Mindful Innovation in Higher Education: 
A case study exploring different business units’ strategic adaptation of distance education offerings at a small Northeastern University

A thesis presented
by
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to
The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

in the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
February 2015
Abstract

The research identified how three individual departments at a single institution are leveraging distance education and which methods they are employing to ensure successful implementations and operations. This study identified how and if these departments are mindful of the distance learning environment and their methods of adjusting to change. The research discovered the importance of Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) theories of mindful organizing in distance education and how these units strategize, make decisions, change, and collaborate. This was done through three data collection methods: document review, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and observations of strategic and operational meetings.

Three findings emerged from this study. First, decision-making and the market drive growth. Second, distance education requires agility in operations. Lastly, perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential. Implications and recommendations for future research included expanding this study to the three other graduate schools at the university that do not offer distance education, but are in varying planning phases. Gathering information about how these departments are mindfully organizing in conjunction with central administration would help to get a larger sampling and round out the study. Further, the causes of the varying degrees of mindfulness would solidify the findings.

Keywords: Mindful organizing, distance education, strategy, decision-making, change, collaboration, higher education
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredible family:

To my amazing wife, Lisa La Rosa, whose support and love has been unwavering and to Bella, my loyal Great Dane/Labrador daughter.
Acknowledgements

This has been the most challenging experience I have encountered. Having the ability to work a full-time job, teach part-time, and go to school for over four years has taught me a number of lessons. The glaring one is how important family is and how supportive and flexible they can be. I’ve tested some of those boundaries and am grateful for the resilience and patience shown. I hope to reciprocate this someday.

First, I would like to acknowledge my parents, Alberta and John La Creta, who have always taught me that nothing was too good for me and have modeled a type of determination you see in the movies. To my colleague, Anne Marando, who was more helpful then she could possibly imagine with my fieldwork, thank you. To my colleague, Dr. Cynthia Phillips, who has been supportive and always willing to read my work and give me helpful comments, thank you. To my work colleague and friend, Kate Goldfield, who has been supportive of me for many years and always knew what to say during difficult times. To my advisor, Dr. Margaret Gorman, who has supported me through this long process and kept me moving forward when it was easier to stay still. To my colleagues at Brandeis University who have been supportive during this journey and allowed me flexibility throughout this process, thank you.

To the most important person in my life, Lisa, who has been my best friend for over 25 years. You are the most selfless person I know and I am honored to call myself your husband. Your steady encouragement and ability to listen to my, sometimes, persistent complaining never went unnoticed. I love you dearly and am the luckiest person to have you as my wife and best friend.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The memory of the crippling economic crisis still lingers in the minds of administrators at many institutions. Institutions of higher education across the United States of America were forced to layoff staff, slash budgets, and freeze retirement funds. Since then, Brown (2012) claims that universities have become more cautious about decision-making. They have been forced to find creative and innovative ways to remain fiscally viable. Sometimes a particular innovation becomes the status quo and institutions must catch up to it and mold it to fit their needs. Distance education is an initiative that has been knocking at the door of many higher education institutions and requires a decision from the administration.

Distance education has slowly begun to gain acceptance in higher education and its expansion continues to grow at many institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Davies, Howell, & Petrie, 2010). In 2013, 66 percent of chief academic leaders said that online learning is critical to their long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Leaders of distance education programs are required to have great vision, people skills, curriculum knowledge, marketing savvy, and technology expertise. Possessing all of these attributes allows organizations to be ready for quick changes and constant innovation, which are inherent in distance education programs (Nworie, Haughton, & Oprandi, 2012). Over the past ten years, institutions of higher education have greatly increased the role of technology in their daily operations (Cornford & Pollock, 2003; Irlbeck, 2001; Portugal, 2008). Since distance education is relatively new to American institutions of higher education, changes are continuously being made to improve it. Higher education does not have the luxury of analyzing a large sampling of successes and failures like they would for a traditional classroom offering (Marcus, 2004). Instead, they must maneuver through constantly changing environment that is often positioned within a setting that still uses
the traditional archetype that Beaudoin (2003) referred to as the “old economy.”

Moore and Kearsley’s (1996) fundamental concept of distance education sums it up best: “students and teachers are separated by distance and sometimes by time” (p.1). How are organizations implementing and operating distance education in higher education? What sense are they making of the internal and external environment? How mindful are they in their implementation, decision-making, and daily operations? What adjustments are they making in order for it to fit their institution’s strategic vision? In a fast-moving world, are they in a state of perpetual movement similar to the technology that is being utilized for the delivery of distance learning programs? A leader’s ability to bring all of these issues to the forefront may be the difference between failure and success for the program.

Despite the many papers and articles that have been written about distance education and the leaders of these new programs, the discussion of how departments in higher education institutions are adjusting to this educational innovation is, like distance education itself, in a state of perpetual motion with no one right answer (Portugal, 2008). Departments at higher education institutions are forced to adjust their strategic plans in order to keep pace with the evolution of distance education. Understanding these adaptive methods contribute to this field of study.

**Statement of Problem**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2011) reported that in 2006–2007, approximately 11,200 college-level programs were designed to be completed through distance education. Allen and Seaman (2014) claimed that in 2013 there were 7.1 million U.S. students enrolled in at least one online course at a higher education institution. These numbers have been steadily increasing for 20 years (Hoffman, 2012). Each year, institutions of higher education add more programs to accommodate these growing demands. They have accomplished this by
incorporating degrees that can be earned online or through a combination of onsite and online courses, known as a hybrid format. In essence, technology has systematically begun to alter higher education’s organizational structures (Cornford & Pollock, 2003).

In 2001, Yale University, Princeton University, Oxford University, and Stanford University formed a distance education venture that required each school to invest $3 million into the joint programs. Bates (1999) claims, "famous campus brand names are no guarantee of experience or excellence in distance delivery" (p. 13). However, the majority of higher education institutions do not have the deep pockets of the aforementioned institutions. Feenberg (1999) argues that in higher education, the bottom line is extremely important to senior administration. Thus, many institutions wait and watch, while schools with deep pockets test the technology and then use the data to create their own smaller programs (Beaudoin, 2003). The focus is not on education, "but the fiscal implications (i.e., cost savings) of distance education" (Feenberg, 1999, p. 3). The quality of material available and the ethical implications have come into focus, particularly in light of the demand to get courses online immediately. Myer (2002) claims that "many discussions of quality are not about quality at all but about basic perceptions and deification of the status quo" (p. 11). The “old economy” is something a distance education leader must constantly struggle with, as well as working with external constituencies (Beaudoin, 2003; Nworie, Haughton, & Oprandi, 2012). Myer (2002) states that distance education brings "a fear that the new market-place could bring irreparable harm to institutions to which individuals have devoted their careers and lives" (p. 11).

Beaudoin (2004) defines leadership in distance education as "a set of attitudes and behaviors that create conditions for innovative change, that enable individuals and organizations to share a vision and move in its direction, and that contribute to the management and
operationalization of ideas” (p. 132). Leaders of distance education, as discussed in this dissertation, are people at a higher education institution who are responsible for administering or directing a distance education program, the ones who are involved in the day-to-day operations. These leaders may hold the title of Executive Director, Director, Faculty Program Director, Associate Director, or similar position titles. Williams, Paprock, and Covington (1999) assert that leadership and administrative roles differ in that leaders are a vital component of the organizational setup, whereas administrators are in charge of individual change. An effective distance education program will meet the needs of the students and the goals of their institutions (Beaudoin, 2003; Irlbeck, 2002; Marcus, 2004; McKenzie, Ozkan, & Layton, 2005; Moore, 1994). These leaders in distance education are on the cutting edge of a type of learning that has the potential to change an entire organization. Distance education leaders must navigate upper central administration, technology concerns, and customer issues in a 24/7 setting, while preparing the organization for change, both structurally and procedurally. In addition, they must get buy-in from employees, create a program that supports the mission, vision, and core values of the school. They must set requirements for faculty; training programs, mentors, and best practices quality concerns about distance education and other complex matters in a quickly moving dynamic environment (Beaudoin, 2004; Garza Mitchell, 2009).

Allen and Seaman (2014) report that less than one-third of academic leaders believe that there will no longer be concerns about the relative quality of online courses. Because there has been a tremendous amount of press on this topic, many institutions of higher education have been forced to carve out a department dedicated to online programs (Moore & Kearsley, 2004). Distance education is no longer the insignificant relative of the brick and mortar institution. It is, in fact, a critical asset to many universities’ strategic plans and requires the full attention of the
leadership (Otte & Benke, 2006). Effective distance education leadership is crucial in order to influence the future direction of the field (Beaudoin, 2004).

My study explores how three departments at a single institution implement and operate a distance education program. Therefore, this doctoral thesis identifies how distance education departments are leveraging this fast-moving mode of delivering information and what methods they are employing to insure successful implementations and operations. This study also identifies how and if distance learning departments are mindful of the distance learning environment and their approaches to change, decision-making, and collaboration.

**Research Question**

In order to address the aforementioned research problem, one research question guides this research.

1. What is the nature of mindfulness for three departments’ strategic planning and operations for distance education programs at a single institution?

**Theoretical Framework**

The primary theoretical framework informing this doctoral thesis is Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing as a lens to uncover how departments are implementing and operating distance education programs (Weick, 1995). This lens allows an alternative view of collective cognition of distance education leaders as they seek to examine failures, uncover assumptions, and reconcile unanticipated events.

**Mindfulness**

According to Langer (1989), mindfulness is the state of cognizance and ongoing alteration and improvement to one’s thinking in order to consider all possible perspectives. Institutions of higher education must decide what their purpose is for implementing distance
education and then consider how they plan to execute it. One of the hallmarks of mindfulness is to anticipate and survive the unexpected (Weick et al., 1999; Coutu, 2003). Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) described mindfulness as realizing one’s current expectations, constantly advancing those expectations based on new experiences, and implementing those expectations to improve the current situation into a better one.

**Mindful Organizations**

Distance education leaders must be mindful as to how their organizations will adjust to upcoming threats and changes to the status quo. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) define a mindful organization as one that has a mental orientation that continually evaluates the environment, as opposed to mindlessness in which a simple assessment leads to choosing a plan that is continued until the plan runs its course. It was concluded that if an organization employs mindfulness, it would have a sense of purpose and cohesiveness (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001; Weick et al., 1999). A truly mindful organization works on improvement before it is necessary. They consider the past and present before coming to a conclusion and understand how it will affect the organization. Levinthal and Rerup (2006) claim that before people can be mindful, they must understand what is considered routine at their organizations. Only then can they begin to fully realize the composition of their surroundings.

Lack of awareness can greatly harm an organization and may lead to mindlessness (Langer & Piper, 1987). Further, Langer and Piper (1987) state that a mindless organization’s basis for operations are uncompromising mandates that are followed through to their conclusions. According to Weick and Sutcliffe (2006), organizations should focus on clearly comprehending emerging threats and interfering factors. In order to be mindfully organizing (Weick et al, 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001), it is recommended that these organizations have
(a) a preoccupation with failure, (b) reluctance to simplify interpretations, (c) sensitivity to operations, (d) commitment to resilience, and (e) under-specification of structures.

**Preoccupation with failure**

Organizations utilize preoccupation with failure in order to avoid disasters. The hallmark for this characteristic is to be preoccupied with the small failures even more than the large ones. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) claim “they treat any lapse as a symptom that something is wrong with the system, something that could have severe consequences if separate small errors happen to coincide at one awful moment” (p. 10).

**Reluctance to simplify interpretations**

Organizations that require employees to simplify interpretations and focus on less are missing many key issues and indicators according to Weick and Sutcliffe (2001). Mindful organizations painstakingly take steps to create more complete controls. Their theory is that by simplifying less, they see more. Mindful organizations recognize that the “world is complex, unstable, unknowable, and unpredictable; they position themselves as much as possible” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001, p. 11). Organizations encourage their employees to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and possess the ability to find and understand differences in opinions without alienating others.

**Sensitivity to operations**

There is an ongoing concern for the unexpected at mindful organizations. Weick et al. (1999) believe that there are latent “loopholes” in all organizational operations. These “loopholes” include: supervision, reporting defects, engineered safety procedures, safety training, briefings, and certification. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these failures, but a mindful organization
will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly.

**Commitment to resilience**

A commitment to resilience is maintained by keeping errors small and implementing quick workarounds that keep the system successfully functioning. Mindful organizations labor under the belief that no system is perfect. “This is why they complement their anticipatory activities of learning from failures, complicating their perceptions, and remaining sensitive to operations with a commitment to resilience” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001, p. 14). The organization requires deep knowledge of systems, technologies, co-workers, and one’s self (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001; Weick et al, 1999).

**Under-specification of structures**

In a traditional hierarchical structure, decision-making is the sole responsibility of leadership. These decisions are driven down through the organization. In a mindful organization, this structure is loosened so decisions can be made by employees to “allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems” (Weick et al., 1999). Expertise with specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization. Not keeping a typical top-down structure allows anyone in the organization that has expertise on a particular issue to be available and prepared for a quick reaction.
The changing landscape of higher education has forced leaders to introduce an organization that is proactive and no longer reactionary. With the advent of technology mediated learning, organizations are unable to prolong the decision-making process or deliberate about making sense of an event. They must quicken the pace of their organization, while not wasting money on needless innovations. For the average university, it is impossible to remain on the cutting edge because of the required funding. Distance education leaders’ employment of a mindful organization will help them make sense of what the institution’s needs are, what the external market is, and how they should be allocating their funds and time (Moore & Kearsley, 2004).

**Overview of Research Plan**

This descriptive case study (Creswell, 2012) uses qualitative methods at an institution operating multiple distance education programs. A case study enabled the researcher to explore
the phenomenon of how departments at a single institution are mindfully organizing when implementing and operating online programs. Three data collection techniques were utilized: (1) document review and analysis of any documents, memos, announcements, websites, marketing materials, newsletters, strategic plans, annual reports, and advisory board minutes that discuss strategic planning and operations; (2) semi-structured interviews with 2-3 key administrative staff about how they have made sense of failures, explored assumptions, and reconciled unexpected events; (3) observations of three meetings at each unit in order to understand how and if operational and strategic plans are occurring; (4) leadership thematic validation in which the leaders from each unit were given a document highlighting themes and trends from the findings and asked to comment and identify questions they had. These techniques were used at Brandeis University with three departments that met the criteria employing purposeful sample techniques. To enhance trustworthiness, participants were given their transcripts for review.

**Significance of Study**

There has been an abundance of research conducted regarding leadership in distance education. The conversation about whether distance education is legitimate or whether the quality equals that of onsite programs has lessened and does not add much insight into how to improve delivery (Dziuban, Moskal, Brophy-Ellison, & Shea, 2007; Arbaugh, Godfrey, Johnson, Pollack-Leisen, Niendorf, & Wresch, 2009). The percentage of academic leaders rating the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face instruction increased from 57 percent in 2003 to 77 percent in 2012 (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The topics are wide-ranging, but there have been few that are investigating higher education’s use of mindfulness while implementing or operating their distance education programs.

According to Allen and Seaman (2014), 90 percent of academic leaders believe that it is
likely or very likely that a majority of all higher education students will be taking at least one online course in five years’ time. Further, in 2013, the proportion of higher education students taking at least one online course is at an all-time high of 33.5 percent (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Regardless of the statistics, the argument still continues amongst department heads and faculty chairs about the legitimacy of distance education. While the “old economy” is still in power at many institutions, the evidence is clear that the students want the option of distance education. It is also clear that distance education is far from being fully entrenched and established at many institutions of higher education (Cercone, 2008).

This study helps to advance our knowledge of how organizations are looking at implementation and operations of distance education programs. It examines how they are adjusting to the lack of attention from administration in the “old way” to having pressure to maintain quality, enrollment, and innovative technologies to match the market. The research attempts to understand how leaders are adjusting and whether they are mindful of their environment and organization. Are they implementing methods so the organization does not get caught in the trap of mindlessness? It also attempts to delve into how these leaders make sense of the current and future distance education landscape. As they advance their programs and implement new ideas, are they utilizing any or all of these concepts? What information would have been helpful to them and how are they forging ahead?

Secondly, it assists distance education leaders in understanding how others are employing mindful organizing. This study attempts to uncover how the employees utilize mindfulness and what their methods are for making sense of their surroundings. Are they consistent with the organization and leaders’ vision? The findings may help to define roles and help to outline training methods for leaders and administrators. Lastly, this study could assist in the creation of
a roadmap for change, decision-making structures, and collaboration models.

**Assumptions/Limitations**

Utilizing three departments at Brandeis University as the sites for this case study allowed a better opportunity for purposeful sampling through the differences in data and to illustrate the issues and potentially alternative perspectives (Creswell, 2007). The context for each site will be the same to maintain consistency, implementation and maintenance of distance education. In maintaining uniformity with the chosen approaches of inquiry, the forms of data utilized are: (1) document review, (2) semi-structured interviews, (3) observations, and (4) leadership thematic validation. The number of interviewees was limited to three per site in order to focus on the process level of the organization. Including other levels, such as participant or site levels, would have broadened the findings and diluted the research. The danger of this was that it could have forced the researcher to generalize, but that possibility was mitigated by the number of sites researched.

The worldview a researcher brings to a qualitative research study varies by each individual’s belief system (Creswell, 2007). This study employs a social constructivist worldview. Creswell (2007) says that social constructivists seek an understanding of their environment and meanings to their experiences and/or a situation. The researcher purposefully asked broad questions in order to allow the participants to answer in their own words and not be led. The researcher looked for the complexity of viewpoints and disseminated them through the study (Creswell, 2007). Working at the university, the researcher was aware of possible bias towards interpretations and did project this through interview questions and observations.

The researcher’s paradigm plays a large role in conducting and designing the research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) say that a paradigm is a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deal
with ultimates or first principles that represent a worldview that defines the nature of the individual's place in it. These paradigms that researchers must engage themselves in are ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical, and methodology (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Ontologically, the researcher utilized quotes and themes from the semi-structured interviews conducted to illustrate different perspectives of the individual departments’ ability to be mindful of their surroundings. Epistemologically, the researcher works at the university. The sites are familiar to the researcher at varying levels; one is moderately familiar to him and the other two are not. The researcher’s axiological stance could potentially be biased because the researcher has a relationship with one of the sites. The researcher is privy to information and historical data that could potentially influence the data reporting. However, at the other sites, there are no personal relationships with the subjects or the sites. There is no fear of bias at these locations. Rhetorically, the writing appears personal because of the context of the study: leaders discussing how they implement distance education. Finally, methodologically, the researcher adjusted and revised as the research unfolded in the field.

The aforementioned research approach highlights the fact that the researcher worked in multiple sites and subjects with varying familiarity. What remained the same are the context, issues, and topic. By keeping the research to comparable departments at the same institution, there was potential for similar challenges and solutions. Each site and subject has its own voice on viewpoints, behaviors, strategies, beliefs, and operations (Creswell, 2007). Because the study is through the viewpoint of the participants and is not applicable for all higher education universities, it is not generalizable. Looking through the lens of the participant, allowed the researcher to be able collect and report without bias.
Key Terms and Definitions

**Distance Education:** A synchronous or asynchronous course taught where the faculty member and students are not in the same room (Beaudoin, 2004).

**Hybrid Learning:** A formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

**Mindfulness:** The power to detect and act on even weak signals of impending danger (Weick, et al, 1999).

**Organizational Mindfulness:** A mental orientation that continually evaluates the environment, as opposed to mindlessness in which a simple assessment leads to choosing a plan that is continued until the plan runs its course (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to review important contributions to the literature connected to the aforementioned topic. This material attempts to give depth and validity to the research. It allows the reader to understand some historical context, but focuses mainly on current day perspectives. There is a wealth of information regarding distance education that goes back to the 1970s. Even though this type of course delivery is relatively new in higher education, there have been countless articles and papers written on the topic, particularly within the last ten years. Surprisingly, while there are a great number of experts in the field of distance education, few have specialized in organizational mindfulness within distance education departments. The primary reason for this shortage is because the importance of distance education departments has drastically increased over the past few years. A byproduct of this is that the role of leaders in distance education has only recently become formalized at institutions of higher education. Historically, leaders of distance education were administrators of professional studies or adult learning centers that were appointed by the main administration (Otte & Benke, 2006). They had no real decision-making power and were never charged with coming up with a vision and carrying it through. These departments were not part of the larger institution’s mission and strategic plans until they began to make a profit and required their own dedicated staff and faculty (Moore & Kearsley, 2004). This chasm between distance education and onsite education has begun to close a bit, but these departments are still adjusting to this change and operating on an island (Nworie, 2012), thus, requiring these programs to work with this “new” course delivery method. These departments must adapt to working with a program that is a moving target and is always changing. This contrasts with traditional education models
that are more stable and have not changed drastically for hundreds of years (Kearney et. al, 2013).

Studies on leaders of institutions of higher education are vast. Even narrowing the topic to leaders of distance education is still quite broad. The researcher chose studies that represent implementation and operation methods departments utilize instead of concentrating on the well-researched topic of whether distance education is a viable option for learning. Instead, this study seeks to answer the question of how these departments at a single institution are implementing and operating their distance education programs. A comprehensive collection of scholarly literature was evaluated in this review. This review critiques relevant studies, as well as highlights key theorists and theories. Further, it pulls together three elements of the study: distance education departments, their challenges and opportunities, and their methods of implementation and operations. All of these components culminate in an understanding of how organizations make sense of these challenges and opportunities by utilizing mindful organizing.

