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COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER LEADERS IN ONLINE LEARNING AT SMALL, PRIVATE COLLEGES

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COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER LEADERS IN ONLINE LEARNING AT SMALL, PRIVATE COLLEGES

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By
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2019

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER LEADERS IN ONLINE LEARNING AT SMALL, PRIVATE COLLEGES

As online learning continues to grow and became an integral component of many higher education institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2017), the role of leadership in guiding those online learning initiatives differs from institution to institution. At small, private colleges and universities, where online learning is seeing greater enrollment and growth (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013), teaching and learning centers (TLC) often have involvement in guiding and shaping online learning initiatives. This study investigated the role of TLC leaders in leading online learning initiatives. The value of this study is an examination of leadership during a period of transformation and change that requires TLC leaders to manage administrative directives, work with a diverse faculty base, and balance these sometimes competing interests.

This research study sought to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of TLC leaders in online learning leadership within small, private higher education institutions. Utilizing complexity leadership theory as a framework for exploring the various leadership functions of TLC leaders, the study employed a transcendental phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994). Participants included seven TLC leaders or other TLC staff who were involved in online learning initiatives at their institutions. Data was collected through a series of three semi-structured interview sessions based on the qualitative interview design of Seidman (2005). Analysis of the data generated themes centered around the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory: administrative, adaptive, and enabling leadership.

KEYWORDS: teaching and learning centers, online learning, leadership, complexity leadership theory, private colleges.
COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER LEADERS IN ONLINE LEARNING AT SMALL, PRIVATE COLLEGES

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DEDICATION

To Charles D. Watts (1947-2019)
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH STUDY

The development of teaching and learning centers (TLCs) and their relevance to institutions of higher learning has led to extensive explorations in the area of faculty development, which has been the main charge and focus of TLCs since their inception (Hubball, Lamberson, & Kindler, 2012; Tassoni, 2009; Tiberius, 2002). As higher education institutions grapple with an array of issues and external factors that extend beyond the classroom experience and the traditional domain of teaching and learning, the role of TLCs within higher education organizations have transformed to a centerpiece for initiating change and advancing organizational learning (Lieberman, 2005). The implications for TLC leaders and the role they play in grappling with change, learning, and transformation has largely been unexplored, particularly within the context of leadership theory. One area of rapid change and transformation for all higher education institutions is in the area of online learning, which has become essential to the long-term strategy of a large population of colleges and universities in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Small, private colleges and universities are grappling with these changes and because many are still in the early stages of adopting forming online learning programs, they are also prime candidates for observation (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). Administration of these online learning initiatives often sits within small TLC units that oversee faculty development and other support activities (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013; Legon & Garrett, 2017). Due to the rapid changes brought about by online learning, these locales provide a unique vantage point from which to explore the role of TLC leadership, not only because these institutions are in the early stages of implementing online learning, but also because their TLCs are small, often consisting of just one or two
employees (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). The various roles of TLC leaders have been explored in the literature, however the experiences of TLC leaders as they spearhead new initiatives, particularly online learning initiatives presents a gap in the literature.

In identifying this gap, this phenomenological research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of TLC leaders. The study was based on interviews with TLC leaders at small, private colleges, and universities who oversee online learning initiatives as part of their duties. This first chapter of the study presents the background for the study, provides the problem statement, and presents an overview of the methodology utilized for the study. The chapter will also highlight limitations and present definitions of key terms as they relate to the study.

**Background of the Study**

The development of teaching and learning centers (TLC) within the United States higher education system began in the 1970s as institutions wrestled with student-led social movements, declines in student preparation levels, and increased diversity in the classroom and on campuses (Clark & Saulnier, 2010; Lieberman, 2005). Increased enrollment and a changing student population led institutions to promote centers that provided support to faculty in evaluating their own efforts at improving student learning (Tiberius, 2002). As institutions continued to shift and evolve in reaction to environmental changes from decade to decade, TLCs also transformed. The development of TLCs and their relevance to institutions of higher learning has led to extensive explorations in the areas of teaching and learning, the main charge and focus of TLCs since their inception (Hubball et al., 2012; Tassoni, 2010; Tiberius, 2002). Higher education institutions needed to consider matters that were not part of their purview in
earlier decades including issues of retention, mastery of student learning outcomes, and a growing number of other external factors. As these changes occurred, TLCs increasingly became an organizational space that approached such challenges.

Online learning is one area in which TLC leaders are expected to have some role depending on the institutional setting. According to a report by the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and InsideTrack (2014) at many institutions, the trend has been towards centralizing the support of online learning under a dedicated online office or unit reporting to the provost. The trend at large, public institutions was observed early on to situate support for online learning in a central unit (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Paolucci & Gamescia, 2007) and that trend continues today at public institutions, particularly in institutions with large, established online programs (Legon & Garrett, 2017). At smaller, private universities and colleges, centralization is also a common trend as the growth of online programs increases (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013; Hoey, McCraken, Gehrett & Snoeyink, 2014). However, programs in the early stages of online learning initiatives (5 online programs or less) report greater degrees of decentralization as institutions attempt to grapple with the structure that supports online growth (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013; Legon & Garrett, 2017). For those institutions in the early stages of online learning initiatives, Clinefelter and Magda (2013) found that 74 percent of surveyed institutions organized online learning initiatives without leadership from a central unit. Despite this decentralization, two important facets were identified as necessary for the success of online learning: instructional design and faculty development (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). Faculty development largely encompasses the primary
work of TLCs and instructional design often falls within their domain as well (Lieberman, 2005; Sorcinelli, 2002). Both faculty development and instructional design require a level of expertise and leadership for TLC leaders to ensure success in online learning initiatives. This level of leadership also comes at a critical time for these institutions. Allen and Seamen (2017) stated that while public institutions continue to command the market in terms of online enrollment (67.8%), the largest growth from year to year is in the private, non-profit sector. With both the growth in enrollment and the structural organization, such institutions have a greater reliance on TLCs and their leadership more than other institutional types due to their role on the campus in faculty development and instructional design.

While TLC leaders seek to effect change in higher education institutions in multiple areas, including online learning, their leadership role calls for a unique balance between administrative and faculty demands. At institutions of higher education, TLCs are positioned formally within the administrative division of the organization and are at the same time often populated with current or former academics charged with the mission of supporting fellow faculty in the practice of teaching and learning. TLCs strike a balance between advancing administrative initiatives while also being viewed as safe havens for faculty to explore areas of development outside of the purview of administrative oversight. As Lieberman (2005) stated, the role of TLCs has increasingly becoming one of institutional laboratory for learning as much as a faculty support function. Within this role, there is an increasing expectation for TLC leaders to demonstrate institutional leadership that defies hierarchical structures, articulating an influence relationship built on rapport-building rather than any supervisory authority. The
increasing mission of TLCs has been to cross division lines and meet institutional mandates emanating from traditional leadership hierarchies (Lieberman, 2005) while navigating the bottom-up initiatives that autonomous faculty also contribute to institutional change (Kezar, 2013). Examining the unique role that TLCs play lends itself to questions about the role TLC leaders have in implementing administrative initiatives, in creating new initiatives, and in making sense of their own role within the organization. To strike a balance between these seemingly contradictory divisions, the work and leadership of TLCs may find explanation in the theoretical framework of complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

**Theoretical Framework**

The structure of a TLC provides a unique challenge for TLC leaders. TLC leaders are situated within the hierarchical and formalized leadership of institutions and yet the role requires rapport-building, consultation, and academic support (Lieberman, 2005) more closely associated with personal leadership qualities rather than positional authority. This level of informal leadership exists alongside formal structures and via relationships between various individuals within an organization. Informal leadership, articulated in complexity leadership theory as adaptive leadership, surrounds the non-hierarchical forms of leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Within complexity leadership theory there is a recognition, consistent with Rost (1991) that “leadership is not merely the influential act of an individual or individuals but rather is embedded in a complex interplay of numerous interacting forces” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 302).

As individuals seek solutions and implement change, their actions affect the behavior of others within the organization and elicit additional responses and change due
to the interdependent nature of the organization. Complexity leadership theory recognizes that within organizational structures there exists three forms of leadership at work: 1) formal, hierarchical, administrative leadership, 2) informal and emerging adaptive leadership, and 3) enabling leadership. Together these have allowed administrative and adaptive leadership forms to function together (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Table 1

The Three Leadership Functions of Complexity Leadership Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Function</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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| Administrative Leadership | ● Individuals and groups in formal managerial roles plan and coordinate activities to accomplish organizationally-prescribed outcomes in an efficient and effective manner  
● Focuses on alignment and control  
● Represented by hierarchical and bureaucratic functions of organization |
| Adaptive Leadership | ● Adaptive, creative, learning actions that emerge from the actions of multiple agents in an organization  
● Informal emergent dynamic that occurs among interactive agents  
● Not an act of authority |
| Enabling Leadership | ● Catalyzes optimal conditions for adaptive leadership  
● Manages entanglement between bureaucratic (administrative) and emergent (adaptive) forms of leadership |

*Note.* Adapted from Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McCelvey (2007).

To place these functions of leadership into a visual diagram to reflect the interplay of the various functions, we can see in the diagram (see Figure 1) that enabling leadership serves as the means to “manage entanglement” (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McCelvey, 2007) and serve as a mediator between the bureaucratic forms of leadership found in administrative leadership and the informal, emergent forms of leadership found in
adaptive leadership. In the next section, we will explore the role of TLC leaders within this framework.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework diagram based on the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

The roles of TLC leaders align with the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory. TLC leaders are often positioned several levels down in the hierarchy of academic administrative leadership, but at the same time are called upon to extend an informal leadership role in institutions. As part of their administrative leadership, TLC leaders plan and deliver activities that aim to achieve institutional outcomes as expected by higher education leadership (Schroeder, 2011; Singer, 2012). TLC leaders also operate with the aim of building rapport with faculty and assisting faculty in developing creative and adaptive methods within the arena of learning (Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 2002). Sorcinelli (2002) also wrote about the tension between these roles and the need for TLC leaders to balance these roles, in a method that distinctly aligns with enabling leadership. To explore the role of TLC leaders as they lead online learning initiatives, the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory were used as a conceptual framework. In this conceptual framework (see Figure 2), TLC leaders and their various roles are situated within the three functions of complexity leadership theory. TLC leaders have a distinct organizational role with expectations coming from their supervisors and so
serve in administrative leadership within a hierarchical role. On the adaptive leadership role, TLC leaders have a rapport relationship with faculty and serve as advocators for their teaching and learning experiences. Between the roles of administrative and adaptive functions, TLC leaders employ both approaches and utilize enabling leadership practices to mediate the balance between the administrative and adaptive leadership functions. Enabling leadership overlaps with the other functions of leadership indicating that enabling leadership can be utilized as a means of reducing tension and allowing TLC leaders to navigate between the other two leadership functions.

*Figure 2.* Conceptual framework based on the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

This study sought to explore the experience of TLC leaders and the alignment of that experience with the three functions of leadership within complexity leadership theory. TLC leaders are positioned between both administrative needs coming from their hierarchical supervisors and the ambitions of faculty that require adaptive leadership. The ability to balance the tensions between these two leadership functions requires enabling leadership. In order to effect change in online learning initiatives, it was assumed prior to the study that TLC leaders must employ all forms of leadership given in the conceptual framework and within complexity leadership theory.
Statement of Problem

Higher education institutions have been expanding their offerings in the area of online learning. Online learning is being more broadly adopted in order to increase enrollment, extend institutional prominence, and also to meet a growing learner demand for online offerings (Allen & Seaman, 2017). The expansion of these offerings places pressure on administrators as well as faculty to develop online programs (Esterhuizen, Blignaut, & Ellis, 2013; Lin, Singer, & Ha, 2010). Higher education institutions have created new units or charged existing units to provide expertise and help faculty navigate online learning. TLCs and the leaders within these units, with their historical emphasis on faculty development, often are viewed as the appropriate leaders to lead online learning on campuses (Lieberman, 2005; Wright, 2000). TLC leaders bring faculty development expertise as well as technology integration experience (Blumberg, 2011), skills which are readily needed for online learning initiatives. Studies also revealed that the impact of TLC leaders often extends beyond the realm of faculty development into the area of organizational development, assisting individuals and departments throughout the institution in navigating change and implementing new initiatives (Lieberman, 2005; Schroeder, 2011).

In the area of online learning, TLC leaders are often expected to provide both pedagogical and technology expertise, regardless of the institutional type and size (Meyer & Murrell, 2014). The structure of TLCs is also consistent at a variety of institutions. TLCs most often are situated within a hierarchical structure where TLC leaders report directly to either the provost or one level below the provost (Ambrose, 1995; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 1988). As a result, TLC leaders have some measure of
authority from an administrative and organizational perspective. Despite this positioning, Sorcinelli (2002), emphasized that TLC leadership relies heavily on rapport-building with faculty and expresses itself in informal, non-hierarchical leadership. While the structure and presence of TLC as an academic unit is valuable, Sorcinelli (2002) emphasized that it has been the informal leadership that TLC leaders provide that fosters faculty buy-in. Faculty seek connections with a person, not an academic unit, and therefore TLC leaders must be both visible and available (Sorcinelli, 2002). In previous examinations of TLC structures, researchers emphasized the unique role that TLC leaders have in the success of their unit, however the role of TLC leaders on specific initiatives has not been explored. Moreover, the forms of leadership employed by TLC leaders or even the self-perceived role of TLC leaders in leading institutional initiatives is a gap in the literature. TLC roles in leadership, coupling both hierarchical position and trust-building finds natural alignment through complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007) and served as a framework for this study. The research study utilized the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory (administrative, adaptive, and enabling) as the three primary areas for exploration with TLC leaders. Administrative leadership aligns primarily on the efforts of TLC leaders to meet administrative and external directives. Adaptive leadership is best emphasized within the relationship between TLC leaders and faculty partners. Enabling leadership concentrates on the tension between these administrative and faculty demands, exploring how TLC leaders find balance between them.

Research has been conducted on the types of faculty development offerings provided by TLCs (Centra, 1976; Erickson, 1983; Frantz, Beebe, Horvath, Canales, &
Swee, 2005), the structures of TLCs (Ambrose, 1995; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 1988), and the background of TLC leadership (Bishop & Keehn, 2015). Despite the acknowledgment that leaders in a TLC have a role in the leadership of institutional change and in particular online learning, no studies have sought to explore the perceptions of TLC leaders in these areas. The lived experiences of TLC leaders and their perceptions of their own leadership within such initiatives is therefore a significant gap in the literature. While research is limited in exploring the role and perceptions of TLC leaders in online learning at any institution or setting, complexity leadership theory as a framework is well suited to explore change management within structures undergoing transformation. Institutions that are undergoing the greatest amount of transformation in the area of online learning presently are small, private institutions that are largely implementing online programs later than their larger, public counterparts (Allan & Seaman, 2016; Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). These institutions, still in the early inception of online learning initiatives, also follow a decentralized model of organization (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013), requiring advocates for online learning to work with a variety of departments in order to implement new online initiatives. Likewise, TLC units with their focus on faculty development and instructional design are largely the primary drivers for such initiatives at institutions where online learning is relatively new (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). Due to this setting, this makes for a unique environment in which to explore the role of TLC leaders in complex online learning initiatives that are still in their early formation. This environment is appropriate for exploration with the complexity leadership theoretical framework utilized for this study.
Research Questions and Design

This research study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of TLC leaders in the area of online learning leadership within small, private higher education institutions. The research questions are also framed by the theoretical framework guiding the study, with each question centered around an area of complexity leadership theory.

The following questions guide this study:

1. What perceived leadership roles do TLC leaders have in administrative directives related to online learning initiatives? (Administrative leadership)

2. What perceived roles do TLC leaders have in implementing online learning initiatives among faculty? (Adaptive leadership)

3. What tensions, if any, exist between the TLC leader’s roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff as they lead and support online learning initiatives? (Enabling leadership)

The first question sought to explore the role of TLC leaders in administrative leadership as defined by complexity leadership theory; situated within the hierarchy and structure of their institutional administration. The second question was designed to investigate the complexity leadership theory function of adaptive leadership that requires working with diverse faculty and building rapport and trust amongst them. Finally, the third question aimed to explore the adaptive leadership of complexity leadership theory, that accounts for the tensions between the two other areas of leadership and allows TLC leaders to navigate these two often conflicting roles concurrently.
**Research Design**

The research study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of TLC leaders as they relate to their influence and leadership in online learning at their institution. In considering my own research epistemology, the research questions, and the theoretical framework, a transcendental phenomenological methodology (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994) was selected to inform and guide the study design. Transcendental phenomenology is grounded in the concept that researchers set aside all preconceived ideas related to the study to observe phenomena through an unbiased view (Moustakas, 1994). The true meaning of the phenomena observed can then naturally emerge with these biases set aside. As a TLC leader, I have observed the constraints of serving in an administrative position while also building faculty rapport and therefore have preconceived notions related to the topic that will be explored. Due to these close connections to the topic, transcendental phenomenology was selected as a valuable methodology for removing inherent biases that I have associated with the topic. In addition to aligning with the research topic, the methodology also corresponded to the framework of complexity leadership theory, with theorists acknowledging that qualitative studies are an avenue for further exploration and that the theory requires a “methodology that is capable of analyzing the interactions of multiple agents over a period of time” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 215).

In applying a transcendental phenomenology methodology to the research problem, the investigation could derive knowledge and understanding about the “meanings and essences of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). Within the context of TLCs, the methodology aimed to focus the research on understanding the experiences of
TLC leaders surrounding their role as mediators of institutional change. Due to the nature of the study, and my own experience as a former TLC leader, the initial phase of the study involved the application of epoché, in which personal biases and assumptions are set aside, or bracketed, in order to explore a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). After exploring researcher bias and preconceptions through the process of epoché, the study utilized interviews as the primary source of data in exploring participant experiences.

**Significance of the Study**

Within the given research topic, there is a gap in the literature as it relates to the lived experiences of TLC leaders, particularly in the area of online learning. By exploring the experiences of individuals working in TLCs at higher education institutions, the emerging role of TLC leaders can be explored from these disparate voices. Dooley and Lichtenstein (2008) have remarked that the interactions that form leadership are subtle and rich, requiring a level of exploration that considers the complexity of human interactions. By utilizing transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), the complexity of these experiences could be more fully explored. Schroeder (2011) completed a large (427 respondents) quantitative study in which TLC leaders positively identified their role in institutional initiatives and organizational change, yet the experience of these leaders as they take on these roles has been largely unexplored. However, Schroeder (2011) did not look at any particular institutional initiative and so the experience of TLC leaders in online learning leadership has not been researched. Within smaller, private colleges and universities, the role of leadership in online learning often is positioned within academic structures like a TLC and therefore allowed for those
experiencing the complexity of such leadership to share about the changing nature of their role. As a result, the results of the research study should have implications for other higher education administrators, particularly TLC leaders, as they examine leadership paradigms that will allow them to grapple with organizational change.

