic information will be encrypted and password protected. Once the project is completed, the audiotapes and transcript records will be kept for a period of five years following project completion and then destroyed, as per the guidelines provided by the University of Calgary, Faculty of Graduate Studies and/or the Werklund School of Education.

At any time, if you have a question or concern with respect to any aspect of this project, you may contact me directly at [email address] or [telephone number] or my supervisor Dr. W. Ian S. Winchester at [email address] or [telephone number].

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study (REB19-1295).

Sincerely,

Larry Couture

Appendix B: Sample Consent Form



Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

L.J.G. (Larry) Couture, Doctoral Candidate, Werklund School of Education
[email address]
[telephone number]

Supervisor:

Dr. W. Ian S. Winchester, Werklund School of Education
[email address]
[telephone number]

Title of Project:

Perceptions of Faculty With Respect to Change at a Western Canadian College: An Exploratory Study

Sponsor:

No sponsorship

This consent form, a copy of which will be given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

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

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Your participation in this research project will not affect your employment at Olds College.

Purpose of the Study

This is an exploratory study to investigate faculty perceptions with respect to change impacting the postsecondary education system and their sense of the urgency for change.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

You will be asked to attend a face-to-face interview and to answer questions related to the subject matter. The interview will be semistructured, meaning that there will be some prepared questions, but that there may be in the moment questions that arise from the discussion.

You will be asked to share your perspectives and opinions with respect to the topic (change in the postsecondary education system).

You will be asked for permission to audiotape the interviews, so that accurate transcripts of them can be produced. During the analysis stage, the researcher will be looking for common themes in those transcripts of participant responses.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate altogether, you may refuse to participate in any parts of the study, and you may decline to answer any and all questions. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss. Your choice to participate or not will not affect your employment at Olds College.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Basic personal information will be collected: your name, gender, approximate age, employment status at Olds College, number of years teaching at Olds College and number of years teaching in postsecondary education.

The intent is to not reveal any individually identifiable information. However, if you were to share an especially interesting thought or perspective and were comfortable having it associated to yourself, consideration would be given to doing so. That said, there is choice as to how can choose to be identified: 1) by a number (known only to you and the researcher), 2) by a pseudonym (known only to you and the researcher) or by your actual name, but only with the explicit permission given below.

Once the project is over, audiotapes of interviews will be destroyed, in accordance with University of Calgary's Data Retention Policy (five years after the completion of the project). There is no intent to play the recordings in public and access to the recordings will be limited to the primary investigator and his supervisor.

Please review each of the options below and answer Yes or No. You can choose all options, some, or none of them:

I grant permission to be audio-taped:

Yes: ____ No: ____

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ____ No: ____

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a uniquely assigned number: Yes: ____
No: ____

You may quote me and use my name: Yes: ____ No: ____

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Little to no risk is anticipated by your participation in this project.

An investment of approximately one hour of your time is all that is requested. Also, it is expected that you will share your thoughts and opinions with respect to the topic, to the best of your abilities.

It is not anticipated that you would reveal information that is required by law to be reported to a law enforcement or other agency, but please note that, if that circumstance were to arise, I would honour my legal obligations.

The only cost that you are anticipated to incur is approximately one hour of your time.

In return, the potential benefits of participating may include one, more than one, or all of the following:

- 1) You will be assisting with the process of generating new knowledge.
- 2) You will have the opportunity share opinions and perspectives on topics that, while directly related to your job, are not normally discussed in the course of daily activities.
- 3) You may enjoy the experience.
- 4) The discussion may help generate insights that may be valuable to you with respect to management of your career.
- 5) The new knowledge generated may assist postsecondary education leaders as they manage change processes within their institutions. As an exploratory study, the results may provide guidance with respect to larger scale investigations.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Access to the information collected will be limited to the researcher and his supervisor. Your contribution will be treated in a manner consistent with the information supplied in the previous section.

Should you decide to withdraw from participation, you are free to withdraw on or before **May 15, 2020**. In the event that you decide to withdraw, every reasonable attempt to destroy the information provided BEFORE that date will be conducted. After that date, it will likely not be possible to do so.

In summary, no one except the researcher and his supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the interview. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results, unless explicit permission for individual comments to be shared has been received and then only in exceptional circumstances. Print versions of the transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet, accessible only by the researcher. Electronic data will be encrypted and password-protected.

Upon completion of the project, and after a reasonable time period to ensure that all academic requirements have been met (maximum five years after degree completion), it will be destroyed.

“Would you like to receive a summary of the study’s results?”

Yes: ____ No: ____

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number):

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant’s Name: (please print) _____

Participant’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, please contact: Dr. W. Ian S. Winchester

Werklund School of Education

[email address]

[telephone number]

If you have any concerns about the way you have been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

(To aid in the presentation of the content of this interview, a Google slide presentation was prepared and projected onto a screen, when it was possible to conduct the face-to-face interviews in person.)

Narrative

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, for signing the consent form and for agreeing to sit down with me today.

I remind you that the objectives of this study are twofold:

- 1) to gain an understanding of your perception of the current state of change within the postsecondary education system, and
- 2) to gain a sense of the urgency with which you believe any change may need to be implemented

This interview is expected to last one hour or less. I am recording audio, so that accurate transcripts can be produced afterwards.

You may decline to answer any question or questions and you may end this interview at any time. Any questions before we begin?

Section 1 - Basic Demographics

1. How long have you been teaching at Olds College? _____ years
2. How long have you been teaching in postsecondary education sector? _____ years
3. If applicable, list the name(s) of other institutions where you have taught.
4. To confirm, you are a permanently appointed Academic Staff Member at Olds College?

Yes or No

If Yes, the interview continues. If No, this participant is not eligible to participate, s/he is thanked for their time and the interview is terminated.

Section 2 - Your Perceptions of the Current State of Change within the Postsecondary Education System

5. Have you experienced change thus far in your career in postsecondary education? Yes or No

If Yes, please proceed to next question. If No, describe why that is not perceived to be the case, then skip to the second last question in this section.

6. Describe some of the change in the postsecondary education sector that you have personally witnessed or experienced.
7. How would you describe the pace of change in this sector? (no change happening, little change, moderate amounts of change, large amounts of change, other: _____)
8. Do you believe that the pace of change is slowing, has remained steady or is increasing?
9. Do you perceive change to be positive, negative or a mixture of the two?

Please explain your answer using an example or two.

10. What do you predict will happen in the foreseeable future?

Please describe your response to the previous question in detail.

Section 3 - Your Perception of the Sense of the Urgency with which you believe change must occur

11. Do you believe that change must occur within the postsecondary education system? Yes or No

If Yes, proceed to the next question, if No proceed to the next section.

12. How much change do you believe must occur (little, moderate amount, substantial)?

13. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing no urgency and 10 representing immediate need for change, how urgent do you believe is the need for change in the postsecondary education system?

Section 4 – Summary and Closing Comments

14. Are there any questions to which you want to return?
15. Are there any questions where you want to add or change your answers?

Thank you again for your participation in this project.