**Distance Education Leadership**

Chris Dede is a renowned expert in leadership and emerging technologies from Harvard University. He has set the table for many distance education studies. Dede’s overall themes are that education is ever changing and these changes are dictated by the times (technology) and students. Dede (2004) says, "the evolution of higher education is shaped by changes in the characteristics of entering students, by development of new methods of teaching and learning, and by shifts in the knowledge society values" (p. 1). Dede’s papers, including the 2012 article *Customization is the Future of Teaching*, have proven to be a valuable springboard for an understanding of the short, but constant, evolution of distance education. He, perhaps
unknowingly, refers to mindfulness and sensemaking through his conclusion that institutions and leaders must adjust to this change in education or be left out.

Williams, Paprock, and Covington (1999) were amongst the first to make a distinction between a leader and a leader of distance education. They believed that leaders of distance education must create strong programs and hold true to them, just like any brick and mortar program. According to Williams et al. (1999), transitional leadership in distance education requires several factors relating to organizational and administrative elements, including:

(a) statements of mission, purpose, and objectives; (b) unified program, curricula, teaching, and learning strategies; (c) well-developed interdepartmental infrastructure, communication, and interaction; (d) the presence of administrative proponents; (e) policies regarding students, tutors, and proctors; (f) engaging additional staff and outside experts as needed; and (g) materials development (p. 14).

Portugal wrote a few important articles about educational leadership that has helped to define leaders in distance education. Her articles, *Emerging Leadership Roles in Distance Education: Current State of Affairs and Forecasting Future Trends, The Lived Experiences of Faculty in an Online Teaching Environment,* and *Diversity Leadership in Higher Education* are key works that contribute to the field of study. Portugal (2007) posits that leaders of distance education must create strong policies and hold true to them, just like any program. Leading wisely involves a balance between personal philosophy, vision, pedagogical knowledge, and a willingness to transcend daily challenges and/or political struggles. The author says that traditional professors teaching with students learning at their feet is becoming a thing of the past. Portugal (2007) continues by saying that online professors are considered to be facilitators, while online learners have become the new consumers in higher education.
Portugal (2008) says that leaders must decide what their purpose is for implementing online learning and then how they plan to accomplish it. In another study, Portugal (2013) continues to argue that innovation, vision, contribution, flexibility, adaptability to change, and lifelong learning agendas are necessary attributes of emerging leaders in distance learning environments. An effective leader must constantly watch market trends and begin new agendas when they are called for (Bolman & Deal, 2003); thus, a leader of distance education could potentially continue to evolve for many years. Because of this constant movement, the research will continue to evolve as well.

**Challenges for Distance Education**

**Technology**

The role of the leader of distance education at an institution of higher education has become ambiguous over the years. Nworie et al. (2012) have made some significant contributions to one of the largest challenges faced by leaders of distance education: technology. The main reason is because distance education is a fast-paced environment, dictated by technology (Beaudoin, 2003; Nworie et al., 2012). The rapid pace of technology has pushed the envelope of higher education and has had a direct impact on how leaders function. Leaders must be able to stay in front of the current technology and the demands of the student population and market. Nworie et al. (2012) reference that one need not look further than the nightly news to find stories of technology redefining how business is being conducted. These news stories have made their way into the forefront of topics at many board meetings, where there is power to give funding for distance education programs (Otte & Benke, 2006; Nworie et al., 2012). The study culminates in Nworie et al. (2012) claiming that leaders should possess an entrepreneurial spirit that must be reflected on their managers and faculty. The culture of institutions of distance
education must be that of perpetual motion, openness to updating policy, procedures, and a constantly fresh approach (Cornford & Pollock, 2003; Portugal, 2008).

**Roadblocks**

Nworie et al. (2012) point out that, historically, department chair/program heads are the ones who have the power to obstruct implementation or get behind it. A faculty champion is necessary for a leader in higher education to be successful. Christensen (2008) wrote about faculty quality concerns for students and institutions alike. The number of part-time faculty has been increasing over the past five years. In 2010, adjunct or part-time faculty made up 70 percent of college faculty (Adjunct Nation, 2010). This increase can be attributed in part to the growth of distance education. The advantage of hiring adjunct faculty is that the institution can save a substantial amount of money because they do not have to provide office space and can pay adjuncts at a lower per-class rate than full-timers (Christensen, 2008). The main disadvantage is that adjunct faculty’s skills are not fully developed. Quite often, adjunct faculty have full-time jobs and are stretched too thin to be able to completely focus on developing new material and teaching techniques (Fordyce, 2011). Christensen (2008) says, “most institutions do not encourage or reimburse for professional development, such as traveling to conferences to present papers or stipends for scholarship expenses” (p. 33). For adjuncts that desire full-time positions, lack of publishing or conference attendance can be serious hindrances to not only their careers, but to the students they teach (Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez, & Muth, 2010, p. 24).

Christensen (2008) continues the study by adding that adjuncts are retained semester by semester and in some institutions, student evaluations are used to rate adjuncts (Christensen, 2008, p. 34). Adjuncts need good evaluations from students and therefore will not be as
demanding as necessary and may inflate grades in order to curry favor with the students (Fagen-Wilen, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2006, p. 41). All of these factors contribute to the ethics and quality of teaching experience and lecture materials presented to the students. A successful organization will be able to identify the potential issues before they become a problem and make adjustments accordingly.

**Ethical Implications**

There are a number of authors contributing to the discussion of ethics and quality of distance education, with no one expert voice. For this topic in the review, the focus will be on the common theories presented by a handful of reputable researchers. The rapid expansion of online education opportunities has raised many concerns about academic integrity in online education. Because of this, two related issues must be taken into account. (1) "Academic rigor," refers to the concern that instructors apply comparable standards in assigning grades to their online and traditional students. Research by Ridley and Husband (1998) state that "there are fears that online students can receive better grades for equivalent learning or equivalent grades for learning at a lower level" (p. 2). (2) "Academic integrity," refers to the confidence that the work leading to recognized course achievement is the student's own work (McCabe & Pavela, 1997).

Wyatt claimed that those opposed to online education tend to view the growth of online instruction as "being driven by university administrators looking for economical ways of increasing enrollments" (Wyatt, 2005, p. 461). They view the economic and human capital costs of developing and delivering online courses as a drain from resources that could be used to strengthen traditional classroom instruction. Maloney (1999) asserts that one of the most serious concerns among professors regarding online education is "loss of control over the curriculum, a
main area of faculty responsibility and a hot issue in debates over the faculty's role in governing colleges and universities" (p. 21). Some worry that quality control policies are often not in place for online courses and consequently an inferior product may be delivered; consequently, online instruction may amount to little more than selling credits (Maloney, 1999; Wyatt, 2005).

The ethical implications for students are difficult for instructors to monitor. What can be tracked is the students’ participation, what they read, when they read it and the number of responses they post. Little is known about the moral and ethical stances that students adopt as they contend with the unique dimensions of online life (Davis, Katz, Santo, & James, 2010). This lack of data emanates from the fact that during face-to-face interaction, one can see the results of inappropriate and unethical behaviors immediately. However, online interaction can feel less personal since the other person in the exchange is not generally seen or heard. It is more difficult to ascertain whether the distance student is doing the work and the assignment is indeed done by the student enrolled or not (Toprak, Ozkanal, Aydin, & Kaya, 2010). It is the educational institution that should inform the students on collegiate ethics and academic honesty, which brings the topic back to leadership ensuring that the proper standards have been implemented and that they are doing it for the right reasons. Davis et al. (2010) concluded that institutions must constantly monitor quality and be ready to change with the evolving model. Once again, this leads to leaders making sense of these concerns and being mindful to change.

**Mindfulness**

Langer (1989) is responsible for originating the term individual mindfulness and mindlessness. Langer’s (1989) theory of mindfulness and mindless behavior provides a strong foundation for this research. However, the focus of Langer’s research was on individuals’ actions and not on organizations and leaders. Individual mindfulness requires “being open to
new ideas and different points of views as opposed to mindless activity whereby individuals become so efficient at following routines that they no longer consider alternatives or innovative viewpoints” (Kearney, Kelsey, & Herrington, 2013, p. 318). Embedded routines induce mindless action when they are not developing awareness, refining existing categories, or multiple perspectives on context (Langer, 1989). Gilovich (1991) added that mindful behavior requires an individual to question past viewpoints and recreate practices that are reflective of being thoughtful instead of mindless.

For the purposes of this study, the largest contributions to mindfulness are from Weick et al. (1999), Weick and Sutcliffe (2001), and Weick and Sutcliffe (2007). This research expanded on the earlier work of Langer (1989) by introducing the idea of ‘collective mindfulness’ into their studies of organizations and leadership. Weick et al. (1999) studied High Reliability Organizations (HROs) that avoid mistakes and failures by employing collective mindfulness. The authors innovated the employment of five processes at HROs called Mindful Organizing: (1) preoccupations with failure; (2) reluctance to simplify interpretations; (3) sensitivity to operations; (4) commitment to resilience; and (5) under-specification of structures (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001). The authors concluded that HROs strive to create a culture in which their employees are constantly looking for quality solutions. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) assert that these organizations must recognize potential, improve upon it based on new knowledge, and implement these new ideas to improve on the status quo. Vogus and Welbourne (2003) claim that mindful organizing can exist at any organization. It is believed by some researchers that institutions of higher education are highly reliable organizations (Hoy, 2003; Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2005). Further, those who practice collective mindfulness will also display unity and commitment.
Over the years, there have been many important contributions to and interpretations of mindfulness. Krieger’s (2005) definition of mindfulness is “a psychological state in which individuals engage in active information processing while performing their current tasks such that they are actively analyzing, categorizing, and making distinctions in data” (p. 127). Fiol and O’Connor (2003) make their own distinction of information processing by maintaining that paying attention to failure, simplification, and resilience produces mindfulness. Mindfulness helps people to be more aware of their environment, allows them to think of multiple interpretations, and leads them to exhibit sharper decision-making behavior (Fiol & O’Connor, 2003, p. 60). To sum it up, mindfulness as information processing is what comes out of this behavior (Lant & Shapira, 2001; Fiol & O’Connor, 2003). Drilling down further, Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe, and Weick (2014) claim that a mindful organization is more likely to occur when individuals are motivated to act for the benefit of others and are open to alternative perspectives. In essence, these individuals are sensitive to other’s needs and are concerned about not just their own, but other’s potential failures.

**Mindfulness in Organizations and Education**

Building on HROs, Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) broadened the topic with their theories of mindful organizations. The hallmarks for these organizations are: innovation, flexibility, and fast moving environments (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). A large amount of attention to detail must be paid and substantial resources must be invested to produce early detection of mindlessness. Additionally, an organization that employs mindful organizing exhibits a healthy environment with enhanced systems and procedures. Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) updated their definition of mindfulness as “a mental orientation that continually evaluates the environment as opposed to mindlessness where a simple assessment leads to choosing a plan that is continued until the plan
Hoy (2003) based his work on Langer’s (1992) individual mindfulness and Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) work on mindful organizations. Hoy (2003) applied these two constructs to schools and found those that follow Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) collective mindfulness theory are normally successful. School mindfulness inspires leaders to critically think and learn from their mistakes, while feeling comfortable listening to ideas from all areas of the organization, including faculty and staff (Hoy, 2003). In this structure, faculty is encouraged to challenge thoughts and behaviors, while conferring with those who have expertise. Hoy and Miskel (2008) later added to their research the idea that conceding to expertise rather than experience and rank leads to the best decisions. Lencioni (2002) made contributions to the field of mindfulness in education by investigating faculty trust in correlation to mindful leadership. If faculty trust is absent, then the commitment to the leader and their mindful organizations are in jeopardy. Lencioni (2002) determined that trust heightens commitment and success rates in mindful organizations. Jordan and Johannessen (2014) studied the potential impediments to a mindful organization. They claimed that it is difficult to maintain a mindful organization because the individuals involved bring so many nuances to the environment. Jordan and Johannessen (2014) focused on creating a mindful culture that aided in fostering the varying personalities and points of view. In addition, different departments within an organization have their own individual goals and may display organizational defensiveness, which is a large impediment to a mindful organization.

Some of the most current and pertinent impacts to mindfulness in education are discussed by Kearney, Kelsey, and Herrington (2013). Their work is based not only on Weick and Sutcliffe (2001), but Hoy (2003) as well. Kearney et al. (2013) discuss the importance of
individual mindfulness and the importance of challenging all formal procedures and structures. Further, having a mindful leader can have a profound effect on an institution’s mindfulness. Hoy et al. (2005) claim that a mindful leader can allow staff and faculty to feel safe taking risks. Even a leader who is personally acting mindful can have an impact. The marriage of just the leader acting mindful to creating a mindful organization will allow an open environment where new information, multiple perspectives, and viewing problems as opportunities will increase the probability of success for the organization (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The outcome is the ability to engage in meaningful problem solving with administrators and faculty (Kearney et. al, 2013). A mindful institution is always looking for danger and trying to quickly resolve small problems before they turn into large ones. An institution’s preoccupation with failure is “demonstrated by continually scanning for variations, avoiding routine rules and procedures, and correcting situations before they escalate into a crisis” (Hoy & Tarter, 2008; Kearney et. al, 2013). As referenced in this paper multiple times, institutions of higher education are complex organizations deeply rooted in tradition. In order to be mindful, leaders within these institutions must have a reluctance to simplify and instead continuously scrutinize the status quo. This style encourages diversity and disdains routine rules and standard procedures that are unshakeable (Kearney et. al, 2013). Kearney et al. (2013) believe these procedures must be refined and ever changing with the environment in order to mitigate risk.

**Mindful Leadership**

According to Weick and Sutcliffe (2001), leaders should be constantly looking to improve their current strategic plans and environment. Further, they should always scan inside and outside their organizations for potential problems, learn from them, and implement solutions in their organizations to prevent future problems. Coutu (2003) expanded on some of Weick and
Sutcliffe’s ideas about a leader’s mindfulness. Coutu (2003) says that leaders must be able to act on even the weakest signal of impending danger. A leader who endeavors to change an organization should work on recognizing needs continuously to ensure mindfulness (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). These authors claim that institutions of higher education have a tendency to be environments where innovation suffers for what is deemed as a safe environment. They conclude that some institutions are failing to answer the bell and are being left behind by their competition.

Coutu (2003) ably expanded on Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) hallmarks of a leader’s mindfulness by adding that leaders should: (a) Fixate on failure – leaders should be obsessed with the smallest details and events on the front line. Organizations must learn from their mistakes and spot failures early on – when they are small and easier to recover from (Coutu, 2003, p. 2). (b) Refuse to simplify reality – instead of taking shortcuts, one should seek more information that may be missing (Coutu, 2003). The more details there are, the better chance one has for success. (c) Hire generalists – employing executives with diverse backgrounds will give an organization a decided advantage. Coutu (2003) reasons that a generalist can cope with problems more creatively than specialists and has the ability to bounce back quickly from surprises. (d) Leap while looking – an organization must keep moving forward to grow. When the market is shifting around an organization, its leaders must be able to change in order not to fall behind. When an organization is lost, any action or movement can help them to discover what to do next (Coutu, 2003). (e) Do not over plan – plans can sometimes be too specific and can create a false sense of security (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001; Coutu, 2003). Well thought-out plans can fool people into believing that all is well and prevent them from looking for the unexpected. It can “heighten the tendency to postpone action during crises” (Coutu, 2003, p. 2).
Coutu suggests that many organizations should base their operations on this model, concluding that organizations that utilize some semblance of these characteristics are successful.

Figure 2.1 Weick & Sutcliffe’s Hallmarks of Mindfulness

Vogus and Sutcliffe (2012) state that the concept of mindful organizations “refers to the extent to which an organization captures discriminatory detail about emerging threats and creates a capability to swiftly act in response to these details” (p. 723). Becke (2014) claims that potential innovations are uncovered in mindful organizations. Further, these organizations are “comprised of an infrastructure of dialogue and organizational routines” (p. 49). As outlined in Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) *Hallmarks of Mindfulness*, leaders and organizations must be preoccupied with failure, question the current systems and beliefs, and always look for understanding through multiple lenses (Weick et. al, 1999; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012).

**Sensemaking**

Weick (1979) initially proposed the theory of sensemaking in *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. Weick identified that when chaos ensues, individuals and organizations could turn these events into orderly processes by making a shared interpretation of them. Sensemaking occurs only after the event has transpired. The act of making sense is up to an individual’s own
representation of reality. In Weick’s (1995) seminal piece, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, he expands on this own work by claiming that an individual makes sense of an event by comparing it to current and past experiences. In other words, each individual could have a different interpretation to any decision or event. Being a mindful organization at an institution of higher education requires constant change in structures and procedures. In order for an organization to accomplish this, they must be able to make proper sense of internal and external factors. They must also have systems in place so that employees understand the impact and outcomes of a particular change (Eddy, 2003).

Weick (1995) identified the seven properties of sensemaking as: (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. As an individual goes through the process of sensemaking, each of the seven properties interrelates and links. Being *grounded in identity* refers to how individuals interpret events and react to them. Also, how people identify themselves, as individuals, is another hallmark (Weick, 1995; Weick et al, 2005). The property of being *retrospective* refers to when individuals realize the event and what they notice will affect their interpretation of it (Weick, 1995; Kearney et al, 2013). It can alter how they make sense of it. Being *enactive of sensible environments* is when individuals discuss their current environments with others. As they build dialogue, their narrative will assist them in thinking and organizing their experiences (Weick, 1995). The *social* property refers to when an individual’s and organization’s sensemaking is a result of social activity. Sensemaking evolves through dialogue with one’s self and others (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is *ongoing*, because an individual will automatically react to an event. Individuals will adapt and adopt their environments, which are ongoing. They will make sense of what is in front of them and that will
always be changing, as will their ideas and beliefs (Weick, 1995). Individuals will *extract cues* from the event that they find relevant and believable. Essentially, anything that will help them is applied to the conclusion of making sense. Weick (1995) says that these extracted cues are the beginning seeds and lead to an individual’s reasoning of what has transpired. The idea of being *driven by plausibility rather than accuracy* is defined by Weick (1995) as "an equivocal, postmodern world, infused with the politics of interpretation and conflicting interests and inhabited by people with multiple shifting identities, an obsession with accuracy seems fruitless, and not of much practical help, either" (p. 61).

Weick (1995) believes that people depend on sensemaking to frame their surroundings and act accordingly. When an individual encounters instability or an issue they have not encountered before, they use this framework to inform their decision. These frames are submerged in one’s value system and beliefs and are acquired from their environment. In essence, leaders must develop potentially new methods for interacting with their environments and making sense of them. Changes external to an organization tend to shake the sensemaking process that leaders set forth (Weick, 1995). Therefore, the author concludes that identifying and labeling certain events for employees will help to simplify this process and give a common meaning of an event to the organization as a whole.

**Context for Research**

Established higher education institutions in the northeast area are amongst some of the most prestigious in the world, yet many of them have only begun to implement distance education within the past 10-15 years. While the market continues to move in the direction of distance education, established institutions have historically tried to find ways to utilize distance education only on a part-time basis. So there is no disruption to onsite programs, institutions of
higher education have developed graduate professional study units, cohorts, executive education, or part-time degrees. Over the past few years, distance learning leaders have attempted to make sense of market pressures and have been mindful to move their institutions forward in order to remain competitive. These institutions’ missions and strategies are ever changing. A distance education department must be cognizant of its strategic direction and not head down the wrong path. It must be well informed and have internal and external data at its fingertips. Being such a competitive market, understanding what the customers want and how the employees interpret it is paramount. Distance education departments must also contend with constant challenges with technology, faculty, external markets, ethics, quality, implementation, and maintenance.

A distance education leader’s ability to attain top faculty’s endorsement and participation is an important cog in the institution’s success. They are asking full time faculty, who have been mainly teaching onsite and are tenured or are on tenure-tracks, to be involved in reshaping their roles and the institution’s mission. There are many compelling factors occurring. People’s jobs could potentially be on the line, along with the prestige of the institution, and potentially the institution itself. The changing landscape of education has many institutions struggling and scrambling to figure out how to generate revenue and fill the needs of the customers (students). Drucker (1997) posits, “Thirty years from now the big university campuses will be relics. Universities won’t survive” (p. 125). Institutions must be mindful of this possibility and work to alleviate the risk and make changes as needed.

**Chapter 2 Summary**

The aforementioned studies are all strong contributions to the topic of this research. There is an abundance of research that has been conducted on leaders in higher education as well as mindfulness and sensemaking. However, distance education departments are a relatively new
breed. They have not been the subjects of much discussion until recently. The quickly evolving nature of distance education leaves many gaps in research. Even though Kearney et al. (2013) recently published their findings about leaders of distance education and their implementation methods, the position continues to evolve and the topic requires more time and research.

Where this research differentiates itself is that three departments at a single institution were studied regarding their ability to employ mindful organizing. Some established institutions have begun to implement online programs for approximately 15 years. Yet there are some institutions in the Boston area, known for their successful on-ground education, that have not implemented any online programs to date. This study examines these relatively new departments, the challenges they face, and how they operate. This study looks through the lens of how they are accomplishing this implementation and explores whether they are mindfully organizing. Also discussed are questions around how they are ensuring that their organizations are being mindful of their surroundings, internally and externally.

The dilemma of how to fit a traditional learning style into a distance education environment continues at many institutions. This study asks how departments are operating and implementing their online programs. Hoy (2003) found that mindless procedures and policies that have a damaging effect on the organization easily bog down institutions of higher education. In order to be mindful, one must display persistent attention to detail as well as an awareness of what is considered routine and normal (Levinthal & Rerup, 2006). Mindful institutions do not become too comfortable with the status quo, and are flexible and innovative in tackling new challenges (Kearney et. al, 2013). Furthermore, they anticipate changes, learn from their mistakes, and show resilience by constantly changing with the environment.