**Definition of Terms**

In the scope of this research study, there are a number of terms that require definition for greater clarity:

**TLC leader:** A person within a teaching and learning center (TLC) unit who is primarily responsible for leading development initiatives (Gaff, 1975) at their institution (Green, 1990; Sorcinelli, 2002). The term applies primarily to directors of TLC, but may also include associate directors or other TLC staff who serve in a primary role for development initiatives at their institution. Development encompasses faculty, instructional, or organizational development as defined by Gaff (1975) and explored in detail in Chapter 2.

**Epoché:** From the Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, this practice is the first step within transcendental phenomenology as formulated by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. In practicing epoché the aim of the researcher is to open their consciousness to the preconceptions and biases that already exist and allowing them to leave freely through a reflective and meditative process (Moustakas, 1994). The end goal of epoché is to approach a phenomenon with a fresh view and pure state.

**Online learning:** Overlapping with the broader category of distance learning, online learning refers to the use of web-based and Internet tools to facilitate learning (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009; Moore, Dickson-Deane, Galyen, 2010). An
emphasis within this definition is on asynchronous learning environments in which student and faculty interactions are distributed both in location and time (Anderson, 2004; Johnson, 2006).

Summary

At small, private institutions, the growth of interest in developing online programs and courses has spurred academic leadership to seek out internal resources that can drive these efforts. TLCs with their natural alignment in areas of faculty development and technology adoption are often at the forefront of these initiatives. While the role of TLC leaders has been explored within the literature, this research study sought to explore the lived experiences of TLC leaders and how they view their leadership role within online learning initiatives. To fully understand this role, an understanding of TLCs and their placement within institutions is necessary. Entering into the study, it was assumed that the conceptual framework based on complexity leadership theory would give meaning and structure to the experiences of TLC leaders in their effort to lead online learning initiatives. In chapter 2, a review of the literature will explore TLCs, the role of TLCs within online learning, and an exploration of complexity leadership theory and its alignment with TLC leaders and their roles in online learning.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The aim of this research study was to explore the influence and leadership of TLC leaders at small colleges and universities in the arena of online learning. Due to this area of exploration, I sought to engage the literature surrounding three major sections. The first section of the literature review is related to understanding the historical role of TLCs and TLC leadership and the changing nature of that role over time, including the organizational position within institutions. The second section of the literature review is related to online learning including a brief history and literature related to leadership initiatives in online learning. Finally, the third major section of the literature review is an exploration of leadership theories as a framework for exploring the TLC as a laboratory for learning initiatives, particularly as they relate to online learning.

Literature Review Procedure

To explore the research topic, a search of academic databases was conducted, primarily using Google Scholar as an initial filter of publications and EBSCOhost's Academic Search Complete to conduct a more in-depth search based on the initial results. Research was initially conducted around the key phrases center for teaching and learning, and center for teaching excellence, popular terms in use at institutions. As searches continued, the phrase teaching and learning center was added as results revealed its greater use among the literature. In addition to the phrases, keywords were added to narrow the focus to topics related to history, leadership, and structure. Articles to be explored further were identified for promise based on their full title and a review of the abstract. A specific journal, Journal on Centers for Teaching and Learning, was also
examined for articles related to the topics of TLC history, structure, and leadership paradigms.

After determining a selection of appropriate articles, the bibliographies of those articles were examined to identify further useful literature. Those articles, reports, and books that repeatedly appeared in reference lists were noted as potential seminal works. Using this strategy allowed me to both identify a more significant number of articles and to draw out additional keywords for use in further database searches.

**Historical and Developing Role of TLCs**

The concept of TLCs and their place in the organizational structure of higher education institutions emerged as colleges and universities explored and employed faculty development models over the years. To understand the role of TLCs in modern institutions and their organizational placement it is valuable to seek a summary of their development and the needs they responded to through different eras. In looking at their structure and situate TLCs role as a response to the pressing issues of higher education in different ages, it is possible to understand the development of that role over time more fully. Understanding this role as a response to changing emphases in higher education will allow a greater exploration of the impact that the growth of online education has on TLCs and the leadership paradigms that are emerging to respond to these changes.

Faculty development traces its early roots to Harvard University and the granting of sabbatical leave for faculty members in the early nineteenth century (Sorcinelli et al., 2005). At that time faculty development was driven from the assumption that subject matter expertise ensured teaching expertise and, as a result, development was fostered through sabbatical leave, research grants, and funding for travel to professional meetings.
(Wilkerson & Irby, 1998). Faculty development remained largely consistent for the greater part of a century until a shift in institutional mission and character served as a catalyst for change (Schroeder, 2011). This transformation was driven in the 1960s due to an emphasis on learning as the primary function of universities, rather than teaching, which resulted in the founding of faculty development units in higher education. The establishment of the first center occurred at the University of Michigan with the creation of the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching in 1962 (Lewis, 2010; Singer, 2002). By the next decade, instructional consultation had become a key practice among many institutions (Erickson & Erickson, 1979). During this period, as institutional practices were transformed from a focus on teaching to learning and assessment, TLCs also emerged or were changed to adapt to the new paradigms in higher educational institutions (Schroeder, 2011). Most noticeably, the naming of faculty development centers began to reflect the new mission of centers and their place in the wider campus communities where they operated. Faculty development centers became known as centers of learning, instructional development centers, teaching excellence centers, or some variation of these titles (Schroeder, 2011). By the 1990s, TLCs on many campuses provided the resources for curriculum and instructional development and technology (Schroeder, 2011), as well as faculty orientation, mentoring programs, peer support groups, individual consultations, workshops, seminars, resource libraries, and newsletters (Singer, 2002). In looking to account for changing TLC responsibilities, Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach (2005) clarified the role as one of assisting faculty in responding to the growing use of technology in the classroom and instructional support for online programs, in addition to the past roles that TLC leaders occupied.
Defining Faculty Development and the TLC Role

As higher education institutions recognized the need for faculty development in the areas of teaching and learning, concomitant structures and support organizations expanded. Gaff (1975), in his seminal work exploring the forms of development, identified three areas of development: faculty, instructional, and organizational. Faculty development refers to activities to assist individual faculty members in their role as teachers and scholars. Gaff acknowledges faculty development can vary from institution to institution but identifies several common elements, including cross-disciplinary work, increased knowledge of the science of learning, instructional skills, and gaining personalized feedback. While faculty development has focused on the instructor and the improvement of teaching, instructional development emphasizes learning and the student experience. Instructional development has included curricular development, course design using the latest technology and student learning through course content (Gaff, 1975). Organizational development has involved a greater participation in support of institutional initiatives and goals. Gaff acknowledged that faculty development has looked to the improvement of the individual faculty and instructional development focused solely on the learning tasks of single units. As a result, both elements may have missed the larger institutional implications of instructional improvement. Organizational development has served to take the whole institution into context when considering overall function and change within a complex system.

TLC transformation has largely touched all three of Gaff’s (1975) areas of development, and important research strides have been made related to TLCs’ role in faculty development (Finelli, Pinder-Grover, & Wright, 2011; Jacobson et al., 2009;
Wright, 2011) and instructional development (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Blumberg, 2011). These two areas are viewed as having a clear impact on teaching and learning and a connection to the mission of TLCs (Fink, 2003; Hubball et al., 2012). Gaff (1975), in identifying organizational development as an equally essential aspect of instructional improvement, acknowledged its presence as a relatively unexplored concept. The literature reflected its late emergence in higher education development; however, its growth in organizations has also been reflected in the literature (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Wilkerson & Irby, 1998). The exploration of TLCs as a change agent and its position within institution-wide initiatives has also gained prominence in the literature with the increasing focus on organizational development.

**TLC Leaders and Their Strategic Position**

In exploring the organizational development role of TLCs, researchers have observed TLC leaders involved in organizational change. This role has emerged largely because of the unique position of such centers within institutional structures. Firstly, through their placement in a department focused on improving teaching and learning, TLC leaders, by their expertise, understand the learning process and serve as learning experts within their institutions (Schroeder, 2011). Secondly, TLC leaders also straddle the line between administration and faculty and thus provide services concerned with the greater academic community rather than single departments or groups (Sorcinelli, 2002).

**Learning experts.** TLC leaders are viewed as sources of expertise in areas of individual faculty development. This also has had greater implications for the organization as a whole. Argyris and Schon (1978) stated that "there is no organizational learning without individual learning" (p. 20). Individual learning and transformation on a
small scale also have been an efficient mechanism for greater organizational learning (Schroeder, 2011; Singer, 2002). Researchers also confirmed that TLCs are being utilized for their learning expertise and their unique position to help apply new knowledge and pedagogical practices in organizational initiatives (Sorcinelli, 2002). Likewise, there has been a strong connection between the individual teaching practice of faculty and conceptual changes across institutions (Gravett, 1996; Ramsden, 1992; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996). A greater need for a continued focus on faculty development, while embracing a broader dissemination of effective practices has been an area for recommendation among researchers as well (Travis, 1995).

**Bridges across institutional lines.** As student populations and needs change, higher education institutions have also sought to continually transform their purpose to adapt to these changes (Qualters, Dolinsky, & Woodnick, 2008). The role of TLC leaders in becoming interpreters of that change has become more evident because of their unique organizational position (Schroeder, 2011). TLCs have had a significant role in integrating new ideas, programs, and technology and disseminating information about these initiatives across the institution. Sorcinelli (2002), in looking at the role of TLCs, noted that the position of a TLC is unique because of its mission, which addresses the "interests and needs of the entire academic community in support of the education that students receive" (p. 10). Sorcinelli continued that the most effective TLC leaders maintain a neutral position, balancing the faculty-based origins while operating in an administrative role. As a result, TLCs provide support to academics without being viewed as an extension of the administration of the institution. TLC leaders walk a tightrope
between faculty and administrative agendas, maintaining a balance between the two groups (Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 2002).

Nemko and Simpson (1991) continued that TLC success in their mission depends upon support from the administration combined with trust and credibility with faculty and the greater campus community. Although balance is an important consideration, this position also placed TLCs at the forefront of educational reform and the core of institutional initiatives (Singer, 2012). Lieberman and Guskin (2003) argued that to bring about organizational development, TLC leaders must increasingly view themselves as change agents within higher education institutions. In surveys of TLC directors, data reveals that those interviewed did see themselves in positions of leadership as it relates to organizational development and change. Schroeder (2011) found that out of 427 surveyed TLC directors, 66% responded as having a high level of involvement in institutional initiatives and change agency.

**TLC Leadership**

TLC leaders often see themselves in positions of leadership in institutional change (Schroeder, 2011) and therefore their role as change agents is worth noting. Studies of teaching development programs have indicated that having someone in the position to both manage and lead a program is critical for success (Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Sorcinelli, 1988; Zahorski, 1993). The role of TLC leaders in organizational development has not been as deeply explored as faculty development programming. However, much of the literature related to TLCs applies to the area of organizational development, particularly the aim of TLCs to make connection across institutional lines and to achieve balance between faculty and administrative needs.
TLC leaders directly influence the success and integration of TLCs into institutional progress. Often TLC connections to faculty are not through a formal departmental presence, but through personal connections and rapport building. “Faculty usually call a person not an office, [therefore] it is important for the director and staff to be highly visible and accessible” (Sorcinelli, 2002, p. 12). TLC leaders also have a direct reporting line to top administrative officials, usually the provost or vice provost of academic or faculty affairs (Ambrose, 1995; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 1988). These levels of access allow TLC leaders to assist with faculty initiatives and accomplish administrative goals. TLC leaders are often expected to actively support both faculty initiatives and administrative requests, although at times the two sides may be at odds. Zahorski (1993) stated that TLC staff must be exceptional tightrope walkers “because they must seek and nurture the support of both faculty and administrators; they must be particularly diplomatic in their words and deeds, especially involving issues in which faculty and administrators are opposed” (p. 243)

TLC leaders guide and oversee initiatives while also ensuring that final products are faculty-driven and crafted (Sorcinelli, 2002). To carry out the critical functions of TLCs, leaders increasingly have a view of themselves as change agents within an institution and move their centers from the periphery of faculty support to the center of academic life at institutions (Lieberman & Guskin, 2003).

**Strategic Position in Shifting Institutions**

TLCs are uniquely situated to respond to and lead changes in the organizational development of institutions due to their distinct position within institutions. TLC leaders work across faculty and administrative lines and must respond to the needs of both. This
process is not without friction and has required the development of leadership that addresses this complexity between faculty and administrative needs. One significant area of development across the United States is the impact of online education and its place in the long-term strategy of higher education institutions. According to Allen and Seaman (2016), 14 percent of students across institutions have taken some level of online courses with 12.5 percent of students of all higher education students taking coursework exclusively at a distance. Institutions in which some level of online education has already been implemented shared that online course offerings are critical to the long-term strategy of the institution as a whole. The long-term importance of online education was reported by 76.3 percent of respondents with less than 2,500 online students and up to 90.3 percent with institutions having 10,000 or more online students (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Understanding that online education is a critical part of the long-term strategy of institutions and recognizing the unique role of TLCs in responding to institutional developments, what role do TLC leaders have in support of these long-term strategies? The next section will examine the historical development of online learning administration and the position of TLCs in the field. Connections to the leadership required to influence the direction of institutions in the area of distance learning administration will then be the next section for exploration.

**Online Learning and TLCs**

As reported by Allen and Seaman (2017), online learning has been essential to the long-term strategy to a growing number of institutions. To fully understand the impact of online education, this section briefly examines the historical development of distance education and the branch of online learning, explores the complex issues surrounding its
implementation, and identifies the role TLC leaders have in supporting institutional online learning initiatives. In understanding the complexities of online learning and the role of TLC leaders in addressing those issues, an exploration of the leadership challenges will follow in the next section.

**Historical Development of Online Learning**

Online learning as a field has its roots in printed and written correspondence that developed around educational societies and university extensions in the late 19th century. The term distance education itself began to be applied towards correspondence courses as early as 1892, associated with the offerings of the University of Wisconsin extension campus (Verduin & Clark, 1991). The field has its roots in the work of Anna Eliot Tickner who founded the Society to Encourage Study at Home in 1873 and John Vincent who pioneered the Chautauqua movement in 1898 (Verduin & Clark, 1991). Both Tickner and Vincent provided educational paths to adults through written correspondence delivered by mail. Vincent used his experience to found the first university-level correspondence program at the University of Chicago in 1892. With the emergence of new technologies, distance education expanded to encompass phonograph records, radio, telephone and television broadcasts. By the 1980s, the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) had over a million adult learners enrolled in their telecourses (Verduin & Clark, 1991). The use of one-way communication to facilitate learning slowly became a movement towards two-way communication technologies that promoted interactivity and social learning (Sumner, 2000).

With the advent of the internet and the development of learning management systems, two-way computer-mediated methods of instruction have became synonymous
with online learning, rather than one of the many tools that distance education employs. As a result of the development of these new technologies, institutions have been impacting students outside of their traditional campus settings and providing online courses for both off-campus and on-campus students (Guri-Rosenbilt, 2014).

**Online Learning in Small Colleges and Universities**

While the growth of online learning has influenced institutions throughout the United States, the impact at small independent colleges and universities has been less significant than at public institutions. Public universities have embraced online learning more rapidly than independent institutions and as a result account for more than double the online students (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). A reaction towards online learning as antithetical to the personalized and intimate learning experience of small colleges has influenced the late arrival of independent institutions into the online learning space. Despite these cautions, a handful of small institutions embraced online learning and developed pioneering programs that sought to attract non-traditional learners (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). In a survey of chief academic officers at independent colleges, the findings of Clinefelter and Magda (2013) suggested that institutions with 2,500 students or less are still limited in their development of online programs with at most four fully online programs. While the development of online learning has been in an early stage of development at private colleges, those who have existing online programs have continued to report growth in online enrollment. As online learning has continued to grow at smaller institutions, the level of governance and administration has also shifted to match the changing institutional structures that support such programs.
Online learning administration. With the growth of online learning as the dominant form of online education, the role of administration of technology, program design, and even marketing of online programs has been rapidly developing. The structure to support these initiatives has varied from institution to institution. In some institutions, employment of traditional departments to drive and support online learning has been used. Other institutions developed divisions focused solely on online learning, sometimes coordinating with traditional enrollment and marketing efforts, while others have developed dedicated departments for online students in all aspects of the institution, including policy.

At small institutions in the early stages of online adoption, Clinefelter and Magda (2013) revealed that the dominant model of governance has been decentralized, with "complementary responsibilities, such as course development, marketing, and scheduling, spread across several departments" (p. 18). This model was employed to 78 percent of the respondent independent colleges and universities, with only a small percentage having a dedicated online education division. While there has existed a decentralization of online learning, two elements have been most commonly found in one central location: instructional design and faculty development. These two areas were rated highest for having a distinct unit overseeing initiatives and were viewed as necessary services for the success of a program (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). At small institutions, instructional design and faculty development have often been situated within a TLC. Oblinger and Hawkins (2006) recognized that "developing and delivering effective online courses require[d] pedagogy and technology expertise possessed by few faculty" (p. 14). As a
result, leaders in TLCs often have wielded a level of expertise in both areas that has made them well suited to lead online learning efforts.

With the increasing complexity of technology and pedagogy required for online learning, TLC leaders have helped bridge such explorations (Singer, 2002), served as consultants (Jacobson et al., 2009) and balanced the technological, academic, and administrative concerns associated with new institutional requirements (Jones, 2003; McCarthy & Samors, 2009). The type of work TLC leaders have provided in the areas of faculty development and instructional design has given indispensable support for faculty teaching in online environments (Lieberman & Guskin, 2003, p. 264). Due to the faculty support needed for online learning, TLCs have been well-equipped to provide for faculty training (Clay, 1999) and to address the key areas of online learning pedagogy and technology implementation (Blumberg, 2011). Providing leadership in online learning, TLC leaders, beyond being recognized for their role in administration, have also employed leadership that balances the technological, pedagogical and administrative challenges that have extended throughout the institution (Jones, 2003; McCarthy & Samors, 2009).

As discussed, small, private colleges and universities have been expanding their online learning initiatives and have largely relied on a decentralized structure to support these initiatives. The historical development surrounding both the growth of TLCs and of online learning in general has been explored thus far, but what of the empirical research surrounding TLC offerings, leaders and their role in online learning, particularly within these types of institutions? The next section will explore relevant literature in these areas.
Empirical Studies Related to TLCs and Online Learning

Within the literature, there has been acknowledgment that the research as it relates to online learning has been limited (Burnette, 2015; Pchenitchnaia & Cole, 2009). Studies have explored the types of offerings and programming that TLCs provide and also the structures within which they operate, but the direct experiences and perceptions of TLC leaders who are involved in online learning have not been fully explored. In order to begin this exploration, the following section will highlight relevant empirical studies in the literature that will provide a background for this study.