As referenced earlier, distance education departments have many challenges to contend
with. Among them are the changing external and internal landscapes. Technology, student needs, faculty concerns and demands, and central administration’s expectations all play a role in the pressures these departments face. Reading through the materials, one can conclude that it is a recipe for failure. However, there are many departments that are successful in their implementation efforts, despite the said challenges. Leaders of distance education at established institutions often come from environments that are encumbered by politics and governance, which make it difficult to navigate. Distance education requires endorsements from key constituents in order for there to be successful implementation. Organizations must have staff and faculty on the same page and understanding how they are operating. There must be a point at which they all make the same sense of the market and what needs to be done. Further, they have to be mindful of their surroundings and of their current internal environment. The challenge lies in getting faculty to be mindful of the external environment, as well as the internal one, and not play protector and stunt the innovation. Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) contributions play a key role in this study and act as the lens. In order for the institution to remain relevant, these changes must be carefully implemented, while getting all the groups to operate within the same model. A department’s ability to juggle this challenge in a moving landscape that is not fully defined is at the center of this study. This research reports on the evolving methods departments are using to implement and operate distance education programs. It seeks to understand the similarities and variances of the operational procedures within three departments at a single institution. Lastly, it informs how departments are strategizing, operating, making decisions, changing with the markets, and collaborating internally and externally. Even within a changing environment, it is evident that this study offers discoveries to be researched and contributes to a better understanding of the field.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

The direction of this research has been identified and described in the first two chapters. The purpose of this chapter is to present the approach that was utilized in this study. Included in this chapter are the methodology, design, data collection methods, and the process in which the researcher analyzed the findings.

Overall Plan

This descriptive case study utilizes the qualitative approach in order to understand the role of mindfulness in distance education organizations. Three methods were used to carry out the research: document review, semi-structured interviews, and observations. These methods attempt to uncover the nature of mindfulness for three departments at a single institution, all of which are in the midst of strategic planning for distance education programs. How are multiple departments implementing and operating distance education programs at a single institution? What sense are they making of the internal and external environments? How mindful are they in their implementations and daily operations? What adjustments are they making in order for this implementation to fit their institution’s strategic vision? In a fast-moving world, are they in a state of perpetual movement like the technology that is being utilized for the delivery and how are they accounting for that? The research explores organizations in the midst of strategic planning for online program offerings using the lens of Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing. This lens allows an alternative view of collective cognition of distance education departments as they seek to examine failures, uncover assumptions, and reconcile unanticipated events.

As described in the assumptions and limitations section in Chapter One, this study employs a social constructivist worldview. The researcher wanted the participants to seek an
understanding of their environment and apply meaning to their experiences and situations. The researcher looked for the complexity of viewpoints and disseminated them through the research (Creswell, 2007). Given the researcher’s connection to the university, the interview process for all sites focused on asking broad questions in order to allow the participants to answer in their own words and not be led. Lastly, allowing the participants to discuss their interactions, views, and behaviors made this constructivist approach the appropriate one to use for this study.

With the constant movement of technology, so goes distance education. As referenced earlier, distance education organizations continue to work under conditions that are in perpetual motion. Looking on the horizon, there appears to be no change to this pattern. Researching these business units uncovered how they are coping with these changes and adapting so they can sustain their success in an ever-changing market.

Three phases were utilized for this case study: Phase I is a document review of internal and external strategic operational plans for adopting distance education; Phase II focuses on semi-structured interviews with key staff members and leaders of distance education; and Phase III includes observations of the organization through meeting participation and a sample of an online course.

**Research Methodology and Paradigm**

A descriptive case study (Creswell, 2012) using qualitative methods was used for this doctoral thesis. A case study, using purposeful sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989) enabled the researcher to explore the phenomenon of mindful organizing to gain more in-depth understanding of how organizations are implementing and operating distance education programs. This study explores how three departments at a single institution are strategizing,
operating, making decisions, changing with the markets, and collaborating internally and externally.

**Research Tradition**

The ways in which distance education departments are employing mindfulness during implementation at multiple institutions can be defined as a process, activity, or program (Creswell, 2012). Case Study Research is most fitting for this study, as it addresses a real setting at multiple sites within a bounded system by time and place (Creswell, 2012). Stake (1995) believes that a case study is a choice of what is to be studied and not a methodology, while “others present it as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy” (Creswell, 2012, p. 73). Each site discussed situations that they are currently experiencing: the implementation and operation of online education programs. After completing the field study, it is fair to say that there are many similarities and few variances between Brandeis University departments and the ways they operate. More specifically, they tend to experience similar challenges when implementing and operating online programs.

Utilizing documents, semi-structured interviews, and observations helped to understand the experience that occurred at each location and thus answered the “how” and “why” questions (Creswell, 2007). This allowed the researcher to find common themes and analyze their universal qualities.

**Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to explore how business units at a single institution are implementing and operating distance education programs. The research design utilized for this study is the qualitative approach. Qualitative research is the “study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”
(Creswell, 2012, p. 37). Further, Creswell (2012) defines the qualitative approach as “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study” (p. 37). This definition works well for this study because, through semi-structured interviews, the rich data that was collected was the best method for understanding how these departments are implementing and operating programs. Qualitative research allowed the participants to make sense out of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). A quantitative study would not supply this type of data collection or yield the necessary materials for this research.

Sample Design

The sampling for this study was chosen to be at three departments within Brandeis University. The reasons the researcher selected the sites were because accessibility is reasonable and the recent implementations of distance education at each unit varies. Having the units at different stages and levels of implementation allowed the study to be better informed of the implementation process and the continuing operations of these programs, as to employ a purposeful sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989). Studying distance learning at the three locations allowed the researcher to gain an accelerated understanding through prolonged engagement. This study called for subjects with varying experience in implementing and operating online education programs from three departments at Brandeis University. The sampling strategy utilized is maximum variation. The study documented diverse variations from the different units, while identifying key common patterns (Creswell, 2012). Choosing departments within the same institution, but at differing levels of distance education engagement and experience assisted in attaining a good sample. The usage of maximum variation in this study allowed the researcher to get a range of different conditions through the phenomenon of mindful organizing decision-making (Eisenhardt, 1989).
The target population was administrators of distance education in three departments. Administrators of distance education were identified as the following: Executive Director, Director, Associate Director, and similar position titles. Most of the research was done in the field, as are most qualitative studies (Creswell, 2012). The requirement for this study was that the participants must have been employed at Brandeis and been involved in the planning of distance education for at least two years. The reasoning for this limit was so that responses would be based on experiences internally and externally. No more than three participants were interviewed per site so the research was focused on the process level of the organization.

**Recruitment and Access**

The purpose of this section is to describe the recruitment and access process for the study sites and the participants. It will go into detail the steps taken to select the three business units and the seven participants.

**Access to research site**

This study took place at three units within Brandeis University in Waltham, MA. Brandeis University was founded in 1948 and named after Louis Dembitz Brandeis, the distinguished associate justice of the United States Supreme Court. The school has long reflected Justice Brandeis’ ideals of social justice. Since 1948, the school has grown significantly in a relatively short period of time. In 1985, Brandeis was elected to membership in the Association of American Universities, confirming its place amongst the top 62 research universities in the United States and Canada (Brandeis University, 2014). Brandeis University has consistently been ranked in the top 35 colleges by US News and World Report every year since the ranking began (US News and World Report, 2015).
There were seven possible units that could be studied at Brandeis University. All seven offer or are in the midst of offering an online program or degree (see Figure 3.1 below). The researcher approached all seven units about participation in this study, but only four responded. Graduate Professional Studies (GPS), Rabb Summer School (RSS), Brandeis Genesis Institute (BGI), and International Business School (IBS) were the four that agreed to participate. The latter, IBS, was used as a pilot site for the study. Detailed descriptions of the three study sites are below. The sites that did not respond are as follows:

• Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) has been in existence since 1953. Offering forty programs and an enrollment of 943 in the fall of 2014, GSAS is the largest and most established graduate school at Brandeis (Brandeis University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, 2015). There are several instances of distance education planning and offerings within the forty programs. Efforts were made to contact an administrator and dean for GSAS that went unanswered.

• Heller School for Social Policy and Management has been in existence since 1953. Offering six degree programs and an enrollment of 536 in the fall of 2014, Heller is continually ranked as one of the top Public Affairs and Social Policy universities in the world (Brandeis University, Heller School of Social Policy & Management, 2015). Heller is in discussions about offering online programs and how they fit in the market. Email communication with the dean of Heller indicated that they did not wish to be part of this study.

• International Business School (IBS) did respond and was used as a pilot site. More about the pilot site can be found in chapter 3. IBS has been in existence since 1994. Offering seven degree programs and an enrollment of approximately 500 students in the fall of
2014, IBS is consistently ranked as a top business school in the world for International Economics and Finance (Brandeis University, International Business School, 2015).

- The Undergraduate Programs have been in existence since the inception of Brandeis University, 1948. Offering 55 programs and an enrollment of approximately 3,614 in the fall of 2014, the undergraduate programs are amongst some of the best in the world (US News and World Report, 2015). There are several undergraduate programs that are exploring and have offered online programs. In particular, in 2012, Brandeis entered a consortium of universities to offer online courses called 2U (Brandeis Now, 2012). This endeavor did not work out and the consortium disbanded. Efforts were made to contact administrators in the Provost’s office that went unanswered.
The first and most experienced site in distance education at Brandeis University was the Graduate Professional Studies (GPS) department. GPS was founded in 1997 and has graduated over 1,400 students for their master’s degree (Brandeis University, GPS, 2014). GPS currently offers eight master’s degree programs in the fields of Bioinformatics; Information Technology Management; Information Security; Health and Medical Informatics; Online Instructional Design and Technology; Project and Program Management; Software Engineering; and Strategic Analytics (Brandeis University, GPS, 2014). GPS began as a predominately on the ground program, with a few online courses, and switched over to completely online courses in 2011.

The second research site was the Rabb Summer School Program (RSS) at Brandeis University. The program has been in existence since 1974. The RSS is an open admission
program offering courses and special summer programs for college-level credit (Brandeis University, Rabb, 2014). Brandeis faculty members, from several departments on campus, teach the courses. There are no “set” faculty members that teach for the RSS. They contract faculty to teach for them. The Summer School program is a small operation with only two full-time staff members. They operate a successful program that began to offer online courses in 2009.

The Brandeis Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry (BGI) was launched in 2009. BGI’s mission is to work specifically with young Russian-speaking adults who engage in Jewish life and deepen their knowledge of the heritage (Brandeis-Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry, 2014). BGI is funded by the Genesis Philanthropy Group. Through this partnership, BGI offers scholarships and programming for three groups of students: high school summer program students (BIMA); Genesis undergraduate fellows; and graduate (Hornstein) fellows (Brandeis Jewish Leadership Incubator, 2014).

BGI programs are built on three pillars of impact: Community Engagement, Research and Scholarship, and Professional Development. The program within the BGI that was researched is the Brandeis Jewish Leadership Incubator (BJLI). The BJLI consists of a twelve month fellowship that welcomes Russian-speaking Jewish professionals, “fortified by superior management skills, Jewish knowledge, systematic understanding of the Russian-speaking and American Jewish communities, and commitment to the future of the Jewish people” (Brandeis Jewish Leadership Incubator, 2014). The fellowship is a hybrid program that combines distance education with a residential element for up to 15 students.

Recruitment of participants

Before the recruitment process could begin, the researcher received permission from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Brandeis University to conduct this study of the institution. The
recruitment for each unit was similar and involved four steps. First, the researcher reviewed the organizational structure through a document review and identified all of the units at Brandeis University that were engaged in distance education discussions and planning. All of these findings were validated through discussions with key administrators at Brandeis University. Second, a general introduction letter and solicitation was sent to the department head and/or deans of each unit. Third, the researcher set up a blend of face-to-face and email meetings with the leaders from the potential units, explaining the purpose of the study and asking permission to interview key staff and observe operational and strategic meetings. Forth, the researcher contacted the potential participants directly to solicit their interest in taking part in the study. Out of the seven business units contacted, four agreed to be part of the study. One was chosen as a pilot site (IBS) and three others were chosen because of their varying amounts of experience with distance education. Maximum variation was accomplished through this selection of an organization that has been offering distance education for 17 years (GPS), 5 years (RSS), and just beginning in January 2015 (BGI). Creswell (2012) says that the researcher must find common experiences and themes. This study is applicable only to this particular university and is not generalizable to the larger population (Creswell, 2007).

A purposeful sampling resulted in 12 potential participants throughout the three business units being targeted. There were three criteria for participants in this study. They had to: (1) be employed at Brandeis University for at least two years; (2) be involved in the decision-making and design of distance education; and (3) agree to be part of this study. From the 12 potential participants, 9 participants were identified that fit the criteria. Two of the participants were not able to take part in the study because of health and scheduling conflicts, thus bringing the number to 7 participants, 3 at GPS, 2 at RSS, and 2 at BGI.
Each of these participants was contacted with an introductory email by the researcher. This communication provided the potential participant with an overview of the study and revealed the research process. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The letter also stated that each interview would take no more than 60 minutes, it would be audio recorded, and that they would have the opportunity to read the transcription and track or add to their comments. Lastly, each participant was asked to choose dates and times convenient for them as well as a private office location they were comfortable with.

**Participant profiles**

Seven staff members across three business units participated in this study: five females and two males. The participant’s years of experience at Brandeis ranged from 2 years to 39 years. The participant’s years of experience with distance education while working at Brandeis ranged from 2 years to 17 years. The participant titles ranged from Executive Director to Associate Director at their respective departments and, thus keeping the study focused on the strategic intent and operations of each unit. The large variable in years of experience and title was the researcher’s attempt to bring purposeful sampling to the study (Merriam, 2009).

Within 48 hours of each interview, a copy of the interview transcript was emailed to the participant for them to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. All participants confirmed their respective transcriptions and only one had added onto one of her answers.

**Overall Plan**

The researcher followed a sequential data collection process that involved 3 techniques at each of the three business units (see Table 3.1). After collecting all of the data; (1) the researcher moved into data analysis for each of the business units; (2) after the researcher conducted a unit
analysis, a cross-unit analysis commenced; and (3) a cross data technique was used to identify themes.

Table 3.1. Data Collection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Document Review</th>
<th>Semi-structured interviews</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis for each unit</td>
<td>Review all operational and strategic materials from institution’s website, news articles, internal documents, marketing materials, and articles involving the institution’s online programs and leaders/participants in the study.</td>
<td>Review all semi-structured interviews, and code transcripts.</td>
<td>Review observation notes from all meetings attended. Identifying codes and pertinent passages pertaining mindful decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross unit Analysis</td>
<td>Compare codes and potential themes from each unit – similarities and variances.</td>
<td>Develop an aggregate of codes across all units and eliminate duplicates. Identified potential emerging themes.</td>
<td>Compared codes and notes from observations to confirm potential emerging themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-data technique to identify themes</td>
<td>Validate themes in documents.</td>
<td>Validate themes by tying them back to the literature and research question, using quotes from interviews.</td>
<td>Validate themes in observation notes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Three steps of data collection, highlighted above, were utilized for this research. The utilization of the three steps ensured that there was consistency in the data and that it was reliable (Creswell, 2012). Step 1 was the review of relevant documents within a business unit, to include structure and distance education operational policy. Step 2 was face-to-face interviews with key informants in each three units to discuss how their business unit is operating and planning for distance education; and Step 3 involved observations of operational or strategy meetings around
the topic of the distance education program. While collecting the data, each site was kept separate, but was researched and scrutinized under the same parameters.

**Step 1: Document review of each unit’s distance education operations & strategy**

The purpose of the document review was to gather an understanding of what and who was being studied. The document review process is outlined in Appendix C. The first step included an examination of the institution’s website materials on distance education, an understanding of online offerings, marketing materials for students, announcements, newsletters, public strategic plans, annual reports, and advisory board minutes that discuss strategic planning and operations. Second, the researcher investigated articles about the institution’s online programs, including rankings and news materials. All articles or stories relating to the participants were also reviewed. Third, a request was made to each site for any internal strategic planning, memos, and operational documents that could be shared for the purpose of this research. The researcher was aware that there was a possibility that this request may not be granted because of confidentiality issues. However, most requests were met without any objections. Having the majority of these documents to review helped the researcher to get a full picture of both internal and external strategy and operations. It assisted in understanding the proposed direction of the institution and was used to understand the organization’s mindfulness.

The researcher extracted sections of the materials and created a comprehensive guide from Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing attributes: preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and under-specification of structures. All materials that contained strategy and operations were listed under these attributes. Analysis of documents were linked back to the research question in order to keep the study focused (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Fifteen documents were reviewed from
each business unit. The materials were used to supplement interviews and observations and greatly assisted in creating a complete study of each site. Several findings from the document review were utilized in the interviews as probes. It set the stage, by “portraying the values and beliefs of participants in their setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 107).

**Step 2: Semi-structured interviews with key informants at three units**

Semi-structured interviews took place at each site. Seven total interviews were conducted with key staff members. Each interview was conducted in a convenient location for the participant and lasted no more than one hour. The semi-structured method worked well for the study, as the order of the questions did not matter as much as the content. It allowed for flexibility and extemporaneous discussions to occur, which yielded stronger interviews (Merriam, 2009). There were three primary questions and nine probes. The specific questions that were asked can be found in the interview protocol in Appendix B. The document review was often reflected in the questions asked by the researcher, as the interviews were the second phase of data collection. The interviews were designed to bring rich data that filled in the details as to how departments are mindfully organizing while they are in the midst of strategic planning for online program offerings. Notes were taken during the interview to highlight areas in which the researcher found particularly poignant and/or required a follow-up question. These notes were copied onto the transcribed document for reference during the analysis stage.

Recording procedures included a Sony audio recorder and note taking during the interview. This assisted in organizing thoughts, concluding ideas, and creating follow-up questions (Creswell, 2012). A paid confidential third party (Rev.com) transcribed all of the interviews. In order to enhance trustworthiness, participants were given their transcripts for review. All copies of the interviews, transcriptions, and coding are kept on a secured password
protected computer server that is only accessed by the researcher. The server has a secured redundant hard drive that backs-up all materials in the event of a hard drive failure. All field notes that were taken were transcribed and stored on the secured computer server. After transcription of the field notes, the notes were destroyed. Materials were carefully marked using pseudonyms in order to protect the subjects. A database was kept containing a master list of dates, times, and information that had to be gathered. All audio recordings are properly labeled and stored in a safe.

**Step 3: Observations**

The observation portion of the study was used more as a validation technique to see each unit in action. Requests were made to observe operations and strategic meetings to help solidify how each unit was engaging in mindful organizing. The researcher observed 6 meetings at 2 out of 3 business units. The third business unit (BGI) was not available because of time constraints on the unit. However, the 2 document collection methods of document review and interviews proved to be enough information to inform the research. The researcher is a participant and observer in other distance education meetings across campus and that informed the overall conclusions that had already been formulated. The ability to collect this data further validated an understanding of how the institution operates and gave practice to the theory discussed in the interviews.

For all observations, the researcher requested the ability to take notes to ensure accuracy in reporting. The researcher not only observed what was being said, but how the meetings were being conducted: who led the meeting, who were the participants, their roles, whether there was an agenda or not, was it adhered to, and if everyone had an opportunity to express their opinions. All notes were reviewed and initial themes were noted. The notes were made available to
meeting attendees to validate or dispute. The observation protocol, along with Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing rubric, the researcher developed for note taking, can be found in Appendix D.

Table 3.2. Observation Types per Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Professional Studies</th>
<th>Rabb Summer School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director’s Strategy Meeting</td>
<td>Collaboration/debriefing Meeting with a University Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director’s Meeting</td>
<td>Staff Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Meeting</td>
<td>Marketing Meeting with Vendor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pilot of semi-structured interviews and observations

Before the research process began, the researcher piloted interview questions and observed meetings at IBS. Two semi-structured interviews and two observations were conducted. This allowed the researcher to hone the questions in the interviews, keep to the time limit, ensure that the process was agreeable to the subjects, understand the importance of guiding the sessions and keeping to the script and order of questions, and go through the process of transcription, coding, and member checking. The observations allowed the researcher to practice looking for operational and strategic discussions and how the notes should be organized by putting them into a grid of mindful organizing attributes. Lastly and most importantly, the piloting of interviews and observations convinced the researcher to change the focus of the study from the leadership level to the organizational level. Studying the people that are actually implementing and strategizing gave the research a better view into each business unit. For example, there were a few research questions that focused on the point of view of faculty members. It became evident that the daily operations and strategy was not carried-out by the faculty and would have not yielded many findings.
Data Analysis

The analysis process commenced after all of the data was gathered. To help organize, the researcher analyzed each of the business unit’s data one at a time. After each unit was analyzed, the researcher examined cross-case (Creswell, 2012) to identify themes. The following paragraph further describes the process.

Documents, interview transcripts, observational notes, and the researchers field notes were used as the sources for data analysis. **Step 1** involved creating a general profile of the distance education operational practices across units. **Step 2** involved developing a profile of the key informant to ascertain their perspective on the distance education practices and extent to which mindful qualities (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001) were reflected in their descriptions. **Step 3** involved categorization of the practices across all three data sources in each business unit, using 15-20 codes using Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) attributes (see Appendix H). **Step 4** involved code classifications into three themes (see Table 4.1). **Step 5** involved validating these common themes in face-to-face session between researcher and business unit leaders, where they reviewed the themes and codes as described in the below subsection. **Step 6** involved the development of 3 findings. **Step 7** involved examination of analysis output in relation to the research question.