Much of the past research related to online learning has focused on the professional development activities offered. Centra (1976) conducted early research on faculty development activities through a national survey of 756 colleges and universities. This research resulted in grouped categories of the type of activities offered and was expanded upon by Erickson (1986). Their findings suggested that faculty development was largely associated with grants, awards, and leave, although the growth of individual consultation services and expansion into instructional technology were noted by both. Hellyer and Boschmann (1993) continued the research around faculty development at 94 different institutions. Their study focused on faculty development activities, but also on TLC staffing size and budget. They found that the most common activities were workshops and discussions (93%), consultations (69%), faculty orientations (60%), research on teaching (51%), and grants (34%). Wright (2000) also explored the types of services offered by TLCs and at the time showed a significant expansion into instructional technology, with 81.8% of respondents supporting instructional technology through the TLC. While the previous research focused primarily on large, public research
institutions, Frantz et al. (2005) conducted a survey of 109 TLCs across a variety of institution types including public and private institutions at a variety of levels. They surveyed 109 TLCs and explored not only program offerings, but also structural organization, assessment types, and elements that contribute to success in program implementation. Their research was organized into strategies that helped achieve goals as well as obstacles to success. Pchenitchnaia and Cole (2009) conducted a Delphi study with TLC directors to establish a comprehensive list of the essential faculty development programs and examine the essential function of TLCs. Their research again emphasized the importance of individual consultations, orientations, and other traditional activities identified by the previous literature.

An area of increased emphasis not previously explored in the literature was the importance of TLC leaders in collaboration and partnership with other institutional departments and as an advocate for teaching and learning across the institution, not only within the purview of faculty development. Herman (2012) conducted a survey of 191 institutions where TLCs engaged in faculty development in online learning. The researchers examined 25 types of faculty development offerings and sought to determine the frequency of these offerings. Online web resources, technical support, access to printed online resources and webinars, and individual consultations were the most common offerings.

The role of technology and faculty adoption of technology for use in the classroom has been another area of exploration within the literature. Lin, Singer, and Ha (2010) undertook a mixed methods case study of both faculty and administrators on the use of learning technologies at a single institution. The study resulted in pro-technology
sentiments from administrative members, but mixed results from a diverse faculty body. Those who emphasized teaching as a key aspect of their jobs, tended to have higher use of technology. The researchers did conclude by highlighting the tensions present between administrators and faculty in the appropriate use of technology for teaching and learning and the growth of online learning. Nicolle and Lou (2008) conducted a mixed methods case study that looked at barriers to technology adoption and identified institutional support as a significant factor to technology usage. The researchers also discussed peer support as one of the most significant factors for success, with non-judgmental, non-imposing advice from peers as desired by faculty. Their research, conducted at a top tier research university, found that because of the priority on research and faculty publications, teaching and the use of technology in teaching was not a significant priority for faculty. The researchers found that this largely was the result of administrative emphasis on publications and research.

There has also been research in the area of TLC structure and leaders within the last decade. Seaman (2009) in a survey of faculty at 69 institutions found that faculty would describe the support structures in place to support online learning as below average, including in support for online course development and support for online delivery. Bélanger, Bélisle, and Bernatchez (2011) researched the impact of services of a teaching and learning center using mixed methods and observed that TLC services, if utilized, were valuable. Faculty respondents reported positive changes and an improved impact on student learning by participating in TLC services. Perceptions of faculty attending TLC offerings in the area of online development has also been explored, revealing the type of professional development that resonates most fully with faculty is
that which is focused on pedagogy first and technology second (Chang, Shen, & Liu, 2014; Hixon, Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2011). Research also suggests greater success of initiatives amongst faculty when those offerings are tied to intrinsic motivation, most often connected to teaching, and involve faculty in the planning and implementation of such offerings.

Meyer and Murrell (2014) explored similar activities as those looking at TLC faculty development offerings, but with a specific focus on online learning. Their national survey garnered the participation of 48 institutions and explored the type of faculty development offerings and compared the type of offerings by the institution type as defined by the Carnegie classification. Meyer and Murrell (2014) found that the most commonly offered trainings were consistent across institution type with assessment, community-building, learning management systems, learning styles, and instructional design being the most prominent areas of emphasis. The major difference between institutions of different classifications was a difference in emphasis, although the type of activities and methods of delivery were largely similar. In research/doctoral institutions there was a higher emphasis on pedagogical training, while at the associate-level there was a greater focus on tools. Esterhuizen et al. (2013) examined the needs of faculty when teaching online courses from a professional development standpoint. Their study was unique in that it compared the perceptions of faculty at a single South African institution to that of the e-learning manager. The main areas of distinction were a faculty focus on applicable tasks associated with their teaching, while the e-learning manager focused on strategic initiatives such as policy and reduction of negative effects of online learning.
Lastly, there has been a limited amount of research in the structure and leadership of online learning at higher education institutions. The most recent study to fully explore online learning leadership across a wide range of institutions was the research of Fredericksen (2017). Using survey methods, 255 leaders in online learning responded to questions about their role in their institution and the history and structure of their positions. While online learning was a responsibility of participants, sixty percent reported that they were responsible for supporting all courses at the institution, not only online courses. The survey also identified that the majority of participants (70%) have been involved in online learning leadership for less than six years. Leaders also reported that their position and role was vital for greater organizational change within the institution. Vu, Meyer, and Cepero (2016) examined the responses of 85 participants at 85 different institutions in regards to the organizational structure of online learning on their campuses. Sixty-one percent of those surveyed reported a centralized administration for online learning at their institutions. The results revealed that mid-size or small universities operated with a centralized administration more often than larger university types. Participants, regardless of their own applied model, tended to look more favorably towards the centralized administration model.

The research related to faculty development and TLC offerings has largely looked at programmatic offerings and the types of activities being conducted. In a similar vein, the bulk of research thus far as it relates to TLC leadership has been an examination of organizational structure, and to a small degree, the background of TLC leaders. Faculty perceptions of the value of faculty development offerings has also been explored. This research has been instrumental in exploring the structures and activities of TLCs, but the
voices and experiences of TLC leaders as it relates to online learning have not been given significant attention.

Uniquely, in addition to providing leadership in the realm of online learning, the work of TLC leaders has extended to the organizational structures of the entire institution. This represents another area that has been largely unexplored in the literature in addition to the lived experiences of TLC leaders. Researchers indicated that faculty development and teaching technologies extend beyond the purview of online learning (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2005). Providing leadership in the areas of faculty development and technology integration has created new bridges between academic and administrative staff (Coates, James, & Baldwin, 2005) and has extended the development of teaching and learning activities into institutional activities. As a result of this complexity, new leadership constructs have become necessary to explain the role that TLCs hold within institutions. In the next section, we will look at complexity leadership theory as a framework for addressing the challenges of leadership in an era of increased technological change.

**TLCs and Leadership Theory**

In the previous section, the role of online learning at small institutions of higher education revealed the need for leaders that are engaged with the technological and pedagogical challenges of distance learning administration. The role of TLCs aligned naturally with many of the skills needed for engagement with faculty, and ultimately the institution as a whole, in the continually developing field of online learning. However, the integration of new teaching technologies through the lens of online learning often had an impact on the organizational development of the entire institution (Sorcinelli et al.,
To address the role of TLCs in organizational development, there is a need for a theory of leadership that acknowledges administrative demands and constraints while understanding the importance of building rapport with and supporting the work of faculty members; two divisions which often represent opposite ends of the spectrum of higher education. Due to the continually changing environment in which TLCs operate, the leadership theories of the past are difficult to align with the demands required of TLC leaders. In the section below, I will examine these constraints, evaluate the usefulness of complexity leadership theory as a potential response to such constraints and provide a survey of the literature surrounding the theory. The section will conclude with a review of the literature of complexity leadership theory as it relates to education and the role of TLCs in higher education institutions.

A Need for New Leadership Paradigms

The developments and changes of the twenty-first century cast into light the challenge of organizing people and leading organizations using the same techniques that were utilized in the Industrial Age. The concept of organizations as places where a state of equilibrium is managed is no longer a viable option (Kowch, 2013). Instead, we face challenges where no solution is readily available or in which the questions are continually changing. There is a growing tension which extends from both the increased co-dependence on spheres both inside and outside of our institutions as well as the technological changes we are seeing develop on a daily basis (Kowch, 2013). These developments have resulted in both a shift from top-down hierarchies to collaborative structures and a movement where knowledge is the core commodity (Cleveland, 2002; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Researchers and theorists recognize that one of the glaring
disparities between our current age and the increasingly outmoded organizational structures that we operate in is in the view we have of leadership. Studies identified that rational top-down theories are at best simplistic (Grint, 1997; Lester & Kezar, 2012; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002) and the notion of leadership as a characteristic or composed of characteristic behavior has been called into question (Seers, 2004). Rost (1991), in his effort to synthesize the various definitions of leadership in use, identified leadership, outside of the realm of hierarchy, authority, or character, but as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p.102). Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) recognized this interactive relationship between leaders and followers and the inadequacy of leadership theory to account for such relationships. They stated that past leadership theories have “failed to recognize that leadership is not merely the influential act of an individual or individuals but rather is embedded in a complex interplay of numerous interacting forces” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 302). To describe this interplay, they crafted a framework called complexity leadership theory which focuses on leadership as a process rather than as a set of skills of a specific individual and as a solution to challenges that are adaptive rather than technical (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

To explain the changing organizational structures and the new paradigm of leadership as described by Rost (1991), researchers turned to the disciplines of physical sciences and mathematics where change within complex systems were being observed. While the notion of equilibrium is described as the optimal state of organizations, when applied to living systems the case is the opposite. Rather than being optimal, it is a precursor to death, with equilibrium making it less responsive to changes and at greater
risk (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000). Scientists investigating unstable environments within natural world phenomenon observed evolutionary models which when influenced by turbulent change took on nonlinear and unpredictable changes (Bak, 1996; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). “In many cases, the chaotic and complex nature of these systems leads individual units to self-organize and facilitate transformative development of the system—where increasing complexity emerges” (Gilstrap, 2013, p. 26). Organizational theorists have also found that institutions undergoing similar turbulence in the form of change exhibit similar features and actions as those found in the evolutionary studies (Gilstrap, 2007; Lichtenstein, 2000; Stacey, 1992)

**Complex Adaptive Systems**

Researchers described the structure through which self-organizing action has been observed, both in the physical sciences and in organizational management studies, as a complex adaptive system (CAS) (Bak, 1996; Stacey, 1992). A CAS is composed of interdependent agents that can operate simultaneously by certain rules and localized knowledge that governs the CAS, while also being able to adapt and emerge based on feedback from the system (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Plowman & Duchon, 2008). The system is as a result, not predetermined, but emerges through interaction and overlapping connections guided by common goals or needs that arise naturally and respond creatively to solve problems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

An essential element of CAS, derived from complexity literature is the concept of annealing (Carley, 1997; Levy, 1992; Lewin, 1999). Annealing refers to multiple agents within a system as they respond to environmental problems within the system. Invariably as the agents develop solutions or even work around responses, "they affect[ted] the
behaviors of other interdependently related agents, who subsequently built on the original response to create higher-order responses" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 303). The responses that emerged because of annealing are marked by high creativity, rapid adaptation, and complex problem-solving (Cilliers, 1998; Levy, 1992; Marion, 1999). The environmental tension, "when spread across a network of interactive and interdependent agents, generates system-wide emergent learnings, capabilities, innovations, and adaptability" (Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, Marion, Seers, Orton, & Schreiber, 2006, p. 3). CAS therefore, when applied to organizational theory, has not observed the individual acts of leaders within a system, but rather the outcomes of collaboration amongst agents throughout the system.

**Complexity Leadership Theory**

If the observations of CAS are marked by the informal and nonlinear interactions that occur within a system, how can we develop a theory of leadership out of a system marked by an unstructured, non-hierarchical collaboration? Complexity theorists acknowledged this tension and although the behavior may resemble a bottom-up dynamic (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Marion, 1999), theorists also stress the informal characteristic of the action and the term *informal emergence* (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) has been applied to differentiate CAS and its existence outside of bureaucratic structure. However, CAS itself acknowledged the influence of constraints, both internal and external, which are part of the annealing process, including hierarchical structures (Marion, 1999; McKelvey, Marion, & Uhl-Bien, 2003).

Complexity leadership theory emerged out of this tension by seeking "to foster CAS dynamics while at the same time enabling control structures appropriate for
coordinating formal organizations and producing outcomes appropriate to the vision and mission of the system" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 304). The aim of complexity leadership theory was a complex interplay between CAS and hierarchical structure, allowing for top-down administrative structures while enabling informal emergence and encouraging the environment in which it occurs.

To balance the competing forms of informal emergence and formal structures, complexity leadership theory employed three broad types of leadership: administrative leadership, adaptive leadership, and enabling leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Administrative leadership is grounded in the traditional, hierarchical structure that leadership theory explored extensively and refers to the top-down managerial role of those who plan, allocate resources, and oversee the decision-making efforts for an organization. The distinction within complexity leadership theory is that administrative leadership must employ the functional leadership not only towards traditional leadership roles, but also with consideration towards the structures that will allow informal emergence to develop and flourish (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Adaptive leadership correlates most directly with CAS and as a result can occur in the top levels of an organization or within self-organized teams developing informally to respond to complex issues within an organization (Cilliers, 1998). Adaptive leadership results from the tensions that develop within a system and cannot be claimed as the efforts of a single individual but instead results from the interplay and interaction and the spaces between those agents (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The tension that arises between the formal hierarchy of administrative leadership and the informal emergence of adaptive leadership, referred to in the literature as entanglement (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007), is the
main area of operation for enabling leadership. Enabling leadership works to create the conditions for adaptive leadership to thrive within the bureaucratic structure of administrative leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). This role includes managing and operating within the organizing structure while also “helping disseminate innovative products of adaptive leadership upward and through the formal managerial system (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 308). Enabling leadership operates through fostering interaction, encouraging interdependency, and allowing tension within the system.

**Complexity Leadership Theory Within Education**

Complexity leadership theory has been applied in educational research to a limited degree, although the need for some explanation to fill a gap in leadership theory is recognized. Gilstrap (2007) remarked that “in educational research, we recognize that there are limits to deterministic models when describing human interaction and experience” (p. 51). Researchers struggled with the existing models just as those in complexity science or management did, and sought new frameworks for leadership theory as a result. Morrison (2010) affirmed that educational leaders “face continuous and ubiquitous change in education, in which closer links with, and responsiveness to, the external environments of schools are constantly being required” (p. 376). As a result of these changes, the call for new forms of leadership in educational settings emerged in the form of co-leadership (Moos, 2003) or transformative learning that emphasized a greater level of sharing among leaders (Karpiak, 2000). External environmental challenges also drove educational leaders to look for new leadership paradigms. “The impact of technology and the change it brings in educational settings drives professionals to make fast decisions with large amounts of information” (Gilstrap, 2013, p. 25). These changes
challenged the notion of a bureaucratic organization at institutions and led to further exploration in areas aligned with complexity leadership theory. Those researchers who explored the potential application of the theory most thoroughly stated that educational leaders need to maintain enough structure to prevent adverse effects, but enough freedom to allow for spontaneous collaboration and self-organization and acknowledge the ability of complexity leadership to meet these seemingly divergent goals (Gilstrap, 2007; Lichtenstein, 2000).

Complexity Leadership Theory as a Framework for Exploring TLC Leadership

Teaching and learning centers (TLCs) are positioned uniquely in institutions of higher learning. Their primary mission is support faculty in teaching and learning (Clark & Saulnier, 2010; Lieberman, 2005), and serve as an administrative unit which supports and reports to administrative leaders within higher education institutions. As a result, TLC leaders are charged with building rapport and creating trust with faculty while also answering to the strategic initiatives of the university administration. Straddling the faculty and staff divisions has led to TLCs becoming increasingly seen as “springboards to assist change across the campuses” (Lieberman, 2005, pp. 88-89). TLC leaders accomplish this through incorporating organizational learning, encouraging the flow of information and linking curriculum design and teaching to institutional mission (Lieberman, 2005).

TLC leaders must balance their various roles carefully ensuring compliance and adherence to strategic planning from the administrative side and often from external forces, while also supporting faculty in pursuits that may challenge institutional goals (Lieberman, 2005). The roles of TLC leaders aligns naturally with the theoretical
framework espoused within complexity leadership theory. Within the structure of the university, TLC leaders sit within a hierarchical structure with distinct reporting lines that disseminate administrative expectations and require the employment of administrative leadership (Lieberman, 2005; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). At the same time, TLCs are at the forefront of innovation and often serve as the learning laboratory on campuses (Lieberman, 2005), employing creative problem solving and collaborative interplay that aligns with adaptive leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The leadership required for both roles also aligns with enabling leadership, with the ability to apply innovative concepts within the traditional hierarchical structure of higher education institutions.

The purpose of my research was to explore the influence and leadership of TLC leaders at small private 4-year colleges, particularly in areas of online learning. Research to date on leadership teams in higher education largely focused on teams from the higher levels of the organizational structure (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Lester & Kezar, 2012; Lorena Hernández Yáñez, 2004). Ferren, Dolinsky, and McCambly (2014) also has observed that

As higher education institutions respond to numerous challenges and opportunities—from new technologies to changing student demographics—their efforts to adapt depend on faculty and staff collaborating across departments and divisions. (p. 30)

TLCs, with their unique position straddling the staff and faculty divisions of an institution, are a prime area for exploration of changes within a higher education setting. Also, while TLCs have a structure and position within administrative leadership, leaders work directly with faculty outside of hierarchical boundaries, and any suggestions for
implementation of change rely more heavily on adaptive leadership techniques than any positional authority (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Researchers also noted that with the introduction of educational technology, such as online learning initiatives, leaders have largely used such technologies as vehicles for reinforcing current identity rather than enabling change (Marshall, 2010). Barwick and Back (2007) also emphasized that while attention has been given to how new technologies are used to educate, "little attention is paid to the leadership opportunities these technologies create" (p. 28). The services provided by academic support departments such as TLCs are often background operations that while essential are often unobserved yet involve the cooperation of numerous agents (Jameson, 2013). Such technological change also has served as a tension-generator in contemporary organizations (Kowch, 2013) and has existed as a valuable catalyst for observing interaction within a system.

Summary

In examining the literature, there is evidence that within institutions, TLC leaders have extended themselves into areas of organizational development and initiatives (Sorcinelli, 2002). At small, private colleges, this expectation also extends to online learning initiatives by the nature of their decentralized structure applied towards online learning (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013). The role of TLCs has moved beyond that of solely faculty development and as a result has required a level of leadership that leverages both hierarchical reporting structures and informal influence relationships, a type of leadership that complexity leadership theory has both espoused and promoted (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). With this leadership theory in mind, the aim of my research is to explore the
perceptions and experiences of TLC leaders to understand the application of such theory when viewed through online learning initiatives at small, private colleges.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach used in this study. The chapter includes a restatement of the research questions and the purpose of the study. It also outlines the research method and design and provides a rationale for the chosen design, including support for the methodology and participant selection process. The chapter will also address the protection of participant rights, detail the procedures for data collection, and address credibility and dependability.

Research Problem

In determining the design of the research study, the research questions provide a critical guide for the design and directly influence all elements within that design (Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). The research questions serve to establish the context of the study and also determine the approaches that might be used. In exploring the influence and leadership of TLC leaders as it pertains to online learning initiatives at small colleges, I have used complexity leadership theory as the guiding framework for the study. Therefore, each question addressed one of the three leadership functions of the theory, which included administrative, adaptive, and enabling leadership (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). The following questions guided my research:

1. What perceived leadership roles do TLC leaders have in administrative directives related to online learning initiatives? (Administrative leadership)

2. What perceived roles do TLC leaders have in implementing online learning initiatives among faculty? (Adaptive leadership)
3. What tensions, if any, exist between the TLC roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff as they lead and support online learning initiatives? (Enabling leadership)

The research study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of TLC leaders in the area of online learning leadership within small higher education institutions. Given this focus on the experiences of those working within TLCs, a phenomenological method was selected (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is a qualitative approach which aims “to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p.13). The researcher’s role, then, is to derive meaning, whether general or universal, from the individual experiences of a phenomenon. Phenomenology aligned with this research study because it seeks to explore the lived experiences of participants and because the aim of the study is to understand the experiences of TLC leaders engaged in online learning leadership. In addition to aligning with the research topic, the phenomenological methodology also corresponded to the framework of complexity leadership theory. Complexity leadership theorists acknowledge qualitative studies are an avenue for further exploration and that the theory requires a “methodology that is capable of analyzing the interactions of multiple agents over a period of time” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 215).

**Research Design**

Phenomenology exists as both a philosophy and a specific research approach underneath the broad umbrella of qualitative research. Phenomenological studies are interested in the lived experiences of participants, so that in exploring such events and occurrences, researchers may arrive at the essence of a particular experience (Merriam,
A focus on participant perspectives allows researchers to explore individual realities and modify the research design as new insights are revealed during the research (Maxwell, 2005). This is in contrast to utilizing surveys or other quantitative instruments in which the research plan is not altered from the outset.

Phenomenological research has several forms; the guiding methodology for this research study is transcendental phenomenology as defined by Moustakas (1994). Transcendental phenomenology is defined by its aim to set aside prejudgments and biases and form a “picture of the dynamics that underlay the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes specific steps of epoché, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Epoché is the practice of setting aside researcher biases and preconceptions that already exist related to the phenomenon, so that the researcher may approach the phenomenon with a pure view (Moustakas, 1994). In using epoché, researchers seek to allow such observations to appear as though experienced for the first time, although the researcher may already have connections and associations with the experience firsthand (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental-phenomenological reduction follows epoché and is the process in which the researcher isolates and considers each experience individually, providing a complete description of its “essential constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors, and shapes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Finally, imaginative variation brings order and structure to the many essences of experience cultivated in the transcendental-phenomenological reduction process. This process allows the researcher to derive “a structural description of the essences of the experience is derived, presenting a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it” (Moustakas, 1994, p.
Because I previously worked as a TLC leader at a small, private institution, I have close connections to this topic. As such, transcendental phenomenology was particularly useful due to its acknowledgment and handling of researcher bias.

In applying a transcendental phenomenological methodology to the research problem, my aim was to explore the “meanings and essences of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). Within the context of TLCs, the methodology aimed to focus the research on understanding the experiences of TLC leaders in relation to their role as a mediator of institutional change. While other studies have used quantitative survey methods to discover more about the role of TLC leaders (Bishop & Keehn, 2015), there is a gap in giving voice to the experiences of TLC leaders, particularly in the area of online learning. Van Manen (1990) states that the main goal of phenomenological research is to explore the nature of a given experience. Because this study aims to understand the nature of TLC leaders’ perceptions towards their leadership role—not organizational structures or the perceptions of those who work with TLCs—a phenomenological approach is therefore the most suitable method to address my research questions.

Research Context

The aim of the research study was to explore the influence and leadership of TLC leaders as they administer online learning initiatives within an institution. In researching the organizational models of online learning at private colleges, Clinefelter and Magda (2013) found the dominant model at small institutions was decentralized with duties spread across departments rather than in a single online department. Within this context, TLCs often serve as both instructional designers and traditional faculty developers. In light of this model of governance and the role that TLC leaders can potentially have in
online learning leadership, the research study sought to explore the perceptions of TLC leaders within small independent colleges and universities in the Southeastern region. TLC leaders were targeted at institutions that are identified as small, non-profit, 4-year colleges and universities within the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. TLC leaders were also identified based on their unit’s organizational structure in which leaders have a traditional role in faculty development and oversee online learning within a single department.

**Participants**

The participants in this study are TLC leaders at small independent universities and colleges, located in the Southeastern United States. Small, independent universities and colleges were identified as the target locations based on the research of Clinefelter and Magda (2013). They found these types of colleges and universities are most often organized with oversight of online learning tied closely to faculty development. The geographic region was selected based on its affordances in providing a convenience sample (Hatch, 2002). Close institutional ties between the researcher and the primary independent college associations within the region lent themselves well for attracting participants. Participants at these institutions who are involved in online learning were purposefully selected due to their employment as directors within a TLC and their involvement within online learning at their institution (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2005). To find TLC leaders who were involved in both traditional TLC roles as well as online learning, the directory information of independent college and university organizations was utilized in order to ensure all universities were considered. The independent councils for Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina were used to form the
participant group. A list of colleges and universities was created and institutions were removed if they did not meet the classification of small 4-year colleges and universities within the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. This list totaled 53 institutions in which the classification criteria was met. Publicly available websites of these 53 institutions were accessed to determine if they had active online programs and courses offered and if TLC leaders were involved in their administration. Websites were initially evaluated for evidence of online programs and courses with 28 institutions not displaying evidence of any online learning initiatives. Publicly available institutional websites also served as the main source of purposefully determining participants with departmental websites and directory information serving as the basis for identifying TLC leaders who also have leadership in online learning. Institution websites were explored to determine whether the institution had a designated TLC with specified members. For those institutions with a TLC present, it was then determined if the TLC had a specific role related to online learning. This determination was made primarily through the examination of TLC mission statements, lists of services, and types of resources provided on their websites. For example, several institutions with an organized TLC relied on their information technology (IT) units for technology and online initiatives. The role of the TLC largely focused on a range of traditional topics such as writing across the curriculum, scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), and other faculty development initiatives. After reviewing the websites of the 25 remaining institutions, three institutions had online learning situated within their information technology (IT) unit and four had dedicated online learning units. Three units appeared to meet the criteria, however the TLC leader position was vacant. The remaining 15 institutions served as the purposeful
sample, meeting the Carnegie classifications, having distinct online programs and courses, and having oversight of these efforts situated within the TLC.

In order to recruit participants, an initial email (see Appendix A) was sent to potential participants. The initial email also encouraged individuals to identify others at their institution aside from the TLC director who would be identified as TLC leaders in online learning initiatives. An initial sample size of six to eight participants was sought based on the recommendations of Morse (1994) and Kuzel (1992), who suggest that six to eight participants for phenomenological studies would yield a homogenous sample (Guest et al., 2006). The initial email communication was sent to 21 TLC leaders, classified as directors and associate directors at the 15 institutions, anticipating that not all TLC leaders would respond or participate in the study. Of the 21 TLC leaders emailed, 12 individuals responded to either the initial email or a follow-up email. The remaining nine TLC leaders contacted did not respond to email communications. Out of the 12 responding individuals, five confirmed their willingness to participate in the research study. In one case, the identified TLC leader also recommended speaking to one of their senior instructional designers due to their involvement in online leadership within the unit. After confirming their role as a leader in online learning, I contacted the senior instructional designer and they agreed to participate in the research study. One of the seven individuals who declined to participate in the study suggested a TLC leader who was not contacted in the initial email. While the institution was included on the initial list of reviews, indications of their role in online programs on the website was determined by the researcher as not within the purposeful sample. After communicating with the individual regarding their role and confirming this individual’s role within online
learning initiatives and receiving their agreement, I also included them in the study participants.

A total of seven participants participated in this study. Six of these participants served as the primary TLC leader on the campus. An additional individual who was significantly involved in online learning initiatives was added from one institution at the recommendation of the identified TLC leader. Table 2 provides demographic information collected from all participants in the study.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Demographics &amp; Background</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misha</td>
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<td>Leslie</td>
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<td>Colleen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trisha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peggy</td>
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<td>Jesse</td>
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Because the points of data collection and analysis are intermingled in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990), additional participants from beyond the initial associations could be added as needed during the data collection.
phase if they were needed to ensure saturation. Based on the analysis of the data, it was determined that no additional participants were needed.

**Instruments**

The instruments used in this study reflected the transcendental phenomenological methodology with the data collection method being interviews (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect data with open-ended questions that could be readily adapted to allow for new knowledge derived from the *essence* of participant experiences to be incorporated into the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Initial questions (see Appendices B, C, and D) were developed with the aim of, as Moustakas (1994) describes, “approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (p. 97). Questions also aligned with complexity leadership theory with specific questions written to address the three functions of leadership in each interview protocol (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In addition, field notes were taken during the interviews noting both researcher observations and the direct responses to interview questions.

**Procedure**

This section provides an overview of the procedure for data collection and analysis and then provides details on both facets of the research study. The procedure for the research followed the guiding principles of transcendental phenomenology using a process of epoché during the data collection process, followed by reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (see Figure 3) using transcendental methodology and the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). The process, with analysis taking place during the data collection period, allowed for iterative reflection to take place in both the
interview questions and data collection procedures, but also in the analysis of the data itself as more voices were incorporated into the research study.

Figure 3. Flowchart of the data collection and analysis process.

While each step will be detailed below, the process allowed for the researcher to set aside their biases during the data collection period (epoché) and then analyze data as it emerged through the interviews. This was accomplished by evaluating transcripts shortly after conducting interviews and using an inductive process in coding the data (Merriam, 2009). Evaluation at this period allowed for the researcher to also approach the phenomenon shortly after identifying internal biases and also to follow-up with participants in subsequent interviews for greater understanding and clarification. This process of reduction produced 45 individual codes which were then analyzed and evaluated collectively using a process of imaginative variation, which identified elements unique to all participants. Lastly, a synthesis of these common experiences coded in the
data created nine distinct themes. While the themes were derived in an inductive manner, the nature of the questions allowed for the themes to center around addressing the research questions and ultimately the leadership functions of complexity leadership theory.

In this process, prior to data collection with the researcher engaged in the practice of epoché, the setting aside of one’s “prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). This process involved the researcher conducting individual journaling sessions prior to the data collection procedures. In these brief sessions prior to each interview, the researcher spent from ten to fifteen minutes writing down notes and acknowledging those areas where personal biases and assumptions exist and reflexively examining those preconceptions with the aim of entering into the interviews with a fresh look at the phenomenon being explored (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The journals were hand-written and reflected a stream of consciousness form of writing (see Figure 4). Occurring prior to each interview, the researcher typically wrote a page of notes for each interview session and developed a total of 19 pages of notes.
Figure 4. Notes from the researcher journal.

Trotman (2006) emphasizes that the process of epoché is a “spiral in practice and requires the practitioner to exercise precision in reflectivity, attention, recognition and clarity of description” (p. 249). The aim of the researcher was to make the reflective process a regular occurrence prior to data collection in order to approach the phenomenon with as little bias as possible and with all bias acknowledged prior to beginning participant interviews.

The data collection procedure included an introductory briefing of the research and how data collected would be utilized. Participants were emailed a consent form prior
to the initial interview to acknowledge their understanding and give consent to the data collection method through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E). The data collection included three iterative in-depth interview sessions, in which each participant used the approach developed by Seidman (2005) to explore 1) past experiences, 2) a narrative present, and 3) a reflection on the meaning of these experiences. With the method employed, the goal was to have participants reconstruct their experience of the phenomenon as part of the interview process, with each interview building on the previous (Seidman, 2005). Following a semi-structured interview design, initial questions were utilized for each of the three sessions (see Appendices B, C, and D), however additional questions developed during the course of the interviews through concurrent analysis of the data. The initial questions were structured around the three main research questions, which in turn reflected the complexity leadership theoretical framework that guides the study. Because the interview sessions followed the approach outlined by Seidman (2005), the research questions were interwoven in each interview rather than approaching each leadership function of complexity leadership theory in a singular interview.

The interviews lasted for approximately thirty to forty-five minutes and were conducted using Zoom web-conferencing software. The interview audio was recorded and in cases where participants used the video function of Zoom, video was also recorded. Prior to the start of the recording, participants were read the consent form and verbally agreed to continue with the interview, based on the conditions provided. Recording of the interview ensured that during the interviews, the researcher would be able to utilize field notes drawn from visual observations to supplement the primary data.
To ensure triangulation and validity of the research, in addition to the recordings, participants were asked follow-up questions during the interview as a form of member check, they were provided with transcripts of the interviews after completion and were given the opportunity to review the transcripts, clarify elements, and make additional adjustments (Cho & Trent, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The use of three interview sessions with each participant not only ensured that the data provided was rich, but they also allowed for emerging themes to be explored in subsequent interviews (Maxwell, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

**Analytical Procedures**

Analysis was conducted utilizing the modified Van Kaam method of analysis as described by Moustakas (1994). Within the modified Van Kaam method, data were analyzed in close proximity to the time that data was collected, with each description of the phenomenon being experienced listed and grouped together, a process that is termed horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). After listing every element from the transcripts that was relevant to the experience of the TLC leader, emergent codes were applied to the clustered data. This was accomplished by taking the transcripts from each interview and applying a broad set of codes to each individual description of the phenomenon. In addition to the application of codes, the process also allowed for the development of elements to explore in the follow-up interviews. Using an initial Google Sheet, the transcript was placed into a single column with inductive codes applied in the subsequent columns and any notes or follow-up questions placed afterwards (see Figure 5).
The researcher allowed for the codes to emerge inductively rather than having set codes in place; however, the researcher did seek to cluster participant responses within the construct of complexity leadership theory in addition to the emerging codes. The analysis allowed for recognition of the three functions of leadership within complexity leadership theory, with administrative, adaptive, and enabling leadership as the potential descriptive themes for structuring and examining the experiences of TLC leaders (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

After completing initial analysis of the participant interviews shortly after the actual interviews, the researcher also synthesized all codes, eliminating overlapping elements and drawing out the unique elements of the phenomenon into distinct themes (Moustakas, 1994). From the emergent codes, the researcher then utilized textual description to link the statements thematically and to provide a full description of the phenomenon for each individual (Moustakas, 1994). These descriptions were then examined from different perspectives (imaginative variation) to reach the essence of the experiences in a textual-structural description for each participant that was combined into a singular description of the experience for all participants (Moustakas, 1994). Once all items had been reviewed completely, the researcher evaluated the codes developed

*Figure 5.* Portion of coding sheet including transcript, inductive codes, and researcher developed questions.
through the data collection and analysis process during the initial evaluation of the data. In this process, common codes were combined, and a single set of codes, totaling forty-five in all, were derived. The data and codes were entered into the Coding Analysis Toolkit, an open-source qualitative data analysis program, developed by the University of Pittsburgh. Entering the individual descriptors and codes into this software, allowed the researcher to examine the interviews in light of the generated codes and again ascertain further alignment and evaluate codes for overlap. After the completion of this process, a final thirty-six codes emerged (see Appendix G), reduced from the original forty-five. Of these thirty-six codes, several were not consistent across participants, so were set aside as cursory to the phenomenon being explored due to their low presence throughout the interviews in accordance with the Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). Codes which were consistent throughout the majority of the participants’ interviews were grouped into themes and used for reporting of the findings, found in Chapter 4 of this research study.

**Relation to Research Constructs**

By conducting interviews and practicing horizontalization and imaginative variation, the research design emulated a typical transcendental phenomenology study (Moustakas, 1994). By using interviews, researchers can explore past events that cannot be replicated and can conduct explorations that allow respondents to define their world and experiences (Merriam, 2009). The interviews with individual leaders working in TLCs at small independent colleges and universities allowed the emerging role of TLC leadership to be explored from these disparate voices. Dooley and Lichtenstein (2008) remark that the interactions which form leadership are subtle and rich, requiring a level of exploration that factors in the complexity of human interactions. The use of interviews to
explore leadership roles allowed such subtleties to be explored, and by using semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to explore these interactions as they emerged in the interview sessions. While the codes were developed inductively, as the questions centered around each leadership function of complexity leadership theory, it provided a guiding construct for structuring and interpreting these results within the area of leadership. Researcher field notes served to provide additional insights observed in the interview sessions.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the proposed research questions and purpose of the study based on the framework and gaps in the literature identified in chapter two. The research study sought to explore the lived experiences of TLC leaders at small, private colleges and universities. These sites have been identified as areas of significant change in the area of online learning (Clinefelter & Magda, 2013), and as a result, they were suitable locations for exploring the influence of TLC leaders in a time of transformation.

In addition to providing a description of the participants and criteria for their selection, the chapter also outlined the research design, following semi-structured interviews based on the process outlined by Seidman (2005) for use in transcendental phenomenological research studies. Along with interviews, field notes were taken and served as an additional source of data when exploring codes as part of the data analysis. Data was analyzed using the modified Van Kaam method of analysis as described by Moustakas (1994). Transcripts of the interviews and field notes were reviewed, eliminating overlapping statements and focusing on unique elements of the phenomenon.
Statements were then linked by thematic connections to provide a fuller description of the phenomenon. The complexity leadership theoretical framework served as an initial guiding structure for the thematic elements.

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of TLC leaders and their perception of their leadership role in online learning initiatives. The results of this research, shared in the following chapter, will ideally contribute to a greater understanding of TLC leaders and their influence within their institutions and the education community at large.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this transcendental phenomenological research study on the lived experiences of TLC leaders at small, private higher education institutions as they undertake online learning initiatives. The findings from this study seek to answer the three research questions, which are framed within the context of complexity leadership theory:

1. What perceived leadership roles do TLC leaders have in administrative directives related to online learning initiatives? (Administrative leadership)

2. What perceived roles do TLC leaders have in implementing online learning initiatives among faculty? (Adaptive leadership)

3. What tensions, if any, exist between the TLC leader’s roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff as they lead and support online learning initiatives? (Enabling leadership)

The results represent a thematic analysis of interviews with seven TLC leaders who identified their role in online learning leadership at their institution. Each TLC leader participated in three interviews to discuss their experiences as a TLC leader involved in the online learning initiatives on their campus. The interview data were analyzed throughout the collection phase and field notes and researcher journals were used to support the development of themes from the participant interviews. In an attempt to truly reflect the lived experiences and voices of the participants, textual quotes directly from TLC leaders are utilized extensively to ensure that participant voices are complete and provide their original intent (Moustakas, 1994). Associations with complexity leadership theory, the theoretical framework guiding the study and research questions,
exist, but primarily in the leadership functions of adaptive and enabling leadership. TLC leaders largely see themselves as bridges between the faculty and administrative on their campuses and as a result there was limited alignment with the administrative leadership function. This chapter provides an analysis of the themes that emerged from the interviews and a synthesis and discussion of the findings.