Deductive Approach

The approach used was deductive analysis (Figure 3.3) using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) process coupled with Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) framework for coding. The approach was deductive analysis using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) process coupled with Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) framework for coding. A deductive process is often used in qualitative studies when verifying themes against data. It can also be used in evaluating patterns against the data to
confirm the accuracy of the analysis. Creswell (2012) says that using deductive analysis helps to reinforce the identification of patterns and themes. The deductive analysis approach usually moves from the general to the specific. The three phases of deductive analysis are: preparation, organizing, and reporting (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). The preparation entails becoming familiar with the materials by reading through them several times and immersing oneself in the data. Asking questions such as: who, when, where, what, and why will help to move to the next phase (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Organizing was done by creating a categorization table and moving the appropriate code and phrasing to each grouping. Afterwards, the researcher was able to make sense of the themes and findings from the study (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999). Lastly, reporting allows the researcher to relay the findings from the study.

Figure 3.2 Deductive Analysis

| Preparation | • Selecting Unit of Analysis  
|             | • Data Collection  
|             | • Data Reduction  |
| Organizing  | • Data Display  
|             | • Coding and Themes  |
| Reporting   | • Findings and Theories  
|             | • Conclusions  |

This researcher used Miles and Huberman’s (1994) process - data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusions: drawing and verification. (1) Data collection refers to
the document reviews, interviews, and observations made for the study. (2) Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes and transcriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). In essence, it is the identification of codes. (3) Data display is the review of the codes and the commonality findings, which begin to reveal themes. Lastly, (4) conclusions: drawing and verification is the finalization of the findings, understanding what they mean and verifying their legitimacy.

Figure 3.3 Data Analysis Process

Data collection

To ensure that the data would be rich, three collection methods were utilized for this study: document review, semi-structured interviews, and observations.

Data reduction

The researcher took a six-step approach for the reduction of the data. (1) The interview transcripts were separated by department and all were read through without any notes being taken. This was done to become familiar with the content and to avoid making any sweeping
judgments (Thomas, 2009). (2) The researcher did all of the coding by hand. The transcripts were read a second time utilizing descriptive coding. This allowed for “basic vocabulary” and some categories to bubble up for further scrutiny (Turner, 1994). Using descriptive coding allowed the researcher to depict what was said and gave a stronger understanding of potential initial themes and identify topics (Saldaña, 2013). Lastly, this allowed for key sections and like codes to be highlighted and documented on another sheet of paper by topics of discussion. (3) The interviews were read a third time, using in vivo coding to identify common phrases (Saldaña, 2013). Similarities in the code were identified and additional key sections and like codes were documented on another sheet of paper using Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing attributes: preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and under-specification of structures. (4) The interviews were read a final time using pattern coding to help develop major themes. Finding similarly coded passages allowed the researcher to link relationships in the code across units and three themes emerged as a result: Operational Change, Strategic Decision-Making, and Collaborative Culture. (5) After three rounds of coding, an aggregate of codes emerged from all of the units and were placed under the aforementioned themes to verify (see Table 4.1). (6) Lastly, notes about each participant were merged with the three themes for further validation (see Appendix E for the participant notes).

**Data display**

This next step of the analysis entails the review of the codes and the commonality findings, which began to reveal the main themes and potential findings. Miles and Huberman (1994) claim that the usage of charts and graphs helps to organize information into justified conclusions or move a study to the next step of analysis. A table was created for each
department within the emerging codes from the in vivo coding. All of the tables were compared and duplicates were eliminated to produce a combined table with common codes. A similar table was created for the observation portion of the study. These tables were compared and similarities and variances were highlighted. All pertinent codes were placed below the research question. This further vetted the codes and ensured that they were common within each site. Lastly, the researcher created a visual with the three over-arching themes that had emerged to this point. In an effort to capture the theoretical lens, it contains key quotes that displayed mindful organizing attributes (See Appendix G).

**Drawing and verifying conclusions**

Drawing and verifying conclusions include the finalization of the themes and the understanding of what they mean as well as verifying their legitimacy (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The researcher identified that Weick and Sutcliffe’s mindful organizing examines operations, change, strategy, decision-making, culture, and collaboration, thus making them the main themes and focus of the study. After concluding the document review, semi-structured interviews, and observations, it became clear at each unit what some of the themes were. There also had to be leadership thematic validation that these were, in fact, the themes they recognized as well. This step of analysis involved sharing the common codes with the leader. Leaders from each unit were given a document highlighting codes and trends from the findings and asked to comment and identify questions they had. This gave validity to the findings and allowed the leaders insight into what was researched in their organization. It also allowed the researcher to receive feedback and validate codes, and understand how the leaders viewed their respective departments and the university as a whole. It also highlighted the importance of the codes at
each unit and allowed the researcher to compare across all units, thus helping to inform the themes.

The researcher kept notes of initial impressions from each observation and interview that was conducted. Not wanting to have any biases coming into meetings and interviews, the researcher decided not to review these notes until the study at that particular unit was complete. Data displays played a key role in the study. Displays were utilized to disseminate materials and findings. They assisted with emerging themes and keeping the work organized. The analysis of data was ongoing because there was some collaboration between the three sites that opened further inquiries from the researcher.

**Trustworthiness**

Maintaining trustworthiness was the key to the success of the study. There was prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field and of the field. Throughout the process, the researcher continually conducted member checks with the subjects via email. Boundaries were set in the beginning to ensure that subjects were comfortable with the arrangement. Participants also received a full description of the study, research question, and an explanation of the theoretical lens in which the study was viewed. This enabled building trust, understanding the culture, and ensuring that all information being collected was correct (Creswell, 2012). The fact that the researcher had an understanding of the topic beforehand helped to clarify all biases. As a practitioner, this researcher had certain beliefs and understandings going into the study. These beliefs were clearly stated from the beginning. Additionally, having common interests with participants on the topic helped to build trust and rapport (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Having this rapport with the subjects and recruiting mostly
those who have experience with online education, allowed the conversations to have rich and deep content.

There were many potential threats to the study that were mitigated. Aside from having an advisor appointed by Northeastern University to provide peer reviewing, additional qualified support was available to audit the research. The researcher solicited participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations through a draft copy of the transcriptions. The participants had the ability to change and correct what they felt was necessary from their interviews. Providing a detailed description was necessary to help inform the research question. Equally important was the usage of triangulation and member checking to corroborate evidence from different sources to help shed light on the theme and perspective (Creswell, 2012). This was done through the data collected: documents, semi-structured interviews, and observations.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher has been employed by Brandeis University for over 12 years at the International Business School (IBS) as the head of Technology and Capital Projects. The researcher is involved in a number of committees internally and university-wide regarding distance education. From this, the researcher has familiarity with the strategic intent and operational decisions related to distance education at Brandeis University.

Working at the university, the researcher was aware of possible bias towards interpretations. Control for researcher bias was taken through the following 7 steps: (1) this study did not take place at the researcher’s place of business; (2) the researcher did not interview anyone he supervised; (3) member checks were conducted for all interview transcriptions and notes were made available for all observations; (4) leadership thematic analysis was used as a way to validate themes; (5) throughout the research process, discussions with colleagues who
were studying their universities were had to ensure that the research process was reliable; (6) a personal journal was kept about the research process and noted reflections and potential bias; and (7) a PhD organizational expert reviewed the research process, data analysis, and findings. These steps helped to ensure that the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were supported by the data (Creswell, 2012).

Protection of Human Subjects

The research required semi-structured interviews with key staff from three departments at Brandeis University that have distance education programs. One of the benefits of this study is that it allowed participants to gather information about how institutions of higher education are implementing and operating distance education programs. This is a sensitive topic that may be difficult for some to discuss openly and honestly in fear of the material surfacing in a negative fashion. The following assisted in easing these concerns.

This study abided by the standards and practices set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants’ rights were protected and risk was mitigated. The study did not involve any children, prisoners, or pregnant women. There were no obvious physical risks to any participant. Participation required that the individual had implemented and/or administered an online program. No participant was forced to take part in the study. Interview participants were informed verbally as well as through an informed consent form (see Appendix A), that their participation was voluntary. The participant was issued a copy of the signed form and the researcher retained one for their records. All documentation was given to the participant again before the interview for additional review. This information included an explanation of the research being conducted, why the participant was chosen, how much of their time was required, and the risks and benefits from their involvement. Further, participants were reminded that all
involvement was voluntary and they could withdraw at any point. Each participant was given the researcher’s contact information.

Since the material discussed could potentially be sensitive in nature, all data collected was kept confidential. Participants were given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity if they chose (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants had the opportunity to view transcripts to ensure accuracy and their comfort level. All copies of the interview and research materials are kept on a secured password protected computer server that is only accessed by the researcher.

**Positionality Statement**

The researcher’s assumptions and biases can be impactful on the study’s findings. This section will fully disclose the researcher’s position on distance education at Brandeis University relative to the research conducted.

The researcher has been actively involved in distance education as a student, faculty member, and administrator at Brandeis University for approximately twelve years. Being involved in a number of online endeavors on campus, the researcher is aware of most initiatives and the administrators involved. Working at a decentralized unit at Brandeis, the researcher has worked with central administration on a limited basis, but went into the research understanding that at least one of the findings may involve them. While all of the other business units in this study are decentralized like the IBS, they do not have the same amount of resources available to them and therefore are not as autonomous.

The researcher is also a clear supporter of distance education and recognizes that central administration could be viewed as a hindrance by other units. As an administrator and information technology practitioner, there are a number of commonly held assumptions: lack of
effectiveness of central administration, budget driven models limits growth, central office controls all resource allocations and one cannot grow without it, there has to be alignment with the central administration office, there has to be streamlining to reduce duplication of efforts, central administration has to be involved in each endeavor, central administration must dictate collaboration with each business unit, more structure is better, and tension between central administration and these units must be reduced.

The researcher took great care in assuring that the participant’s words were reported and not any preconceived notions. This was done through member checks and depending heavy on the coding process.

**Chapter 3 Summary**

These three chapters provide an introduction to the study conducted by this researcher. This chapter described the methodology the researcher used for data collection as well as how the data was analyzed. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how distance education departments mindfully organize. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand how these three units were making strategic and operational decisions. Those results will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this descriptive, qualitative case study was to gain insight into how distance education departments mindfully organize. This study focused on three departments, at a single university, that are implementing and operating distance education programs. This study identified how and if these units were mindful of the distance learning environment and their methods of adjusting to change, making decisions, and collaboration efforts. There were seven units that were identified as offering or planning to offer distance education programs. Invitations to take part in the study were extended to each of these units. Of the seven, four responded with favorable responses. One of the four was used for the pilot study, which included two interviews and two observations. The remaining three sites were utilized for this research. Invitations for interviews were sent to twelve potential participants from the three units. Due to time constraints, non-responsiveness, and lack of interest in participating in the study, a total of seven participants agreed to take part in the study.

Introduction

The goal of the study was to answer the research question: What is the nature of mindfulness for three departments’ strategic planning and operations for distance education programs at a single institution? This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section is comprised of descriptions of the three sites. The second section presents the profiles for each participant by site and discusses individual findings. The third section will provide a detailed description of the data analysis processes utilized by the researcher. The fourth section offers the themes for all of the sites, as well as the overall findings.
Description of the Three Study Sites

Through conversations with other units on campus, GPS is widely recognized as the center for distance education at Brandeis University. Despite this recognition, they do not have the full support of the university as a whole. In Brandeis University’s 2013 strategic plan, there are only four instances of the phrase “distance education,” whereas there are one hundred and sixty one instances of the word “research” throughout the 72-page document. There are mere mentions of what is being done by GPS and other pockets within the university and no real plans to advance distance education. Brandeis University is deeply rooted in research and the new strategic plan has hindered distance education initiatives due to the lack of planning by central administration. Pockets at Brandeis University are not dissuaded from offering online courses, but the support is not present. This is one of the few struggles GPS must contend with in an environment in which they are chartered to grow (Brandeis University, GPS, 2014). As a result, GPS operates like a small franchise, where they are allowed to innovate a bit, but not without the permission from the central offices. Within this structure, GPS strives to stay current in the market and uses mindful organizing as a method to achieve success. This unit is in perpetual motion, always looking for ways to improve and mitigate failures. GPS recently hired a Vice President to run not only this unit, but also a few other similar units. This marks the first time that GPS has not been led by the provost’s office.

RSS was the smallest of the three business units studied. Therefore, their operations and strategy were not very robust. They run a very tight operation that yields over one million dollars in revenue per year. Two full time employees run the day-to-day operations of the unit and have been doing so for at least ten years. The two employees work very closely on all decisions and try to constantly adjust to the shifting markets. However, this unit proved to be the
least agile out of the three units, despite its small size. The main reason was RSS’ dependency on central administration. They utilize faculty from several departments on campus to teach their summer courses. This requires coordination with not only the respective departments, but the provost’s office as well. RSS mindfully organizes in their daily operations, but the hindrance from central administration and other departments on campus stunted their agile movements and required many work-around solutions.

This is BGI’s first experience with distance education, with a launch in January of 2015. BGI’s experience with on-the-ground offerings has been well documented. Their inexperience with the online portion of the program has caused them to look for assistance from other departments on campus. In particular, BGI has worked very closely with the provost’s office for strategic support, Library and Technology Services for technical support and GPS for online pedagogical support. Since BGI is new to the platform, they have benefited from GPS and RSS’ experience. Their needs are not beyond the current university’s infrastructure. Their perspective of central administration is that they are helpful and supportive. However, at that time of this study, the program had not been launched yet. BGI was aware of potential issues from conversations with GPS and RSS. They were operating this program like a start-up company would. Their organization was flat, where all employees were encouraged to express their ideas and opinions. They had an “all hands on deck” approach for this program and used many of the mindful organizing attributes without knowing it. While it was apparent that BGI normally operates using a hierarchical structure and remains internal, this online initiative program required them to be more dependent on outside sources and employ a flat organization. They realized that internal dialogue could prove helpful for implementation.
The Participants

Below is a brief introduction of all of the participants in the study. There is a short description of each participant and associated quotes that were utilized for the study’s data display (See Appendix E).

Lisa

Lisa has been working at GPS for nine years. During her nine years, Lisa has worked in three different roles: coordinator of registration, associate director of admissions, and director of admissions and recruitment. She works with students throughout the entire funnel. The “funnel” means that she works with them from “the prospect stage to obtaining leads to having them prospect with our division to applying for admission to then converting to student status and then graduation.”

Lisa is a “jack of all trades” and her demeanor was optimistic when it came to discussing internal operations. She remained optimistic even with external operations, but was cautious. She said:

There’s a ton of opportunities. I think now more than ever. I’ve seen more divisions and department reaching out to our particular division because of what we do…I anticipate as we move forward, we will work more with other departments.

Lisa reiterated this point a few times throughout the interview, but when asked about the larger university and their desire to innovate, she was not so optimistic. This strengthened her notion that pockets of the university are open to collaboration, but there is a lack of an overall plan. She stated her belief that GPS continues to move forward and eventually everyone would catch up. Lisa was just not sure how or when.
Jane

Jane has worked at GPS for fifteen years. During that time, Jane has worked her way from administrative assistant to director of administration and finance. Jane has been with GPS almost from its inception. She began when there were very few staff supporting the program so she has historically held multiple roles during her time at GPS. Only recently has that begun to change. Jane’s overall demeanor was positive, particularly when talking about internal relations. There has been a struggle with growth over the years because of shifting roles and a shifting market, but GPS has adjusted to this. Jane said:

…I think as we’ve gotten bigger and the number of staff has gotten bigger, kind of incrementally and slowly, we have now got a little bit more structure in place. We used to have everyone wear all of these hats. It’s a small group and everyone kind of knew how to do everything. And now it’s different, and we have more clearly defined roles and still have a lot of interaction…there is a little bit more of a hierarchy.

Much like her colleague, Lisa, when asked about collaboration, she was positive that there were strong partnerships to be had on campus. However, she did feel that the university was very far behind. “It’s happening so slow. There hasn’t been a lot of top-down support of distance learning at Brandeis.” Like Lisa, she was positive about internal, but not so optimistic about external – the university.

Mary

Mary has worked at GPS for seventeen years. She has worked in many different capacities. In 1997, she began as an adjunct instructor and did some other work for GPS starting in 2001. Over that time, she has grown into the position of executive director of GPS, acting as head of the department for approximately a year, until the recent hiring of a vice president for
this unit. Mary has worn many different hats, much like the other staff at GPS. She feels that it has allowed her to understand the organization better, particularly since she has developed along with the school. Mary is responsible for setting many of the policies and operations for GPS. She is data driven and very organized. She is optimistic about internal and external interactions, but is also a realist. She said:

> I’ve done some reorganization of the team and some different sub team structures to position us to growth and scale. Team development, staff development, budget, making sure that we hit targets or doing the forecasting.

With a new vice president in place, Mary has worked with her on the strategic plan for the school. She said:

> Now that we have a new leadership at GPS, she is reviewing the iterations that I’ve done for the GPS strategic plan, adding her vision for how that can tie into growth of online for the rest of the institution.

Mary was positive about partnering with different units on campus, but there has not been much of that to speak of yet. Over the years, she has organized dozens of meetings to discuss partnership possibilities, but the majority of these meetings have not gone anywhere. Mary is optimistic that with new leadership in place, collaborations will be fostered and roadblocks will be lifted. She is realistic that this will take some time to change and attributes the barriers to indecision.

**Kate**

Kate has worked at Brandeis University for thirty years. She began working at the RSS in 1978. Kate has worked her way up through the ranks since 1978, where she is currently the director of the program. She stated that normally a school of Brandeis’ size does not have a
summer school program, much less a very successful one. Kate has had to do more with far less. She worked by herself in this department until 1994, when they added another full-time employee. Kate works very closely with her staff member, Hal. They discuss all nuances of the strategy, decisions, and planning. She said:

If a problem comes up and the end result is something that Hal is going to have to work with, which is just about everything, I always solicit his view and we talk about it. I’ll tell him what I’m leaning toward and why I’m leaning toward it. He often brings up really good points, things that I had forgotten; particular groups that need to be worked with in a specific way. There is a great deal of give and take and a lot of respect for each other’s ideas.

The RSS is housed in the same building as GPS, so collaboration between the two units is easy and very successful. They also recently share the same new vice president. Previously, the RSS reported to the provost’s office. In order to launch the courses in the summer school, Kate must collaborate with several departments. This has been challenging for Kate throughout the years because of different policies and operational standards of the many units. She feels that they are “the tail that is wagged by the decision-making process.” Kate is concerned about the “lack of a formal communication pipeline.” Still, she is optimistic that online education will eventually grow at Brandeis University, starting with partnerships with other departments and then perhaps central administration will be forced to address it university-wide.

Hal

Hal has worked at the RSS for over ten years. Hal’s role as assistant director for the RSS is to support faculty and students. He also acts as the technical liaison with the Library Technology Services department at Brandeis. He sits in on at least the first two classes of each
online course to ensure that everyone is comfortable with the technology. Hal believes he works in a collaborative environment at the RSS. He feels comfortable with stating his opinion, but is also aware of the decision-making body and process that feeds the RSS their strategy. He said:

When we have a meeting with either the vice president or the provost, we talk right after, so it kind of evolves every day. Part of the evolution of our online classes comes about from the priorities that we’re given by our bosses…OLAC, which is the Online Learning Advisory Committee, and they’re the ones who kind of really set the agendas as to what methodology will be used for our online classes.

Hal is optimistic about the future of online education at Brandeis, mainly because of the new leadership internally at the RSS. He does feel that Brandeis University has been slow to adopt online education and will continue to be in the foreseeable future. Most of this is due to the current perceptions of distance education by some of the administration and influential tenured faculty members.

**John**

John has worked at BGI for three and a half years. He has been the Executive Director for the Brandeis Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry during this time. His department is relatively small and does not have a formal decision-making process other than a standard hierarchy. They do solicit feedback and look for ideas from any interested party. John collaborates both internally and externally to help push the institute forward and innovate. He says:

I work with faculty to shape our strategic vision and work with staff to ensure that our programs that include: community engagement initiatives, professional development initiatives, and research and scholarship projects are meeting their benchmarks of
success. I also spend a lot of time raising funds…and developing strong relations for the Institute.

John’s experience with collaboration on campus has been positive so far. He has experienced a very supportive central administration. He said:

The administration aids new initiatives that fit within the newly developed strategic plan for the university, especially those that explore and develop new ways of learning, such as online. Whenever we had the opportunity to discuss our vision with the leadership of the university, we were met with support and questions of what we can do to help.

Since the online environment is new to BGI, John stated that they looked for expertise on campus. They have collaborated successfully with a few units with the online portion of the program. He does feel that Brandeis is lagging behind other leading schools in the online environment. John sees vast opportunities for Brandeis in the online market and not just by conferring degrees, but with centers and institutes and off campus initiatives that expand into the community.

Susan

Susan began working at Brandeis University in 1998 as an adjunct professor. She has since become the Director of the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program. Hornstein is “a dual degree graduate program that trains people for work in the Jewish professional community. They take a Master’s degree and then they have to take a second degree at the same time…most take the MBA at Heller (a Brandeis University graduate school).” Hornstein collaborates with many divisions on campus. Their first collaboration that includes online learning is with BGI on the Brandeis Jewish Leadership Incubator. She said:
It’s really a good pilot exercise for us to see if, as a department within a university, we can actually contend and cope with this…it’s just exactly the right audience. The BJLI is focusing on early-mid career Jewish professionals who we want to excite and retain in the field…we’ve shaped our curriculum around them so it fits twice, as a pilot program and our target audience. If this goes well, we at Hornstein would then be able to take that experience and expand potentially to larger online populations.

Hornstein and BGI are collaborating on a number of initiatives. Susan is quite familiar with working on projects with other units. She understands Hornstein’s space in the market and is interested in innovating. She said:

There are three or four really good quality programs in the country that do what we do. We’ve all been looking at distance learning. Several of them have failed, and so we were trying to figure out if we’re going to expand our reach. We don’t have the resources internally to take that on ourselves. So when John came with the BJLI opportunity, it fit nice.