This chapter begins with a description of the TLC leaders who participated in the research study. After giving a background of participants, the findings are described by examining each research question in turn, with sub-themes grouped as sections within each corresponding question area. In total, there were seven major themes with two of the major themes having three distinct sub-themes each. These themes were found consistently in participant interviews and are grouped based on their relation to the research questions, which, in turn reflects the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory: 1) administrative leadership, 2) adaptive leadership, and 3) enabling leadership. The themes are displayed (see Figure 6) to reference the nature of complexity leadership theory with two functions of leadership, administrative and adaptive, and a third function that enables balance between the other two functions.
Figure 6. Themes and sub-themes from the research study based on the three leadership functions of Complexity Leadership Theory.

The first question, covering the administrative function of complexity leadership theory is represented as the TLC leaders’ administrative role in online learning initiatives. The experiences of TLC leaders implementing online learning initiatives among faculty forms the second question and the next section of this chapter. In that section, the adaptive role of TLC leaders built on rapport and trust with faculty is detailed. Lastly, the enabling role of TLC leaders explores the tensions between the administrative and adaptive roles as TLC leaders and how participants seek to navigate their roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff.

Description of Participants

Participants in this research study were TLC leaders who had a significant role in the online learning initiatives at their institution. All participants were involved in the TLC at their institutions, with six of the seven participants serving as the primary lead of the TLC. In all but one institution, that role carried a title of director. One individual was recommended because of their leadership role in online learning initiatives at their institution and the close alignment of their role with the research study. In order for participants to share their lived experiences without concern for their own confidentiality
or that of their associated institutions, pseudonyms were used for participants and institutions were not mentioned by name (Kaiser, 2009).

Alex

Alex recently joined their role as the director of their institution’s TLC, previously serving in a different unit on the campus. Alex also served previously in a faculty role at their current institution. The interviews with Alex took place during their first academic term in their role.

Colleen

Colleen had a background as a faculty member and served as the director of their institution’s TLC. Their position was a grant-funded position that was ending its funding cycle during the research interviews. Colleen had been at the institution for the length of the grant and prior to their involvement, the institution did not have a TLC unit.

Jesse

Jesse reported to the director of a TLC who also participated in the research study, Peggy. In their role as an instructional designer, Jesse was involved in the institution’s online learning initiatives and regularly working with faculty in this area. Their work background was in information technology and prior to their instructional design position, they had worked in the institution’s information technology office.

Leslie

Leslie served as both the director of the institutional TLC while also retaining faculty status and a regular teaching load. During the interviews, Leslie also had recently stepped into a role as head of the information technology unit, while retaining the job
roles of the TLC director. The TLC at their institution was a faculty appointment that was guided by a faculty development committee.

**Misha**

Misha was a newly appointed leader in online learning and technology initiatives in their office, which did not exist prior to their appointment and was still an office of one. They had worked in corporate information technology positions prior to starting the position as a TLC leader at their institution. They were crafting policy and processes that did not exist as a result of the newly created position.

**Peggy**

Peggy served as their institution’s director of the TLC unit. Prior to their current position, they were in a K-12 position, working in a school district office. In addition to providing their insights in the research study, Peggy also supervised another participant, Jesse.

**Trisha**

Trisha served as the director of their institution’s TLC and had recently started this position, moving from a different institution. They had served in TLC units at three distinct institutions. Prior to their administrative work in a TLC, they had served in a faculty role and continued to be actively involved in the classroom.

**Participant Composition**

The majority of participants served at the director level of their unit with only one TLC leader who was not at the director level. In the case of the one individual, Jesse, their director suggested their inclusion because of the role they played in online learning initiatives at their institution. The participants also represent several career pathways,
with some participants coming from faculty positions, while others began in their institution’s information technology unit or an outside organization. The next sections explore the voices of those TLC leaders participating in the study in the areas of their administrative, adaptive, and enabling roles.

**Administrative Role in Online Learning Initiatives**

Participants in the research study identified their work as being deeply involved in the initiatives related to online learning and instructional technology. A clear administrative role in online learning initiatives was a criterion for participants and yet participants, when asked about the catalyst for online learning initiatives, gave mixed answers on who owns those initiatives administratively. All participants identified administrative leadership of online learning initiatives as coming from outside their unit. In some cases, administrative leadership came directly from the president (42%), from the provost or an academic council (28%), or was driven by a mix of these elements and including other units such as marketing (28%). Despite, not identifying themselves as the sole driver of online learning initiatives, participants did express ownership over the initiatives, often serving on committees or being directly involved with the growth of online learning in their institutions. Rather than viewing their role as directly administrative, participants saw themselves as mediators of administrative expectations, assisting faculty to meet administrative expectations. Participants also spoke frequently of other mitigating factors which influence their administrative role: supervisor support, policies surrounding online learning, and accrediting body expectations.
**Mediator of Administrative Initiatives**

Participants acknowledged they played an administrative role in online learning initiatives at their campuses, but to a larger degree they see themselves as mediator of directives from other administration units. Leslie, in speaking to the methods of communication that may help faculty be aware of methods for improving teaching, stated “I'm sort of behind the scenes facilitating [initiatives] or promoting an administrative agenda that I agree with.” Other participants felt their role served to deliver administrative initiatives in ways that faculty could process or they were equipping faculty with tools needed to meet initiative aims. Peggy, in speaking to a new online learning initiative mandated across the institution, shared:

I feel like I'm kind of like the soft mattress that's on top of the box spring. I know it's mandated. I know what's required, but the way I deliver it has to allow the faculty to feel as if they have buy-in and they're contributing to the decision making.

Faculty buy-in was an oft-mentioned phrase amongst participants, and Trisha noted the phrase “buy-in” came up regularly as a significant priority in planning initiatives and workshops for faculty and as a priority for to communicate with faculty. In reflecting on this approach, Trisha stated:

I think I try to strike a middle ground generally, and certainly I'll try to understand each perspective. They commonly are contrasting perspectives. I'll absolutely try and put myself in the shoes of each kind of party, try to advocate for an approach that will satisfy at least some of the needs of each party. Often, support and move forward the priorities and interests from an administrative perspective, but in language or in a manner that I feel will go over better with faculty. I think, really,
that's one of the key functions of a faculty developer is to figure out how to advance those institutional priorities in a way that you might be successful with your faculty customers.

Other participants saw their role in mediation of administrative initiatives as helping ensure smooth communication on both sides. Peggy encountered a situation in which an administrator asked them to add the administrator into an online course to make a change as the faculty member was unavailable. In making the change, Peggy knew that this would have negative implications for the faculty member. Peggy stepped in to help both sides understand the implications of the action, stating, “I certainly understood why the decision was made and I also understood why the faculty member was upset.” Although it was not directly associated with her role, Peggy felt that it was within the scope of her role.

I think that I almost viewed myself as a voice to communicate what [faculty] were feeling in regards to online initiatives and just kind of the heartbeat of where do we stand with online stuff or what was going on or how do they feel about it or what's getting done? I definitely felt like I was better able to carry that message up to administration.

In two instances shared by separate participants, there was also the need to reach out to administrative leaders on campus to discuss faculty perceptions of certain initiatives and to help clarify the faculty perspective. In both cases, the participants felt faculty did not have a correct perception of the initiative but felt the need to share that perspective with trusted administrative contacts so that the messaging surrounding the initiatives could be more clearly communicated.
Academic Support Structures

The TLC leaders in this study did not strongly identify with an administrative role in their approaches to online learning initiatives, choosing instead to take on a role of mediator for such initiatives. In addition, participants were aware of a number of academic support structures which helped facilitate the administration of online learning initiatives. Participants spoke about the level of support from upper administration, the policies surrounding online learning, and the impact of accreditation on online learning initiatives.

Support from administration. All participants spoke of the impact of administrative support on their unit and their own effectiveness as leaders, with many having positive experiences with the level of support offered. The direct supervisor for six out of the seven participants (85.7%) was the institution’s provost. The only participant who did not report directly to the provost at their institution had previously reported to the provost in an interim capacity and was now reporting to a newly appointed director.

Misha, who had recently started her role at the institution, shared about the support from the provost, stating “I feel like my boss has also been a very good guide. I have an instructional design committee forming this fall because he knows his faculty way more than I do.” The provost recommended employing standards for online courses as “best practices” and letting the instructional design committee guide the release of the best practices in order to ensure faculty reception and generally guided Misha in selecting members of the committee. Colleen, who served in a position that was grant-funded, also spoke of the support of her immediate supervisor, both in getting the position funded, and in pointing faculty towards the services of the office. Alex, while acknowledging that
there was some administrative tension, emphasized that this was not directly from the provost and stated:

Our provost office, I mean they truly support the faculty members. I adjunct for some other institutions and I'm so amazed when people talk about some of the problems that they have, but you know, they fully support what we're doing. And when budget cuts happened this last year, they didn't take anything out of our budget because this is something that's needed, for our faculty and so we really want to push that and hopefully build attendance with some of the events we have to also diversify what we have been doing.

Participants shared that supervisor support was a key component of their success. Many participants spoke highly of their supervisors and if tensions were mentioned, they were often directed at other elements impacting online learning, primarily presidential initiatives or in one instance with marketing decisions impacting academic initiatives.

**Online learning processes.** Clinefelter and Magda (2013) in their survey of private institutions of higher education, identified that small, private institutions were primarily in the early stage of online learning adoption. Not surprisingly, participants in the study noted that there were very processes or policies associated with online learning at their institution. Leslie, in describing the experience at her institution, stated:

We don't have like a process or regulations - that whole process isn't really regulated. I guess that's the best way to say. So, I would be more than happy to sit down with them and talk about things or go through and I've had, I think it was two or three different groups that we, we have people who were developing online courses or were revamping online courses. But, they were volunteers – like they were people who
wanted to. There's no expectation that someone would have to come and meet with me to develop a course at this point, but I would be the person if they wanted to meet with somebody.

Alex, while working at an institution expanding their online offerings, also acknowledged this gap, but also shared that the effort was one they took ownership over:

Some of the challenges in that is that there's not been anything mandated by the administration of what quality online courses look like. And so being able to kind of develop those frameworks and help support, while looking at the Quality Matters standards has been really helpful. So that's one of the things that I want to be able to help.

Referencing the standards that Misha was attempting to implement related to online courses, they stated:

I want to create what I would call standards, but heaven forbid, I can't call them standards. We're going to call them best practices. But this group is faculty, so it's going to be coming from their peers, all their peers will have agreed upon it and then kind of be implemented. And then, I'll do a lot of training on it, probably next fall actually because it'll take a full year to get this.

Other elements of online programming were not formalized. For example, Colleen mentioned that most of the institutional efforts in online courses thus far had been by faculty who volunteered to teach courses in online without a direct administrative emphasis on growing online initiatives. In the responses from study participants, there was an acknowledgment of the impact of policies and processes on online learning initiatives, whether they were present, limited, or non-existent. In those responses where
TLC leaders were attempting to implement standards, like Alex and Misha, there was a strong sense of ownership by TLC leaders over that administrative role.

**Accreditation.** One theme which emerged related to the administrative role of TLC leaders was the impact of accreditation and its effectiveness in promoting organizational change. Leslie noted the effect accreditation can have on the implementation of an online initiative, stating:

> Whenever anything's related to accreditation it gets done. Right? No matter how much it costs, it's going to get done because it's related to accreditation. You know, it's sort of like, that's how stuff gets done in a world of limited resources.

Initiatives related to improving the design of course elements, when tied to accreditation, could also encourage faculty leaders to promote projects of the TLC leader. Alex described one such initiative, sharing about a meeting with a specific dean:

> We had a really good talk about measurable learning objectives for courses. And [the dean] was like, if you did a session on designing an effective syllabus, like just that basic level, then I would guarantee admission because I would require all of my faculty members to come there because we're going through accreditation and I can't get them to do certain things.

Misha, also acknowledged leveraging an upcoming accreditation visit for accomplishing certain initiatives by tying those initiatives to their upcoming visit by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) stating “we're very much riding on kind of SACS platform. So right now it's pretty much tack anything to SACS and you can get people to say okay to you.” This approach has led to the establishment of online course best practices being identified as a priority at the institution.
These academic support structures described by the research participants reflect two key roles: mediators of online learning initiatives on their campuses, and essential players in accomplishing those initiatives, particularly in the eyes of their organization’s leadership. The TLC leaders in this study are operating as leaders who craft policies and processes associated with online learning and also leverage opportunities like accreditation to advance online learning initiatives on their campuses. These efforts show an administrative engagement with online learning initiatives, despite not seeing their role as the primary administrative driver for online learning on their campuses.

**Adaptive Role in Online Learning Initiatives**

In addition to exploring the administrative role of TLC leaders in online learning initiatives, the purpose of this research study was to investigate the perceived role of TLC leaders amongst faculty. In conducting a review of the literature surrounding TLCs, there was an emphasis on the impact of rapport building and informal approaches to faculty development (Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 2002). In applying this concept within complexity leadership theory there was close alignment with the definition of adaptive leadership, which relies on creative, informal, and non-hierarchical approaches to affecting change (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Participants, in exploring their roles with faculty, identified with several characteristics that aligned with adaptive leadership. Their description of faculty interactions, their perceived leadership style, and their aim to empower others all featured elements of an adaptive leadership approach.

**Faculty Interactions**

All participants spoke throughout the interviews with great detail about faculty interactions during the course of the interview sessions. Perceptions about their role with
faculty, the barriers encountered, and effective faculty engagement were areas of exploration in each session. In investigating how TLC leaders interacted with faculty and the types of interactions, participants shared themes of the informal approach employed, challenges, and their general approach towards faculty interactions.

**Informal approaches.** TLC leaders did not identify any formal processes or specific framework as it related to faculty seeking assistance from their unit. Instead, participants identified informal communication methods as the primary way that faculty engaged with their office. Leslie described faculty either emailing or stopping by their office door to ask questions, stating:

They would just come by a couple of, not tons of them, but there were there like a few regulars who would just come by or send me an email and say, “hey, you have a minute to talk about this?” And just come by and we would just have these conversations about whatever is going on. And just talk through it.

Jesse also spoke to the informal nature of faculty interactions, sharing:

It was always very informal. It was either going out to lunch or them just kind of stopping by my office for a few minutes and you know, standing around the standing desk and going through some stuff. So, it was never - and it was always just a one on one thing. Like, I never had any meetings with the faculty member and division chair or anybody else. It was just, just a one on one informal thing.

Informal approaches also served as a means to engage faculty with more structured initiatives in a manner that would be well-received. Trisha gave an example of a particular initiative related to hybrid courses. The institution discovered that hybrid course instructors received little support in the design of the online component, but much
too late to make a swift change. An informal approach allowed Trisha and their unit to begin engaging with faculty about design, but without asking faculty to reconsider their entire courses that semester. Reflecting on the experience, Trisha shared:

Realistically it's too late for us to have any significant impact on the structure, what happens with the design of those courses. Really, the best thing we could do would be to engage the faculty in a friendly way, hopefully within the first month so that then they would engage with us and maybe have an ongoing dialogue with them before they start a next class in that format. We would hopefully have a chance to guide them to maybe something that's an improved version of what they were already doing.

Even when reaching out to faculty there was a general informal nature to the methods used by the TLC leaders. Alex, in trying to work with faculty who would not normally come to the TLC, shared about one initiative to reach those faculty members:

I think one of [the initiatives] will be trying to get like a meeting of some sort with them. I think instead of just the community email that goes out, if I called them or stop by their office or something and personally invite them, I think they can tell me yes or no to my face.

These approaches used by TLC leaders demonstrated a leadership style aligned with adaptive leadership overall and reflected the previous literature surrounding the nature of the work of TLC leaders.

**Challenges.** TLC leaders acknowledged that there were a number of challenges associated with their work and their engagement with faculty. A challenge identified by participants was the mixed participation of faculty, with all institutions not having
expectations for faculty to work with the TLC for online learning initiatives or any other TLC programming. In asking about faculty perceptions of the office, Jesse shared:

We never really saw anybody come to us with a negative attitude because it was either they came to us knowing that we could give them help and seeking our help or they just avoided us altogether. Like anybody who had negative feelings about [our office], just we never saw them or dealt with them at all. And I think that was because there, there's really, there was no accountability as far as like making people have to communicate or work with [our office], you know, it was like they're there if you want to use them as a resource. If you're not interested, then just continue along your merry way.

Alex, likewise, spoke about the faculty coming to their office as those who truly wanted to be there or who did not seek support because they were not teaching online:

Most of the faculty that we work with that we see are the ones who want to be here. A lot of those who don't show up, don't ask for help, they're not really teaching online anyway. They think that it can only be taught face to face. So, for me, working with the registrar's office to find out who all will be teaching online. I've got that data last week for this semester. So, I know as we look into the [next] semester and those schedules start coming out. So, looking for and reaching out to the different departments of how I can provide training or support.

Trisha, who was beginning her role as a TLC leader at a new institution and reflecting on their past experience, also reflected on approaches to encourage faculty to consider online learning:
I need to start mentally preparing myself to do that. At least some faculty will not need to be sold as much because they will find it convenient; they’ll see how it supports students, they’ll see it as making even greater use of their discipline. Health professions, nursing, many other examples. Some other faculty would definitely need to be sold on it and some faculty could just not be reached, no matter how clever we are. Some of them will just not be willing to try, most likely would not be willing to come to a one- or two-hour session. "Hey, this is what it's like, this is what an effective course might look like, and here's a sample of what it feels like to be a student, and what you can experience as a student in this modality." Some of them definitely wouldn't even come to something like that, even if I offered lunch, and I'm saying all this now, I have met almost none of the faculty, so I'm drawing on general experience and the few that I have, and what I've heard here of some, even if we offered lunch they would not come to that.

Within the responses of the TLC leaders, there was a sense that the nature of working with faculty, particularly surrounding concepts of academic freedom, meant adapting approaches that might differ from other industries or environments. Participants acknowledged this challenge and even voiced frustration with the challenges, but also recognized their role in navigating the environment that faculty operate within.

Leslie, who came from a faculty role, shared the following about initiatives involving administrative goals: “it’s always sort of mind boggling to me when faculty are just resistant.” Likewise, Misha, who was making a transition from a corporate environment back into academia stated:
There's some things that you just want to be, like, your boss told you to do it, not this whole, you know, academic freedom and this kind of stuff. And processes and things that would just be easier to change in more of a corporate setting.