Susan’s collaboration with BGI has been successful to date. The decision-making process is streamlined with a small group. She has had several discussions with different departments on campus that are supportive, but are not able to assist with the initiative. She feels that while BGI and Hornstein is moving in the direction that the university would like them to, there is no infrastructure to support distance education. Lastly, she feels that while there may be discussions, there has been no action by the university to move in this direction.

**Overview of Research Themes and Findings**

For all three units, Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing paradigm was utilized to categorize the practices. The researcher took all three sources: documents, interviews,
and observations and inserted data in the five attributes of mindful organizing (see Appendices G & H). Forty-six unique codes originally emerged from all three sites that fit into the mindful organizing attributes. Each unit was individually analyzed and unique codes that fit the paradigm were identified: GPS had 20 codes, RSS had 15 codes, and BGI had 11 codes.

Codes from each unit were identified and presented within a chart (see Appendix H). The charts were compared and three themes were identified: Operational Change, Strategic Decision-Making, and Collaborative Culture. The common codes from the three units were added to a forth chart under the themes for confirmation (see Table 4.1). As the researcher progressed through the other data collection methods, the themes that developed were consistent. The researcher transferred participant quotes into a chart that outlined Weick and Sutcliffe’s attributes for mindful organizing (see Appendix G). This was cross-referenced with the same form that was utilized in observations.

There was very little variance in responses between the three departments. Any variance was due to different lengths of time in the online market. The units had varying amounts of experience with offering online courses and the day-to-day operation of such programs. Some of their opinions were not fully developed due to lack of experience.
**Table 4.1. Aggregate of Common Themes and Codes from Three Units**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Change</th>
<th>Strategic Decision-Making</th>
<th>Collaborative Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continually updating and revising; constant assessments and perpetual change</td>
<td>Ideas, planning, trickle-down, but open. Some autonomy</td>
<td>Cautiously external, constantly internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most changes internal; fast moving; agile</td>
<td>Patterns in strategic planning, new initiatives, planning and analysis vetted.</td>
<td>Small organization, creative, efficient, learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mechanisms in place for innovation, small, flat organization with ideas</td>
<td>Formal committee organization</td>
<td>Opportunities looked for, branch-out, partnering with university departments cultivated, decentralized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned change; infrastructure built for change, process structure</td>
<td>Scan internal and external market conditions, benchmarking</td>
<td>University resistance to distance education and change; indecisive leadership, difficult to innovate, hindrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful analysis; Change with the market Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>Growth driven by decision-making</td>
<td>Optimism for future and university’s place in distance education; however currently lagging, glacial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant evaluation of organization, professional evaluation, implement</td>
<td>Upper management meetings, staff meetings; planning for present and future</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial, open environment, room for growth, and learning from errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External research and actions inform change</td>
<td>Data driven, external resources driven, goals and needs driven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Operational Change**

This theme speaks to how these changes must be executed. Because these organizations must constantly scan the internal and external market and make proper adjustments to growth, they must have the ability to change quickly. The distance education industry is, by nature, an
ever-changing environment. While growth and market conditions are important factors for many different types of organizations, they are imperative in the distance education market. This is due to how quickly the technology and the needs of the customers have changed. From this study, it was discovered that a stagnant distance education department, no matter how large or small, will not survive if agility in operations are not practiced. There are a number of elements that must be rolled-out: the assembly of a staff who understands the industry, a strong but untethered strategic plan that is constantly evaluated and updated, an open environment in which communication amongst departments is encouraged, and a hierarchy to ensure that all ideas are properly vetted and that they tie into the strategic plan of the central university. Using in vivo coding, the key words supporting this theme are: agility, implementation, and entrepreneurial. A sampling of this is in Appendix F. Table 4.2 highlights a number of instances in which participants discuss their unit’s operations and change.

Table 4.2. Theme: Operational Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme: Operational Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>“Making adjustments to where we should focus our advertisement on or we want to increase enrollment…then working with our vendor to then change Google AdWords in that direction.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“…it’s a balance of trying to keep the ship moving, versus refining and growing and making new strategies, and coming up with new plans for new programs, or a new infrastructure…that we’ve seen this year, the growth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“Between 2007 and 2010, our audience just went completely online. In 2010, we shut down the classroom based programs because we weren’t populating the campus based classes and we started marketing with a broader base.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>“We have to be lean and flexible because what’s happening in the world is the focus of what we’re doing in our work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>“I think some of that change will either come with more knowledge of what online actually is, or it will come with retirements or people moving onto other places.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>“…the first full scale online blended loading program that the institute will be launching.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>“This is an experiment too. Nobody has a clear answer yet. So it’s clear to me that the university is going to learn as we’re going to learn through this.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship to research question and theoretical framework**

Thinking about the research question, the data indicates that each department recognizes that they must be mindful of their environment and be willing to change quickly in order to remain relevant. Members of each department suggested that they consider the speed of the changing market when updating their strategic plans. One manager described the strategic plan as “a living and breathing thing” by constantly making adjustments according to internal and external factors. One of Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing attributes, reluctance to simplify interpretations, state that employees are encouraged to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and find and understand differences. One participant said, “we have to be lean and flexible because what’s happening in the world is the focus of what we’re doing in our work.”

The participants all recognized the importance of an agile organization and tried not to get stuck with an unrealistic work-around solution. One of the participants indicated that being a small organization with no real power to make large decisions impeded them from being agile. They were periodically forced to adapt a work-around because of the lack of decisiveness.

**Strategic Decision-Making**

This theme was revealed fairly early in the interview process for each department. The observations further solidified this theme. The usage of external marketing firms by each department displays their dependency on data. A tremendous effort is made in staff meetings to do competitive analysis, constantly scanning external markets, researching current and future trends, attending conferences, recruiting faculty, hiring necessary staff, keeping staff informed,
listening to innovative ideas, and networking. Two more items that were revealed during this study: that growth could be internal or external to Brandeis and it is not all positive. For instance, two of the departments expressed frustration with the lack of growth internally and thus had to make adjustments that negatively impacted their organization. However, each department has worked hard to establish external connections and has successfully pushed their group in directions that the market has dictated. The internal decision-making process is not only driven, but also dependent on data and external markets. The in vivo coding uncovered several key words amongst the participants: decisions, strategic planning, benchmarking, and market. A sampling of this is in Appendix F. Table 4.3 includes quotes from each of the interviews, many of which reference the strategy and decision-making of their units.

*Table 4.3. Theme: Strategic Decision-Making*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme: Strategic Decision-Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>“…in terms of benchmarking with other divisions on campus, we haven’t gone to that point or we don’t currently do that. We do try to address best practices that we learn from mostly external sources.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“…the administration of an online program is so very different from the administration of an on-campus program.” “…we’ve been wondering, should we do payment plans? Would students be more likely to shell out money? Is there a business reason or is there a business case to do that? Are other schools doing that? Are there other schools that are in similar businesses as us?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“The decision made was we follow the audience. We went online because the audience went there. That was the way we were going to stay alive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>“We belong to the North American Association of Summer Sessions, and have for forty something years, so there is a group of professionals who constantly compare their models and adjust accordingly.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>“…I do think the change institutionally will be slower, and some of that I think comes from some key departments that are vocally resistant, that have staff meetings where the department will take a vote against ever offering anything online ever.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| John        | “…make sure that whatever we do actually meet the needs of our target
“…we were looking for a way of providing professional development opportunities…professionals are not willing to come to Brandeis, leave their jobs, and spend with us two years.”

“That’s how we came up with an idea of creating…a new professional development program specifically designed…”

Susan  “We made the decision, not wholly popular, to get an evaluator from outside the university, so that we can really get fresh eyes on this initiative.”

**Relationship to research question and theoretical framework**

The research question guiding this study asks about the nature of mindful organizing in a department’s strategic planning for distance education programs. The participants all indicated the importance of growth and the current market. They have varying amounts of support and funds available, so while they are all mindful of current trends, the degree and speed to which they are able to implement is scalable.

An attribute of Weick and Sutcliffe’s mindful organizing is sensitivity to operations in which there is an ongoing concern for the unexpected. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these failures, but a mindful organization will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly. One of the departments indicated that the growth of the online market and needs of students effectively changed their focus from being a predominately on the ground program to a fully online one. The on the ground course enrollment began to dwindle and the demand for online courses rose. “In 2010, we shut down the classroom based programs because we weren’t populating the campus based classes and we started marketing with a broader base.” This was a lesson they learned going forward: the necessity of paying better attention to the market and attempting to anticipate changes. They became mindful of identifying trends and not investing in fads that did not serve the school’s overall strategy.
Each department has been chartered to grow by Brandeis University. While the university has a strategic plan, each department has their own individual plan and a mechanism for evaluating it. Employees from each department receive their direction internally and are encouraged to look outward for innovations and benchmarking. The degree to which each person does this varies. This messaging is reinforced within each department through internal communications, meetings, and strategic plans.

**Collaborative Culture**

Two out of the three sites studied have been working with the central university’s administration for over five years on distance education. The third site was working to get their first program online for January 2015. Their level of engagement is varied, but there is one common theme amongst the three departments: the central university is behind when it comes to distance education. Even in the aforementioned Brandeis University Strategic Plan (2013), there is no real direction charted for any of these departments. Each department has taken it upon themselves to employ mindful organizing, in varying degrees, in order to remain relevant and to offer the best quality course fitting a high-level research university such as Brandeis. Even with the hard work from these three departments, there are many obstacles and frustrations related to their operations and growth. While each group is chartered to grow and bring in revenue, there is a lack of overall support from the university. Thus, the final theme is that these departments will only develop in response to a collaborative culture. Using in vivo coding, the key words supporting this theme are: leadership, hindrance, lagging/glacial, and decentralized. Responses from participants strongly indicate that this theme is the crux of Brandeis’ future in the distance education market (See Table 4.4).
Table 4.4. Theme: Collaborative Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme: Collaborative Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>“The attempt by the university to have some type of arching online committee needs to firm up a little bit more.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Jane        | “The university has not done anything to block our vision, or block our planning and our growth patterns…we know that they want us to prosper.”  
               “But they haven’t necessarily cleared the way as far as backing us and our mission.” |
| Mary        | “…schools are interested in doing it, schools are trying to figure it out and the schools don’t have central support in doing that.” |
| Kate        | “It’s very difficult to get information out of departments when you have a decentralized operation.” |
| Hal         | “I think change here is a little glacial. I don’t think that five years from now that there will be tremendous changes on campus.” |
| John        | “…we are lagging behind other universities in the area and nationwide when it comes to online learning.” |
| Susan       | “It’s either we’re in it or falling apart. I mean, this is where it’s going.” |

**Relationship to research question and theoretical framework**

Participants in the study all indicated that the lack of attention to distance education has stultified its growth. While two out of the three departments have been offering online courses and programs successfully for a number of years, the central administration does not properly outline a strategy or fully support them. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) call this type of inaction and not learning from past events a lack of sensitivity to operations. It is an ongoing concern for the unexpected at mindful organizations. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these failures, but a mindful organization will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly. Every participant was uncertain where Brandeis University would be in five years
with distance education. One participant intimated that the situation was dire, “It’s either we’re in it or falling apart. I mean, this is where it’s going.”

**Conclusion of Themes**

These themes are critical because the three departments are forced to develop their strategic plans and operate on their own with very little support. Each department has developed mindful organizing and has employed some of Weick and Sutcliffe’s five attributes. They all have made errors, but learned from them and made adjustments accordingly. The conflict is that the university has been operating mindlessly and this creates more difficulty for the departments that are innovating and following the university’s instructions to grow. In the meantime, departments will continue to operate the way they have been for a number of years. More departments are on the cusp of developing programs and will be met by the same system. Success and failure may be measured by the amount of mindful organizing central administration employs. Each unit can achieve success by virtue of a mindful department. However, they will likely plateau at the same levels because of the central administration’s lack of support and infrastructure for distance education.

**Three key findings**

The purpose of this case study was to gain insight into distance education departments’ ability to mindfully organize their departments. This study focused on three departments at a single university, who are implementing and operating distance education programs. The goal of the study was to answer one research question: What is the nature of mindful organizing for three departments’ strategic planning and operations for distance education programs at a single institution?
Coding by hand, the researcher identified 424 codes from three cycles. The common codes were identified for each site and put into a table (see Appendix H) separated by three columns using the five attributes of mindful organizing. The three tables yielded 46 codes (see Appendix H). Using the three data collection methods and referencing literature, three themes emerged. A forth table was created using these themes, combining the common codes from the three units to further validate the themes.

Three data collection methods were utilized for this study: document review, interviews, and observations. In order to validate and reinforce the findings, triangulation of data was utilized for each site (See Table 4.6). In Table 4.6, the three findings are presented through the lens of each data collection method: Decision-making and the market drive growth, Distance education requires agility in operations, and Perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential.

The finding of decision-making and the market drive growth addresses what is happening not only externally, but also internally at the institution. The growth and the current market could be strong or poor. This causes each department to assess how they are being or will be affected and what plans will be made in response. Strategic plans are shifting in the distance education environment and the leaders of these departments must be mindful of this. The next finding, distance education requires agility in operations, highlights that once a decision has been made to change, a system must be in place that can quickly enact the change. The last finding highlights the bottom line of a program’s degree of success or failure: perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential.

All three findings tie into each other and, more specifically, the research question: What is the nature of mindful organizing for three departments’ strategic planning and operations for
distance education programs at a single institution? While the finding of *decision-making and the market drive growth* describes the respective departments’ planning and vision, the second finding, *distance education requires agility in operations*, involves the actual action of making the change. Researching each department and how it operates through the lens of Weick and Sutcliffe’s mindful organizing, the data showed that while they were individually displaying mindful characteristics, their fates were closely tied to the university’s degree of mindfulness. The last finding, *perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential*, is a culmination of the first two findings. Two of the departments have had success with their online offerings. However, the research showed that university support was minimal and could be largely improved. There were also many intersecting lines with other departments on campus that have prevented these two departments from innovating. While the university administration struggles to make decisions and plan for distance education, the two departments have deployed mindful organizing by adjusting and keeping clear of negative intersecting lines when possible. The feeling was prevalent that central administration was strangling and limiting the growth potential. Within the business units themselves, they were engaged in mindful decision-making, but it is a constrained version because they felt handcuffed by the central administration office. From the research, it appears that there were multiple similarities in the way that each of these business units operated versus how central administration operated. Further, because of the recent leadership changes in the provost’s office, all three departments could potentially be waiting for support and direction for a long time.

**Finding #1: Decision-making and the market drive growth**

Growth of the institution or a particular department and the external markets can heavily dictate how leaders are making decisions. Weick and Sutcliffe claim that a mindful organization
will loosen the typical top-down decision-making structure so decisions can be made by employees to allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems. Expertise with specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization. All of the departments employed a similar decision-making model. There was an inquiry process that allowed any staff or faculty member to express their thoughts and opinions to the organization. There were informal and formal opportunities for these discussions at each department. Regardless of how they make these decisions, they all indicated that the market plays a large role in the directions they will go for programs, course offerings, and tuition. The idea that “data drives decisions” was prevalent throughout the units. A large amount of time, money, and effort is spent on external relations, research, and marketing. Two of the departments work with marketing firms to ensure they have proper market visibility and that they remain competitive.

Finding #2: Distance education requires agility in operations

The distance education environment remains in perpetual motion because of emerging technologies and the shifting of the market needs. This reality has put a sizeable amount of pressure on each department. The employees are aware of the constant changes and strive to keep current. The continuous demands from the market directly impact how they function and strategize. Weick and Sutcliffe’s mindful organizing indicates that a leader’s ability to be able to bring all of this to the forefront may be the difference in the success of the program. Nworie et al. (2012) claim that leaders should possess an entrepreneurial spirit that must be reflected in their managers and faculty. Further, the culture of institutions of distance education must be one of perpetual motion, openness to updating policy, procedures, and a constant fresh approach (Cornford & Pollock, 2003; Portugal, 2008).
All of the participants spoke about change implementation and some highlighted the importance of agility. One manager said, “I think we’re agile and we’re entrepreneurial and we come up with our ways to achieve the goals that we set in order to meet higher growth targets.” Another participant said, “It’s a balance of trying to keep the ship moving, versus refining and growing and making new strategies, and coming up with new plans for new programs, or a new infrastructure…that we’ve seen this year, the growth.” All of these departments have a small staff, ranging from two to fourteen. Their level of agility differs, but all make an effort to continually change. In order to remain relevant in the ever-changing market, successful programs constantly look outward and change. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) highlight the preoccupation with failure as an essential part of a mindful organization. This hallmark suggests that organizations should be concerned with the small failures even more than the large ones. Several participants spoke about constantly communicating with their internal and external peers as a method of determining where flaws in their organizations exist. One department implemented bi-weekly senior manager and staff meetings, along with other informal and formal meetings that each sub-department conducts. They have taken their staff on retreats to brainstorm. They have also required each sub-department to present at a staff meeting, discussing their operations through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

All participants indicated that there is great emphasis placed on the constantly changing environment. Even though there were varying degrees of agile operations, it was clear that they were all doing the best they could with their available resources and support from central administration. This was not only evidenced by the interviews, but also by the document review and observations.
Finding #3: Perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential

Despite efforts to interview members from the central administration office, interviews were not granted. This finding was a culmination of the first two themes. Each participant was asked about collaboration, central administration, and culture. Along with the document reviews and observations, it became clear that central administration has the ability to foster these programs if they want to. While each group is chartered to grow, there is a lack of infrastructure to support online endeavors. There is also a lack of support from central administration and the faculty senate. It was mentioned by a number of participants that they were not very optimistic that the university would be innovative in the online environment within the next five years. Many indicated that they thought the university would move in a positive direction because the market would force them to, but that this movement would be very slow. The research revealed that are a number of reasons for this belief: lack of a strong strategic plan and vision, lack of funding, an older faculty who do not want to change, and an uneducated community when it comes to distance education. The effect central administration had on each department varied, depending on their size and operations. There was a large amount of collaboration between departments interested in distance education. Central administration does support these efforts, but does not get involved in assisting the programs. There are two committees on campus that govern very specific areas; one looks at the pedagogy and the other at operations within a specific unit. Some of the participants’ comments included:

“She was instrumental in getting us online against some resistance in the university.”

“…even the university strategic plan is not telling us how it should grow.”

“It’s saying that we should be an online incubator to help support novel programs.”
“…the decisions were made thoughtfully and trying to be careful, very careful about how we did it, because of the Brandeis reputation.”

“…leadership of the university is very supportive to aid new initiatives that fit within the newly developed strategic plan for the university.”

“…met with support and questions of what we can do to help.”

“We were told to dive into the pool, but we were essentially wearing cinder blocks.”

“For the most part, we have been…I don’t want to say ignored, but left to our own devices by the university.”

“…they haven’t necessarily cleared the way, as far as backing us and our mission.”

“Mostly internal right now with implications of working collaboratively with other departments.”

“They’re still going to be struggling, not necessarily that they won’t offer online, but that every different school on campus is going to offer online completely different.”

It became apparent that central administration’s ability or lack of ability to be mindful had great consequences on each department. The university’s indecision has made it more difficult for departments to operate. There is no formal directive or education from the university about distance education and so each department has a different opinion and is allowed to exercise its beliefs. The research shows that the university is not moving in any formal strategic direction and does not plan to do so in the near future, thus causing departments who want to offer online education to figure out the landscape themselves or seek assistance from other like units, internally or externally. Each group chooses its own vendors and its way of operating. There are no set templates or organizational procedures that the university has
vetted. A lack of these guidelines fosters silos, redundancies, and communication issues. The stance the university appears to take is that they will know the answers after someone else tests the waters.

Table 4.5. Triangulation of Data for Graduate Professional Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Graduate Professional Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td>Decision-making and the market drive growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source One: Document Review</strong></td>
<td>Documents were evaluated, such as statistics of department growth and the change in programs offered due to market conditions. Competitive analysis materials and web site review of current direction and marketing direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</strong></td>
<td>Some participants felt that they controlled the change, while others contended that it came from the outside-in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Three: Observations</strong></td>
<td>Staff meeting and leadership meetings observed in which they discussed growth and external markets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Four: Leadership Thematic Validation</strong></td>
<td>The leader endorsed this finding as two large factors that continue to dictate her decision-making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Finding</strong></td>
<td>The fast moving market drives which initiatives will be taken on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Graduate Professional Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td>Distance education requires agility in operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source One: Document Review</strong></td>
<td>A number of iterations of the strategic plan were viewed, as were plans for development and growth. Internal marketing materials were made available for review. Organizational chart was reviewed and recent changes to the structure were identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</strong></td>
<td>Participants all recognized the importance of an agile organization and tried not to get stuck with unrealistic work-around solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Three: Observations</strong></td>
<td>Leadership meetings observed in which strategic plans and new initiatives were discussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Four: Leadership Thematic Validation</strong></td>
<td>The leader endorsed this finding and added that agility was necessary for every facet of the department, not just</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The speed of technology and customer needs requires quick action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Graduate Professional Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source One: Document Review</td>
<td>University strategic plan and internal articles about distance education were reviewed. Faculty senate meeting minutes that mentioned distance education, as well as available OLAC meeting minutes were reviewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Participants felt that the university was lagging behind on fully supporting distance education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Three: Observations</td>
<td>Leadership meetings observed where strategy of the university was discussed and how they were going to adjust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Four: Leadership Thematic Validation</td>
<td>The leader was in agreement with the theme, but also felt that the GPS department drove their own opportunities on many occasions and that they were not the only factor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Finding</td>
<td>Distance education will only go as far as the university allows it to. In GPS’ case, there are more issues because they offer degrees that some view as a conflict to other masters’ programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6. Triangulation of Data for Rabb Summer School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Rabb Summer School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Decision-making and the market drive growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source One: Document Review</td>
<td>Documents were reviewed. Marketing materials from the vendor were made available, as was a complete competitive analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Participants felt that the market drove some decisions, however the university was the largest influencer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Three: Observations</td>
<td>Marketing and planning meetings observed in which they discussed growing the program and benchmarking competition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source Four: Leadership  
Thematic Validation  
The leader endorsed this finding as two large factors that continue to dictate her decision-making process.

Final Finding  
Growth and the market partially dictate decision-making. However, the university plays a larger role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Rabb Summer School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Distance education requires agility in operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source One: Document Review</td>
<td>To find potential changes and agility, documents, dating back one year, regarding the operations of the RSS were reviewed: emails, articles, and OLAC meeting minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Participants felt that being a small organization with no real power to make large decisions impeded them from being agile. Further, they were forced to adapt a work-around because of the lack of decisiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Three: Observations</td>
<td>Planning meeting observed in which VP and staff discussed changes for the upcoming semester, including program tuition evaluation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Source Four: Leadership  
Thematic Validation | The leader endorsed this finding and added that agility in departments was the same for a small group as it is for a large one, adding that it is about the culture and less about the size. |
| Final Finding | Rabb Summer School suffers from lack of agility due to lack of decision-making from the university. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Rabb Summer School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source One: Document Review</td>
<td>University strategic plan and internal articles about distance education were reviewed. Faculty senate meeting minutes that mentioned distance education, as well as available OLAC meeting minutes were reviewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Some participants felt the university to be lagging in their decision-making process and others felt optimistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Three: Observations</td>
<td>Planning meeting with university representatives observed in which they discussed collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Four: Leadership</td>
<td>The leader was in agreement with the theme and also felt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thematic Validation

that RSS was held up by a fair amount of indecision.

Final Finding

Distance education will only go as far as the university allows it to.

Table 4.7. Triangulation of Data for Brandeis Genesis Institute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Brandeis Genesis Institute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Decision-making and the market drive growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source One: Document Review</td>
<td>Viewing of web site marketing materials, strategic plan, and program planning documents displayed how BGI based their decision to enter the online market because of growth and what their customers wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Participants agreed that the market dictates what directions they will go in for programs and course offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Three: Observations</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Four: Leadership Thematic Validation</td>
<td>The leader endorsed the themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Finding</td>
<td>The fast moving market drives what initiatives and programs will be taken on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Brandeis Genesis Institute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Distance education requires agility in operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source One: Document Review</td>
<td>Emails, program and strategic plans have changed drastically since inception of plans. These documents show that the program went from being on the ground to being hybrid. Also, BGI has had to collaborate with departments they previously never worked with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Participants felt that BGI’s operations were relatively agile, but because the program was new, did not have much to support that notion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Three: Observations</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Four: Leadership Thematic Validation</td>
<td>The leader endorsed the themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Finding</td>
<td>Having not been in distance education for long, BGI recognizes that they must be agile with their offerings and operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Brandeis Genesis Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td>Perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source One: Document Review</strong></td>
<td>No mention of BGI’s program in the university’s strategic plan. The only visible marketing to the public was on the BGI web site, hosted by the university. Collaboration emails sent to BGI from the central university, offering assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Two: Semi-structured Interviews</strong></td>
<td>Participants felt that the university has been receptive and has offered to help, but has not innovated or driven opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Three: Observations</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Four: Leadership Thematic Validation</strong></td>
<td>The leader endorsed the themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Finding</strong></td>
<td>Distance education will only go as far as the university allows it to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question Analysis**

The research question that guided this study was, “**What is the nature of mindfulness for three departments’ strategic planning and operations for distance education programs at a single institution?**” Looking across three departments at the same institution, who were at various stages of offering online programs, painted a common picture for the research. The researcher expected to find multiple variances, but instead found very little differences and several commonalities in operations and strategy even though each unit were in different stages of implementation. This insight was achieved through 7 semi-structured interviews across the 3 units, where each participant discussed how they operate and how they plan strategically. Three themes emerged from the data that addressed the research question.
Document Review Informing Research Question

The researcher did a search for “strategic plan” on the main university web site and found the main strategic plan as well as a number of articles written about it by school publications. This research was essential as one of the over-arching themes eventually made the central administration relevant to the study. As mentioned earlier, there are only four instances of the phrase, “distance learning” in the Brandeis University strategic plan. There is no mention of new initiatives or innovating with new offerings on campus. The four instances of “distance learning” refer to GPS and the RSS, two departments that are already offering online programs.

“Brandeis already has a strong foundation in distance learning through the programs of the Graduate Professional Studies, and is beginning to add additional distance learning options through the Rabb Summer School, the 2U Semester Online consortium, and a proposed Boston-area digital humanities consortium. There are opportunities to enhance the University’s classrooms and scheduling to gain even greater benefits from these advances” (Brandeis University, 2013). The referenced 2U Semester Online consortium, in the above quote, is now defunct. Brandeis’ strategy for distance learning includes: (1) Create an Office of Educational Innovation, (2) Develop policies and a model for using technology for the greatest benefit, (3) Invest in experiments with new teaching strategies and creative business models, (4) Further advance GPS’ position as an online innovator, and (5) Create a plan that links re-imaged learning options, spaces and schedules (Brandeis University, 2013). Most of these plans were referenced in the interviews and observations.

The request for internal documents from each site was met with differing levels of cooperation; however, strategic plans were supplied for all. The only overlap of strategic plans between the university and one of the units, GPS, was to “Further advance GPS’ position as an
For two of the sites, the researcher was able to obtain the roles of their respective governing bodies: the Rabb Summer School and Online Learning Advisory Committee and Graduate Professional Studies and the Rabb Council. The Online Learning Advisory Committee is tasked specifically to ensure that an online pedagogy is followed (Brandeis University, OLAC, 2012). The Rabb Council’s role was not as clearly defined and thus has taken a hiatus to reevaluate its purpose. This committee and council provided context into the central administration’s involvement in monitoring these departments. Two of the sites provided internal marketing materials, while the third site’s marketing materials were available through a Google search. Through these materials, each organization displayed different aspects of mindful organizing.

The documents reviewed gave the researcher a clear view into what each site’s strategic plans are and how they intend to move their respective departments forward as the market shifts around them. What was not clear was how each organization operated, whether they practiced their plans and how they were or were not executing them. The interviews and observations further revealed the operational aspects and informed the strategic intent.

**Interviews Informing Research Question**

Participants discussed how they currently operate as a unit and how they could achieve greater success internally at Brandeis University and within their unit. Words such as: strategic, collaboration, change, and decision-making were prevalent in these interviews. They all were well informed about how their organization operates, what they are responsible for, and how they fit into the larger context. Further, they were mindful of their surroundings and seemed to welcome any change. There was a large degree of frustration with the central administration. Their consistent lack of support and planning for distance education concerned many
participants. These units were all operating under a decentralized model, but the university still had to provide the infrastructure and be invested in any online endeavors. The numbers were proof that each unit was successful, but every participant felt that their success had nothing to do with central administration. In fact, many of them indicated that they could be more successful if central administration were fully supportive of their efforts.

Through these interviews, participants highlighted the themes: the importance of agility, change, decision-making, external markets, and central administration’s support. All of the groups were mindfully organizing because they had to in order to be successful. Each unit acts as an individual small business that requires constant inspection and the ability to change with the fast-moving distance education market.

**Observations Informing Research Question**

The meetings observed at GPS were very structured, but had an informality to them that allowed individuals to speak freely. There were a number of discussions that occurred regarding changes and innovations. Each of these new ideas was the result of market research. There were also discussions and evaluation about the current state of the program, as well as how their vendors are performing. There were several comments of inquiry such as: “Because they are coming back, we need to plan and change.” “Do we have the marketing capacity to support this?” These types of questions were indicative of all of the meetings. Pieces of the strategic plan or “roadmap” were reviewed, as were current plans and the status of the plans being carried through. All of their processes were very open and collaborative.

There was a common discussion on how to align staff and faculty to achieve goals and results, as well as managing expectations and professional development. Lastly, there did not appear to be much alignment with the university because of their lack of strategic vision. It was
said that GPS moves only as quickly as Brandeis’ process allows them, unless they do not need to involve the central university. There were also brief discussions about how the strategy of the university could change shortly because the current provost was stepping down.

RSS’ format for meetings was similar to GPS’, but on a smaller scale. They consisted of going around the table and discussing what each member felt needed to be worked on. An item came up in which there were some obstacles regarding the communication pipeline from central administration to RSS. Specifically, RSS had problems with department chairs informing them who would be available to teach summer courses for them in a timely fashion. They were holding up the process because the tardiness of this information did not allow RSS to plan and market appropriately. RSS offered to be more transparent in their operations in exchange for the same and for earlier decisions from department chairs. The university appeared to be open to suggestions and collaboration on this item. However, on other issues, the university appeared to be rigid and not willing to change or discuss change to existing procedures that would benefit RSS and Brandeis. Lastly, it is important to state that this was the first time these three individuals participated in this type of meeting together. These meetings had previously occurred without the head of RSS or staff present, but within the provost’s office.

Two other meetings observed at RSS displayed their ability as a unit to constantly scan their environment and change. They discussed competitive analysis, benchmarking, cost analysis, marketing plans, and a business plan going forward. RSS were consistently discussing their main competitors and how they plan on adjusting after internal failures occurred. They spent some time brainstorming about possible innovations, as well as looking for niches and opportunities internally. There were a number of times that people expressed frustrations, theories, and hurdles, but these discussions appeared to be professional and helpful to the
proceedings. A fair amount of time was spent on whether such innovations fit RSS and the university’s model. A particular item came up regarding differing policies from the university. It was said that they could, “…stand alone on our own policy or be protected by the Brandeis shield.” RSS stands alone on many of their decisions because they must be agile and cannot wait for the university to make decisions. They are required to defer to the university on many processes and this appears to be the cause of many frustrations and sometimes stagnation in innovation.

The phrases “data driven” and “market driven” were brought up a number of times. RSS came to the conclusion that they must continue to change their position in the market if that is what is required. They did not want to remain dormant. They were also very mindful that the location of RSS is not in a major city, while most of their competition is. It was explained to the vendors by an RSS employee as, “…it’s like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, when her house landed in Oz. Everything was black and white…when she opened the door, everything was in color. That’s our challenge. We’re in black and white and the city is full of color.”

Having reported the research themes and findings for this study, Chapter five will discuss conclusions and present implications for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into distance education departments’ ability to mindfully organize. The study focused on three departments at a single university, who are implementing and operating distance education programs. Each unit was analyzed through the theoretical framework of Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe’s (2001) mindful organizing theory. Three data collection methods were utilized at the three units that participated in the study. Through the seven interviews conducted, rich data was recorded as the participants discussed how their units were mindful of the distance learning environment and their methods for adjusting to change, making decisions, and collaborating with other departments.

This descriptive case study was fitting for the research. It addressed a real setting at multiple sites within a bounded system at Brandeis University (Creswell, 2012). Miles and Huberman’s (1994) process was utilized: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusions—drawing and verification, along with deductive analysis: preparation, organizing, and reporting. Three rounds of coding were conducted and, from this, multiple codes emerged from each department. Three themes emerged and the aggregate of twenty common codes from all of the departments were merged into one table under the themes for validation (see Table 4.1). The next step of the analysis was the review of the codes and the commonality findings, which began to reveal the potential findings. The triangulation of data was utilized for each site to validate and reinforce the findings through all of the data collection methods. From this, three findings emerged that supported the importance of mindful organizing in the implementation and operations of distance education.

This final chapter will examine the implications and conclusions from this research. It will also emphasize the opportunities for future research. Implications for theory, practice, and
ideas for future research will also be discussed. The chapter will close with final thoughts and conclusions.

**Interpretation of Themes**

The interviews revealed three themes that supported the importance of mindful organizing in the implementation and operations of distance education: operational change, strategic decision-making, and collaborative culture. From these three themes, three key findings emerged: (1) decision-making and the market drive growth, (2) distance education requires agility in operations (these are the actual actions of making the change), and (3) perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential. Each unit was forced to operate like a small business. They constantly looked at the external markets and let data determine their strategies. They had the ability to make internal decisions and grow, but were stunted by the central administration office’s inability to plan and support. Each group made mindful decisions in order keep current and ensure that their enrollment numbers did not dip. Their response rates were rapid and adjustments to change were welcomed. When these groups worked with external sources, outside from Brandeis, they were still able to remain flexible. However, when central administration was involved, the units were forced to significantly alter their minding process. The following section examines the conclusions.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how distance education departments mindfully organize. The primary research question sought to answer what the nature of mindfulness for three departments’ strategic planning and operations for distance education programs at a single institution. The three themes of operational change, strategic decision-making, and collaborative culture began to slowly emerge from the document reviews and began
to validate themselves during the second cycle of in vivo coding. They were fully realized after the coding for all units was complete and an aggregate of the codes was collected. These themes were further validated through the other data collection methods and the three findings emerged: (1) decision-making and the market drive growth, (2) distance education requires agility in operations (these are the actual actions of making the change), and (3) perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential. Four conclusions were reached from this study.

- Within each unit operational decisions were reflective of mindful practices – innovation encouraged.
- Lacking across-unit sharing of lessons-learned to improve overall mindfulness at an organizational level.
- Disconnect with distance education unit’s mission of growth is perceived to be constrained by the central administration.
- Pre-occupation with market-driven data over-riding internal mindfulness.

Implications to Theory

This study is grounded in Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe’s theory of mindful organizing (2001) which focuses on the importance of a clear understanding of emerging threats and the elements that hinder these understandings. Further, considerable system resources must be invested to produce early discovery and change, but the resources are not necessarily financial (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006). The research was viewed through the theory’s five attributes. First, organizations should have a preoccupation with failure that has them assessing their department and looking for small issues, even more than the large ones. The small ones are the ones that can blossom into large ones and if they can be stopped early on, an organization can save itself time
and resources. The second hallmark of a mindful organization is a reluctance to simplify interpretations in which leaders encourage their employees to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and possess the ability to find and understand differences in opinions without alienating others. The culture a leader sets within an organization drives this hallmark. Employees must feel free and safe to question the status quo without repercussions. Third is sensitivity to operations in which there is an ongoing concern for the unanticipated issues. Frequent assessments are conducted to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly. Mindful organizations are looking inward and outward, continuously assessing the operations. Fourth is a commitment to resilience that is maintained by keeping errors small and implementing quick workarounds that keep the system successfully functioning. Agility in operations is the key to this hallmark. Fifth is the under-specification of structures in which the typical top-down decision-making structure is loosened so evaluations can be made by employees to allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems. This hallmark’s main point is that expertise to specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization.

The literature provided a strong framework for the study, even though mindful organizing research in higher education is not plentiful. In this study, the participants and the three organizations they represent each displayed mindful organizing in various ways. All departments are working in the field of distance education. Because of the constantly shifting landscape of distance education, each department has figured out on their own that they must organize mindfully. A stagnant or mindless organization would not be able to remain relevant and successful. Each group adjusted to the market and needs of their industry, but was slowed-down by central administration’s lack of support and structure. Yet, they still were successful financially, but strived to be more successful. Initially inadvertently, the study acted as a
qualifying checklist for central administration’s level of mindful organizing. Since central
administration was not one of the sites studied, the researcher was not able to conclude how they
operate internally, but how they operate externally and the effects they have. Nworie (2013) and
Nworie et al. (2012) have contributed to this field of study by investigating how distance
education organizations must operate differently than standard organizations. Just as this
research yielded, Nworie (2013) claims that groups must be entrepreneurial in a perpetually
moving environment. Further, they must implement this type of culture throughout the
organization so the best possible solutions will be available. Becke (2014) asserts that potential
innovations are uncovered in these types of environments and that the infrastructure is comprised
of dialogue and organizational routines. Hoy and Miskel (2008) claim that conceding to
expertise rather than experience and rank leads to the best decisions. There were similar findings
in this study. Each of these departments displayed an entrepreneurial spirit and contained an
element of a flat organization in their daily operations. Units with the aforementioned
characteristics align with this researcher’s findings (distance education requires agility in
operations, as well as decision-making and the market drive growth) that the ever-changing
markets in distance education must match the ever-changing departments that offer it. These
departments must be mindful of these principles when strategizing and operating programs for
distance education.

Kearney et al. (2013) researched the importance of having a mindful leader and the
profound effect it can have on an institution’s mindfulness. These departments must be able to
engage in meaningful problem solving with administrators and faculty if they are to be
successful. Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe, and Weick (2014) claim that a mindful organization is
more likely to occur when individuals are motivated to act for the benefit of others and are open
to alternative perspectives. These individuals are sensitive to other’s needs and are concerned about not just their own, but other’s potential failures. This research ties into the theory that engagement with administrators is a large factor in the success of a program (perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential). The level of engagement with central administration from the online departments is important, but this engagement must come from the top-down to maximize the effectiveness and success of these departments. The next section will examine the implications this research has on practice.

**Implications to Practice**

This study focused on mindful organizing of online programs at three departments at a single institution. The data collected was from middle and upper management who were responsible for the day-to-day operations of their respective programs. The distance education market is flooded with competition and is still adjusting to the speed of technology and the changing needs of students. There are many articles, journals, and papers being written about several different aspects of distance education. Mindful organizing in higher education is not an area that has been greatly researched. However, there are a few key researchers who are contributing to the field. Hoy (2003) applied individual mindfulness and mindful organizing to higher education institutions. Hoy (2003) found that school mindfulness inspires leaders to critically think and learn from their mistakes, while feeling comfortable listening to ideas from all areas of the organization, including faculty and staff. In this structure, faculty is encouraged to challenge thoughts and behaviors, while conferring with those who have expertise. Lencioni (2002) made contributions to the field of mindfulness in education by investigating faculty trust in correlation to mindful leadership. If faculty trust is absent, then the commitment to the leader and their mindful organizations are in jeopardy. Lencioni (2002) determined that trust heightens
commitment and success rates in mindful organizations. Kearney et al. (2013) maintain that one must have a reluctance to simplify and instead continuously scrutinize the status quo. This style encourages diversity and has disdain for routine rules and standard procedures that are unshakeable. These studies do not answer key questions about how distance education organizations must adjust to not only a changing market, but also the stigma attached to distance education internal to their institution. Are they implementing methods so the organization does not get caught in the trap of mindlessness? As they advance their programs and implement new ideas, are they utilizing any or all of the mindful organizing concepts? What will be helpful to them as they forge ahead?

The findings from this study indicate the importance of mindful organizing to not only the individual departments that offer distance education, but to the central administration at the university as well. The first finding, decision-making and the market drive growth, displays how departments are basing their decisions and advancing in the market. For other departments and institutions implementing and operating distance education programs, this finding offers guidance on what departments should be looking at when making decisions and determining what drives success.

Second, distance education requires agility in operations with such a fast-moving method of teaching, the ability to change quickly with the ever-changing needs of the market becomes imperative to an organization’s success. Departments must be able to look internally and externally and make adjustments to course offerings, tuition, staff, faculty, marketing plans, and alignment with the institution. With all of the activity in the distance education market, it is important for existing and established departments to understand that they must strategically align an agile organization in order to be successful. They must be able to identify changes from
external sources and offer an open environment in order to identify new directions. They need to have the ability to make these changes quickly and successfully (Cornford & Pollock, 2003; Portugal, 2008). The culture must be set and the operations must be able to accommodate it.

Lastly, the perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential. In order to achieve a high level of success in a distance education program, central administration’s support must be strong. Departments can operate and be successful on their own. They can even have their own strategic plans and culture. However, central administration’s influence on these departments has a large impact on their innovation and growth. Brandeis has fallen into a state of what Langer (1989) admonished against: being embedded in routines, which induces mindless action or inaction. The following section highlights the implications of this research on future research prospects.

**Implications for Future Research**

This case study revealed three key findings, helping to understand how distance education departments are utilizing mindful organization while implementing and maintaining their respective programs at a single institution. Specifically, the findings are: growth and the market drive decision making, distance education requires agility in operations, and perception that central administration is constraining innovation and growth potential. It was noted during the study that these departments were fairly small in staff size. Their ability to be agile was made fairly easy, in some respects, by the sheer size of their organizations. A possible avenue for future research could be how scalable agility is at departments of varying size that offer online education. Further research could be done on whether the size of the department is a key indicator for success.
The importance of central administration’s involvement in an online program could be further explored. This study did not include any participants from central administration and only yielded findings on the effects from central administration. Further research could be done to understand how central administration operates internally. Studying other central administration units at multiple institutions of higher education in the Boston area, similar in size to Brandeis, would help to enrich this finding as a possible phenomenon. The degree of how much transparency and communication comes from central administration can determine success and collective mindfulness (Jordan, Messner, & Becker, 2009). Measuring these degrees would further this finding.

Lastly, aside from the one graduate school included in this study, there are three more at Brandeis that plan to launch online programs in the future. Extending the study to these three units would help to support these findings and possibly unearth others. Another potential study could be on these graduate schools, who offer established on the ground programs. Research about mindful organizing in an environment that has never offered online programs before would add to the field of study. Researching and understanding how these graduate schools are thinking about online education, the challenges they face, and how they operate would greatly enhance the understanding of how organizations are or are not mindfully organizing. It could potentially reveal what methods they are employing and the pitfalls they face. The final section will discuss the summary and reflections from this study.

Summary and Reflections

This study focused on mindful organizing of online programs at three departments at a single institution. The research found that: A. decision-making and the market drive growth, B. distance education requires agility in operations, and C. perception that central administration is
constraining innovation and growth potential. Through these findings, the researcher offers these considerations to the three business units at Brandeis University:

1. Based on mindful organizing, decentralization enables innovation and attention to the value of a less-formal structure.
2. Business units need to embrace ambiguity and not seek to be controlled by the central administration.
3. Need to build capacity of business units to continuously be mindful and examine the tension between the desire to be autonomous and the desire to be controlled.
4. Business units can share best practices with each other on their own.
5. There is inherent tension and the question is what is the right balance of “healthy tension.”