Trisha, in describing the growing emphasis on online learning at her institution and the degree to which marketing was driving conversations and encouraging growth of online programs, shared both her own perspective and that of a faculty member:

My answer to this is very different now than it would have been if we were speaking 3, 5, or 10 years ago. I can give this answer mostly because I'm not serving as a full-time faculty member now. I get it. Especially with a small institution. With a small institution that perhaps doesn't have the national reputation, maybe doesn't have a huge in-state population, is more costly in terms of tuition than competitors. You have to do something like this, especially given all the changes in the industry as a whole. [...] Now if I were a faculty member, if I pause to think back to my mindset and the mindset of my faculty colleagues and what a typical conversation would have been like, it would have been scoffing. We all would have been rolling our eyes like, are you kidding me? That's not what we came here to do.

Leslie also acknowledged faculty were resistant to administrative directives, and offered an insight on the use of their institution’s learning management system, Blackboard, stating:

So as anybody in academe knows, you're not going to force faculty to do anything. And if you try, you're going to fail miserably or you're going to have a lot of pushback. So, I mean there is an administrative sort of pushed to strongly
encourage, let's say, faculty to at least get their grades on Blackboard for example. But I don't think anybody is being forced, but we're strongly encouraging it from the perspective of it's very important to student success. And that's not necessarily coming from me that's coming from other areas as well. But you would obviously, I obviously would be the one who would sit down with faculty members and help them work their gradebook out and make sure it's working right. I mean that would be, that would be the result that would affect me if I would have people reaching out to me if they don't know how to work their gradebooks and stuff like that. And maybe every school is different but typically here, if you're trying to force something on faculty, it's not going to work. They'll just, it's not gonna work. But it's strongly encouraged and again, work with the willing and try to persuade.

In spite of challenges, participants remained adept in navigating the environment to accomplish their goals and work in collaboration with faculty to affect change. Most participants expressed ideas for how to continually engage faculty in unique ways regardless of these challenges and perceived addressing faculty needs in online learning as within the scope of their role.

**Engagement approaches.** Despite the mixed engagement and common faculty challenges shared amongst participants, this did not prevent TLC leaders from seeking ways of engaging faculty which aligned with the forms espoused in adaptive leadership. As mentioned previously, participants like Alex used available resources like data about online courses to target faculty for support. Jesse shared a strategy for engaging with faculty who may be approaching online learning at the insistence of their chair or dean.
Obviously, those who are eager to learn were easy, easy to work with. Those who we're not so eager to work with us. I tried to approach it in the way of just trying to show them the benefit of the things. Like how can this help you? How could it make your life easier? Because in large part I think that their mindset was, well, I already know what I'm doing, what I do works, the way I do it works, and so they were just hesitant to change. And so I always tried to approach it, I'm trying to give them examples of how this could really help and asking them questions about, you know, is there anything that you would like to do better or what are some of your challenges? And then kind of approaching it that way.

Peggy also adopted the approach of showing the benefits of working with the TLC and how it would assist in the workload and effort of faculty:

That's what we're going to do in [our] office and all we can do is: do it, showcase it and encourage anyone else who wants to do it to do it as well. So I think you have to start first and demonstrate what you're trying to accomplish and then once you're able to do that, I think that people can make an informed decision about whether or not this is something that they want to do or not. But it does save time and it saves energy.

Alex also in considering their approach and what they intended to do in their position took similar approaches with both leadership and faculty in the various colleges at their institution:

In a letter to the deans, I also reached out and said, you know, I want to take you to lunch or coffee and learn about your needs as well and how we can support your college specifically. And even like, once I talk to deans and stuff – Our
campus isn't that big, I'm going to be walking around and, you know, chatting up with people or you know, like, “hey, I haven't seen you in [our office]. I'd love to have you there” and even invite some people who've never even stepped foot in here to be a part and to lead some things as well.

The method of interacting with faculty was usually adaptive to the needs of the faculty member as well, even if it was not the most efficient in terms of time or scope. For example, Leslie stated:

I really think the one on one, which is of course that's labor intensive, but if you can meet with people one on one, because then they are not embarrassed in front of other people. They get a chance to ask all their questions.

Alex also took an approach that was personal, informal, and consultative in nature, encouraging faculty to meet one-on-one, sharing this approach as one of their initiatives:

Also setting up some one on one consultation meetings with some faculty members. So, I think I have like six or seven of those scheduled for this week, which is really exciting because then there's a takeaway for them. That’s what's really exciting is that they get to come in and meet with me and we can talk about what are their goals and how can I help support you with that. So that's really exciting.

Personal and adaptive approaches were acknowledged by several participants and responsiveness was also a key element of these approaches. Leslie in sharing what about what makes for effective faculty approaches stated:

So that, I think, is the one on one and being able to respond to faculty when they need it. There's this thing in teaching called just-in-time teaching, which is, you
know, giving students what they need when they need it. And it's really true with faculty, when they need it is when you really need to respond. That can be challenging because like our students, they often wait until the last minute. You know, like the week before classes is suddenly when everyone needs Blackboard help, when they've had kind of all summer where they could have been asking for help but haven't. Things like that. If I can do it, I'll help them. Because you have to - because you've got to help the willing. You've got to work with the people who are willing to learn, when they're willing to learn it and if you are mean about it or snarky about it, then they're not going to be willing to work again, work with you again. And I've read articles or blog posts or whatever about how to do technology training and pretty much all of them say the same thing: Start with the willing. Start with the core of the willing and interested and work from there.

In describing these approaches, TLC leaders also acknowledged the type of approaches that they did not want to be identified with and which they believed would not resonate with faculty. Jesse described their approach with new initiatives in discussions with faculty:

I would feel perfectly comfortable if I thought something could be successful to say, “Hey, I really think you should explore this. I think this could benefit your department.” But I would never feel comfortable saying like, you, this is what you need to do. You need to do this.

These approaches with faculty reflect both an awareness of effective means for reaching their target audience while also grappling with their greater institutional role as leaders of institutional change (Schroeder, 2011). The methods in which TLC leaders employed
also reflected their leadership paradigms and the next section reflects perceptions of how to lead as reported by participants.

**Leadership with Faculty**

TLC leaders, in acknowledging the role they have in implementing online learning initiatives amongst faculty, also referenced their own leadership models that complimented the interactions they employed. These approaches aligned with the consensus amongst participants that their role was much more aligned with faculty and as a mediator of administrative initiatives, rather than as an administrative driver of initiatives. TLC leaders as a result used language that reflected the collegial and informal leadership approaches they employed.

In identifying the type of leadership they employed, participants both identified the approach and some of the methods that resulted as part of their leadership paradigms. Peggy, tied her own leadership style to what actions they took:

I'm not a dictator. I'm more of a participatory leader. So, I think for me it's all hands on deck. I'm working as hard as everybody else is. So, if someone has difficulty, I have to be accessible always to work with them to assist them. And if they have that, they know that they have someone that they can go to or they have a team that they can go to that is willing to help and is working as hard as they are. I think that they are a lot more receptive than if it's just handed down to them and they're given an expectation to accomplish something.

Colleen described both her approach primarily as facilitation of ideas and emphasized the smaller academic setting, sharing that it was the smallest actions that carried significant weight on impact. When asked about the forms of leadership employed, they shared:
Mostly I would say collegial. You know getting friendly - you know just talking to [faculty]. Like I said, going to events and just talking to them. This is such a small campus and everyone know everybody - there's only 70-80 full-time faculty and maybe a bit less than that of adjuncts, so if you go to - if their honor students were giving a presentation or if they had invited an outside speaker or they were giving a presentation before the [TLC] was established, I would go. You know either during the day or if it was seven o'clock at night, I would just stay after and attend. And so, I noticed people, they smiled, you realized that they appreciated the fact that you took the time out - so that's how you build relationships with people.

Relationship and rapport building were common themes amongst participants. Alex, who was starting a new role in a TLC, but at the same campus as their previous position shared:

You know, one of the things about being at a smaller institution, I personally know every single dean at this university. Relationship building is one of my biggest competencies. And I think that helped me, in this leadership role, and so being able to, you know, if I reach out to deans or department chairs of, “hey, I want to meet with you, I want to find out what your needs are.” I think they're going to be more likely to respond and be willing to meet with me in order to - because I think they'll know that I'm here and I want to support them as much as possible. And so, what can I - so, I'm hoping — I'm crossing my fingers and get some meetings on my calendar the next few weeks. Yeah, I think I'm definitely, of course the relationship building, communication and your communication
style. Communicativeness, active listening is huge. Not just listening to be listening, but really listening to them, to let them know that I understand where they're coming from. I'm sitting trying to think - organizing and planning and problem solving and decision making with kind of, our team has had to do that. I have a lot of ideas and they know that about me, that I'm very passionate about it.

Effective communication was also shared as a key component by other participants. Misha had been intentional in her new role to be connecting with individual faculty regularly and reflecting on that communication stated:

I honestly think that the biggest tool I have in my toolbox is communication. A constant stream of communication. Because one meeting was a little tense, but I also know that almost every person in that room and I have had a great communication in the past six months. It has been simple things like “hey thought of you when I heard blah blah blah” or “here’s a tool that may be cool in your area”. So hopefully they always kind of see that I am always thinking about them. I'm always thinking about what can help them and that helps whenever we have to have a little bit of a stronger interaction.

The manner of communication was also an insight shared by some participants with the informal communication channels that Misha alluded to above being an area of emphasis. Peggy commented about their own style of communication sharing that the approach was gentle in nature:

I have to first listen to their perception and then I have to gently kind of gravitate it towards what the reality is. And it's all very gentle. Because you don't want to get into an argument with one of your colleagues about something like that, but
you do want to know where people stand and you want people to be comfortable talking to you - because that informal network of communication is usually, you know, much more - gives you more knowledge than the formal network of communication. So you always want to keep those doors open.

In addition to relationship building and communication as approaches in the leadership of TLC leaders, a general theme of unassertive, available, and open approaches was common among participants. Jesse, in describing their role with faculty, commented:

Just to be a help resource to answer any questions that they might have about challenges or, you know, creative solutions for teaching online, for developing online courses. I think just kind of helping them to find those answers and knowing a little bit better maybe where to look or, you know, kind of being more familiar with that modality or some of the different tools available.

Colleen, in reflecting back to when the TLC initially began operating on the campus, also stated:

I would just go out and introduce myself and any kind of event on campus, I would attend, just so they could see me and get to know me. So, all this was going on even before we officially opened the [TLC]. And so that helped. When somebody wanted technology training, I'd go to their classroom and work with them in the class. And we would just do a lot of one-to-one training.

The process of developing opportunities with faculty was also described by Trisha as organic and developed over time “as people drop by, have questions, and learn little by little.” Other participant approaches with an emphasis on one-on-one and informal interactions also addressed this form of engagement with faculty.
TLC leaders were able to articulate the tools and personal perspectives they employed on reaching faculty. One area warranting focus was the leaders’ view of facilitation and offering opportunities for faculty to take ownership of initiatives TLC leaders were promoting. The responses from participants related to allowing faculty to be empowered and lead initiatives was significant enough to explore in its own section.

**Empowering Faculty**

One element that was consistent in responses from the TLC leaders participating in this study was an emphasis on empowering the faculty they were working with. This included voicing methods to empower faculty on specific online learning initiatives as well as a general sense of this aim as essential to the role of TLC leaders. This approach also served as an additional means by which TLC leaders mediated administrative directives, but also served to promote faculty agendas and aligned with the leadership paradigms identified by TLC leaders associated with adaptive leadership.

Equipping faculty and giving them opportunities to lead was closely associated for several of the participants with their own leadership paradigms and the desire of the ways that they expressed their role with faculty. Alex shared:

I'm about setting up others for success as much as possible and so, you know, if [faculty] have done something really successful in their classroom, being able to share that and then even if they don't want to maybe come in and lead a session, if I could think of some questions and have our videographer record them that then they could be highlighted maybe in our monthly newsletter or on our website or our Youtube account when we get all of that setup.
Peggy also shared that they did not want others to feel unempowered and strived to ensure the TLC provided tools for others to “be empowered to do the things that they need to do.” Colleen also saw their role as a TLC leader primarily as a facilitator and coordinator, highlighting what faculty already were engaged in when it came to online, technology, or general teaching initiatives:

And also people once they’ve started they would say I want to talk about this and so a lot of people volunteered to give presentations and so I would on our website we would have a calendar where we would put the dates, the date, the topic, the professor and what the presentation was about and also we would send out an email to everybody campus wide. You know, Professor X is giving a presentation on - you know - and the date and the times. So, they would come - so people were volunteering because part of it was you know with a campus like this it gave faculty a chance to see what their fellow faculty members were doing. And just to get to know them better and also if they are doing teaching tips - sometimes the things that you are doing in your math class may help me in my English or history classes, techniques for working with students and so on.

Alex also utilized this approach, because faculty had unique expertise and experiences that could benefit others as well:

Depending on the topic, I'll reach out to faculty members and ask them if they would lead that session just because of their skill set and their experiences and what they could bring as well.
In addition to being closely tied to the dispositions of the participants, empowering faculty to be engaged with initiatives was also seen as an effective avenue for instituting change. Leslie shared the impact of this effort on certain initiatives:

So, I think that's another way is to try to get people to hear from their peers about stuff they're actually doing in the classroom. That's much more effective than sort of a top down, you know, here's best practices, blah blah blah. Let’s let people talk about what they're really doing and how they're really using it. […] When we had our faculty week this year, we had people actually demonstrating like what they were already doing. So, I think that's really an important avenue too. It's like to keep getting those sort of cheerleader people out in the front. Find out what are you doing, how are you doing it, let's share this.

Effectiveness in hearing from peer faculty, rather than administrators or even trusted TLC leaders was also mentioned by Peggy in describing approaches to faculty development:

One of the ways that I do that is I have faculty lead the training. So, I go out and I find faculty members who are rock stars with different aspects of technology. So, when we have faculty development days, their peers are leading sessions, not me or a paid consultant that's coming in. They embrace it a whole lot more that way.

There was also a connection to the literature related to technology initiatives, with Leslie addressing why they felt empowering faculty was important:

I think another thing, and this is in literature too, if you read like how to launch technology or carry out technology training, it always talks about like working with your core, find who your core sort of fired up passionate people are or the interested, the willing, and try to work with those people first and then like help it
spread. So, I think trying to get faculty to show what they know and demonstrate that to their peers is good.

At one particular institution, Peggy and Jesse were attempting to find ways to formalize and drive deeper connections between the TLC and faculty when it came to propelling online initiatives and to ensure that those initiatives were faculty-driven, rather than coming from the administration. Peggy shared:

I would like to see master teachers or master professors in every area who are just an extension of the [TLC]. It’s like having your own [TLC] person right there. I'd like for us to have that kind of leadership training. We don't really do a lot in that area, like have a leadership training academy or anything like that. And I'd like to see a leadership academy in place where we take individuals who want, who are very good at what they do. Exceptional at what they do. And just show them the other side.

Jesse, who was also supportive of providing pathways for greater connections with the faculty and the TLC commented:

I didn't feel like it was good for us to say, “Hey, you need, I think you need to start this program and that”. And that was actually part of what the conversations that [Peggy] and I had about the model of working with the faculty fellows, is that they're going to have a better idea of what's going on in their school, in what areas to pursue with online stuff and what, what might have a better chance of being successful as opposed to us in the [TLC] or in my opinion of the administration saying, no, we need to start this program without really having all the background knowledge of, you know, whether it can work or what's involved in it.
As a result of these conversations faculty empowerment was seen as not only an aim of
the TLC, but also as closely tied to the growth and development of new faculty-driven—not administratively imposed—online programs.

TLC leaders participating in the study viewed engaging with faculty as an essential element of their role and also utilized approaches that aligned closely with adaptive leadership. Their methods were informal, dynamically navigated the challenges of the academic environment, and showed practices of leadership that were not reliant on their position or status. TLC leaders perceived their role as built on relationships and rapport-building and sought to empower faculty as means to drive TLC initiatives generally and online learning initiatives in particular. In the next section, we will explore the intersect of this role with that of the administrative expectations that participating TLC leaders faced and the tensions between these two forms of leadership employed.

**Enabling Role in Online Learning Initiatives**

Complexity leadership theory, in addition to articulating administrative and adaptive leadership functions, recognizes that there exists a third form of leadership that balances the tensions between these other two leadership functions (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Enabling leadership allows for adaptive leadership to be engaged and optimized within an administrative structure and helps leaders navigate the entanglements that come from these differing functions of leadership. In exploring the perceptions of TLC leaders as they implement online learning initiatives, this research study also sought to explore what tensions exist, if any, between the TLC leader’s roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff. Participants did acknowledge that there were such tensions found within their role. TLC leaders participating in the study spoke of both their role in
representing the perspectives of both sides and the general role of the TLC as enabling collaboration and institutional change.

**Representing Perspectives**

In discussing the administrative role of TLC leaders previously, it was clear from participant responses that they did not perceive themselves as playing a prescriptive administrative role when it came to their institutions’ online learning initiatives. However, participants did perceive of themselves as mediators of administrative initiatives. Closely associated with this role, but outside of the function of administrative leadership, TLC leaders in this study emphasized the importance of representing faculty perspectives and their voice. Likewise, it was important to represent administrative perspectives to faculty in ways that encouraged faculty buy-in as discussed in the section on mediator of academic initiatives. The tension between these two roles was acknowledged, but participants also employed strategies for navigating the role.

Alex, in describing the perception of online learning initiatives from traditional faculty and their online unit, shared:

> I try, you know, and I, I look at it from all perspectives and you know, I can understand where the quote traditional faculty may get, you know, get some things misconstrued and think one thing and I can see where the other college is coming from. And so, trying to be that voice of reason in the middle and working with both sides.

Understanding the administrative aims and also the concerns of faculty was a key function of the participants. Trisha in describing what their role looked like acknowledged this important function of her role as TLC leader:
One of the things that I think has been becoming more and more clear to me when I think about my predecessor, and also at least one of my coworkers here… Actually, probably more than one of my coworkers here. I mentioned in one of our previous conversations is how easy I think it is, those of us who have the luxury of spending all of our time on some variation of faculty development, I think we just lose sight of who our customers are. We just think that oh, of course. Of course, like the LMS is going to be the critical thing for any course regardless of modality. Of course. Wait a minute. That's just going to be perceived as extra work by the faculty member, right? So then if we want them to do this, how do we message it? How do we present it in a way that's going to get more of them responding positively? So I think that would end up being one of my recurring roles here, is trying to speak from the mindset of an average faculty member. Not to be resistant myself, but to help us understand how we can get our message across to that group more effectively.

Trisha continued that for a particular online learning initiative they had to intervene by speaking up on behalf of faculty. In this particular case, the steps proposed by administrators were, in Trisha’s mind, disconnected from what they knew would be the reaction faculty would have upon hearing such decisions:

A lot of what I said was designed to help my colleagues understand the mindset of a faculty member who may be resistant or might be inclined to have a negative reaction to what was being proposed.

TLC leaders also recognized that there was an inherent tension as faculty were inclined to be suspicious of administrative directives. Leslie shared:
Sometimes, you know, the truth is if people know it's coming from administration, they're just going to reject it because it's coming from administration. Or just be a little more suspicious or reactive. It's just, it's just the nature of the beast. I mean it's the same everywhere.