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how departments that offer online education are mindfully organizing, specifically their methods for adjusting to change, making decisions, and collaborating with other departments. This case study was bounded inside one institution, which assisted in being able to drill deep into the three units. The study contributes to the field of mindful organizing at higher education institutions in the online environment and suggests a number of potential future research opportunities. The online education market is large, evolving, and has room for plenty of growth. With such a relatively new innovation comes a large amount of research and potential studies.
References


Brandeis University, Graduate Professional Studies (2014, August). Strategic plan for GPS.


Brandeis University, OLAC (2012). Role of online learning advisory committee (OLAC).


Portugal, L. M. (2013). The lived experiences of faculty in an online teaching environment. Capella University, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing.


APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Institution: Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies,

Investigators: Dr. Margaret Gorman - Principal Investigator, Jim La Creta - Doctoral Candidate

Title of Project: Mindful Innovation in Higher Education: A case study exploring different business units’ strategic adaptation of distance education offerings at a small Northeastern University

We invite you to take part in a qualitative research study focused on distance education at Brandeis University. The purpose of this study is to identify how each department is leveraging this fast-moving mode of delivering information and what methods they are employing to ensure successful implementations and operations. This study will also identify how and if these units are mindful of the distance learning environment and their methods of adjusting to change. The goal of this study is to gain insight into how three departments at a small institution implement distance education.

This letter will explain what participation in the study means, but if you have further questions, please ask. Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to participate if you do not want to. After you have read this document, and made a decision, please advise me. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign this statement. You will be provided with a fully signed copy for your records.

You are being asked to be in this study because you meet the following criteria:
1. You have been employed full-time at Brandeis University for at least 2 years
2. You have played a significant strategic role in the implementation and/or the operations of distance education at your unit.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview that will not exceed one hour in duration. You will also be asked to allow me to observe 3-5 strategic and/or operations meetings.

- The time, location, and length of observations will be entirely your choice. I will only take notes on items that relate to the study and will not record the meeting. I will not use names when taking notes. After each meeting, the notes will be made available if you would like to view them.

- The interview will be approximately one hour, preferably conducted in person. It will be conducted at a location on or off campus chosen by you. With your permission, the
The final communication you will receive from me will be a copy of our transcribed interview. This will be sent to you via email. You will have the opportunity to review and add any additional comments.

The following actions will maintain confidentiality of your responses:
- Materials will be carefully marked, protecting the confidentiality of the subjects by using pseudonyms.
- All copies of the interviews, observations, and transcriptions will be kept on a secured password protected computer server that is only accessed by the researchers.
- All field notes that are taken during interviews and observations will be transcribed and stored on the secured computer server.
- A database will be kept containing a master list of dates, times, and information to be gathered.
- Upon completion of the research, the informed consent documents will be kept for three years in a fire proof safe in the student researcher’s personal residence and will then be destroyed.

The one potential risk could be because of the student researcher’s dual role as researcher and employee at Brandeis University. However, given the focus of the research and the mitigation of the transcription being supplied to you, this is highly unlikely. Your personal identity as a participant in this study is unknown. Your part in this study will be confidential and only the researcher on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and have the ability to quit at any time during the study. You have the right to refuse to answer any question. There may be no direct benefit for you in this study, however the results of this study could benefit your unit at Brandeis University. For instance, the results could help to advance how the institution is looking at implementation and operations of distance education programs. It could also assist leaders in understanding how other departments are employing mindful organizing while implementing online programs.

If you have questions or problems, please contact Jim La Creta at 781-736-2231 (voice mail is confidential) or by email at lacreta.j@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Margaret Gorman at M.kirchoff@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University,
Sincerely Yours,

Jim La Creta

If you agree to participate in this study, please read, initial directly below and sign at the bottom of the page.

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Initials</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the information presented on this form.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have discussed this study, its risks and potential benefits, and other options with the student researcher, Jim La Creta.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have received answers to the questions I have asked up to this point.</td>
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</table>

My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study. My signature below affirms my understanding that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

________________________
Signature of participant

________________________
Date

________________________
Printed name of person above

________________________
Signature of person obtaining consent

________________________
Date

________________________
Printed name of person above
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

You have been selected for this interview because you have been identified as someone who may have a great deal to share about distance learning implementation and operations at Brandeis University. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into how departments at Brandeis University are implementing distance learning programs. Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction:

How long have you worked at Brandeis University?

Main Interview:

1. Tell me about your role here at Brandeis University and distance learning implementation.

   • **Probe:** How were/are decisions made when planning an online program?
   • **Probe:** Has Brandeis University’s leadership given you a strategic plan to follow? If not, how did you decide to proceed?
   • **Probe:** How often do you evaluate your strategic plan and what is the process to change it? Were/are other departments at Brandeis University involved?
   • **Probe:** What actions or resources have the university or other departments taken to assist or collaborate with you? If none, what could have been done?

2. Thinking about methods you have tried, could you go into detail about one that did not go well and lessons you learned from it?

   • **Probe:** How does your unit make changes? Is there a mechanism for sharing across the other school departments – formal and/or informal?
   • **Probe:** What type of decision-making structure do you employ in your organization? How do employees express their ideas?
   • **Probe:** How do you assess your department and how often do you do it? What do you look for?
   • **Probe:** How does your department institute change?

3. Assume that your program five years from now is widely recognized as an innovative and successful. How does it look?
• **Probe:** How do you see the rest of the university in five years when it comes to distance education? Why?

I have completed my questions at this point. Is there anything that we did not discuss that you think would be important to add at this time? Do you have any other questions for me?

I will send you a copy of the text transcript of this interview and will contact you afterward to obtain additional information as needed and to verify your comfort with the material.

I thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. Your participation has been very helpful and I hope the process was rewarding to you as well.
APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT REVIEW PROCESS

1. Research each department’s website for marketing materials, newsletters, strategic plans, and annual reports.

2. Reach out to each department for marketing materials, newsletters, strategic plans, and annual reports that were not available via the web site.

3. Reach out to each department head for permission to view any documents that discuss strategic planning and operations, including advisory board minutes.

4. Reach out to Provost office for permission to view any university marketing materials, newsletters, strategic plans, and annual reports that were not available via the web site.

5. Review all highlighted documents that discuss strategic and operational plans for adopting distance education. Highlighting important areas and identifying them by sorting them by unit.

6. Referenced highlighted sections that help to inform interview conclusions.
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

As some of you may know, I have worked at Brandeis International Business School for the last twelve years. I am also a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University pursuing a degree in Higher Education Leadership. As the final part of my doctoral program, I am required to conduct research and write a thesis paper.

**Purpose of Study**
The purpose of this study is to identify how each department is leveraging distance education and what methods they are employing to insure successful implementations and operations. This study will also identify how and units are mindful of the distance learning environment and their methods of adjusting to change. In order to gain this understanding, I will be acting as a participant observer during your meeting today.

Before we begin, here are a few key points:

- I will only take notes when the discussion focuses on distance education strategy and operations and how mindful organizing is employed.
- This study is confidential. I will not use names when taking notes.
- My notes will be made available to anyone who would like to review them.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I appreciate the opportunity to observe your meeting today.

**Rubric for Mindful Organizing (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Characteristics of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Analytical Questions</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Quotes &amp; Interactions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preoccupation with Failure</strong></td>
<td>The hallmark for this is to be preoccupied with the small failures even more than the large ones.</td>
<td>How do you assess your department and how often do you do it? What do you look for?</td>
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<td><strong>Reluctance to Simplify Interpretations</strong></td>
<td>Leaders encourage their employees to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and possess the ability to find and understand differences in opinions without alienating others.</td>
<td>Do you have a culture in which employees are encouraged to question the status quo?</td>
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<td><strong>Sensitivity to Operations</strong></td>
<td>There is an ongoing concern for the unexpected at mindful organizations. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these</td>
<td>How often do you assess your operations and those outside your organization?</td>
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failures, but a mindful organization will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly.

**Commitment to Resilience**

This is maintained by keeping errors small and implementing quick workarounds that keep the system successfully functioning.

How agile of a department are you? Are you able to make quick changes? Do you have to live with workarounds that are not ideal until a permanent solution is implemented? If so, how long does this take?

**Under-specification of Structures**

The typical top-down decision-making structure is loosened so decisions can be made by employees to allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems. Expertise to

What type of decision-making structure do you employ in your organization? Do employees have the opportunity and ability to express their ideas? If so, how do they go about doing this?
Specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization.
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

Lisa: Summary
One-on-one in-person interview
Graduate Professional Studies (GPS)
Primary role: Admissions

Operational Change:
Environment is one that has allowed people to work up through the ranks and try different jobs. There are directors meetings bi-weekly in which, “we discuss either implementation or moving or planning to put the project forward.” There is staff meetings bi-weekly to discuss initiatives and to open the floor for discussion.

Felt that they sometimes make changes based on the market. There have been times when they were late on making changes and were forced by their surroundings. They strive to not let that happen by constantly looking and evaluating market trends. They are not afraid to try different initiatives and adjust them as needed.

Strategic Decision-Making:
Decisions are made in varying ways. Sometimes they are told to the directors and they discuss who needs to do different tasks to accomplish it. After the strategy has been established, directors trickle it down to their sub teams. “We work with our teams and move forward with it.” If the initiative is large enough, there is more discussion in the larger staff meeting.

There is the university’s strategic plan and then there is GPS’ strategic plan. GPS has worked with the university to ensure there are consistencies. However, GPS’ strategic plan is far more robust and current, “continuously updated throughout the year.” There is ownership with the strategic plan because each director has a strong contribution to it. Identify challenges and work hard to fix them.

Collaborative Culture:
They are self-contained in many ways, but if they do something that effects another department on campus, they will work with the group. They have to collaborate with the technology group, student enrollment, and marketing because of common systems and in some cases, cost savings.

Being the leaders of distance learning education on campus, they tend to be at the forefront and therefore do not have many partnerships for new initiatives. Working with the larger university can be a struggle because they are so far behind in distance education. GPS has been trying to become the center of distance education on campus and welcome collaboration from other departments.

The degree of collaboration internally is driven by the culture. It is a small department that lends itself to working with other groups to enhance the offerings.
Jane: Summary
One-on-one in-person interview
Graduate Professional Studies (GPS)
Primary role: Director of Graduate Professional Studies

Operational Change:
Grown with the school and has had the opportunity to do different jobs, thus allowing her to understand how the organization operates. The job continually changes because of the growth of the department. There is a struggle because it can be difficult to keep up with. Only until the need becomes great will it get addressed – band-aid solutions. Great improvement from previous years when “everyone kind of knew how to do everything.” There are more clearly defined roles, which allows people to focus on their jobs.

Continually scan the environment internally and externally to look for opportunities to make adjustments and for opportunities to the organization.

Strategic Decision-Making:
Strategy and decision-making was initially very slow because GPS wanted to ensure quality and be able to live up to the standards of the institution. “It was very deliberate.” “Eventually, we got to a point where the growth pushed the decision-making.” There was a point in which the program took off and it was difficult to stay ahead of the strategy. The market unfolded in front of them and they struggled, with a small staff, to keep up. So they did the best they could and had a learning curve to get ahead of.

Once it became clear what their identity was, they realized the direction they needed to go in and “it became a division-wide push.” There have been retreats, meetings, and presentations by the staff regarding the strategic plan. It is referred to as a “living, breathing thing.” It is constantly being reviewed and changed with the market. “It’s a group effort.”

Collaborative Culture:
Involved with internal and external collaborations on a daily basis. Helping to cultivate partnerships with companies. There is a strong feeling of ownership due to the time invested, commitment, and pride in the programs.

GPS has worked hard to collaborate with other departments, but have not been met with open arms in many places. The university “has not done anything to block our vision or to block our planning and our growth patterns.” There is uneasiness amongst many groups on campus that hinders the online initiative.
Mary: Summary
One-on-one in-person interview
Graduate Professional Studies (GPS)
Primary role: Executive Director of Graduate Professional Studies

Operational Change:
Has grown with the school over the past 17 years. Began as an adjunct professor and worked her way up through several roles as the school has grown and changed. Places a high value on “team development, staff development, and budget, making sure that we hit the targets or doing the forecasting and making sure they match the actuals.” She has had a heavy involvement in the operations and changes over the years and has instituted the plan is to improve and build.

Certain changes must go through governing bodies outside of GPS. “There are various levels of checks to make sure that as we’re moving forward that other parts in the university are aware of it.”

The way change is implemented has differed over the years. Because of the fast-moving environment and being new to the online market in 2007, they were forced to change with the market. Now they strive to stay ahead of it by looking internally and externally and constantly change to meet the needs of the audience. Many ideas come from within.

Constantly looking at new and better ways to offer their courses through partnerships, technology, or new pedagogical theories.

Strategic Decision-Making:
Investments are made in the marketing of the school as well as the research into upcoming trends in order to properly plan and decide whether they want to delve into a venture. They are not keen on doing what everyone else does. They are aware of what they do well and will try different niches if it will differentiate themselves from others. They are mindful of the external markets and will not hop onto “flashing” trends very often.

Collaborative Culture:
The staff is small, but understand their roles and the direction of the school. Each person has had a stake in planning, so there is a sense of ownership. It operates very much like a start-up company.

GPS constantly looks for opportunities to partner with other departments to offer services. They also try to collaborate with other groups on campus to not necessarily widen their scope, but to act as a service center for less experienced distance education endeavors. Appears to be a one-way street on collaboration on campus because of some views on distance education. Lack of a university-wide plan with distance education from senior administration. There is optimism that the university will eventually catch-up and change their views on distance education.
Kate: Summary
One-on-one in-person interview
Rabb Summer School
Primary role: Director of Rabb Summer School

**Operational Change:**
Worked at university since 1978 and has been part of the Rabb Summer School since its inception. Comprised of two people and is a very large revenue generator because of its success and low overhead. General feeling that they are being asked to do too much with too little. They are the first adopter of distance education on campus.

University requirements proved to be too much and not thought out as there were many faculty drop-offs. There was also a drop-off in students from summer ’13 to summer ’14 because of workload was too much.

**Strategic Decision-Making:**
Has helped to create the strategy and was the only decision maker at the school for many years. Decisions were made internally up until 2009, until collaboration with another department on campus did not work out. Several were unhappy and felt that there needed to be a formal decision-making body. “We apparently didn’t follow the right pathway to doing it and had our leash jerked quite hard.”

This is when the Online Learning Advisory Committee (OLAC) was formed. The university plays a very strong role in deciding the courses offered, curriculum, faculty quality assurance, and the general format – synchronous versus asynchronous. There are protocols and process for every decision.

Strategically look at external markets to see if adjustments need to be made. This is done once a year and is not a constant movement because of the university vetting process. The university is also slow to make decisions and respond to requests for decisions. Internally, they must strategically be creative in order to innovate.

**Collaborative Culture:**
Being part of the Office of Continuing Studies as an offshoot, the culture was set by Kate. Difficult to collaborate with many departments on campus because of the stigma attached to distance education and lack of university support for the initiative. Communication is slow and the pipeline is not always opened on the other end. There is some collaboration for service-related needs – technology.

The culture internally is collaborative. With two people running the program, their relationship is open and discussions are constantly happening. Ideas flow freely and there is a sense of openness.
Hal: Summary
One-on-one in-person interview
Rabb Summer School
Primary role: Associate Director of Rabb Summer School

Operational Change:
Hal has been working for Rabb Summer School for over ten years. He was part of introducing online courses at the Rabb Summer School. The initiative has fluctuated over the past five years between synchronous and asynchronous. They continue to adjust with the needs of the market and direction Brandeis University would like to go in.

“I think it’s going to be a kind of pendulum swing that instructors did it one summer over the 10 weeks, then they’ll give themselves kind of a treat with the next summer and take that summer off.”

Strategic Decision-Making:
Hal is not directly involved in the strategy or decision-making of the unit. He is an indirect influencer. The university has an overarching plan for strategy, but it is not well thought-out. A committee has been assigned by the university to plan the vision of the school. “…OLAC (Online Learning Advisory Committee)…they’re the ones who kind of really set the agendas as to what methodology would be used for our online classes.”

Involved in looking at the external market to see what other schools are offering and more importantly for Hal, how they are doing it. Hal is more involved in the day to day operations in a customer service capacity.

“My role is really the front lines for students, instructors, and helping instructors get set up, and kind of also being a little bit of a technical help desk for them.”

Collaborative Culture:
This is a very small department and fosters collaboration internally and externally. Hal meets with his boss on a daily basis and discuss decisions and directions. “When we do have a meeting with either the vice president or the provost, we talk right after, so it’s kind of evolves everyday.”

The external collaboration, on the whole, is far more daunting for this department. They have been trying every avenue to work with other departments. “Even if your department says no online learning, well, let’s offer them training and resources in case they want to go to another university.”
John: Summary
One-on-one in-person interview
Brandeis Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry (BGI)
Primary role: Executive Director of Brandeis Genesis Institute

Operational Change:
John has been working for BGI for three and a half years. However, he was part of introducing the hybrid learning experience. This initiative is new and there is a lack of experience in the field of distance education. Willingness to adjust and change through the process. Constantly looking at opportunities and adjust to meet the needs of their target audience.

Professional development is a “pillar of impact of the Brandeis Genesis Institute.” This new hybrid program grew out of another program and addresses the needs of the market.

Strategic Decision-Making:
Works with “faculty to shape our strategic vision and work with staff to ensure that our programs that include community engagement initiatives, professional development initiatives, and research and scholarship projects are meeting their benchmarks of success.”

Strategy moves forward and changes with the market and reevaluation of their audience’s needs. “We talk about first and foremost identifying, figuring out where we are in this specific moment. What’s being offered in the field? What are the needs of the field?” They move onto benchmarking, mapping, and look internally. Then a proposal is written.

Guiding committee that helps with strategy and decisions of the school’s direction, “assessing our progress and outlining our back steps.” Another guiding committee is the funders of the institute. They are constantly discussing ways to refine the strategic vision and to discuss new initiatives.

Collaborative Culture:
The environment is that of a learning community, where ideas are solicited from all places. The environment is flat when it comes to ideas about programs. “Collaborative structure and atmosphere.”

Collaboration is key as this is a funded program. There are multiple external partnerships as well as some internal. In particular, BGI works with another division well versed in distance education. They are assisting with the online pedagogical aspects of the course. BGI is customizing their offering and are mindful of not replicating another formula that does not fit into their plans. Positive experience with the university leadership and viewed as quite helpful with their initiative. General feeling that the university is lagging behind when it comes to distance education.
Susan: Summary
One-on-one in-person interview
Brandeis Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program on behalf of Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry (BGI)
Primary role: Director of Brandeis Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program

Operational Change:
Susan has been working at Brandeis University for sixteen years. Susan’s role in this initiative is a collaborative effort between BGI and the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program. Susan is accustomed to collaborating with other divisions, but this marks the first one that includes distance education. This is not the first time she has collaborated with BGI. “They know our expertise…our faculty…the quality of our students.

“They (BGI) are really an administrative department. They’re not an academic department.”

Strategic Decision-Making:
Works with the faculty to discuss initiatives and whether they can accommodate certain requests. Also works closely with department administrator on strategic initiatives and evaluations. Faculty training is required since none of the faculty for BGLI is experienced in teaching online. “They don’t know about any of it. We have to bring them into the system.”

The decision-making process is quick and does not include many parties. “We have an ultimate steering committee.” It includes Susan, John from BGI, and two faculty members. Susan and John take the lead in these discussions and meet with the two faculty members, “maybe twice a semester just to basically to update them.” “…we had the outline of what we’re going to do, the time table, and so forth.”

Collaborative Culture:
Collaboration is extremely important to this initiative. As mentioned, the BGI is an administrative office and Hornstein is an academic one. BGI brings in funding and creates opportunities through collaboration with other groups. “It’s been a good collaboration based on a good foundation. All the work, all the energy is John, our administrators, and John.” “John definitely is the department that has taken the lead on this.” There has also been collaboration with another department on campus that has online education expertise.