Jesse also shared that there was some danger of the TLC being perceived as affiliated more closely with the institution’s non-teaching administrative core, and how important it was to clearly communicate their role as supporter for faculty:

I felt like [faculty perception] was kind of split right down the middle. Like there were those that really understood that we were there to help them, that we were there for support. And then there were those that just felt like we were almost like an extension of the strong arm of the provost and it's like, you know, they're here to tell me what I'm doing wrong or to challenge me or to, you know, make sure I'm doing the right thing.

These perspectives required participating TLC leaders to not only be aware of faculty perceptions, but also ensure they navigate those sources of potential tension. Misha shared her own experiences figuring out these dynamics:

But my boss knew for this to get buy in, it's not something I could create by myself and I almost feel like a politician. Like we would go and feel people out to see, hey, they would be good on this committee, they’ll play nicely. And that's different, you know? Normally you just go into a conference room and whoever is there is there. You don't get to pick and choose in business.

Misha, in describing the politician approach, commented, “I want to stay in the middle much as possible because either way, you know, I still have to work with them – get
more flies with honey or whatever that's called.” Participants were cognizant of the various perspectives at work between administrators and faculty members and sought to ensure a balanced approach with both sides. Understanding both sides required an awareness of the administrative goals and also of common faculty mindsets, but balancing these perspectives needed a special function of leadership. This form of leadership also impacted what the TLC as a whole looked like through the guidance of TLC leaders.

**TLC Role in Change**

Participating TLC leaders recognized the unique role that their unit held within their institution for impacting online learning initiatives and more broadly campus transformation. Peggy, when asked to describe this role, commented:

> Well, I feel like we always are placed in the center of everything. You know, like any initiative is always somehow reaches back to us and so whatever it is, we somehow find ourselves tied to it in some form or fashion.

The same level of impact was what drew Alex to the role and they commented:

> One of the things that really drew me to this particular position is that it impacts the entire university. So being able to support and help faculty across campus and then also our, not only our full-time faculty, but also our adjuncts as well. And so being able to provide training, support, consultations, whatever they need to show that they're the content experts, but our office, you know, with the pedagogy and the support, we're their advocates. And so we want to help them in order to help our students. And so that was the thing that really attracted me to this particular role.
The role of enabler of others to accomplish goals oriented towards student success and learning resonated with many participants. Colleen also recognized this role and described that it was primarily their aim to get out of the way for what faculty wished to accomplish, while giving them tools to drive the conversations around online learning and technology at her institution:

I went to a POD [Professional and Organizational Development] Network conference and there were some people they had a session for new [TLC] directors. Most of the people in the room were having problems with getting faculty to come except for myself and a couple other people who realized that the [TLC] is for the faculty. So, it's not like I come up with programs and create it and then say, "Here's this program and you all come". No, I let the faculty come up with ideas and they tell me what they want to do. Because it's generated by them, the faculty come, because it's theirs. That was the big advice that we gave everybody, that you can't just go top down, you have to go bottom up and let them decide what they're interested in.

While the TLC leader role was to serve as a central figure in shepherding online learning initiatives and to orient faculty within those initiatives, several participants recognized that the expansion of online learning initiatives was something that could not be accomplished with TLC involvement alone. Peggy concluded that her role is just one of many institutional units which supports the efforts for online learning, with the TLC centrally situated in those conversations:
Everybody has the same amount of interest in this. That's why one person can't make the whole thing work. Two people can’t make the whole thing. Everybody's got to come together.

TLC leaders identified their role with faculty and administration as central to the future of online learning initiatives, and also to wider institutional aims. A key component of this role was representing perspectives of both faculty and administrative groups and helping others navigate those viewpoints to accomplish goals. These functions, operating within administrative structures, but building on rapport and trust, aligned with enabling leadership as a potential framework for use.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from this phenomenological research study exploring the lived experiences of TLC leaders. The findings present the voices of participants around several themes organized by the leadership functions of complexity leadership theory that most closely aligned with the identified themes. In exploring these themes, the study provided insights into the experiences and perceptions of TLC leaders and their units. Findings indicate that TLC leaders do not identify strongly as the administrative drivers of online learning initiatives, however they are active in mediating administrative directives. However, when exploring their role as it relates to informal leadership and enabling initiatives to move forward, TLC leaders saw this as a key area for contribution from their unit.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This final chapter provides a restatement of the research problem, a review of the methodological approaches, and a summary and discussion of the findings. Implications for higher education institutions and TLC leaders are discussed along with areas for future research. As online learning continues to be a strategic initiative for universities and colleges (Allen & Seaman, 2017), the role of those tasked with realizing that vision provides an opportunity for understanding the nature of change at higher education institutions (Lieberman, 2005). Studies have explored the role of TLCs at institutions as agents of change, often equipped with both faculty development and technology integration experience (Blumberg, 2011), that provides unique skills needed for institution-wide initiatives, including online learning (Lieberman, 2005; Wright, 2000). While recognizing the position of TLC as catalysts for change, the aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of TLC leaders as they are in the midst of implementing online learning initiatives, a potential source of institutional change. The literature has provided details on TLCs, their programmatic offerings, and the background of their leaders, but has not explored the perceptions of TLC leaders in their role within strategic initiatives, such as online learning.

Summary of the Study

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of TLC leaders in the area of online learning leadership at small, private higher educational institutions. The study used a transcendental phenomenological methodology centered around the leadership functions described in complexity leadership theory. Research questions were designed to
explore one of the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory: administrative, adaptive, and enabling leadership. The questions guiding the study were:

1) What perceived leadership roles do TLC leaders have in administrative directives related to online learning initiatives?

2) What perceived roles do TLC leaders have in implementing online learning initiatives among faculty? and

3) What tensions, if any, exist between the TLC leader’s roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff as they lead and support online learning initiatives?

TLC leaders were purposefully selected based on their employment as directors of a TLC and from institutional website research which clearly identified online learning as a facet of the TLC (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2005). TLC directors were also encouraged to recommend others who may serve as TLC leaders at their institution but were not in a director position. A total of seven participants were interviewed for the study. This transcendental phenomenological study utilized semi-structured interviews with three interview sessions with each participant based on the qualitative interview design of Seidman (2005). Data was analyzed using the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) in which the researcher evaluated transcripts of the interviews for core themes consistent with the phenomena being explored. Afterwards the themes consistent among all participants were combined to inform the findings of the study.

The findings of this study were described in chapter four, based on the semi-structured interviews and analysis of participant responses and the common themes that emerged through analysis. The three research questions, and therefore the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory, were used as an organizational
structure for arranging the sub-themes. Within the administrative role, the emergent themes explored included: mediator of administrative initiatives and academic support structures. In exploring the adaptive leadership role, themes centered around: faculty interactions, leadership with faculty, and empowering faculty. Finally, in exploring the adaptive leadership role, themes included: representing perspectives and TLC role in change. Findings indicated that TLC leaders closely identify with the leadership functions of adaptive and enabling leadership, but do not emphasize their administrative leadership in guiding online learning initiatives on their campus.

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this discussion is to present the study’s major findings, provide discussion, and link the findings to existing research. The organization is centered around the three primary research questions and thus is structured around the three functions of complexity leadership theory: administrative, adaptive, and enabling leadership. An additional finding, unrelated to the research questions, regarding the nature of TLC leader positions and rapid change in TLCs at small, private institutions will also be discussed.

Administrative Leadership of TLC leaders

Participants in the research study discussed the active role they played in online learning initiatives on their campuses. In exploring the perceived administrative leadership role that TLC leaders possess, participants did not express strong identification with this role. TLC leaders identified other offices or individuals on their campuses as the primary administrative drivers for online learning initiatives. Participants voiced that administrative leadership for online learning initiatives aligned primarily with the president (42%), the provost or an academic council (28%), or distributed among many
units such as academic affairs and marketing (28%). Instead of identifying with the administrative leadership role in online learning initiatives, participants instead saw themselves as mediators with the faculty, advancing the administrative initiatives coming from those offices identified above. Another theme showed that participants were able to navigate the administrative and academic processes at their institutions and were keenly aware of the academic support structures they could leverage within an administrative leadership role.

**Mediator of administrative initiatives.** In the ways that TLC leaders saw themselves in an administrative role, it was primarily as a mediator of administrative initiatives, finding approaches with faculty to increase buy-in and adoption of administrative initiatives. Leslie remarked that their role was behind-the-scenes and operated as a stealth promotion of administrative agendas. Peggy and Trisha both described a key role as helping both administrators and faculty understand each other’s perspectives. In participant descriptions, there was identification and support for online learning initiatives, but no participant saw their role as the main administrative driver of those initiatives. As a result, the conceptual framework utilized with this study showing TLC leaders as balanced between the administrative and adaptive leadership functions is insufficient in describing the perceived role of participants. A revised conceptual framework based on this finding will be discussed in a subsequent section of the chapter.

TLC leaders lack of strong identification with administrative leadership is not wholly surprising, given the existing research around TLCs and their institutional role. Sorcinelli (2002), in providing guidance for unit roles, stated that TLCs “should
provide support and service to academic leaders - without being perceived as an arm of the administration” (p. 11). Nemko and Simpson (1991) noted that TLCs, in order to function effectively, needed both strong support from administrative units and the trust and credibility with faculty and the institutional community at large. These researchers suggest that TLC leaders must establish rapport among the faculty and articulate their mission and goals without being viewed as an extension of the administration itself. TLC leaders interviewed were aware of the tension between these roles and shared that their role as mediator was the primary means of administrative work, even though they would identify others as leading online learning initiatives. Placing the study within the framework of complexity leadership theory, it is important to recognize that TLC leaders are situated within a complex system that involves numerous other agents interacting together (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). As a result, administrative leadership may not adequately describe the work of TLC leaders, but instead represent other agents in operation with TLC leaders in the institutional whole. Individuals such as the president, provost, or marketing leaders, identified by participants in this study may represent this function of leadership more fully and an element for further study may be the interaction of multiple interdependent agents operating within a single system.

**Academic support structures.** The other major theme associated with administrative leadership was the academic support structures that TLC leaders utilize to accomplish tasks. Participants expressed strong support from their direct supervisors, primarily the provost, and this support was identified as valuable to accomplish the initiatives that TLC leaders prioritized, including online learning initiatives. TLC leaders
were also keenly aware of the impact of accreditation and leveraged the expectations of
the outside agency to accomplish administrative goals.

While not sharing a strong identity with administrative leadership of online
learning initiatives, TLC leaders nonetheless shared about initiatives like the
development of online standards in which TLC leaders were clearly the driver of the
initiative. Misha, for example, was attempting to implement online standards, but realized
that in order to garner faculty support, Misha had to present and frame the standards as
best practices in order to create buy-in. Other participants, like Colleen, recognized that
standards were not in place for online learning, but identified the TLC unit as the main
area for support of online learning initiatives. Accreditation as a means for driving
administrative initiatives was mentioned by several participants. Leslie and Alex
described the impact on tying particular initiatives to accreditation and creating greater
support as work done towards maintaining accreditation was prioritized by all campus
stakeholders.

Lieberman (2005) recognized the institutional roles that TLCs occupied and
emphasized the impact that TLC leaders could have on institutional change. The
participants in this study recognized the support structures in place to promote change
and were aware of how to leverage these elements. This approach to administrative
initiatives also aligns with research that stated that TLC leaders are involved in
institutional initiatives and can be change agents in administrative processes on campuses
(Lieberman & Guskin, 2003; Schroeder, 2011). The perceptions of participants in this
study align with previous research, with the ability to leverage academic support
structures for online learning initiatives being a key facet.
Adaptive Leadership of TLC leaders

TLC leaders described their experiences in interacting with faculty as relational and built on trust and rapport-building rather than based on their position at the institution. This approach aligned with the function of adaptive leadership as described in complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Participants spoke about the approaches they used to engage faculty and the informal approaches they employed.

Faculty Interactions. TLC leaders made themselves widely available, provided opportunities for faculty to drop by their offices, and also regularly attended other events around campus to establish their presence. These approaches were seen as effective given that most participants shared that there was no institutional expectation that faculty work with their office. Participants described one-on-one meetings, showcasing faculty work, and a willingness to quickly respond and engage with those who seek help as influential factors in garnering trust among faculty members. Leslie described their approach as just-in-time and with an openness to work with anyone who sought their help as the TLC unit had an obligation to work with the willing.

The literature regarding TLCs and the types of offerings they provide aligns with those elements described by participants, including one-on-one consultations, faculty showcases, and other means to empower faculty (Pchenitchnaia & Cole, 2009). In addition to not appearing as an extension of an institution’s administration, it is important for TLC leaders to be highly visible and accessible (Sorcinelli, 2002). This is largely because of the personal connections and individual rapport building that associates TLCs not as much with an office, but with the individual leaders within the unit. Similarly, approaches that were responsive to faculty needs and provided just-in-time resources
have been identified by researchers as effective faculty development practices in previous studies (Baran, 2016; Grant, 2004).

**Leadership with faculty.** In describing the forms and tools of leadership that TLC leaders employed, there was a consistent emphasis on collegial and participatory leadership, leading by example, and employing regular communication with faculty. Colleen described their approach to leadership using phrases such as *facilitator* and *relationship builder*. Alex also described the importance of relationship building as a key element of their leadership style and approach. Other participants remarked about their own leadership approaches using similar emphasis on the value of relationships and clear communication.

While the literature is still limited in the leadership approaches of TLC leaders, there remains a common emphasis on TLC leaders as collegial partners and bridge builders (Sorcinelli, 2006; Zahorski, 1993). Schroeder (2010), likewise, emphasized the role of collaboration with a focus on relationships and partnerships to lead significant change. Overall, the experiences of the TLC leaders in this study align with those approaches often identified as part of effective practice for TLC units and leaders.

**Empowering faculty.** Participants also shared a common desire to empower faculty by giving them the tools needed to succeed and encouraging faculty to lead the initiatives associated with the TLC. There was a sense that this form of engagement would lead to success in online learning initiatives, but that it would be driven by the faculty, rather than through an administrative expectation. Leslie found it essential to get faculty who were already employing online learning and technology in front of their
peers. Peggy and Jesse were in the process of formalizing ways to greater empower faculty to be involved as an extension of the work of the TLC.

Sorcinelli (2002) emphasized the importance of TLC leaders in guiding administrative directives while ensuring that the outcomes are faculty crafted and led. Other studies also emphasized the importance of TLC units in serving as a liaison of initiatives with faculty, but which ultimately equip faculty to enact those aims (Singer, 2002; Sorcinelli, 2006). The participant responses aligned with this approach, with TLC leaders keenly aware of the ways that they could increase faculty buy-in and empower faculty to both adopt online learning initiatives and become champions of those initiatives. Overall, both in the literature and in the experiences of participants the connections between the work of TLC leaders and the approaches of adaptive leadership appear closely aligned.

**Enabling Leadership of TLC Leaders**

The third leadership function found in complexity leadership theory is enabling leadership, which serves as a mediator of both the hierarchical leadership approaches of administrative leadership and the informal and dynamic approaches of adaptive leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In this study, the third research question sought to explore what tensions, if any, exist between those roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff that are specific to TLC leaders. Participants in the study did acknowledge tensions within the role and articulated methods they used to navigate the positions and perspectives of both faculty and administrators that could differ or at times be adversarial. In the study, the primary approaches identified by TLC leaders that
aligned with enabling leadership were the ability to represent perspectives from both faculty and staff and the nature of the TLC unit as a catalyst for institutional change.

**Representing perspectives.** Participants in the study identified other units or positions as the primary administrative drivers of online learning initiatives, but also took extensive ownership over those initiatives and their deployment at the institutional level. Within the administrative leadership function this was closely associated with the theme of mediator of administrative initiatives. TLC leaders saw their role as taking the administrative directives and employing them in ways that faculty would accept and freely adopt. Closely aligned with this concept, but representing a function more closely aligned with enabling leadership, was the theme of representing perspectives. TLC leaders were able to articulate ways in which they used their role to both understand administrative and faculty perspectives and to communicate those perspectives in ways that increased understanding and buy-in from all parties. Trisha articulated instances in which their intervention was important in order to help administrators understand the impact and potential reaction from faculty of certain decisions related to programming for online faculty. Jesse also was keenly aware of the potential for faculty to see the work of the TLC as both a unit of support for faculty and as “an extension of the strong arm of the provost” and communicated ways in which to navigate those perceptions. In balancing these perspectives, TLC leaders had to understand the perspectives, but also be adept at communicating with all groups in ways that would be accepted and understood, avoiding entanglement with the differing perspectives, a key function of enabling leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).
The role of TLC leader in the existing literature has been compared to that of a tightrope walker. The position has required leaders to be “particularly diplomatic in their words and deeds, especially involving issues in which faculty and administrators are opposed” (Zahorski, 1993, p. 243). The nature of the TLC role has been described as consultive (Jacobson et al., 2009), bridge-building (Singer, 2002), and facilitative (Zahorski, 1993). TLC leaders are also increasingly required to balance concerns associated with faculty development and technology with institutional requirements (Jones, 2003; McCarthy & Samors, 2009). These elements explored in the literature align with the experiences described above and the ability to navigate tensions is a key theme in this research study and a strength of TLC leaders and their units.

**TLC role in change.** Participants also recognized the unique role of their unit as a whole and the function of the unit in implementing change at their institution. TLC leaders recognized and chose to be a part of the unit, because of the impact that it was having for transformation of the institution. Peggy described how the TLC was at the center of many initiatives on their campus and Alex moved from a different role in order to engage in the work of the TLC as both an advocate for faculty and more broadly student success. Another key element of the TLC role on campus, articulated by Colleen, was for the unit to serve faculty it had to be a faculty space that was directed by the faculty, rather than the TLC leader. In this way, faculty were driving the programming and focus as much as the TLC leader. Peggy also emphasized that while the TLC played a central role in institutional change, it was not the sole source for that change, but rather an enabler of various groups and departments at the institution.
The descriptions of the role of TLCs for the institution aligns with the literature on the expanding scope of TLCs in the area of organizational development. Researchers have commented that the work of TLC leaders is increasingly moving “from the periphery of the academic experience to the core” (Lieberman & Guskin, 2003, p. 263). Sorcinelli (2002) also described the rising expectation for TLCs to be responsible for administering new initiatives because of their ability to help individuals apply new knowledge. Chism (1998) elaborated on a number of ways that TLC leaders can serve as catalysts for change within an institution, including assessing current processes, generating possibilities for change, and testing new initiatives. The TLC leaders interviewed expressed excitement at the role of their unit and the impact that it had at an institutional level. The approaches described for online learning initiatives also resonated with what Lieberman (2005) described with the TLC as institutional learning laboratory. This view of the TLC recognized the role of the unit and its leaders as essential to enabling change on campus and ensuring buy-in from diverse groups across institutional departments and divisions.