Central administration has been supportive of this initiative and any other collaborations that grow the programs. “We have been encouraged by the past president, by this president to keep moving in this outreach direction, finding additional ways to bring students in to get our expertise out.” While departments have been encouraging, there is a sense that the university is well behind when it comes to offering distance education. Brandeis would like for departments to innovate, but do not have the structure internally to support it.
APPENDIX F: EXAMPLE OF CODING

Conclusion 1: Decision-making and the market drive growth
Participant #1: Lisa

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“…the unit looks at the strategic plan but throughout that time we then are revisiting different operations based on a new academic year.”</td>
<td>UNIT LOOKS AT</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>STRATEGIC PLAN</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“…implementing different initiatives outside of the strategic plan.”</td>
<td>REVISITING OPERATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“The decision was made amongst people above my level and then we discussed it within a director’s meeting about who needs to do what.”</td>
<td>DECISION</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ABOVE MY LEVEL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Mostly internal right now with implications of working collaboratively with other departments.”</td>
<td>WHO NEEDS TO DO WHAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“…looking at our strategic plan and how it coincides with the main university.”</td>
<td>STRATEGIC PLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They’re still going to be struggling, not necessarily that they won’t offer online, but that every different school on campus is going to offer online completely different.”</td>
<td>COINCIDES WITH MAIN UNIVERSITY</td>
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<td>INTERNAL</td>
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<td>IMPLICATIONS</td>
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<td>COLLABORATIVELY</td>
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<td>STRUGGLING</td>
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<td>SCHOOL</td>
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<td>ON CAMPUS</td>
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<td>COMPLETELY</td>
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<td>DIFFERENT</td>
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**Participant #2: Jane**

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<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“…as we’ve gotten bigger and the number of staff has gotten bigger, kind of incrementally, we have got a little bit more structure in place.”</td>
<td>STAFF GOTTEN BIGGER \INCREMENTALLY STRUCUTRE IN PLACE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We used to have, everyone wears all these hats…”</td>
<td>EVERYONE WEARS HATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“…after a certain point, it became a little bit more business. And business started driving.”</td>
<td>BUSINESS \STARTED DRIVING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“For the most part, we have been…I don’t want to say ignored, but left to our own devices by the university.”</td>
<td>LEFT \OWN DEVICES BY \UNIVERSITY \HAVEN’T CLEARED \WAY</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…they haven’t necessarily cleared the way, as far as backing us and our mission.”</td>
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**Participant #3: Mary**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“Once we had a full program available online then we had the ability to attract a broader set of students.”</td>
<td>FULL PROGRAM \ABILITY TO ATTRACT \BROADER SET OF \STUDENTS</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…big data was everywhere and we said we’d be silly if we ignored it.”</td>
<td>BIG DATA \SILLY TO IGNORE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“The decision made was we follow the audience.”</td>
<td>DECISION TO FOLLOW \AUDIENCE</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>“…how do we come up with new programs if we are going to formulate one? A default, it has to be online.”</td>
<td>NEW \PROGRAMS \DEFAULT IS ONLINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“I wouldn’t really say that anyone gives us a strategic plan or anyone dictates strategy.”</td>
<td>STRATEGIC PLAN \DICTATES STRATEGY</td>
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“…the ideas for new programming and growth…the seed of that is from us because we are chartered to grow.”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“…someone with great foresight put money into the ’15 budget…and that is being repurposed to help this division hire an instructional designer.”</td>
<td>GREAT FORESIGHT</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>REPURPOSED INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“…you just can’t throw an idea out there.”</td>
<td>CAN’T THROW IDEA OUT</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It really has to have logistical ties that are realistic.”</td>
<td>LOGISTICAL TIES REALISTIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“We were told to dive into the pool, but we were essentially wearing cinder blocks.”</td>
<td>DIVE INTO THE POOL WEARING CINDER BLOCKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…an enormous amount of work and it’s no surprise that instructors found it a great deal of work and that the drop off…was over 50%.”</td>
<td>ENORMOUS WORK NO SURPRISE GREAT DEAL OF WORK</td>
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**Participant #5: Hal**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“…I do think the change institutionally will be slower, and some that I think comes from some key departments that are vocally resistant.”</td>
<td>CHANGE INSTITUTIONALLY KEY DEPARTMENTS VOCALLY RESISTANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“We got certain targets, financial targets that we’re expected to meet.”</td>
<td>CERTAIN FINANCIAL TARGETS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“If there is a problem that’s coming up, I want to let my boss know about it.”</td>
<td>PROBLEM LET MY BOSS KNOW</td>
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“It's pretty organic because we are in such close proximity.” ORGANIC CLOSE PROXIMITY

Participant #6: John

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“…it happens on almost a daily basis.”</td>
<td>DAILY BASIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“…constantly looking at our strategic plan.”</td>
<td>CONSTANTLY LOOKING AT STRATEGIC PLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…make sure that whatever we do actually meet the needs of our target audience.”</td>
<td>MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR TARGET AUDIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“…leadership of the university’s very supportive to aid new initiatives that fit within the newly developed strategic plan for the university.”</td>
<td>LEADERSHIP VERY SUPPORTIVE NEWLY DEVELOPED STRATEGIC PLAN</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“…met with support and questions of what we can do to help.”</td>
<td>SUPPORT AND QUESTIONS</td>
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Participant #7: Susan

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“So they’re not an academic department, and when they were looking for an academic program and since they’re looking to do professional quasi executive education, we were the logical place to come.”</td>
<td>ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT ACADEMIC PROGRAM EXECUTIVE EDUCATION LOGICAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“We already had that in our planning documents as the strategic plan for Brandeis was being developed. When that plan was finally published, we were already there.”</td>
<td>PLANNING STRATEGIC PLAN PUBLISHED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collaborative Culture
“Somewhat in cooperation with that, we’ve made alliances with the Genesis group.”
“I have worked out a professional relationship and we have many projects going at the same time together.”

Conclusion 2: Distance education requires agility in operations
**Participant #1: Lisa**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Change</strong></td>
<td>“…we discuss either implementation or moving or plan to put the project forward.”</td>
<td>IMPLEMENTATION MOVING OR PLAN FORWARD</td>
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<td>“…further discussed at a staff meeting that this is going to happen.”</td>
<td>STAFF MEETING</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“…each director works with their sub team.”</td>
<td>WORKS WITH SUB TEAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>“It’s mostly internal for now…our leadership is fairly new.”</td>
<td>INTERNAL LEADERSHIP NEW</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I anticipate changing as we move forward…”</td>
<td>ANTICIPATE CHANGES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…looking to better ourselves in our processes and services.”</td>
<td>BETTER OURSELVES PROCESSES AND SERVICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Culture</strong></td>
<td>“…we look at internal areas first and then move external.”</td>
<td>INTERNAL AREAS MOVE EXTERNAL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We naturally have to move to external sources either from colleagues and other universities.”</td>
<td>MOVE EXTERNAL SOURCES COLLEAGUES AND UNIVERSITIES</td>
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### Participant #2: Jane

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Change</strong></td>
<td>“…it’s different and we have more clearly-defined roles, and still a lot of interaction and working together.”</td>
<td>DIFFERENT CLEARLY-DEFINED ROLES INTERACTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…my role has changed over the years.”</td>
<td>ROLE HAS CHANGED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>“…we got to the point where the growth pushed decision-making.”</td>
<td>GROWTH PUSHED DECISION-MAKING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Culture</strong></td>
<td>“…the decisions were made thoughtfully and trying to be careful, very careful about how we did, because of the Brandeis reputation.”</td>
<td>DECISIONS THoughtFULLY CAREFUL REPUTATION</td>
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<td>“Early on, we wanted to make sure we’re doing this slowly…wanting to maintain quality.”</td>
<td>SLOWLY MAINTAINING QUALITY</td>
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### Participant #3: Mary

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Change</strong></td>
<td>“It’s easier to launch a program if you have some core elective courses shared with an existing one so that you’re not building every single course new.”</td>
<td>LAUNCH A PROGRAM CORE ELECTIVES EXISTING ONE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“…try to carve out what would make us unique.”</td>
<td>CARVE OUT UNIQUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>“We went online because the audience went there. That was the way we were going to stay alive.”</td>
<td>ONLINE BECAUSE AUDIENCE WENT THERE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…we try to do the competitive analysis to see what other programs are out there.”</td>
<td>COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS OTHER PROGRAMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Culture</strong></td>
<td>“I think we’re agile and we’re entrepreneurial and we come up with our ways to achieve the goals that we”</td>
<td>AGILE ENTREPRENEURIAL ACHIEVE THE GOALS</td>
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set in order to meet higher growth targets.”

“…even the university strategic plan is not telling us how it should grow.”

“It’s saying that we should be an online incubator to help support novel programs.”

Participant #4: Kate

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“…ask instructors if they’re interested in teaching online…there are very few that are comfortable at this point.”</td>
<td>VERY FEW COMFORTABLE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“…it’s really hard to find the resources to support new endeavors.”</td>
<td>HARD TO FIND RESOURCES FOR ENDEAVORS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“OLAC was formed as a way of bringing the faculty into decisions about how online learning was going to happen.”</td>
<td>OLAC FACULTY IN DECISIONS</td>
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<td>“In that process, the reinvention of our online courses, the decision was made that asynchronous was not acceptable.”</td>
<td>REINVENTION ONLINE COURSES NO ASYNCHRONOUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“…many of the faculty had absolutely no idea what online learning was about.”</td>
<td>FACULTY NO IDEA WHAT ONLINE LEARNING WAS ABOUT</td>
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<td>“…holding hands all last summer, so it’s no surprise that the weaker members of that cohort didn’t return.”</td>
<td>HOLDING HANDS NO SURPRISE COHORT DIDN’T RETURN</td>
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### Participant #5: Hal

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<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Change</strong></td>
<td>“We’re always looking for more ways to get people involved in summer school.”</td>
<td>WAYS INVOLVED</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>“You would think that other schools would be into the online arena for summer faster, but they weren’t.”</td>
<td>OTHER SCHOOLS ONLINE ARENA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“They were actually asking us questions at that meeting.”</td>
<td>ASKING US QUESTIONS AT MEETING</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Culture</strong></td>
<td>“She was instrumental in getting us online against some resistance in the university.”</td>
<td>INSTRUMENTAL RESISTANCE IN THE UNIVERSITY</td>
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### Participant #6: John

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<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Change</strong></td>
<td>“…developed certain tools and knowledge on how to make our programs more engaging, but this is still something that we continue to work on.”</td>
<td>DEVELOPED TOOLS KNOWLEDGE PROGRAMS MORE ENGAGING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>“…we do some benchmarking study, do mapping, and see what are the services that are already being offered to our constituencies.”</td>
<td>BENCHMARKING MAPPING SERVICES CONSTITUENCIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Culture</strong></td>
<td>“…don’t have a lot of experience in dealing with online education, it was instrumental for us to get the support of folks who actually have experience in distance learning.”</td>
<td>DON’T HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE SUPPORT OF FOLKS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCE</td>
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### Participant #7: Susan

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Change</td>
<td>“He’s very good if he thinks something is going to shift.”</td>
<td>SHIFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…that makes us able to move very quickly…which is what you need on this.”</td>
<td>MOVE QUICKLY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Decision-Making</td>
<td>“Through all of this resource developments, we’re also now recruiting and beginning to introduce students, which is going to get very time consuming. We’ll report back on that, but the nice thing is the decision-making is by committee, me and John.”</td>
<td>RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT RECRUITING TIME CONSUMING DECISION MAKING COMMITTEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>“This is where the university is going according to the strategic plan. Here are the people. Here are the resources. Here’s the hiring up that we’re going to need to do if we’re going to do this.”</td>
<td>STRATEGIC PLAN RESOURCES HIRING UP</td>
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### APPENDIX G: DATA ANALYSIS SAMPLE

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<tr>
<th>Attributes of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Characteristics of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Analytical Questions Informing Research</th>
<th>Examples of decision-making and the market drive growth (LISA)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation with Failure</td>
<td>The hallmark for this is to be preoccupied with the small failures even more than the large ones.</td>
<td>How do you assess your department and how often do you do it? What do you look for?</td>
<td>“Sometimes we’re told to do certain things and then it’s…Then we’ll take it and spread it out throughout the sub teams…look at the different director within the unit to implement the program or something that involves online learning to work with our teams then and forward with it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance to Simplify Interpretations</td>
<td>Leaders encourage their employees to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and possess the ability to find and understand differences in opinions without alienating others.</td>
<td>Do you have a culture in which employees are encouraged to question the status quo?</td>
<td>“…my particular team is looking at our SWOTS again to then revisit because the unit will then revisit the strategic plan, the overall strategic plan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to Operations</td>
<td>There is an ongoing concern for the unexpected at mindful organizations. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these failures, but a mindful organization will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly.</td>
<td>How often do you assess your operations and those outside your organization?</td>
<td>“Every six months I would say that the unit looks at the strategic plan but throughout that time we then are revisiting different operations based on a new academic year or implementing different initiatives outside of the strategic plan.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment to Resilience</td>
<td>This is maintained by keeping errors small and implementing quick workarounds that keep the system successfully functioning.</td>
<td>How agile of a department are you? Are you able to make quick changes? Do you have to live with workarounds that are not ideal until a permanent solution is implemented? If so, how long does this take?</td>
<td>“Making adjustments to where we should focus our advertisement on or we want to increase enrollment and then working with our vendor to then change Google AdWords in that direction.”</td>
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<td>Under-</td>
<td>The typical top-</td>
<td>What type of</td>
<td>“Even though we’re</td>
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down decision-making structure is loosened so decisions can be made by employees to allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems. Expertise to specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Characteristics of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Analytical Questions Informing Research</th>
<th>Examples of decision-making and the market drive growth (JANE)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation with Failure</td>
<td>The hallmark for this is to be preoccupied with the small failures even more than the large ones.</td>
<td>How do you assess your department and how often do you do it? What do you look for?</td>
<td>“There is a number of ways that feedback filters into the program chair. We meet with program chairs once a month. And we would either hear about those ideas for change, hopefully we would hear about them before, as we’re thinking about them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reluctance to Simplify Interpretations</strong></td>
<td>Leaders encourage their employees to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and possess the ability to find and understand differences in opinions without alienating others.</td>
<td>Do you have a culture in which employees are encouraged to question the status quo?</td>
<td>“We have had retreats to talk about opportunities for growth, a lot of brainstorming sessions, and scribbling on whiteboards, and notes coming away from those.”</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensitivity to Operations</strong></td>
<td>There is an ongoing concern for the unexpected at mindful organizations. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these failures, but a mindful organization will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly.</td>
<td>How often do you assess your operations and those outside your organization?</td>
<td>“…we were offering these online courses, and this is where, I guess, it affected me with the course scheduling. I couldn’t fill the on-ground courses anymore, the on-campus courses, and was frustrated by that, we were always having to cancel it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to Resilience</td>
<td>This is maintained by keeping errors small and implementing quick workarounds that keep the system successfully functioning.</td>
<td>How agile of a department are you? Are you able to make quick changes? Do you have to live with workarounds that are not ideal until a permanent solution is implemented? If so, how long does this take?</td>
<td>“Mary made the new strategic plan. She is the one that maintains it, she thinks it’s a living, breathing thing. She’s always kind of bringing it back to our attention to review it, or to look back and say…Because it’s not enough to just put it out there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under-specification of Structures</td>
<td>The typical top-down decision-making structure is loosened so decisions can be made by employees to allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems. Expertise to specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization.</td>
<td>What type of decision-making structure do you employ in your organization? Do employees have the opportunity and ability to express their ideas? If so, how do they go about doing this?</td>
<td>“We do meet with staff every two weeks…those come down through, and then disbursed through staff. And then those changes get disbursed to the registrar’s office. And we’ve been trying very hard to bring in those kinds of changes and make them happen once a year, rather than just kind of willy-nilly – all over the place, trying to make an infrastructure that’s a little bit more set for those kinds of changes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes of Mindful Organizing</td>
<td>Characteristics of Mindful Organizing</td>
<td>Analytical Questions Informing Research</td>
<td>Examples of decision-making and the market drive growth (MARY)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Preoccupation with Failure</strong></td>
<td>The hallmark for this is to be preoccupied with the small failures even more than the large ones.</td>
<td>How do you assess your department and how often do you do it? What do you look for?</td>
<td>“Now that we have a leader…there’s the system and the visioning and making sure that what I’m proposing for GPS fits into the vision. I’ve done some reorganization of the team and coming up with some different sub team structure to position us to growth and scale as well as overall responsibility for the adjuncts we hire and the professional development we do for them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reluctance to Simplify Interpretations</strong></td>
<td>Leaders encourage their employees to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and possess the ability to find and understand differences in opinions without alienating others.</td>
<td>Do you have a culture in which employees are encouraged to question the status quo?</td>
<td>“I think we are pretty flat. Yeah, we have sub teams and I’m trying to foster leadership among sub team leaders to lead their teams, but we’re still small enough that ideas can flow from many different places.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensitivity to Operations</strong></td>
<td>There is an ongoing concern for the unexpected at mindful organizations. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these failures, but a mindful organization will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly.</td>
<td>How often do you assess your operations and those outside your organization?</td>
<td>“We look at our current program, we look at the market…looking at other programs that people might be starting. Just looking at the newspaper to see what people are talking about. Looking at what professionals might want for their skills and that will give the idea for the program.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment to Resilience</strong></td>
<td>This is maintained by keeping errors small and implementing quick workarounds that keep the system successfully functioning.</td>
<td>How agile of a department are you? Are you able to make quick changes? Do you have to live with workarounds that are not ideal until a permanent solution is implemented? If so, how long does this take?</td>
<td>“We are doing some market research on programs that are out there, how they are shaped, how they are formed. We just talk to people and talk to other faculty, do market research, look at job data.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under-</strong></td>
<td>The typical top-</td>
<td>What type of</td>
<td>“Ideas for new</td>
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</table>
**Specification of Structures**

Down decision-making structure is loosened so decisions can be made by employees to allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems. Expertise to specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization.

**Decision-making structure do you employ in your organization? Do employees have the opportunity and ability to express their ideas? If so, how do they go about doing this?**

Programming, they’ve come from staff, they’ve come from faculty, they’ve come from chairs, they just come from my brain as different things hit the cue.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Characteristics of Mindful Organizing</th>
<th>Analytical Questions Informing Research</th>
<th>Examples of decision-making and the market drive growth (KATE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Preoccupation with Failure</em></td>
<td>The hallmark for this is to be preoccupied with the small failures even more than the large ones.</td>
<td>How do you assess your department and how often do you do it? What do you look for?</td>
<td>“We have many objectives in our program. We’re aware of who our competitors are. We reach out to them when we need to have basic questions answered. We are acutely aware of our environment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reluctance to Simplify Interpretations</strong></td>
<td>Leaders encourage their employees to be skeptical, challenge boundaries, and possess the ability to find and understand differences in opinions without alienating others.</td>
<td>Do you have a culture in which employees are encouraged to question the status quo?</td>
<td>“We’re going to discuss how processes have to change and, again, sensitivities; we’ve been functioning the same way as long as I’ve been part of the summer school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensitivity to Operations</strong></td>
<td>There is an ongoing concern for the unexpected at mindful organizations. Latent failures are usually realized after an event occurs and it is too late. Day to day operations may reveal these failures, but a mindful organization will conduct frequent assessments to expose these deficiencies before they reveal themselves unexpectedly.</td>
<td>How often do you assess your operations and those outside your organization?</td>
<td>“I would say that in general, every two to three years we take a look at our strategic plan. We check in on it on a regular basis because our revenue targets are tied; we’re expected to deliver a certain amount of revenue.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to Resilience</td>
<td>This is maintained by keeping errors small and implementing quick workarounds that keep the system successfully functioning.</td>
<td>How agile of a department are you? Are you able to make quick changes? Do you have to live with workarounds that are not ideal until a permanent solution is implemented? If so, how long does this take?</td>
<td>“The summer school program started in 1974 and in 1994-1995, we finally got permission to have a second staff person in the summer school. That was twenty years ago and we still have only two people. We pretty much have to work around the clock during our busy seasons in order to make things happen.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-specification of Structures</td>
<td>The typical top-down decision-making structure is loosened so decisions can be made by employees to allow decision-making to migrate along with the problems. Expertise to specific issues can be found at all levels of an organization.</td>
<td>What type of decision-making structure do you employ in your organization? Do employees have the opportunity and ability to express their ideas? If so, how do they go about doing this?</td>
<td>“If a problem comes up and the end result is something that my staff is going to have to work with, which is just about everything. I always solicit his view and we talk about it. I’ll tell him what I’m leaning toward and why I’m leaning toward it. There’s a great deal of give and take and a lot of respect for each other’s ideas.”</td>
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# APPENDIX H: INITIAL CODES

## Graduate Professional Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindful Organizing Attributes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Preoccupation with failure** | Continually updating and revising  
Constant assessments and perpetual change  
Most changes internal; fast moving; agile  
University lagging with distance education innovation, struggle |
| **Reluctance to simplify interpretations** | Planned change; infrastructure built for change, process structure  
Patterns in planning, new initiatives, planning and analysis vetted  
Optimistic about future |
| **Sensitivity to operations** | Scan internal and external market conditions; work with marketing group  
Growth driven by decision making and market  
Data driven, goals and needs  
Cautiously external, constantly internal  
Strong in some areas and not existent in others  
Constantly scanning environment, cultivate partnerships |
| **Commitment to resilience** | Thoughtful analysis; Change with the market  
Opportunities looked for, branch-out, partnering |
| **Under-specification of structures** | Ideas, planning, trickle-down, but open. Some autonomy  
Defined roles, multiple roles  
Work with formal committee organization (OLAC)  
Entrepreneurial, open environment, room for growth, and learn from errors |
### Mindful Organizing Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindful Organizing Attributes</th>
<th>Code</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation with failure</td>
<td>University input on operations and vision; Centralized External resources drives decisions, strategy, and direction Operates/strives on working with other units; External partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance to simplify interpretations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to operations</td>
<td>Collaboration internally; Improvements periodically identified Small organization and internal operations that struggles with university lack of vision Aware of environment; internal and external Work with marketing group on strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to resilience</td>
<td>External research and actions informs change Work-around solutions are part of the strategy because of current internal University environment of ambivalence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-specification of structures</td>
<td>Work with formal committee organization (OLAC) University requirements, policy drives decisions University resistance to distance education and change; indecisive leadership, difficult to innovate Lack of communication, pipeline from the University not clear; lack of funding and support Small organization, creative, efficient, learning environment</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Mindful Organizing Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Code</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation with failure</td>
<td>Constant evaluation of organization,[br]professional evaluation[br]Consultative body that institutes change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance to simplify interpretations</td>
<td>Learning community[br]No mechanisms in place for innovation,[br]small, flat organization with ideas[br]University was supportive, other unit support on pedagogy aspect of distance learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to operations</td>
<td>External and internal review[br]Adjust to market, benchmarking[br]Optimism for future and university’s place in distance education; however currently lagging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to resilience</td>
<td>Partnerships with university departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-specification of structures</td>
<td>Upper management meetings, staff meetings; planning for present and future Processes in place, top-down decision making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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