**Complexity Leadership Theory as an Appropriate Framework**

Based on the findings of the study, the conceptual framework guiding this study is inadequate in addressing the role of TLC leaders in online learning initiatives at small, private colleges. As described in the findings above, participants readily described their work in areas that aligned with adaptive and enabling leadership functions. TLC leaders leveraged informal and adaptive approaches to working with faculty and sought to empower faculty members while also balancing the administrative needs of their direct supervisors. TLC leaders, however, did not have a strong association with the
administrative leadership functions as espoused by complexity leadership theory. Participants identified other individuals or positions which applied more concrete directives for online learning and TLC leaders saw themselves as mediators of those directives in ways that would increase faculty acceptance and buy-in. As a result, the conceptual framework guiding the study has been revised below to better reflect that experience of TLC leaders as described by participants. In the revised framework (see Figure 7), TLC leaders have a small overlap into the administrative leadership area, but are situated largely in the space of adaptive and enabling leadership. Rather than being active agents in the work of administrative leadership, TLC leaders act as a filter for administration directives, recognizing their role as mediators. The position of the TLC leader is not wholly outside of the sphere of administrative leadership, however, as participants were also deeply aware of administrative expectations and constraints, but able to translate these areas for broad faculty acceptance. Enabling leadership continues to represent a continuously flowing interchange between administrative and adaptive leadership functions, but one in which TLC leaders have the ability to navigate despite the tensions that exist. Their role is both translator and transformative change agent in this enabling leadership function.

In constructing a revised conceptual framework (See Figure 7), the aim was to reflect the narrative above with TLC leaders more directly located in the adaptive and enabling leadership circles, with a limited positioning in the administrative leadership circle. Rather than TLC leaders occupying an equal space in the administrative leadership circle, other administrative leaders (whether that be president, provost, etc.) can apply initiatives using TLC leaders as a mediator and filter towards more adaptive and faculty-
facing approaches. This phenomenon, as described by participants, is represented by the overlap from administrative leadership towards enabling leadership.

**Figure 7.** Revised conceptual framework based on the research study results and the three leadership functions of complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

Based on the research questions and their exploration of the three functions of complexity leadership theory, there is still inadequate explanation for administrative leadership functions when solely examining the role of TLC leaders. As TLC leaders identified several organizational positions as candidates for the administrative leadership function, this will be an area of recommendation for further research later in this chapter.

**Change in TLC units**

An unintended area of note which emerged from the research study was the significant change TLC leaders experienced in the course of their work. While the study did not seek to select participants based on factors of transformative change, a commonality among all participants was the presence of institutional and unit changes which were impacting participant positions. An acknowledgment and discussion of this discovery is worth discussing as it was a shared experience among all participants. Out of the seven participants, five had recently started a new role within the unit and were still in the midst of adapting to their work. Two participants were in recently reorganized or
newly created positions. One participant’s grant-funded position was ending the three-year period and so the institution was evaluating how to continue the efforts of the TLC at the end of the grant. Many participants were still in the early stages of discovering the role their office would have in online learning initiatives as a result of the institutional changes taking place surrounding their unit. The changes within TLCs and the online learning environment at the small, private institutions which participants represented may correspond to the research of Clinefelter and Magda (2013), who identified the greatest area of online enrollment growth at smaller, non-profit, private institutions. There may be a connection between the organizational transformation occurring at these institutions and the growth and strategic emphasis on online learning initiatives. As this was an observed phenomenon not associated directly with the research study, there are no conclusions that can be made from these changes, but their commonality among participants is worth noting and may be an area for future exploration.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings in this study have several implications for practice particularly for small, private colleges undertaking online learning initiatives. As research has indicated common programming, structures, and roles among TLCs across a variety of institutional types (Meyer & Murrell, 2014), these implications may also be generalizable for a wider audience. The study confirmed the recommendation of many researchers that TLC leaders view their role at a broad institutional level and are adept at navigating administrative and faculty concerns and crafting solutions that result in increased buy-in (Lieberman, 2005; Schroeder, 2011). Institutional leaders should look to TLCs for their involvement in broad campus-wide initiatives that involve multiple stakeholders. The
ability of TLC leaders to understand and anticipate critical faculty feedback is a skillset that can be utilized effectively by institutional leaders. In the same manner, the skills of TLC leaders in implementation and planning of new initiatives may be a valuable asset for institutions.

Specifically, for online learning initiatives, the findings indicate TLC leaders are well-suited to guide online learning initiatives stemming from institutional directives. Participating TLC leaders represented both traditional roles of a TLC arising from traditional faculty development initiatives, however all participants were highly capable in integrating technology and employment of online learning practices. As a result, in environments where a distinct division dedicated to online learning is not established, TLC leaders may be looked to as stewards of online learning in the stage of early adoption. The characteristics of TLC leaders in relation to faculty relations, communication, and innovation serve as appropriate qualities to assist in the development of online learning on smaller campuses. Despite not having a strong identification with administrative authority and leadership, TLC leaders may be the most well-equipped leaders on campus to assist in guiding online learning initiatives, particularly if the initiative is contentious among faculty, because of their dedication to representing faculty input and fostering engagement. Care should be taken to ensure that TLC leaders are supported and that their involvement is in service to equipping faculty (Sorcinelli, 2002).

For TLC leaders, the study suggests that there are many areas, including online learning initiatives, where their skills in navigating institutional dynamics are highly needed. TLC leaders should look for avenues at the institutional level where mediators between various stakeholders are present and seek roles as mediators for institutional
change. Leaders have a broad set of skills, but many within an institution may not understand the role that TLC leaders can play in such initiatives. On the other hand, TLC leaders expressed strong support from their supervisors. Leveraging this support for greater involvement in broad initiatives may be a valuable approach to extending the work of TLCs at the institutional level.

**Future Research**

The findings of this study reveal that there is still a gap in fully understanding leadership of online learning initiatives at small, private colleges. Complexity leadership theory applied to the work of TLC leaders accounts for the experiences of TLC leaders to some degree, but the theory may need to be more broadly applied to fully explain the leadership involved in online learning initiatives. Complexity leadership theory, which is rooted in addressing complex adaptive systems (CAS), may more fully address online learning initiatives if utilized in case study form at a single institution. This would allow for the exploration of the experiences of multiple agents involved in online learning initiatives (Cilliers, 1998; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). As the focus of this study centered on the lived experiences of TLC leaders, an expansion of participants that includes those administrative leaders identified by participants in this study such as the president or provost may be appropriate for capturing the scope of complexity leadership theory at an institutional level. Conversely, a study of faculty experiences in working with TLCs may also provide an avenue for further understanding the impact and perceptions of TLC leadership in the area of online learning from co-collaborators working with TLC leaders.

In recommendations for expansive study surrounding the work of complexity leadership theory, it was recommended that further approaches into qualitative studies
would be valuable (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In addition to an expansion of the scope of participants, an additional area for expansion of research would be to evaluate an institution using a longitudinal study through a specific transformative online learning initiative. As noted in the findings above, participants in this study acknowledged changes occurring within their positions, the TLC, and the institution as a whole as it related to online learning. An examination of these changes and the leadership paradigms employed during such changes would be an area for further exploration and study. Such studies would allow for greater understanding of the impact of major initiatives for TLC leaders, their units, and the institution as a whole.

**Conclusion**

Online learning continues to have an impact on universities and colleges regardless of institutional type, however the impact on small, private institutions is an area of growing development (Allen & Seaman, 2017). In this study, the work of TLC leaders in advancing online learning at small, private institutions is an important element of consideration for administrators. TLC leaders readily navigate and lead the conversations between administrators and faculty and provide leadership in empowering faculty in the work of online learning initiatives. This chapter provided a discussion of the roles of TLC leaders in promoting online learning and the ways in which TLC leaders utilize elements of complexity leadership theory in guiding online learning initiatives. The chapter also provided several recommendations for educators in practice and suggestions for further research.
Dear [TLC Leaders Name],

My name is Tyler Watts, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Kentucky. I am conducting research for my dissertation on the role of teaching and learning centers in the area of online learning. It is my understanding that within your current role you have job duties associated with the online learning initiatives at your institution. If this is accurate, I would like to request your assistance by participating in my study. The study consists of three interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes each. As a result of the research design, I anticipate a time commitment of two hours at most to fully participate in the research.

The aim of my research is to understand the lived experiences of leaders working within teaching and learning centers where online learning is an area of focus. I hope that as a result of the research, we will better understand the role and experiences of those in teaching and learning centers such as yourself. I also would encourage you to identify others in your department who meet this criteria if you believe there are several online learning leaders in your unit.

Please reply to this email and inform me if your duties align with my research expectations and if you would be willing to participate in this study. If you are able to participate, I will contact you directly to explain next steps. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Tyler Watts
University of Kentucky
951-684-1175
tyler.watts@uky.edu
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW #1 PROTOCOL GUIDE

[TLC Leaders Name],
Hello, this is Tyler. As I mentioned in my introductory email, I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Kentucky. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me – I greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. The reason for this interview today is to understand more fully your role within the teaching and learning center as it relates to online learning. My hope is that your perspective, working at a small, private college/university will provide valuable insights into the experiences of leaders like yourself at comparable colleges and universities.

To ensure that I fully capture your thoughts and experiences, I will be recording our conversation. The recording will be stored securely on a password protected computer and will be kept confidential. If at any point you wish to stop the recording or end the interview, please let me know and I will do so immediately. Do I have your permission to begin recording our conversation?

- Start recording –

Thank you. I have several questions to ask you about your role within the teaching and learning center at your institution as it pertains to online learning. There may be additional follow-up questions in order to provide further clarity. As this interview is being recorded, after completion, I will transcribe the interview and provide a copy of the transcript for your review. At any point if you do not wish to answer a question or if you would like to stop the interview, please let me know. I anticipate that our interview today will take approximately 30 minutes.

1. Would you please verbally confirm that you have given your permission for this interview to be recorded?

Thank you. A few questions to begin:

2. What has the experience been like working with faculty in the area of online learning?
3. What expectations do your supervisors have for your role as it relates to online learning?
4. What external constraints do you face in online learning leadership?
5. Has there ever been a time where the expectations of your supervisors and faculty expectations have not been similar aims?
6. How would you describe your leadership in online learning at your institution?
7. Is there anything else about your role or online learning that you would like to share at this time?
Thank you so much for participating in this initial interview. I really appreciate your time! I will provide a transcript of this interview for your review. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will be in contact as we approach the next interview time. Thank you again!
Hello, thank you again for arranging for this second interview. In the previous interview the goal was to understand more fully your role within your teaching and learning center. Today, I would like to explore your experiences as you work within the area of online learning. As with the previous interview, I will be recording the conversation. To reiterate, the recording will be stored securely on a password protected computer and will be kept confidential. If at any point you wish to stop the recording or end the interview, please let me know and I will do so immediately. Do I have your permission to begin recording our conversation?

- Start recording –

Thank you. I have several questions to ask you about your experiences within the teaching and learning center at your institution as it pertains to online learning. There may be additional follow-up questions in order to provide further clarity. As this interview is being recorded, after completion, I will transcribe the interview and provide a copy of the transcript for your review. At any point if you do not wish to answer a question or if you would like to stop the interview, please let me know. I anticipate that our interview today will take approximately 30 minutes.

1. Would you please verbally confirm that you have given your permission for this interview to be recorded?

Thank you. Today’s interview will explore your experiences in your position within the teaching and learning center:

2. Tell me about a recent faculty interaction that dealt with online learning in some aspect.

3. Tell me about a recent institutional initiative that you were involved with that related to online learning.

4. How do you interact with other institutional leaders as part of online learning initiatives?

5. How do you balance administrative expectations with faculty expectations within your role?

6. Can you tell me about a time recently where you had a leadership role in an online learning initiative?

7. Is there anything else about your experience as it relates to online learning that you would like to share at this time?

Thank you so much for participating in this second interview, I truly appreciate your time. I will provide a transcript of this interview for your review. If you have any further
questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will be in contact as we approach the final interview time. Thank you again!
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW #3 PROTOCOL GUIDE

[TLC Leaders Name],

Hello, thank you again for arranging for this final interview. In the previous interview the goal was to understand more fully your experiences within online learning. Today, I would like to reflect more on these experiences. As with the previous interview, I will be recording the conversation. To reiterate, the recording will be stored securely on a password protected computer and will be kept confidential. If at any point you wish to stop the recording or end the interview, please let me know and I will do so immediately. Do I have your permission to begin recording our conversation?

- Start recording –

Thank you. I have several questions to ask you about the experiences you shared in the last interview. There may be additional follow-up questions in order to provide further clarity. As this interview is being recorded, after completion, I will transcribe the interview and provide a copy of the transcript for your review. At any point if you do not wish to answer a question or if you would like to stop the interview, please let me know. I anticipate that our interview today will take approximately 30 minutes.

1. Would you please verbally confirm that you have given your permission for this interview to be recorded?

Thank you. Today’s interview will explore your reflections on the experiences you have had within your current role:

2. How do you understand your role as it relates to faculty interactions when exploring online learning together?
3. Where do you see the direction of your supervisors as it relates to future online learning initiatives?
4. How do you perceive your role as it relates to online learning initiatives? How is it viewed within the campus structure?
5. Where do you see the teaching and learning center’s future position as it relates to online learning?
6. What tensions or challenges do you expect will rise or be introduced in the future?
7. Is there anything else about as it relates to your sense of your role in online learning that you would like to share at this time?

Thank you so much for participating in this final interview, I truly appreciate your time today and in the past interviews. I will provide a transcript of this interview for your review. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

KEY INFORMATION FOR COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER LEADERS IN ONLINE LEARNING AT SMALL, PRIVATE COLLEGES You are being invited to take part in a research study about the role of teaching and learning center leaders in leading online learning initiatives at small, private colleges and universities. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are employed in a teaching and learning center that has been identified as active in the area of online learning for your institution. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 8 people to do so.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE, PROCEDURES, AND DURATION OF THIS STUDY?
This study will explore the influence and leadership of teaching and learning center (TLC) leaders as it relates to online learning initiatives at small, private colleges and universities.

Three research questions will guide the study:
1. What perceived leadership role do TLC leaders have in administrative directives related to online learning initiatives?
2. What perceived role do TLC leaders have in implementing online learning initiatives amongst faculty?
3. What tensions exist, if any, between the TLC leaders’ roles of faculty advocate and administrative staff as they lead and support online learning initiatives?

The research will be conducted by having you take part in three interviews exploring your role as a TLC leader leading online learning initiatives at your institution. For the study you will be asked to participate a series of face-to-face, phone, or video web-conferencing interviews.

By doing this study, we hope to further understand the role of TLC leaders in the continually expanding area of online learning development. Your participation in this research will last about three weeks.

WHAT ARE REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?
You may want to volunteer to participate in this study in order to contribute to the voices of TLC leaders and their experiences in leading online learning initiatives at institutions of your size and type. For a complete description of benefits, refer to the Detailed Consent.

What are reasons you might choose NOT to volunteer for this study?
You have been selected for this study based on your role within your institution. There is no reason why you should not participate in this study based on any given criteria other than your position. For a complete description of risks, refer to the Detailed Consent/Appendix.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?
The person in charge of this study is Tyler Watts of the University of Kentucky, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study his/her contact information is: Tyler Watts, tyler.watts@uky.edu, (951)684-1175

If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428
DETAILED CONSENT:

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY?
This study is an exploration of the lived experiences of teaching and learning center (TLC) leaders as they lead online learning initiatives at small, private colleges and universities. You have been asked to participate in this study because of your role within a TLC at your institution and your involvement in online learning initiatives. There are no additional reasons why you would not qualify for this study.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?
The research procedures will be conducted at either a physical location of your choosing or via recorded web conferences. You will need to participate 3 times during the study. Each of those interviews will take about 30-45 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2 hours and 15 minutes over the next 3 weeks.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?
You will be interviewed in three separate instances over a period of three weeks, with an interview each week. Location and time for the interview will be at your discretion and the researcher will make every effort to accommodate your schedule. Each interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The researcher will ask interview questions related to your work within a TLC and your involvement in online learning initiatives. The three interviews will follow specific protocols, however additional questions may arise through the conversation. Interviews will be recorded and the recordings will be transcribed as part of the analysis process. Prior to the start of the interview, we will review the procedure and you will be required to provide written or verbal consent. At any point during the interviews if you wish to cease participation in the study, you may request to do so. Recordings and other data related to your interviews will be destroyed and your participation will not be included in the study results.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?
To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
We do not know if you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, if you take part in this study, information learned may help others within similar roles at other institutions.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?
There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?
When we write about or share the results from the study, we will write about the combined information. We will keep your name and other identifying information private. We may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to know we did the research correctly; these would be individuals from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. Interview recordings, transcripts, and any other collected data will be stored on the principal investigator’s password protected computer. This information will only be viewed by the principal investigator and their faculty advisor.

CAN YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY EARLY?
You can choose to leave the study at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The investigators conducting the study may need to remove you from the study. You may be removed from the study if you are not able to follow the directions, they find that your participation in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?
The principal investigator is being guided in this research by Dr. John Nash, associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership Studies, University of Kentucky. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

INFORMED CONSENT SIGNATURE PAGE

You are a participant or are authorized to act on behalf of the participant. This consent includes the following:

● Key Information Page
● Detailed Consent

You will receive a copy of this consent form after it has been signed.

___________________________________________                      _____________________
Signature of research subject                      Date

___________________________________________
Printed name of research subject

____________________________________________________________          ___________
Printed name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent                     Date
APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Initial Review

Approval Ends: 7/11/2019
IRB Number: 45280

TO: Tyler Watts, PhD in Educational Sciences
Educational Leadership Studies
PI phone #: 9516841175
PI email: tyler.watts@uky.edu

FROM: Chairperson/Vice Chairperson
Non Medical Institutional Review Board

(IRB) SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol
DATE: 7/12/2018

On 7/12/2018, the Non Medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

Complexity Leadership: The Role of Teaching & Learning Center Leaders in Online Learning at Small, Private Colleges

Approval is effective from 7/12/2018 until 7/11/2019 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects can be found in the "All Attachments" menu item of your E-IRB application. [Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.] Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review Report Form which must be completed and submitted to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigator's responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol’s status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" available in the online Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI’s web site. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428.

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### APPENDIX G: LIST OF CODES

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VITA

Tyler D. Watts

Education

Masters in Business Administration
University of Hawaii, Manoa, Hawaii 2012

Bachelor of Arts in English
California Baptist University, Riverside, California 2004

Professional Experience

Associate Director of Curriculum & Instruction
*Clemson University*
November 2016 - Present

Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence
*Southern Wesleyan University*
July 2015 - October 2016

Assistant Director of Online Learning
& the Center for Teaching Excellence
*Bainbridge State College*
October 2013 - July 2015

Associate Dean for Teaching & Learning
*Broward College Vietnam*
September 2011 - September 2013

Presentations

State/Regional Conferences:

Invited Talks:
