EXAMINING WHAT INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND FORMS OF LEADERSHIP SUPPORT THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF NON-ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN UNIVERSITIES

By

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Abstract

The study of career development pathways and support for the population of university employees who do not hold an academic appointment is lacking. Many departments across one eastern Ontario institution are coming to rely on non-academic professionals to help drive strategic objectives within their respective faculties. The goal of this study is to gain insight into the experiences of the career growth of this group in an effort to understand their career journeys. University environments have become more complex, there are higher expectations from stakeholder groups, and changes to funding models and international competition for the best students and faculty is continually on the rise. All of this change has resulted in increased performance pressure for not just the senior administration, but also for the professional staff who do not hold academic contracts but contribute in many areas to the institution’s success. An increase in postings for non-academic professional administrators to assume leadership roles in program management, strategic projects and many of the more functional areas of the university gives weight to the value that this particular population can bring to the environment. The challenge then becomes how can the institution best support the growth and development of this population, given that the human resource infrastructure currently in place in most higher education institutions has been structured around the support of academic faculty holding many of these leadership roles. Additionally, what changes are needed to meet the needs of this new generation of leaders? Reflecting on my experiences in navigating my own career path is the catalyst for this research project, but with a specific goal of flushing out both the consistencies and differences between staff members across one university in Eastern Ontario in terms of their growth and development.
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Chapter One

Introduction

My entire career has taken place on a university campus. Over the last 18 years, as a member of the staff community at a medium-sized, comprehensive university I have held a number of different roles and worked across a number of different academic faculties and departments. I would classify my journey as a successful one, given that my time within higher education has taken me from a junior entry-level position to my current position as a member of a leadership team responsible for advising students and helping to set the direction of an academic program. As I reflect back on my experiences, I have been challenged by the fact that there is no clear explanation for how someone else might build their career within the institution; no set of steps I could share regarding my own career progression other than to say I was in the right place at the right time and was lucky enough to connect and learn from the right people. These experiences have peaked my curiosity to understand if there are others who would provide similar explanations regarding their own careers within a university environment. Through the examination of other’s experiences, my goal is to help to identify the necessary components that lead to a successful career in higher education, from the perspective of professional staff within the institution.

When thinking about the career journeys of those working in a university environment, it is important to consider the changes happening in the higher education sector; university environments have become more complex. Some of these complexities include higher expectations from stakeholder groups, significant changes to funding models, and, international competition for the best students and faculty is continually on
the rise, “Higher education institutions have been confronted with issues of expansion, decentralization and financial pressures…. In addition, these issues have been accompanied by societal demands of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.” (Decramer, Smolders, & Vanderstraeten, 2013, p. 352). A 2012 article published in the Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management summarizes these changes by saying that “higher education occupies a unique position given its role in the development of new knowledge and the dissemination of existing knowledge” in terms of how it chooses to tackle the leadership and management challenges associated with the shifting landscape (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012, p. 67). All of these changes have resulted in increased performance pressure for not just the senior administration, but also for the staff that do not hold academic appointments yet contribute in many areas to the institution’s success. The challenge then is found in how the institution can best support the growth and development of staff whose career paths have yet to be defined, while also building a profile for prospective hires. If we were to examine the career development infrastructure within many university environments, there simply is no clear way of knowing, as an administrator how he or she might effectively make their way through the organization from an entry-level role through to more senior positions. Additionally, the culture and human resource infrastructure currently in place in most higher education institutions has been structured around the support of academic faculty holding many of the more senior leadership roles.

An argument could be and has been made that the shifting landscape of higher education requires a different type or level of talent to manage it or at the very least gain a better understanding of whether or not that talent already exists. I believe that through
examination, a better understanding of how current employees see the opportunities and leadership influences could aid in the formation of a model that institutions could find useful.

**Autobiographical Signature**

During my time working in a university environment, I have developed a keen interest in the career development structures and leadership styles that support the work and careers of non-academic professional staff in the higher education sector. I would identify as a pragmatist who is problem and solution-oriented rather than theoretical, and it is through this lens that I examine my epistemology and ponder how it may impact my intended research. I have embarked on a journey that I hope will both uncover commonalities and differences, study best practices, and provide information that could help to inform the opportunities for professional growth and development of the population of non-academic professional staff in universities. My desire to complete work in this area has been driven by my own experiences working in the higher education sector and early-stage examination of the literature surrounding the issue. It is important to consider how my own voice and experiences may influence the intended work and to expose and reflect upon the assumptions, biases, subjectivity and positionality that I bring to the work. Peshkin (1988) noted that subjectivity is defined as “amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one’s class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one’s object of investigation” (p. 17). Given that I will be interviewing participant’s whose experiences somewhat mirror my own, this research project is very close to my heart and has the potential to take the tone of my own voice or experience. It was very important to ensure that interview questions were left as open as
possible to allow for the voices of my participants to be heard “…..the difficulty in understanding one’s own voice even as one strains to hear the voice of the other” (Britzman, 1997, p. 31). To address this, I have provided an overview of my background here in the introduction of this thesis, so that my perspectives might be easily identified and interpreted by the reader in relation to the work. Furthermore, I believe this overview will position questions and interviews in such a way that the findings are interpreted without bias.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of non-academic university staff and their explanations of what they perceive as catalysts to growth within their career development and progression. The following overarching research question was explored:

- What are the leadership influences and institutional characteristics that support the development of professional, non-academic staff in the university?

To further focus the study, the following sub-questions were used:

1. What are the professional and personal values that motivate non-academic staff in their professional development for professional growth?

2. What tools and resources have been available and useful to them in the pursuit of professional development for professional growth?

3. What forms of leadership are required to motivate non-academic employees’ professional development for professional growth?

4. What institutional structures and strategies support employees’ professional development for career growth?
Context of the Study

In an effort to examine this area, I chose an institution that I felt would be representative in terms of size and structure to a number of universities both in Ontario, but also across Canada. The university chosen for this study can be described as research-intensive and comprehensive, given the broad range of faculties and the presence of professional schools that include medicine, law and business. Universities Canada lists 96 public and private universities among its membership, and while it would have been helpful to speak to members of all 96 staff communities, there was agreement in consultation with my supervisor that this would be well beyond the scope of work reasonable for a Master’s thesis. I felt that given the comprehensive nature of the institution, I chose for this study, alongside the research output and the presence of professional schools would provide an environment where the experiences of its staff population would be relatively indicative of those experienced at institutions of similar construct.

A review of the major historical developments in the evolution of Canadian university governance arrangements (Jones, Shanahan, & Goyan, 2001) provided a snapshot of governance models in Canadian higher education. The historical look at higher education revealed a series of significant changes to both the need for transparency and increased accountability being placed on these organizations on everything from opening up their board and senate meetings to the ways in which they recruited and selected their leaders. They noted, “before the late 1960’s, the process of selecting a university president was left to the discretion of the governing board. By the early 1970’s, presidential searchers were often conducted by ‘search committees’, which
included representation from a variety of internal and external constituencies…” (p. 138). Additionally,

not one Canadian university had open senate or board meetings in 1967. By 1969, more than half of these institutions were allowing non-members to attend senate meetings and a parallel, though somewhat more gradual and limited, change was taking place in terms of governing board policy (Jones, Shanahan, & Govan, p.138).

These earlier disruptions to governance models have slowly made their way through the organization as well where the demands for strong talent at the operation and service levels have also changed. This shift toward a more managerial form of governance has required a shift in the type of talent that may be required to support the universities goals, priorities and requirements going forward and it is the experiences of the community of staff in these roles.

**Research Limitations**

A limitation of this study is that only one location and institution has been examined, however the hope would be that information obtained from this study could be used to evaluate the existence or strength of career development programs at other, institutions, similar in size & structure in the future. The non-academic staff population being targeted for this study hold roles within a specific managerial and professional group but are not considered to be part of the most senior levels of administration. This group was chosen due to the fact that they are more likely to hold leadership or supervisory roles themselves and are not currently part of a collective bargaining union. The latter fact was instrumental as it could impact their willingness to speak freely about
their experiences, leaders and career paths. Additional limitations include the number of participants. In discussions with my supervisor and in determining the appropriate scope for a master’s thesis, taking on only 7 participants seemed to fit; however, it is difficult to say that a sample size of 7 can adequately speak for the entire population.

**Rationale**

A significant body of literature exists linking strategic human resource planning to organizational effectiveness (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). However, little has been done connecting this partnership to a higher education environment, particularly as it relates to professional staff in universities. Faculty development and its relationship to institutional planning is much more likely to be the area of focus with regard to human resource management research in higher education (Bacon, 2009; Whitchurch, 2004). The importance of creating and retaining a workforce that is able to adapt to that change could be the difference between success and failure. I believe this to be true, even in the context of university staff. Student demands, shifting institutional priorities and societal relevance are all part of the changing landscape of higher education environments. Therefore, it is important to understand how non-academic staff contributes to the institution’s successful navigation of these changes and how to best equip employees to manage them effectively. Craig (2014) examined the situation of one Australian university facing many of the challenges outlined here including financial pressures, increased competition and higher expectations from students and faculty. He focused on the fact that while change was necessary, there was a lack of recognition on behalf of the leadership on how to go about this, and stated, “Many universities have become large and complex organizations requiring strategic planning of superior levels of service to attract
and retain future students” (p. 293). He discussed that institutions like universities have become increasingly similar to corporate entities and as such need to align their planning and management practices accordingly. I would argue that universities in Canada are facing many of the same challenges and as such need to ensure they are equipping themselves with the correct talent to manage these processes effectively.

It is important to define the identity of professional, non-academic staff in universities as a first step. Management and professional employees within higher education environments are represented by two distinct groups – generic professional groups, for example, accountants, HR managers, lawyers, etc., many of whom likely practiced their professions in some other capacity prior to joining a university community. The other group represents career employees of the university who are responsible for the operations, marketing, communications, recruiting, information Technology, external relations and student service activities (Bacon, 2009). Whitchurch (2008, p. 376) added that ‘professional staff’ can be defined as “individuals having management roles but not an academic contract.” The importance of making this distinction lies in the fact that the first group is often represented by an external professional body that provides structure and programs for professional and career development. The existence of such bodies is scarce to the second group and so activities related to career development and organizational learning fall to the individual institutions which is a key driver of this work – to better understand what programs and supports are being developed and implemented at the institutional level.

At the time this research study was planned and then conducted, the university environment where the study took place had very little information or identified
structures to support career paths of its professional staff population. Since that time, however, there has been some new developments in this area. The changes include the developing work on a talent management framework that includes a competency library and rating scale used in the performance dialogue process for staff members within the managerial and professionals’ group. Despite this fact, a gap in the research is significant as it relates to the Canadian higher education context which provides relevance to the need for such work to be completed.

**Significance of Research**

Throughout the last decade, there has been greater attention paid to the identity of professional staff in higher education, largely in the UK and Australia (Bourke, Holbrook, & Sebalj, 2012; Graham, 2013; Whitchurch, 2004, 2008, 2010). Little work of significance can be found on this issue for the Canadian university sector; therefore, much of the literature referenced in support of this research will be based in the UK and Australia. This research has informed possible performance management strategies within the higher education context, given its goal of identifying the leadership styles and structures that are deemed to be most effective. In addition, the case study method has the potential to serve as a resource for the purposes of comparison across other institutions facing similar situations. Participants were asked to share their experiences and reflect on the specific people, structures and experiences they felt have had the biggest impact on their professional growth. The goal was to identify possible themes and patterns that emerged to further establish a list of best practices with regard to the support of this population of university employees. In addition, the work gave voice to a group of professionals that are not necessarily represented consistently across either the literature
or as a professional body.

**Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research, provides some background on why it is of interest to me, the purpose of the project, and the possible significance of the work. Chapter two examines the literature that addresses the purpose and problems addressed in the subject study. Chapter three outlines the method and research design. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the interviews conducted. In chapter five I present the identified themes and interpretations uncovered as a result of the work and will form the theoretical link between the work and findings to the literature previously reviewed. This thesis ends with perceived implications for policy and practice, suggested further research suggestions and final thoughts.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

The chapter that follows reviews literature from five strands. These include a) professional identity; b) leadership; c) managing employee talent and creating a learning organization d) workplace systems that support employee development; and, e) employee motivation. These subject areas represent the themes from which the questions for the study were derived. A more abstract approach to reviewing the literature was required as the volume of previous research done in this area is somewhat limited and is largely linked to institutions in the UK and Australia. Additionally, the population being considered for this research project represents an employee group that is still being defined. For that reason, it is important to examine how they have been identified to this point. “While considerable attention has been paid in the higher education management literature to the impact of increasingly complex environments on academic identities, less attention has been paid to changes in the roles and identities of administrative manager, who underpin the governance of academic activity” (Whitchurch, 2004, p. 280).

In my own experiences, the leaders I have had the opportunity to connect and work with have been paramount in my own growth and development and for that reason, a closer examination into the literature on leadership, its role in employee growth and the key characteristics of it will be included. The role of motivation is discussed as this plays a key role in whether or not someone chooses to explore or engage in the opportunities being presented. Great leadership and a supportive infrastructure are not helpful if employees lack the motivation to take advantage of them. The current structures and programs currently established within the institution being studied along with the
literature on other best practices in human resources is reviewed in an effort to highlight what is already being done alongside what might be possible. The concept of high performing workplaces is explored and refers to the bundling of practices that makes up an organization’s approach to how they manage and support their employees (Baer, Hu, Jiang, & Lepak, 2012). Finally, the fundamentals of talent management are considered, particularly as its principals pertain to training programs and building capacity within your workforce.

**Professional Identity**

Part of establishing appropriate career development and support programs should require some clarity around role and position identification. University culture plays a big role in establishing where administrative staff fit and how they are viewed. Academic cultures that are present in an institution essentially set the tone for many ways in which the institution functions. Paul (2011, p. 62) defined the culture within the university as “multi-faceted, with a clear division between the academic and administrative sides.” Understanding academic culture and the identity of faculty in that culture has been considered at length (Paul, 2011), however the nature of careers for non-academics and the roles and identities they assume is far less evident. A 2002 review (Lauwerys, 2002) of close to 40 non-academic staff in higher education revealed that in addition to careers in higher education being somewhat “invisible as a profession” those who choose it as a career are likely to do so by accident rather than design. Lauwerys goes on to say that given that the “choice of a professional career in higher education administration tends to be serendipitous rather than the result of active planning, it raises the issue about how
careers and career development might be promoted so that they are attractive to talented individuals” (Whitchurch, Skinner, & Lauwerys, 2009, p. 58).

A 2012 qualitative study attempted to help identify roles more clearly for research administrators at 36 Australian universities (Bourke et al., 2012). Using a questionnaire measuring a range of information including profile, employment history, professional memberships, role and responsibilities; workplace relations and modes of communication; workplace opportunities and expectations; and workplace change and its implementation, Bourke et al. (2012) elicited 194 responses. Participants were also asked to nominate their preferences of the common terms used for their work. Of the list of terms provided (which included university administrator, administrative staff, general staff, manager and non-academic staff), university administrator was selected by 42% of respondents while General Staff and Non-Academic staff were less popular at 28% and 25% respectively. Findings also demonstrated a higher preference for the title of “Manager” by those at higher salary levels, although a breakdown of how many respondents at what salary levels was not included. For the purposes of my research project, I will be looking to focus on only staff at the top ends of the administrative salary grid for my work (referred to as the Professional and Managerial Group) in an effort to solicit data from those in decision-making roles be it with regard to academic program operations, institutional services (e.g., Marketing, IT, Human Resources, etc.) or, strategy development (faculty or school-level). What is most interesting about those in these roles is that in many cases, many of the positions are either newly created positions or would have typically been held by faculty members, but with the shifting demands within higher education, the need for professional managers has risen. An article
published for The Times Higher Education Supplement addresses this phenomenon and says “For many years, the top jobs in UK universities have typically been reserved largely for academics, with administrators able to rise only so high up the career ladder….But with higher education becoming an increasingly commercialized sector, could that be about to change? More than ever, do institutions need in their highest echelons the skills that managers possess?” (Whysall & McTavish, 2015, para 2). This is a very interesting question and one that I believe will yield some fruitful responses when conducting my interviews as I intend to inquire among my participants how they would classify themselves and the roles they inhabit in terms of the culture of the university. An outcome of the Australian study was the development of a professional staff classification scale using the titles outlined earlier. This is an effective way of providing visibility to non-academic staff and provides a framework for long-term career planning.

In addition to clarifying the identity of professional staff in a university environment, it is also important to shed light on the impact of these roles on student success. A case study written in 2013 used an established framework entitled the Prebble Propositions framework (Prebble et al., 2004), which identified 13 propositions for behaviors of student support as the basis for semi-structured interviews with 14 professional staff in one Australian university (Graham, 2013). The Prebble framework was established from the review of 146 international studies and identified the following list of student support propositions:

- environments and processes that are welcoming and efficient;
- opportunities for students to establish social networks;
- academic counselling and pre-enrolment advice;
• approachability and accessibility of lecturers outside of class;
• access to good quality teaching and a manageable workload;
• availability of orientation and induction programs,
• students experience quality outcomes,
• access to a comprehensive range of student services including supplemental instruction and peer tutoring and mentoring;
• the absence of discrimination on campus;
• processes for diversity of learning preferences, and
• that the institution welcomes diverse cultural capital and adapts to diverse student needs.

The goal of the research was to extract staff perceptions about individual staff contributions to student outcomes; however, no corroborating evidence from actual students was presented. Participants had an average length of service of 10 years and represented a range of responsibility levels from junior to senior managers. Areas where participating staff members felt they contributed most included staff knowledge, relationship management across service departments, policy development that supported student learning and the overall job satisfaction held by staff in seeing students succeed at all points in their academic careers and how it motivated them to provide excellent service. Some key elements of the findings suggest that the participating staff were intrinsically motivated, further suggesting that training and development should focus on fostering this motivation to encourage retention and engagement as well as the recognition of the role that non-academic staff play in helping to contribute to student success.
The concept of professional identity is important not just, for how non-academic staff within a given institution view themselves, but also for how the institution itself examines its goals and objectives. As the nature of higher education evolves, planning for the future and discussion around how to best meet the challenges of the future involve conversation around the human capital required to accomplish its goals. Whitchurch (2008, p. 389) introduced the concept of the third space professional, those whose roles consistently cross boundaries within the institution, be it across faculties and departments or in the space between the academic and non-academic domain. She comments on the rise of these types of roles within institutional projects where expertise and experience in multiple areas is required to enable project success. The research she conducted provided several implications around the third space population for the higher education sector. One of these implications was a better understanding of this population in an effort to best inform recruitment policies and hiring practices that will align with the overall goals of the institution. The international scope of Whitchurch’s work included the examination of institutions in the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and the United States (US). The result with regard to professional identity of non-academic staff was interesting. Her findings indicated a more established professional network of university staff in the US and Australia than what she found in the UK. Additionally, a higher percentage of participants were found to have advanced degrees, “93 per cent of respondents in the US had master’s degrees and 60 per cent had doctorates;” in Australia those numbers were 80 per cent and 60 percent. The comparison group of participants in the UK was 27 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. The implications she drew for the UK are a possible direction for the development of these roles and the development of a “professional discipline in its
own right” (p. 393). While Canada was not included in the study, in my experience, the higher education sector and the career paths for non-academic staff sits somewhere in between the more established structure of the US and the ‘developing’ structure of the UK.

**Leadership**

The university environment represents unique challenges for the study of leadership; training and development of employees; organizational effectiveness and high performance. Largely, it is due in part to the diversity and ambiguity of its goals and objectives. “Leadership studies are central to the management of a private sector organization, but efforts to apply them to universities have had to wrestle first with such prior questions as, what are the goals of a university and who should be responsible for their realization?” (Paul, 2011, p. 49).

The list of researchers who have attempted to tackle the concept of leadership, what it means, how it is developed and nurtured and how to teach it is a lengthy one. In reviewing literature for this study, the list includes examining the work of the following: Burns, Rafferty and Griffin, Hansen, Byrne and Kiersch, Kahn, Gerhart, Santora, Sarros, Scott, Smithey and Jones. Many different theories and definitions exist as a result. In 1978, James McGregor Burns identified over 130 different definitions of leadership (Burns, 1978). One of his many contributions to the field was a claim that leadership should be looked at through a lens that focused on the relationship between leaders and followers and further coined the term that explained this relationship as transforming leadership. He stated that the transforming process occurred “when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher
levels of motivation and morality” (p. 83). Of the many different definitions that have been developed throughout the 20th century, the concept of transformational leadership stands out as one with the most relevance for this study.

As I looked to examine the interaction between leaders and followers and the behaviours and actions that research participants credit for having the biggest impact on their professional development it is the transformative process that I am looking to uncover alongside the behaviours and actions of leaders that interviewees credit with impacting their own professional growth and development. According to Burns, the transactional elements of leadership, that being the exchange of either praise or discipline between the leader and the follower, could be placed at the opposite end of the spectrum. Bass (1985) furthered the concept by tying together the concepts of transactional and transformational leadership and claimed that the two were much more clearly linked than initially conceptualized by Burns. In quantifying the characteristics of a good leader, he identified four factors he felt best described a true transformational leader: a) idealized influence, b) individualized consideration, c) inspirational motivation and d) intellectual stimulation. The development of the Multi-Factor Leadership questionnaire by Bass (1985) operationalized the concept of transformational leadership as a measurement tool of the strengths and weaknesses of leaders in the 4 factors outlined above. These characteristics will help to inform questions on leaders for my research participants to determine if this form of leadership exists within the research site. Building on these elements and claiming a lack of empirical support, Rafferty and Griffin (2004) further developed the model to include five related but different dimensions identified as vision, inspirational communication, supportive leadership, intellectual stimulation and personal
recognition (Hansen, Byrne, & Kiersch, 2014). While the work that has been completed to date on leadership is an important enabler of this research, the question becomes, “what is the effect of these behaviours and leadership styles on actual outcomes by employees and more specifically on those who work in the higher education environment?”

To examine this further, we also need to look at the impact of leadership on engagement and ultimately growth. Kahn (2009) suggested “leaders play an important role in creating the right context for employees to become engaged” (p. 955). Engagement in the workplace can lead to a higher level of commitment among employees (Hansen et al., 2014) which in theory might suggest that employers who are investing in leadership development and training are, in fact, creating a more committed and effective workforce. Data collected from surveys and interviews conducted with executives in 181 of Australia’s top companies investigated how the key features of transformational leadership – idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation – actually played out in the workplace (Santora & Sarros, 2001). Feedback from the participating executives identified a summary list of characteristics associated with leadership that include:

1. Management deals with systems and structures, leadership with people and ideas;

2. Leadership works best when leaders and workers agree where it is they want to go and what mechanisms and strategies need to be used to get there;
3. If you want to be treated as a leader and trusted by your workers, you need to model ethical and consistent work behavior that inspires trust and commitment;

4. Leadership is the personal side of management;

5. Transformational leadership differs from transactional leadership in that it motivates workers to perform beyond expectations. (p. 392).

A positive relationship between leaders and followers can shape the overall workplace environment, leading to better performance, as seen in a 2003 quantitative study that measured employee attitudes in relation to financial outcomes of the ‘100 best workplaces in America’ (Gerhart, Scott, & Smither, 2003). While financial performance will not be central to determining success in my work, the Great Place to Work Trust Index tool (p. 976) used in this particular research provides a set of measures by which important data regarding employee attitudes could be extracted. These measures include credibility, respect, fairness, pride and camaraderie. While the research does not identify what strategies might best be employed to achieve the status of a ‘great place to work’, it does provide a method for better understanding what might be important to the employee community. The challenges associated with being successful in a university environment from a staff perspective are not that different from what you would perhaps find in industry, with the exception that the ultimate goal is not a drive for profits, but rather for excellence in terms of supporting research, teaching and the student experience, the deliverables one might expect of a university. To that end, the role that leadership plays in supporting a dedicated, motivated and successful workforce is important regardless of the environment. Transformation leadership speaks to the relationship between leaders
and their staff or followers demonstrating a care for the contributions of staff and the raising of both awareness and aspiration.

As noted earlier, the definitions of leadership are vast. Transformational leadership has been chosen as one of the lenses for this study given its focus on the relationship between leaders and followers as well as its emphasis on raising the potential and motivation of those involved in the exchange. In addition, transformational leadership has specific links to increased performance and an elevation of motivation by employees as is evidenced again in the work of Bass throughout his research on transformational leaders. “Managers who behave like transformational leaders are more likely to be seen by their colleagues and employees as satisfying and effective leaders” (Bass, 1994, p. 21). He continued, “transformational leaders have better relationships with their supervisors and make more of a contribution to the organization than those who are only transactional” (p. 22). The presence or lack of transformational leadership characteristics and their impact on employee growth and development will be a significant component of the conceptual framework that forms the basis for the research.

Beyond just the relationship between leaders and followers, the relationship between different groups of leaders within the institution will also be an important consideration with this project. The unique structure of the institution with its very different populations and areas of responsibility: teaching, research and the activities that support student learning: program management, library management, technical management, etc. To examine this further, we look to work done in the Australian higher education sector and in particular a study completed by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). This study was established to “fund projects that could
provide empirical evidence on which to base a new understanding and definitions of effective leadership in the context of Australian higher education, learning and teaching in which there is a need to promote and support strategic change” (Jones et al., 2012, p. 69). The strategic change referred to here is referring to the earlier mention of the changing landscape of higher education globally. Two classifications of projects were developed in an effort to establish a “clear framework for effective leadership in higher education” (Jones et al., 2012, p. 69), these classifications included institutional and disciplinary and cross-disciplinary leadership. The classification of institutional leadership, defined as “leadership that contributes to an institution’s capacity to effect change in learning and teaching either through specific roles and structural arrangements or through the support of staff with expertise and passion who engage with colleagues to strengthen learning and teaching as part of their general duties” (p. 69) is further categorized into two additional distinct sub-classifications: positional/structural leadership (those responsible for the actual delivery of teaching & learning) and distributed leadership which “offers a framework which encourages the active participation and partnering of experts and enthusiasts and the networks and communities of practices that are built to achieve organizational change” (p. 69). Distributed leadership is an “emergent leadership concept relevant to the culture of the educational sector” (p. 70). The relevance exists as it recognizes that there are two populations of employees that exist within an institution like a university and that success lies in the space where these two populations can collaborate using their unique skills and talent. It is this idea of the interplay between two sets of expertise that sets the conceptual framework for this study.
Managing Employee Talent and Creating a Learning Organization

While perhaps most often linked to organizations within the private sector, talent management can be defined as the term that “covers a wide variety of human resource management practices that focus on talent pools and talent more generally…” (Bradley, 2016, p. 13). It involves “the practice of continuously discovering, developing, using and retaining those people in an organization, which are especially valuable in terms of having a great potential for the future of the organization, or because they are capable of resolving business and operational issues which are critical for the company.” Additionally, it “acknowledges the importance of managing people and positions at multiple levels within the organization (p. 14). Talent management has been coined by some to be somewhat ambiguous and simply an ‘on-trend’ term for the bundling of human resources planning and practice (Hughes & Rog, 2008). While that may be true, it is fundamentally what underpins this study as we look to examine the existence of institutional structures and practices that have impacted the career paths of non-academic staff. While universities are no different when it comes to the standard operating procedures of their human resource functions, i.e., recruitment, hiring, training, development, discipline and firing, the question remains, are we looking at the relationship between these practices and their alignment with overall strategy and success? All of these practices in isolation are necessary for the operation of any organization, however when bundled together and considered alongside over-arching strategy and organizational goals, they not only have the potential to impact success, but also to create a more engaged and influential workforce.

Professional development opportunities play a key role within the talent
management process. Not only is it important to ensure that employees have the necessary task-specific knowledge and skills to meet the demands of their job description but is also necessary to focus on individual growth and new learning as part of the employee development plan (Ilacqua & Zulauf, 2000). In an effort to create a more high-involvement workplace, employees of a manufacturing facility were selected to participate in a new training program that focused less on the specific tasks associated with their day-to-day job requirements but instead took them through a series of exercises designed to shed light on the manufacturing system as a whole. The logic behind building a high-involvement organization is simple. People give more to their work when they are more involved in the whole production process (Lawler, 1986). Concepts such as work cells were used to help engage employees with one another and to better understand how their contributions fit.

The cells and the new environment advanced the workers perspective of what people needed to know and who needed to know it. The introduction of work cells made clear the gains that could come from a new work organization and new worker capacities. (Lawler, 1986 p. 173)

Knowles, Holten, and Swanson, (2005) identified several key features of adult learning that should be considered in the development of training programs given that adults learn best by participation in relevant experiences and practical information. Many of the employees who participated in the study highlighted a new interest in continuing to learn, some even enrolling in further formal education programs and citing their participation in the training program as a key driver for that. This research demonstrates the importance of understanding the teaching and training methods that go beyond simply task-oriented
learning. Work teams are simply one example; however, several additional methods including empowering people with a collective vision and promotion of inquiry and dialogue are also mentioned methods for enabling learning among employees (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

**Workplace Systems that Support Employee Development**

An examination of human resource systems supporting employee growth and development in the non-university sector, as well as the link between effective human resource strategies and overall organizational performance, are valuable resources to consider when determining what could enable the growth and development of university professional staff. A strategic look at human resources focuses not specifically on individual practices, but rather on the bundling of practices that make up an organization’s approach to how they manage and support their employees often referred to as high-performance work systems (HPWS), high-involvement work systems, and high-commitment work systems (Baer, Hu, Jiang, & Lepak, 2012). The bundling of human resource practices is broken down into three distinct categories: skill-enhancing HR practices, motivation-enhancing HR practices, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices (Baer et al., 2012, p. 1266). Contained within the skill-enhancing bundle were such things as comprehensive recruitment and selection methods and extensive training opportunities. The motivation-enhancing activities included competitive compensation, incentives and rewards, extensive benefits, promotion and career development and job security. Finally, the opportunity-enhancing category focused on employee empowerment by including practices such as flexible job design, work teams, employee involvement, and information sharing.
The breakdown of HR practice as identified in this study will provide a valuable way of determining what elements of human resource management are (a) visible within a university environment (as perceived by the respondents), and (b) what is actually important, as I intend to include questions regarding these practices in my survey and interviews. Several hypotheses were examined in this quantitative study, namely that each of the dimensions outlined above had a positive relationship with human capital as well as the assumption that skill-enhancing practices had a higher degree of correlation associated with human capital than the other two. Further exploration of the relationship between human capital and organizational outcomes, largely related to financial objectives revealed that when proper attention is paid to these practices, there is a direct correlation to enhanced performance of the organization. While outcomes are important when looking at the university’s success, this portion of the research is less relevant for my purposes as I am more interested in examining the status of human resource practice and their perceived importance. However, findings suggest all hypotheses to be correct, but to varying degrees, which is also an important consideration. An emerging trend in human resource practice are coaching and mentoring practices (Adams, 2010). Coaching and mentoring can be seen as having similar goals in that they both focus on helping an individual to better understand themselves and their impact on the work they do and those in their environment that are impacted by them.

Minter (2000), a Professor of Management and Labor Relations at Cleveland State University, noted that while there has been significant literature in the area of mentoring, little exists on coaching and counseling in terms of the interaction between supervisor and employee. He continued: “An important component of coaching and
mentoring that has been identified is the concept of collaboration or ‘teaming’ between supervisor and employee” (2000, p. 45). Effective teaming, Minter explained is essentially the working alongside an employee in a very real way and that research on employee retention has shown that when an employee is told what to do, they will remember approximately 10% of the instruction, when they are shown and told what to do, that number increases to 60% and when this is combined with having the employee actively engaged in the process by demonstrating what they are seeing or hearing, the number increases to 90% (Minter, 2000). These interactions between leaders and followers can be categorized as an active mentoring or coaching relationship and it will be interesting to determine if this type of culture exists on the university campus.

**Employee Motivation**

Motivation will be a specific area of study with the research I plan to undertake. The successful creation of structures and strategies to help employees grow and develop would be relatively ineffective without considering what it is that motivates them. Sources of motivation can be both intrinsic and extrinsic and can represent a variety of different elements including:

- the need for understanding one’s purpose (spiritual);
- the desire to solve problems and make decisions (cognitive);
- a reaction to stimulation (behavioural);
- the need to feel good and reduce feeling bad (affective);
- the need to interact with others (social); and
- basic needs (biological) (Honroe, 2009).
Honroe (2009), summarizes that there are essentially six major theories that form the basis of much of how motivation is measured. They include Maslow's need-hierarchy theory, Herzberg's two-factor theory, Vroom's expectancy theory, Adams’ equity theory, Skinner's reinforcement theory, and the David McClelland Achievement Motivation Model (Honroe, 2009). Many of the theories have similarities in the scope of what they believe are the key elements of motivation, but can be generalized by saying “…the most successful, motivated and productive workforce is one that feels valued, supported and challenged, with a clear direction and an understanding of the important role they play in the achievement of company objectives” (Honroe, 2009, p. 69).

This statement provides some good direction for the creation of survey questions and for interview discussion. To focus specifically on knowledge workers, those being the people who use their heads to solve problems more than their hands (Kumar, 2011) provides a suitable descriptor for the majority of university employees. Kumar conducted a study of knowledge workers in three different categories: management teachers, engineers and accountants. Questionnaires distributed aimed to measure perception of job characteristics, importance of job characteristics, satisfaction with job characteristics and total motivation. Survey results suggest that the management teachers and engineers had high levels of motivation, particularly in comparison to the accountants. Further analysis of the respective work environments highlights the fact that many accountants work individually whereas there are high degrees of interaction and collaboration in the other two professions. An important consideration of these findings for subsequent studies is that the work environment can play a role in a person’s perceptions about their work. One limitation on this study however was the proportionately lower participation rate from the
accountants. Additional results revealed strong correlation between perceptions of importance of job characteristics as well as satisfaction with job characteristics suggesting it is important for these elements to be transparent to employees.

**Intersection of the Literature**

The framework used to inform the literature review and focus of this study is a combination of reviewing practice from industry and examining the unique culture of the university where best practices regarding managing human resources and the changing landscape of higher education and universities in particular intersect. The literature tells us that the professional identity of the non-academic staff role is evolving and in light of external challenges (competition, accountability, transparency) being placed on universities, they need to have a clearer direction with regard to how they attract, recruit, train, manage, and retain talent. The framework that I will use to guide my interviews as a result of the literature will be to establish the sense of identity that participants perceive themselves in as outlined in the work by Whitchurch (2009, 2008, 2010), as well as frame questions that will identify the leadership characteristics that participant’s credit with supporting and enabling their careers.

**Summary of the Reviewed Literature**

In examining the literature on higher education and more specifically with the non-academic staff that exist, it became clear that the work being done in this area, particularly as it relates to the Canadian higher education landscape is lacking, if not non-existent. There is, however, much literature outlining the reactions, behaviours and outcomes of different forms of leadership within higher education outside of Canada, but in many cases still linked to the academic populations on campus. In an effort to better
understand the needs of this group, which I believe to be a needed first step, the literature does provide some great starting points, particularly for the generation of questions.

While the available literature does not specifically relate to the higher education environment in Canada, it does outline some of the focus regarding the need for successful organizations to pay attention to the practices and structures associated with high performance. In addition, from a human resource management perspective, there are several things that need to be considered when properly structuring a legitimate talent management framework.
Chapter Three
Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of non-academic university staff and their explanations of what they perceive as catalysts to growth with their career development and progression. This study has been driven by my own experiences as a university employee with a desire to see the development of a more formal career development planning process for non-academic professional staff.

In this chapter, I provide a breakdown of the research methodology and method used in this study. A qualitative research design guided this study. Furthermore, a case study approach seemed most appropriate given the nature of the research question and the context in which this study was being conducted. The following main question was used to guide the research:

- What are the leadership influences and institutional characteristics that support in the development of professional, non-academic staff in the university?

In addition, several sub-questions were used to inform the interviews:

1. What are the professional and personal values that motivate non-academic staff in their professional development for professional growth?
2. What tools and resources have been available and useful to them in the pursuit of professional development for professional growth?
3. What forms of leadership are required to motivate non-academic employees’ professional development for professional growth?
4. What institutional structures and strategies support employees’ professional development for career growth?

In this chapter, I outline a summary of the research participants, the process of data collection, the sampling process, and the stages of data analysis.

**Case Study and the Qualitative Approach**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) identify two purposes for the use of a qualitative approach: “to describe and explore and to describe and explain. Similar terms could be to examine or to document, to understand and, to discover or generate” (p. 324). This explanation covers all of the key elements of this project, given its goal of examining and understanding the career development culture of one university and the experiences of its non-academic staff. This research will take the form of a case study, which McMillan and Shumacher (2010) defined as “an in-depth analysis of a single entity” (p. 344). That entity, in this case, will be one Eastern Ontario University as it relates to the forms of leadership and structures that are perceived to support the professional growth and development of its non-academic staff. Case studies look to answer the question of ‘why’ or ‘how’; the link to this research comes from a desire to gain an in-depth understanding of the development culture inside a higher education environment and to tell the story of how a growing population of non-academic staff are led, supported and developed. The study also aims to uncover the motivations of the staff themselves as it relates to career growth and development. Findings from the case may be used for future comparison with other institutions that may also be interested in better understanding this. Yin (2009) noted that the case study method “allows investigators to
retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes… (p. 4).

Through this research, I attempted to gain a better understanding of the challenges and successes experienced by members of the non-academic staff community as it pertains to the leadership styles they have encountered and the institutional structures that have been either supportive or not in their careers. The ultimate goal of the research is to shed light onto the phenomenon that is presently taking place on many university campuses with demands for increased accountability and transparency, coupled with increased financial pressures due to changes in government funding models and underperforming endowments are forcing universities to become more entrepreneurial and therefore are requiring a different type of talent to help them navigate some of these challenges. Previously, many leadership roles within the university would have been held solely by members of the academic community (faculty members), however the shifting demands noted above are resulting in changes to the ways in which universities are choosing to manage themselves. Latham and Whysall explained the situation taking place in the UK higher education sector: “for many years, the top jobs in UK universities have typically been reserved largely for academics, with administrators able to rise only so high up the career ladder…with higher education becoming an increasingly commercialized sector, could that be about to change? More than ever, do institutions need in their highest echelons the skills that managers possess?” (p. 1).

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through a series of interviews with members of the professional, non-academic staff community within one institution. The participants were
recruited through an email (Appendix A) sent on behalf of the researcher from the human resources unit within the university. In the email, participants were asked to complete a survey that collected information pertaining to their role, department, and years working with the institution. Of those who expressed interest, seven participants were selected based on the completed surveys with an attempt to secure employees from both a broad range of departments and time working on campus. No consideration for selection was given to their specific titles, or any familiarity on behalf of the researcher.

**Research Site and Participant Selection**

In July 2015, a meeting was held with an organizational development specialist within the human resources department of the institution to explain my work and my intended sample population. The organizational development specialist with whom I met was the team member within the university’s human resources department who was oversaw this particular group employees defined as ‘managerial & professional, the intended target population for the study. We discussed recruitment strategies that might enable me to connect with this population, while casting the widest net across the organization in an effort to attract participants from a variety of different departments and faculties. It was during this conversation that she offered to allow me to use the email list-serve for this group to explain my work and invite prospective participants. Following the meeting, she confirmed with her supervisor that there were no concerns with allowing me to use this tool for recruitment purposes, and I sought additional ethics approval for this new strategy, as it was not initially part of my intended plan. Confirmation for use of the list-serve and an amendment to the ethics application previously approved were both received later that month. It was decided that in addition
to information about the study, the selection criteria for participation were supplemented by a short survey created in FluidSurvey that allowed me to gather the information about interested candidates to ensure fit with the criteria. The survey was also submitted to the ethics board and was granted approval. My goal was to have good representation from across the university in an effort to ensure that as broad a view of the institution as possible could be created, and the use of these methods of recruitment definitely helped with this. The interviewees represented staff members who were responsible for the supervision and/or management of other members of the non-academic community and they all were not members of a collective bargaining unit within the university. Within the chosen research site, this population is identified as the ‘professional and managerial group’. Only those participants with whom I did not have a reporting relationship were chosen; i.e., those individuals over whom I could have had any influence in terms of evaluation were excluded.

Within the context of a case study method, interviews were conducted with seven participants who met the aforementioned criteria. The interviews were semi-structured in design in an effort to encourage participants to reflect on their individual career journeys in the hopes of identifying the specific things that they felt had impacted their professional growth. Many of the questions pertained to their interaction with leadership throughout their careers to better understand the behaviours that have had the greatest impact, both positively and negatively. The interviews served to better understand the structures already in place to support this population within the institution.

Permission was granted to utilize an email listserv of staff members within the professional and managerial group to invite participation in the study. This study has
been granted clearance through the general research ethics board (see Appendix B and C). This recruitment method was chosen given its ability to reach staff members located across the organization and within different faculties as the culture and leadership styles of the various schools and faculties may provide for very different kinds of responses. The initial email introduced the research and principal investigator and asked interested candidates to complete a short survey to determine alignment with the above-mentioned criteria. Those who fit the criteria received a Letter of Information with additional information about the project as well as a consent form for their signature.

**Interviews**

The recruitment email was sent out in August 2015 with a deadline request for responses for later that month. Those participants who indicated an interest were reviewed based on their fit with the selection criteria and the ones who were chosen as good fits were sent the letter of information and consent form (See Appendix D). Once the signed consent forms had been returned, I reached out individually to each participant to find a time to schedule the interview. In an effort to ensure the comfort level of the interview participants, the location was decided in most cases by the participant themselves. Many of the interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants, others required the interviewer to book a separate space. Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews that were approximately one hour in length. While specific questions were prepared in advance, the goal was to also allow for flexibility in the discussion in an effort to bring about the most authentic accounts of the participants’ experiences. Questions focused on experiences with regard to leadership styles, memorable experiences with leaders, development and training experiences as well as a
request for their opinions on what institutional structures (training programs, performance management strategies, workshops) they either have taken advantage of wish they had access to. Specific examples and stories were encouraged. In addition to the interviews a field log was also be used to record any anecdotal observations and reflections that follow the interviews. The interviews were recorded using a program called Garage Band on a password-protected computer and were backed up using Voice memo on a second device that was also password-protected.

Participants were asked to respond to their perceptions of both the importance and the presence of specific human resource strategies outlined in the HPWS framework, that being skill-enhancing HR practices, motivation-enhancing HR practices, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices (Baer et al., 2012, p. 1266). The literature outlines how the active use of some of these strategies can lead the organization to higher levels of overall performance; the question to be answered is the degree that this is true for a higher education environment.

Transcription was completed manually by a third-party transcriber and the researcher validated the emergent themes. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined validity as “the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomenon and the realities of the world” (p. 330). Matheson (1988) defined triangulation as “a strategy that will aid in the elimination of bias and allow the dismissal of plausible rival explanations such that a truthful proposition about some social phenomenon can be made” (p. 13). Essentially, the use of multiple methods in data collection are encouraged to ensure validity of what is being collected and to provide a more holistic view of the
problem or question being explored. Patton (1994) suggested that triangulation is actually an opportunity to “study and understand when and why there are differences” (p. 331).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, field notes were organized, and an open-coding form of analysis was used to identify patterns and themes that arose from the research. Initially, the data were analyzed and organized into segments, which helped to identify ideas and patterns and establish the codes. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define code as a “name or phrase that is used to provide meaning to the segment” (p. 371). Strategies to ensure validity of the data, particularly with respect to interviews prior to coding, included copies of the transcripts being sent back to each participant for review. At this point, participants had the opportunity to request revision or removal of responses they did not feel comfortable with. This strategy is a form of participant review, which McMillan and Schumacher (2010) outlined as the process of having participants review the transcript in an effort to confirm if what they had intended to say is what is being depicted through the interview. None of the participants requested removal of any portion of the transcript. In addition, a second graduate student was asked to review and manually code two of the interview transcripts as a form of ‘inter-rater’ reliability. These transcripts were then compared, and conclusions drawn.

Analysis was completed using a combined etic and emic approach. Some of the themes from the literature review that framed the selection of questions being asked (from the perspective of the interviewer) and others as a result of responses (from the perspective of the participants). The interview questions were derived from a combination of the pre-established research questions and the literature. The interview questions were mostly
open-ended to allow for participants to share individual stories and examples of their experiences at the university. From these conversations, a more emic approach was used as themes emerged from the responses.

**Reflexivity and Limitations**

During my time working in a university, I have developed a keen interest in the career development structures and leadership that support the work and careers of non-academic staff in the higher education sector. I would identify as a pragmatist who is problem and solution-oriented rather than theoretical and it is through this lens that I examine my epistemology and ponder how it may impact my intended research. I have embarked on a journey that I hope will both uncover best practices as well as provide information that could help to inform the construction of a framework for the professional growth and development of the population of non-academic staff in universities. My desire to complete work in this area has been driven by my own experiences working in the higher education sector and early-stage examination of the literature surrounding the issue. It is important to consider how my own voice and experiences may impact the intended work and to expose and reflect upon the assumptions, biases subjectivity and positionality that I bring to the work. Peshkin (1988) writes that subjectivity is defined an “amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one’s class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one’s object of investigation.” (p. 17). As I consider my motivation for conducting work in this area, it is important that I am aware of the subjectivity that I bring to this research. Peshkin (1988) summarized this by saying “when their subjectivity remains unconscious, they insinuate rather than knowingly clarify their personal stakes” (p. 17). I think this is
of particular importance with this study as any conclusions or contribution to a potential framework for career development would need to come from the voice the participants and not be driven by my own needs and concerns, to be taken seriously.

To address this, I believe it is important to state my background as outlined in the introduction of this thesis, so that my perspectives might be easily identified and interpreted by the reader in relation to the work, but then position questions and interviews in such a way that it is being interpreted without bias.

The connection to the research, the environment and past experiences had the potential to inject bias into how surveys and interviews were structured. It was easy for me to make assumptions regarding how others have experienced leadership and development opportunities by injecting my own feelings and experiences. Additionally, there was also the possibility that individuals across the university feel that the absence of a specific framework or development process has actually provided them with more opportunities than they would have had otherwise, and that the HPWS framework, used as a basis of measurement for this study, is not applicable to the higher education environment at all. In an attempt to avoid the injection of my own subjectivity, a conscious effort was needed to ensure questions were structured such that participants not only responded to how certain human resource practices have been implemented and used in respect to their employment with the university, but also to comment on the presence of them at all.

In an effort to discourage or combat sampling bias, it was important to attempt to recruit participants outside of my own work environment at the university where this research is being conducted. I have worked in the department for the last 10 years and
have been open in communicating with my colleagues about the work I intend to undertake. For that reason, it is not unlikely that those who are more familiar with my work would be more eager to participate and result in sampling bias (McMillian, & Schumacher, 2010). The goal was that by targeting candidates outside of my own department, I attempted to combat this as much as possible.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of how a qualitative approach and case study method were chosen as the vehicle for this study. I also provided the reader with information pertaining to site and participant selection, a summary of the participants, themselves, the process of data collection and the stages of data analysis. The next chapter presents my findings.
Chapter Four

Research Findings

This chapter presents the major themes emerging from the research conducted through the interviews with members of the university staff community. It begins with a summary of the research participants’ profiles, with descriptions of their experience, time with the university, and positions on campus. The findings are categorized around the research questions and quotations from the participants will be used to support the thematic organization of the data. Quotes will be referenced using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. The paragraph below provides an overview of the participants and includes the associated pseudonym.

Participant Descriptions

Each of the participants in this study was a full-time staff member of the university who currently hold a role within the staffing group defined as managerial and professional. Time spent working within this particular institution ranged from under 5 years to more than 40 years, with the average years of experience being 12 years. Sarah had worked at the university the longest along with Alice at greater than 15 years of service. Curtis was employed with the university more than 10 years, but less than 15 although he had been working in the higher education sector for much longer. Robin, Sam and Grace were employed for less than 10 years, but more than 5 and Daniel was the most recent hire among the interviewees, having been at the university for less than 5 years. All but one of the participants held a ‘management’ position in the sense that they had staff reporting directly to them. All participants held roles that would be considered to be at the senior level in that they were all reporting directly to someone at the level of...
Associate Dean, Dean, Provost or Vice-Provost. Interestingly, all but one of the interviewees identified as having sought out a career with the institution, most others described their career with the university as a job that has evolved into a career. As mentioned above, direct quotes will be used throughout this chapter to emphasize the presence of themes derived from the research. Questions that examined the professional and personal values that motivated these staff members not only in their day-to-day jobs, but also to seek out new opportunities for growth and development within the organization, brought out the following four themes: a) professional identity; b) leadership; c) professional development; and d) motivation. In addition to the main themes, several sub-themes emerged during analysis. These are highlighted at the beginning of each of the main themes throughout this chapter. In accordance with university ethics and to protect the identity of the participants, as required, they will be referred to by the pseudonyms outlined above.

**Professional Identity**

Participant’s comments regarding identity and the ultimate role they played within the institution ranged from describing themselves as possessing a specific skill set that was being sought, to the belief that the intended work within the university represented a fulfillment of a higher calling and a service to the ‘greater good’. Within the theme of professional identity, a couple of sub-themes emerged from the responses. Three of the seven interviewees indicated that they had chosen to work at the university after having worked in other industries, one from private sector and two others from different public domains outside of higher education. These individuals spoke more significantly about their desire to work at a university because it fulfilled a higher calling. This is in contrast
to the other four participants, whom all had made their careers in higher education with little to no time spent working in other industries. Within the area of professional identity, two major subthemes emerged: a) Desire-service and b) Goals & Objectives.

Desire-service. The notion of desire service related to participants’ core values and the activities, assignments or functions of their job that ‘get them out of bed in the morning’. Some described their job as providing good balance and interesting work, while others noted a more significant personal tie to the function of the university with regard to preparing the future generation through education.

One of the three participants, Sam, who had moved into his role with the university from outside of higher education, shared that the work he had been doing prior to joining the university enabled him to feel like he was really making an impact and in moving to the university, he was really seeking a similar level of satisfaction from his work.

It was actually a for profit company owned by a not-for-profit organization. In that sense there was a higher calling. It was just not about making money. It was about serving our constituency. So, I was kind of looking for a position similar to that ...it was a business role but not necessarily in a pure for profit organization. I wanted something with a higher calling. An opportunity came up at the university. I was basically in the healthcare sector previously, so education had a strong appeal to me. And so I pursued it and got the opportunity. (Sam)

Another participant, Daniel described his move into the university as a significant shift in terms of organizational culture.
…. I have worked through the worst. I have worked in lay off union-driven environments where you have no resources and no support, and you are on your own. …. And it will push you and challenge you and leave you banged and bruised. I have only been here a year…..and every now and then I still catch myself when someone offers to help me on something, my first reaction is what is their motive, what is their angle, and how much are they going to screw me?…..the people are sincere here. There is a very positive attitude, there is a very collegial atmosphere and people genuinely want to see everyone else do good. (Daniel)

When discussing matters of professional identity, Alice wanted to be very clear that there was little to no formal design to her career with the university. “Let me first off say that there is no structure or plan to my career. And if I was to really simplify it, I would say that I am fortunate that opportunities came up while I was here.” She attributed many of the opportunities she had been given to growth within the faculty in which she worked. She also was very clear that her initial reasons for joining the university were largely due to her interactions with the hiring manager in her first department. “

What brought me to the university, and I never thought I would be working in this city so early in my career, it was a leader……he was the driver that really convinced me that I wanted to work here. I was interested in working for a good person who I could learn from and that is what I sensed from him. (Alice)

As we discussed the details of her development and growth within the university, she outlined the various roles she had been in and what she was able to learn from each of them. She noted that while working in the Dean’s office she was able to learn a different
side of the school’s operations besides student recruitment and program delivery. She highlighted that her move from that role into her current role provided an opportunity to reconnect with students and specifically students in a graduate program for working professionals.

And so this is where I knew my passion is…working with an adult audience is a very different type of work. The thing I love about it is yes, we work for a University, but at the end of the day we are running a business, especially in our program. I have objectives and a strategy, and I have to execute on all of those things.

The professional nature of her work and the ability to work with students was a key driver for her sense of identity and how she saw her role within the institution.

**Goals and objectives.** Responses to questions regarding the overall goals and objectives of the university with each of the participants of this study resulted in a variety of answers. The intent of this question was to identify the consistent themes and differing opinions regarding identity & purpose of the people who worked there. Clearly outlined objectives often will help to provide clarity regarding direction and deliverables for staff in any organization. The differing opinions could be a symptom of both the respective roles held by the respondents, their time working in higher education and at the university, specifically as well as the level of responsibility and the discussions they were involved in. Lastly, the responses to this question seemed to also vary depending on whether or not the participant worked within a faculty or if their role existed within a more central department that serviced the university more broadly. Some spoke about the
goals and objectives as it related to their individual contribution, while others took a ‘bigger-picture’ position in their response.

In my role, it is educating students and that is why we are all here. We are lucky to be in a comprehensive university that values research and teaching. So, our students get the benefit of the research culture for sure, but if they don’t come to learn from our professors, we have no jobs. They are the meat and potatoes…. We strive for internationalization, we strive for excellence in research, we strive for the student experience, but to me the main thing is teaching the students. (Sarah)

Two more respondents spoke about the university’s obligation to make an impact on the lives of students, citing:

The goals and objectives of a university are to educate its student population to be independent and productive citizens…hopefully we are developing leaders who will go out and act in a very ethical way that creates a significant amount of change out there.” (Daniel)

…. Also, how to interact with people in your community and about how to be a good community member and citizen. So, all of these things I would not have thought so much about 10 years ago, but I feel that there are more and more important things that universities, a more important role that universities play in the lives of students. (Robin)

Some chose to keep the explanation simple as was evidenced by Curtis’ statement that the goals and objectives are simply to teach students and conduct research. “That is why we are here and why we exist. So to me everything needs to be channeled towards those two primary goals.”(Curtis) When asked about how staff then fit into those goals, Sam
conveyed that for him the role of staff are to service the two populations who benefit from those goals: faculty and students. He also felt it was necessary to always be communicating these goals with his own staff.

I think it is about ensuring that people see the link whether it is direct or indirect between what they do and how it supports the mission of the university. When I get opportunities with employees, I try to sort of draw those links if it is not obvious to them. (Sam)

Additional comments were made with regard to the students as ‘clients’ and how without them, none of the other things we do would matter.

On a daily basis…in my environment, it is basically being that point of contact for the students from the day they decide they are going to apply until the day they get a full-time job. Basically, that is what our role is and what has been instilled in us…it is very clearly stated in everything we do; we are here for the students. We are not here for student government; we are not here for the faculty or administration. We are not here for finance, HR, PPS. All of that would disappear if we do not take care of our clientele, which are the students and that is the key. (Grace)

The pathway to a career in higher education was explained by one participant who described it as “a bit of an accident and when I was a student it was not the plan, but it just sorts of worked out that way.” (Robin) All of her roles had been in departments that were central to the institution and she has worked her way up through various positions during a 10+ year timeframe. This experience working for the central offices of the
institution gave her a unique perspective in terms of the role that staff play, the
opportunities that exist, and ultimately what the goals and objectives of the university are.
In her responses, she highlighted the fact that the needs of the student population are
changing, and as such, the objectives and goals are changing.

It is no longer just about the subject matter anymore that is the most important
thing that Universities do. I think it is about teaching how to be a critical thinker,
how to quickly comprehend the material… how to interact with people from
different cultures, age groups, faculty, staff. And how to interact in a community
and how to be a good citizen (Robin)

Robin also shared how she felt that universities have a bigger role to play in this
development than she feels they did previously. “So, all of these things I would not have
thought so much about 10 years ago, but I feel that there are more and more important
things that universities, a more important role that universities play in the lives of
students.” (Robin)

Another participant also spoke to the changing landscape of the university
environment and highlighted what she felt were the very important roles that staff within
the institution would play in helping the institution navigate the changes.

The landscape is shifting, we are on the cutting edge I would say, we are the ones
who are going to lead that…..it is more about service and how you are able to
service our clientele, you have student clientele, the parent clientele, alumni,
faculty. (Grace)

She elaborated that in addition to the needs of the community changing, it is the staff
roles that ultimately are front facing with these various stakeholders and need to be able
to adapt messaging and information to each of the audiences appropriately. Sam, who had been with the university the least amount of time in comparison to some of the others explained how he felt that is a was his previous experiences that were a key factor in his obtaining his current role. However, he also felt that perhaps the focus on his previous experiences may have led to his superiors overlooking his need for training and introduction to the distinct features of university culture. There was little to know ‘training’ time, but rather his superiors were very specifically interested in seeing what he could do with one particular project that as he described it was “already 4 months behind schedule” (Daniel). He described the early days on the job like this:

It was day one, ‘how are you doing’, day two here is your HR information, Day three, go….I almost did not really have time to be on-boarded because of where our project was at and what I needed to do.

He mentioned that most of the ‘training’ or onboarding that he received in the early days of his employment was faculty-led and mentioned that he was several months into his role before he actually realized that a central Human Resource office even existed within the organization.

When asked about his perceptions of the goals and objectives of the university, Daniel’s response pulled both from his time as a student at the university and how that impacts the way in which he sees his contributions and role now. His initial response included reference to providing a “quality education to the student body” (Daniel), but then also included the efforts on behalf other university to provide a ‘je ne sais quoi’ in terms of the student experience and spoke at length of the role of faculty and staff in providing that.
I think the university wants to build the family community education experience. And it is really education experience. And under that education experience you have delivering learning to students, but you also have facilitating research because that is education as well. And that unique family, close-knit feeling that is developed as students. When you talk to grads anywhere else they don’t often talk the same way about their alma mater as we do for ours.

Daniel also talked about a level of ‘pride’ that he had in that legacy and in wanting to be a part of that and also what he felt are the necessary components of ensuring that can happen. “You have to make sure you have the right academics in the academic positions, and you have the right administrators in the administrative positions”. (Daniel) He added that in order to do that, you need to keep that student experience as a key priority by constantly asking for feedback from various stakeholder groups including students at all levels and alumni and then ensure that that information is fed back to decision makers.

Leadership

Themes that emerged from responses to questions about leadership characteristics and behaviours that the participants had experienced varied across respondents. A big take-away from the interviews was that the participants had experienced leadership from different levels of the organization. These are most clearly represented within the following sub themes: a) mentoring and coaching; b) informal networks, c) feedback and recognition; d) ability to influence change; and e) leadership impact.

Mentoring and coaching. It was evident that there is a visible gap in what some staff refer to as direct leadership activities in the form of mentoring and coaching. One interviewee, in particular, identified this as something that stood out to him from the
beginning of his time at the university. “There are probably two groups of employees but one in particular that I don’t think necessarily gets any good coaching or development from their managers or supervisors. And that would be senior staff roles or any staff roles who report to an academic” (Sam).

Many, if not most of the roles being referred to in the quote above would fall within the target population for this study; those who hold positions within a specific salary grid and most often with managerial responsibilities themselves, within the institution. The other unique feature of these roles is that they often report into members of university community at the most senior levels of leadership including Deans, Associate Deans, VP’s, etc. The participant explained his theory on why this might be the case. “Those are challenging roles and they have a lot of demands on their time and to the extent that they allocate some time to coaching or mentoring they are going to allocate it to faculty members” (Sam). Another participant also noted that the presence of leadership activity in her own career had been somewhat limited, but noted that those times, where it was evident, were very powerful.

…. what drew me in was that I got a sense that he was a man of integrity. He was humble. He was interested in me and what I wanted to do. He listened when he asked questions and really paid attention when I was responding. There was mutual respect between the two of us (Alice).

In addition to mutual respect and a sense of integrity, vision and planning were also key themes that emerged from the interviews and were cited by three of the interviewees as key characteristics of leadership that they admired, citing the creation of the strategic plan and those responsible for its creation as having a big impact on them.
…for me in my role and for me trying to figure out where I fit in this institution
and where we are going is very valuable. Having something that says these are the
things we are focusing on and here are our markers and our milestones. Here is
how we are doing after two or 3 years and this is our goal in each of these
categories and it is not vague, it is very specific. (Alice)

Daniel also questioned whether senior management or executive leadership within the
institution were being recognized for the outputs or performance of those whom they
were managing and therefore felt any obligation or incentive to engage in a coaching or
mentorship relationship with their subordinates. “I think the University provides a very
unique environment to study this because when you have academics who are in these
senior roles and overseeing this particular population of the 10-14 group, they are not
necessarily being evaluated on how well that population does” (Daniel). His thesis could
be summarized by saying that he felt that this may be why some of these formalized
evaluation processes were not really understood or valued by those managing this group.

The idea that planning and vision is a characteristic of a strong leader was also
evident with respondents. There were also clear differences in both the awareness and
referenced practice of a number of leadership activities and behaviors. For example, one
participant from a professional faculty seemed to have an easier time referencing
instances and benefits of things like mentorship, coaching, feedback and continuing
professional development, whereas some others coming from more centralized
environments and larger faculties did not identify as much with these activities as being
the catalyst for their career growth.
Robin spoke specifically of one individual whom she worked for and with whom she had a very good relationship. She explained that this particularly boss had very high standards, but that she was also very good at clearly explaining roles and responsibilities. She also credited this particular boss with taking an active interest in her career progression by giving her an opportunity that was a bit of a stretch for her in terms of her skills and experience and reflected on this being a bit of a ‘turning point’ in her career. “…. she said to me, I am giving you this role because I think you can do it. You are not really there yet, but I think we can make it work.” (Robin). When asked further if she felt that confidence enabled her to be successful, she responded “quite a lot”. She also went on to say that “Out of all the supervisors that I have had she would not be my favourite, but she taught me a lot” (Robin). She highlighted that many colleagues had conversations with her about the fact that this particular leader was challenging to work with, but Robin felt that the clarity in which she worked made it easier to work with her even if others had experienced challenges. She explained that she had worked in that role for 7 or 8 years alongside the same boss and when she (her boss) moved on, Robin stayed on to see an interim and then permanent replacement into the role. At that point she decided to move into a newly created role within the university as an Executive Assistant to a member of the executive leadership team who himself was appointed to a new role within the university’s information technology group. Robin indicated that this was a more short-term stay of only 10 months, however credited her time in this particular role with providing her with confidence regarding her skills and abilities as well as clarity on what she needed out of a role in order to feel satisfied. Part of this was due to the fact that she didn’t really feel that the person she was now reporting to really understood what he
wanted from the role, and this lack of clarity and direction was largely responsible for her seeking out new opportunities.

The role was brand new which could have been a good opportunity, but I don’t think they had any idea what the person could do or what the person in that role could do. I think they created it because they thought ok, now that we have this (senior) role, usually people at this level have and EA or something like that (Robin)

I asked Robin to comment on her exit from the Executive Assistant role to better understand whether feedback was solicited and she highlighted that an exit interview had been completed with her boss providing her with some questions in advance and asking her to think about them in preparation. This was received well by Robin and she felt that he had made the process easy in terms of her seeking new opportunities, given that that role wasn’t really working out for her.

**Informal networks.** Discussions regarding the use of informal networks of peers were consistent across many interviews, with most indicating that they relied on these groups for guidance, advice, insight and simply as a sounding board for decisions. Often times the make-up of these networks consisted of colleagues who performed similar functions within the institution, but in a different department, faculty, or unit. It is unclear whether these networks have formed due to a lack of formalized bodies, or whether these types of groups are simply a part of any organizational culture. Two interviewees specifically highlighted this as a way in which they played an active role in their own onboarding when they were new to the institution “When I first came to the university one of the things that I did was I spent a lot of time just having coffee with as many
people as I could to figure out how the place worked and to build relationships”. (Sam)

For others it was more about finding creative ways to solve problems. One participant indicated that there was

…a lot of informal mentoring that goes on which I think is a really good practice. If the university could figure out a way to formalize that I think it is extremely powerful. Throughout my career I have certainly had the opportunity to engage with others whom I now realize were actually in an informal mentoring capacity. It is harder to find as you get into more senior roles to find those individuals. (Sam)

The structure of the university is such that there are many similar functional roles that are held by different people across different faculties. None of the interview participants cited formal opportunities for interaction between these colleagues, however several of them referenced many seeking out their counterparts across campus in an effort to both feel connected within the organization and as a way of finding support in their respective roles. Participants also suggested that they also encouraged their staff to participate in this as a way to build relationships as well as to ensure that there was continued collaboration between departments that were responsible for working with one another.

...we go on a road trip every couple of months. We are out looking at people in other offices that work with us to make sure we are on the same page and are doing the same thing and then we have people who we can contact….We all want to make sure we are referring students appropriately. (Sarah)

Conversations about leadership had been specific to the more formal employee/employer relationship. However, when asked about other influences, Robin talked about the benefit
of some of the more informal relationships and leadership she had benefited from in her roles.

I had my team of usual suspects that I called on, if there was something in arts & science or commerce I knew who it was and they knew who I was and it was a good amount of time to build those relationships that were very valuable. I think that was one of the things I missed when I moved. I definitely was able to build relationships with the people in units that I did not know.

Robin went on to describe how this use of informal networks were something she utilized regularly in her various roles and valued them as a form of peer-to-peer learning & mentoring opportunity. This was echoed by another participant whose reliance on her group of peers across campus were a vital source of mentoring and information sharing in her day-to-day work life.

From a strategic point of view, who are my main contacts and main ‘go-tos’ if I have a strategic question, but also for behavioural things, how do I improve my public speaking, how to I be a better manager to my employees that might report directly to me to make sure they are safe and comfortable and to get the leadership and feedback (Grace)

**Feedback and recognition.** The topic of feedback and recognition for work emerged largely through questions related to motivation and management. The process of communication and performance and the methods, frequency and scope were referenced in several of the interviews... Some identified simple activities such as responding to emails as a way in which leaders could demonstrate their connection to their employees.
Others, however, spoke specifically of the need to deliver really good feedback: “Let the person know that you think they are doing a great job or not.” (Sarah)

During four of the seven interviews, the topic of performance reviews was brought up, particularly as it related to management structures and processes. One participant who had been with the university the longest out of all the interviewees – close to 40 years – indicated that her first ever performance review had taken place only a couple of years previous. She also highlighted that she had since implemented them across her staff but that this practice had been met with some resistance. “Part of that was a fear by staff that it is going to be disciplinary and not going to be positive. And so, if we don’t do them everything must be ok.” (Sarah)

She indicated the messaging she used to combat this fear was trying to tell people that this is not me managing your performance, this is me hopefully finding out what your goals are and having a chance for you to set some goals and a year later reflect on them…. That was really tough. In the culture, it was, oh this is going to be disciplinary. It was hard to turn that round…. It made me realize that most people are coming to workday by day and don what they have always done and not necessarily think about advancing their career or doing things differently or anything like that. That is kind of too bad. (Sarah)

Another participant highlighted this challenge within his department as well. “Our strong performers do good work, but we have not made any real efforts to provide feedback in a formal and structured way or link what they do with any discussion around career planning and development” (Daniel). While a formal performance review process has existed within the university for some time, it is perceived by many to be an ‘optional’
activity due to the lack of accountability in actually submitting them or providing proof that they have been completed. Daniel’s experience with leadership came across as somewhat self-directed, several times comparing his experience in industry with his key mentors and the more formal engagement with senior management. He felt that many formal processes for bringing in new staff to mid-management was lacking in terms of what senior-level managers knew about how to effectively introduce someone to the university environment. “Where I think we can improve is awareness at the management and executive level of what needs to be done on these things” (Daniel) referring to many of the institutional policies on everything from how decisions get made, how to effectively understand and interpret the collective agreement for unionized employees, purchasing policies, vendor selection and a host of other activities that he felt could have ‘gotten him into trouble’ had he not taken the initiative to ask questions and to leverage his peer group to better understand. Daniel identified this concern as part of a bigger communication challenge between managers and their superiors, citing that frequent and continued communication is necessary between leaders and their subordinates is a key part of the process, particularly as it relates to goal setting and feedback. He expressed confidence that the institution had the appropriate processes and tools in place to support this, but that they were not always being utilized for manager-level positions like his. He described the process he felt had worked best in his previous roles: “So if you set yourself an hour at the start of the year to set objectives for the coming year and if you book an hour for the mid-year review and the you set the performance appraisal at the end and you use the forms in place” and indicated that this is the system he had begun using with his staff, but did not feel that his superiors had prioritized this for him. “I remember
putting my year-end review on my manager’s desk and she said, ‘what is this’? He indicated that he had to walk her through the process and felt that it was well received but questioned the level of accountability on senior leaders to ensure timely and consistent completion of reviews for mid-management. Daniel had joined the university from the private sector and indicated that he felt there was room and acceptance to incorporate some of the practices that he had used in his previous role into his new environment within the university. Performance review processes came up with several times across not only Daniel’s but several of the other interviews as well. He explained his experience with the review process as being met with some hesitation in terms of how it was rolled out.

The other thing that always makes me nervous is when organizations roll out performance management or performance reviews. There is always this focus on ‘we have to make sure we document what is not working…..I think in some respects there is an over-emphasis on the negative side of it and I have really tried to down-play that in our faculty. I say, we have a strong team and everyone is doing great work, we want to make sure that is acknowledged, and my implied message is - if we want to fire you, we don’t need a performance review to do it.

(Daniel)

Unsolicited feedback was also referenced as having made a significant impact on the participants. One interviewee spoke about the feedback she had received after an interview for a new position in which she was unsuccessful, however the hiring manager had provided her with feedback on the process, feedback that she found so valuable that she wrote it down and had been carrying it around with her as reference for future. “He
was very frank and you know I still have it my purse that little notepad…..the little notepad that I wrote down all the things that I needed to work on and I still hold that in my purse.” (Grace) When asked to recall specific instances of feedback from superiors in her current role however, the response was quite different. “Feedback would be lovely. That is missing at our level”. She indicated that while her goal with her own staff is to provide ‘fulsome’ feedback, “the feedback I am getting leaves me wanting more”. (Grace)

**Ability to influence change.** Decision-making structure across departments, faculties and even offices can vary significantly, all 7 participants highlighted the opportunity to be a part of conversations and processes that could have some impact as being very important to them in not only their job satisfaction, but also in helping to prepare them for their next opportunity or career stage.

I consider myself at this stage in my career reasonably seasoned and so I don’t need a lot of direct day-to-day guidance or even to some extent long term. As long as I know there is the opportunity for new things, and I don’t necessarily need to know what they are or have them mapped out for me. I will figure that out on my own and seize opportunities as they come. (Sam)

Sam went on to describe the various opportunities he has had to contribute his experiences and voice to a number of decision-making bodies around the university as being ways he stayed motivated and felt included in the overall goals of the institution. “So, what I have been able to do is find ways to get a seat at the table” (Sam). Autonomy to self-direct work and to leverage one’s own experiences and then apply them to necessary opportunities was also cited in response to questions about influence.
What drives me personally is designing projects, research design…..my job is to steer the ship, get projects started, negotiate the designs, keep my nose to the grind and determine who needs what…..probably two thirds or maybe ever more of what we do in a given day are projects that were not designed when I got here. So significantly what we do is the product of our own thought rather than someone else’s formal step by step instruction. (Curtis)

I found it interesting that these two different participants identified the fact that where the activities they derived the most pleasure of out of or what seemed to get them the most excited about their roles were opportunities where they were able to exercise their own experiences and skills without a specific plan in place.

One of the participants described the university environment as a “compassionate environment, a good place to work” (Curtis), however also cited that part of the culture is to value, publicly only those who are in student or public-facing roles and not necessarily the teams of people who work more behind the scenes to make the university function.

**Leadership impact.** There were several occasions where the relationships between the participants and their supervisors were referenced as having significant impact on the desire to both work with a particular individual and the impact on their careers. This was particularly evident from one participant’s comments regarding why she wanted to work with someone.

What drew me to him was I got a sense the he was a man of integrity. He was humble. He was interested in me and what I wanted to do. He listened when he asked me the questions and really paid attention when I was responding. There
was a mutual respect between the two of us. I think that had a lot to do with why I made the decision that I did. (Alice)

Additionally, there is genuine interest and investment from employees. Alice also shared that she felt that there is a lack of this type of behavior the further she climbs in the organization; “the higher I go in my career the less I am exposed to that. I had great leaders early on…. ” (Alice) Questions around leadership included asking about specific individuals whom the interviewee would indicate had made an impact on them and whom they might credit to helping them grow and achieve goals during their career. As outlined previously, Alice spoke specifically about how the perceived leadership style of one manager in particular drew her to work at the university in the first place. When we discussed the specific behaviours that person had indicated, she highlighted integrity, vision and humility were all behaviours that she was drawn to.

As it was established that this particular individual was someone that she had encountered early on in her career with the university, questions then turned to how often she had seen these characteristics again in the more than 15 years since that time. Her response was simply this

I don’t know if you want to hear this, but the higher I go in my career the less I am exposed to that. I had great leaders early on…. I was lucky to work for them and I got some of their tips and techniques and I am able to share them with others…. but it is not a profile I have seen often.

Alice identified some of the other behaviours she had seen and experienced during her career, particularly as it related to the key things the university should focus on when thinking about developing training opportunities for managers.
It is common sense stuff that some individuals at very senior levels in the organization just have no concept of or have not mastered because they have been independent operators for so long and now they are charged with leading a department or unit or a group but don’t really have the people skills to know what people want from them. It could be really simple things like responding to emails but even more importantly giving really good feedback……understanding how to give feedback whether positive or constructive, but doing it from a coaching place where you generally are interested in that individual who is reporting to you and are invested in their growth.

When asked questions pertaining to other leadership experiences, Alice also identified a ‘wish list’ of sorts that, upon reflection she felt was missing from her development. This include things like “a little bit more one-on-one time authentically, and structured meetings where we have an agenda and are following it and have some objective and we are aware of what we want to do with our time.” (Alice) She also indicated however, that she appreciated the autonomy and trust she currently experiences with her boss.

**Professional Development Tools and Resources**

The third theme related to the notion of professional development. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged: i) *development tools and resources*, and ii) *career development structures*.

**Development tools and resources.** An examination of the current tools and resources currently at the disposal of this group of employees in terms of professional development included questions around courses, training and overall support for these initiatives within their respective roles and departments. Four of the seven participants
answered this question from the point of view of ‘manager’, encouraging members of their respective teams to pursue training from the universities’ in-house training opportunities. “I encourage them to do professional development and I encourage ideas” (Curtis). Another highlighted that he also encourages this and identified it as a real strength for the university “…if you look at the workshop website offered by central HR, they have 40 or 50 course and they range on anything from collective agreements training to dealing with stress…..whatever you need” (Daniel). He also went on to say, however that unless you or someone within your direct community is aware of them, you can miss them, they are not necessarily promoted as a way to build your skill set, specifically for your current role or as a development requirement; there is no link between the training and promotion. These types of offerings could be of great value to members of the university community, however he indicated that his perception was that “they don’t put it together into a big picture very well and if you don’t know to go and look and ask about that stuff, you will never find it”. (Daniel)

Another participant confirmed a similar approach when she described her conversation with members of her team as a coaching conversation.

…. we are constantly having conversation in regard to ‘what do you want to do?’ Have you thought of taking this? I don’t want to stifle them whereby they are going to be looking for something else, and if it means the fact that they are continuing their education…. all the power to you.

The remaining participants did not weigh-in on this as a personal resource for their own progression and development with the exception of one who spoke about her participation in the university’s Foundational Leadership Program. “I think it was really
valuable.” (Sarah). This program is available to senior leaders within the institution as a more formalized way to both network and connect with other leaders across the organization, but also to provide insight and advice on key issues facing the institution through projects that are then presented to the Executive Leadership team. She also spoke favourably about the offerings of the Human Resources department overall. “I have done a number of workshops through HR organizational development. They are great. All you really need for those are people to be willing to spend time to look and see what is out there” (Sarah). Based on the responses, it would seem that unless you go looking, these types of activities are neither actively visible nor are they, as mentioned above, tied to anything specifically regarding job growth or career advancement. Robin commented on a number of workshops and seminars she had taken part in that were put on by the Human Resources office of the university, learning specifically about policy implementation and issues management as it related to human resource issues within the university. She commented that these types of sessions were an environment where several people in similar roles across the institution could come together to learn from each other.

The other people in the room were people like me in the same sort of role that I was in…. there were a lot of examples and a lot of talking about real life scenarios. It was very relevant. (Robin)

She also cited other development opportunities like conferences hosted by provincial or national bodies that brought together middle managers from a number of institutions to discuss issues they were collectively facing, but didn’t find those as relevant due to the fact that the conversations tend to be much broader and not as relevant and that while
they generate great ideas, they are most often discussed in a ‘best case scenario’ situation where you have the ‘perfect job and the perfect resources’ to implement. We discussed some of the current initiatives that are underway within the institution to provide a more formalized association for the middle management at the university who are not unionized nor are they represented by any other sort of formal body. She was very much in favour of the work being done in this area and had played a role in some of the workshops and development work that had been completed, including the creation of a competency library that was to be applied to this group of employees.

…. back in the winter term I guess it would have been, I helped in developing competencies for various positions and the kind of categories that the competencies will fit within and what should be a level 1 and 2, 3 4. There were a couple of workshops and things that they did. I participated in those and think they were good. I am excited to see what they come up with for this academic year. I think that could be quite valuable. I am pleased to see it. It is nice to see HR take a role and a key role in developing that.

When I asked Alice about any formal training, she has had access to during her time with the university, she indicated that she had taken part in some professional skills training in communications and presentation skills that she felt had helped give her confidence.

Alice also talked about working to achieve a coaching certification on her own time, however felt that she had been supported in this and that this coaching had opened up new opportunities for her to expand her engagement across different parts of the school’s operations. One of the other areas that she mentioned was the informal mentoring and
training that takes place within the university as having been very valuable to her in her career.

There is a lot of informal mentoring that goes on which I think is a really good practice. And if the University or the school could figure out a way to formalize that I think that is extremely powerful. Throughout my career I certainly had the opportunity to engage with others who I realized actually were acting in an informal mentoring capacity. It is harder find as you get into roles that are more senior to find those individuals.

Robin commented that in her current role she is also privy to some of the key priorities set out by the governing bodies of the university and cited that the issue of providing some additional structure to the management and development of talent within the university was very much a strategic priority.

The Board of Trustees has taken an interest in the talent management and retention of senior staff or key staff. They are really starting to recognize that when someone leaves not only do you have to find someone to replace them, you have to train them and find the right person. If you don’t find the right person than you are stuck without for a while and you are backfilling or seconding and that can cause a bit of havoc. (FRC)

**Career development structures.** The notion of talent management came up at multiple times during interviews with the participants of this study. It was coded as ‘structure’ or ‘continuing professional development’. There were mixed feelings about the structures that were or weren’t in place and the ways in which different people across the university use them. It was especially evident when the participants were attempting
to explain their respective career paths. Alice, commented that she credits much of the opportunity for change and growth in her career with the university can be attributed to growth (size, scope, scale) in the faculty where she worked but did not highlight the changes in her roles and responsibilities as having been part of any specific plan or a conversation with human resources or her superiors as a way to support talent within the school. She further shared that in her experience once you reach a certain level, and the path becomes even more unclear:

Once you reach a certain point, then what? Up until now I have been working, working, working. But I have been in this role for a number of years and yeah, I would love to plan what my next step is, but I have not a clue what it is because I can’t see it and it is never really discussed…and it is a question that even when I ask I don’t get an answer to. (Alice)

This sentiment was also evident in a response from a participant who was asked about the lack of continuity within some departments who had academic professionals as managers and leaders and the fact that it was difficult to create consistency when after each term a new leader or manager was appointed, a manager who may or may not have an interest in continuing with any of the plans or structures that had been put in place by the person previously in the position. He referenced a previous private-sector employer’s approach which was a matrix of the available talent and the process by which senior leadership positions could be filled by those lower in the organization and how it then created ‘bench strength’ to the organization. Bench strength can be referred to as layers of talent within an organization that can be trained to be ready to take on new roles and higher levels of responsibility as people move on from their position in effort to maintain some
consistency and ensure transfer of key knowledge and history. He commented about his perceptions of the university’s readiness for attrition and movement by saying: “I have made a joke with the HR people and said, I am not sure they do have a plan…..I don’t even know that the university subscribes to bench strength.” (Daniel)

Further comments regarding the divide between a talent management strategy and the university structure was highlighted when one participant spoke about his discovery upon joining the university and the gap he felt existed for the group of employees that hold senior staff positions, (the group selected as the target population for this study). His comments were that

One of the things that I have noticed about the university and I will call it a shortcoming in the structure and the way we manage….there are two groups of employees, but one in particular that I don’t think necessarily gets any good coaching or development from their managers or supervisors and those would be senior staff roles or any staff roles who report to a faculty member. (Sam)

He continued that perhaps the gap lies in the priorities of academic leaders such as Deans, for example

They have a responsibility to their Associate Deans and/or faculty and what is left over for those office or unit managers that report into the Deans and they are often left to find development and mentoring opportunities elsewhere. (Sam)

These comments were echoed by another participant who cited that Department Head roles (those most often held by academic faculty) are some of the toughest within the university, largely because of the incongruence between how they are evaluated and the focus of managing and leading staff, given that in the academy, faculty positions are
evaluated largely on their research outputs and teaching evaluations. There is no real incentive for them to also take responsibility for the career development of the people who report to them.

They take on the head’s roles in many cases because of a sense of duty and it their ‘turn’ and everyone takes a turn. But they are not taking it as a stepping stone to something else. And so relative to most…. if you call that a mid-level management position in most organizations’ middle management are aspiring to senior management (Sam)

The other side of the management picture is not only how employees are supported with new opportunities and development, but also how poor performance is handled, an equally important responsibility for managing talent within any organization. In further discussion to what is outlined above under “feedback and recognition”, Sam outlined the ways in which poor performers are often not dealt with in an effective way.

…negative performers and poor performers need to be addressed but to some extent outside of the performance management process…. I think it is important to play up the benefits and downplay the poor performance through the review because there are other channels to manage that. And in saying all that, I think one of the things that the university is not good at is dealing with poor performance. I have seen too many cases where people have tolerated poor performance for years. And rather than dealing with it, they (managers), work around it and do not address it head on. The fact that many departments have term leadership who are firstly academic faculty and will return to those academic roles once their given service term is complete, exacerbates this as there is a sense of ‘I
am going to tolerate it for my term and not deal with it’, leaving the issues unaddressed and ultimately the staff person is either unaware of the issue or feels no reason to change their behavior. (Sam)

Other interviewees, particularly those who had been with the university for several years referenced instances where there may have been some type of conflict between the academic manager and professional staff roles. Sarah addressed this when discussing a negative experience she had early in her career at the university with a manager who was also an academic faculty member. She explained the details of her experience with this manager by saying:

Her issue with me was that I did not have a PhD, I was not an academic and therefore I should not be doing anything related to academics….I should not be advising the students on the kinds of experiments they should do or I should not be doing anything at all academic. So instead of looking at what I could offer and who cares about the degree, this is where your value is. (Sarah)

She went on to explain that this particular manager then began making significant changes to her role. “She tried to take my job and morph it into something that was half of what I was able to do and half of what I had always done, and that was a little scary.” (Sarah). The participant explained her approach to dealing with this, which was to wait it out, the term nature of the appointment as previously discussed made it a short-term problem. Sarah chocked it up to simply a part of the culture of the university; “there are PhD’s and there are non-PhD’s and you are never going to get past that, I have recognized that from the first day that I was here……they do have a pretty specialized
level of training that others don’t have, I have never found it to be a problem other than that one time” (Sarah).

Motivation

Having established with each participant that their career journeys with the university were for the most part entirely ‘unplanned’ instances as well as the fact that almost all of them were still I was curious to know was it that kept them motivated within the context of the work they were doing and the environment in which they were working in. Responses to these questions, were largely captured under the professional identity theme and in most cases connected to responses about the goals and objectives of the university. There were consistent references to the nature of respective environments that the participants felt kept them motivated in their day to day lives.

Alice shared that much of the responsibility in these falls to the faculty and staff who run programs, “we have a huge obligation to do right”. Alice identified that her motivation is very closely linked to her passion for supporting student success and delivering a very professional experience. She indicated that her current role provides her with the opportunity to really put that passion into practice.

And so, this is where I know my passion is…working with an adult audience is a very different type of work. The thing I love about it is yes, we work for a University but at the end of the day we are running a business

She also indicated that the nature of the relationship and the flexibility she had with her current superior was also a motivator for her
I think the environment I have right now is ideal. I have full autonomy and I have a boss who trusts me to get the job done no matter what – it could be Saturday at 10pm or Monday at 9:30am. (Alice)

Daniel’s, whom among all participants had been working at the university for the shortest amount of time member of the university staff community at the time of his interview, had joined on of the faculties in a Project Manager role from private industry and this was his first time working in the public sector. He was also an alumnus of the institution, having completed both his undergraduate and master’s degrees at the institution. He was very clear in his response to this regarding how happy he was to be working in the university environment, describing the university as his ‘dream employer’ and going on to say that he would ‘live happily ever after’ working at the university and that “whatever the role they need me to do I would do just because I love working in this environment” (Daniel). He relied heavily on the nature of the relationships he had developed as a key driver of wanting to remain working at the university citing the helpful and sincere nature of colleagues.

I have only been here a year and every now and then I still catch myself when someone offers to help me on something my first reaction is ‘what is their motive, what is their angle and how are they going to screw me? People are sincere here, there is a very positive attitude, there is a very collegial atmosphere and people genuinely want to see everyone else do good. It was a breath of fresh air. (Daniel)

The link between motivation and job performance was also discussed by a number of the interviewees as it related to the ability to tie their respective roles to the overall objectives of the university. “I think it is about ensuring that people see the link whether it is direct
or indirect between what they do and how it supports the mission of the university” (Sam). As a public institution, there is more pressure these days to draw these links and be accountable for outcomes to the bodies that oversee public education in our province. Sam felt strongly that if you are then able to then make these connections for staff, it would go a long way to helping motivate the staff population.

**Summary of the Findings**

This chapter reported on the findings from the analysis of the interviews that were conducted. While the structure and scope of the interview questions largely shaped the themes of the findings there was a strong emergence of themes as well based on consistency of responses among the participants. The following chapter examines the themes as they intersect with the literature, discusses implications and direction for future research.
Chapter Five

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

This final chapter summarizes the findings from the stories and experiences shared by the seven full-time staff members within one medium-sized university environment. In this chapter, I compare and contrast the findings discussed in an earlier chapter in relation to the literature. This chapter also describes the study’s implications for policy and practice and discuss the study limitations and recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with my overall impressions and final thoughts.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of non-academic university staff and their explanations of what they perceive as catalysts to growth with their career development and progression. The main research question that guided this study is:

- What are the leadership influences and institutional characteristics that support in the development of non-academic staff in the university?

To help drive the conversation during the interviews, additional sub questions were:

1. What are the professional and personal values that motivate non-academic staff in their professional development for professional growth?
2. What tools and resources have been available and useful to them in the pursuit of professional development for professional growth?
3. What forms of leadership are required to motivate non-academic employees’ professional development for professional growth?
4. What institutional structures and strategies support employees’ professional development for career growth?
Interviews were semi-structured in nature, meaning that the pre-prepared questions were used to guide the conversation with each participant, however also allowed for each participant to engage authentically and for their specific stories to be shared. The interviews were analyzed using an open-coding analysis, which resulted in themes emerging from the research questions but also more organically based on the actual responses.

**Discussion of the Findings**

The findings from the analysis are presented below in response to the research questions in the following subsections: a) leadership influence; b) professional and personal values for development and growth; and c) tools and resources available for professional growth and development and d) institutional structures and strategies that support employee’s professional development for career growth. When I was developing this study and reviewing the literature that might help inform it, I made several assumptions with regard to what I anticipated would be important details for my participants. This can be seen in the differences with regard to the priorities outlined in the literature review and the summary of the findings outlined here. Some of those assumptions were linked to my curiosity around how common human resource practices were being leveraged, the extent to which other senior staff in the university community were seeking these types of activities and the extent to which they felt that the development of career pathways were necessary.
Leadership Influence

A couple of key considerations came through across the responses regarding leadership, particularly as it relates to the crossover between academic leaders and professional staff leaders. This is consistent with the literature that outlines the rise of roles within institutions that often cross boundaries between management and academic leadership (Whitchurch, 2008). The ways in which participants spoke about leadership and its impact on them was also consistent in the sense that they referred to the absence of leadership more often than they could recall positive leadership experiences. All but one interviewee, however also defended this phenomenon within the university culture in the sense that they didn’t actually expect it from their direct supervisors, whose roles they felt required something different from them than staff leadership and management given the overall priorities of the university.

All participants however expressed their desire to try even harder to find opportunities for feedback, recognition and motivation for the staff that reported to them. The behaviours highlighted throughout the findings in terms of the relationships between the participants and the leaders they had encountered throughout their careers can easily be linked back to the model of transformational leadership and characteristics such as idealized influence and individual consideration (Burns, 1978), whereby there is a modeled behavior that others want to emulate and that the leader ‘walks the talk’, so to speak. This was evident in the response of one participant who indicated that the leadership style of one of her previous superiors was a key driver in bring her to the institution. This was largely linked to a set of demonstrated behaviours including a clear vision, a demonstrated sense of integrity among other characteristics. This was in contrast
to other responses who felt there was a significant lapse in understanding of the need and use of many common leadership and management practices including consistent feedback, mentorship and the ability to tie performance to overall goals and objectives.

Another theme that arose from the interviews was the referenced use of informal networks among participants. These networks were often described as a community of individuals within the organization that the interviewees would use as both a sounding board for decisions, but also as mentors. Many of the participants spoke about these networks as fulfilling this mentorship role in the absence of more formalized infrastructure. The networks were most often made up of fellow employees across both the same university or across other intuitions who held either similar roles to the interviewees or were dealing with similar issues and priorities. They would act to provide guidance and insights into practice and management. The informality of these groups likely made them more effective as they were chosen and created by the employees themselves, although there is some evidence that more structured instances of cross-functional work cells can also help to build perspective (Lawler, 1986).

**Professional and Personal Values for Development and Growth**

All but two of the participants who were interviewed highlighted the ‘unplanned’ nature of their careers at the university. This is consistent with the literature that there is an ‘invisibility’ to the profession of administrative manager within institutions such as universities (Lauwerys, 2009). All participants referred to the shift within the university environment in terms of the emerging operational challenges and the changing landscape of the academic environment has called for a change in the talent required to lead the institution. Paul (2011) highlighted also referenced this shift as a key driver of the need to
examine the skills and abilities of those who are leading and shaping the university environment. There were many similarities in responses from the participants about the overall goals and objectives of the university and how this connected with their role and contribution to the institution. Many focused on how their work impacted various stakeholders at the university, be it students, faculty or the output of research, but the other key theme that emerged was the role the institution actually plays in society and its responsibility to prepare the next generation to be good citizens and to make a positive impact on their communities. This is consistent with the research that focuses on staff perceptions regarding their impact on student success. The invisible nature of these career paths perhaps takes away from recognizing this impact. A clear distinction that came through in the interviews was the ways in which the careers of the participants within the institution had evolved. In comparison to industry, for example where there is often a more clearly defined and established pathway for career development, not one of the interviewees could highlight for me the connection between either performance or training to a development plan for themselves or for the people who worked for them. This lack of clarity (Whitchurch, 2004) is in part due to the fact that the spotlight in terms of active study and research seems to have been placed more on the development of academic careers than those who hold professional staff roles.

What is interesting is that despite a lack of ‘identity’ with regard to the career paths for professional staff in universities, participant’s levels of intrinsic motivation even with a lack of direct paths came across as very high. This is supported by the consistent stories of how they felt a ‘higher calling’ in terms of their work and that their goals were not just about their own professional development, but also a sense of ‘duty’ to the work
they were doing. While there was some variation of this within the participant group, what was consistent was how many of them felt that the work of the university, and ultimately their main goal for being here was to impact the lives of students and to support the work of faculty, be it for teaching or conducting research. This common understanding is consistent with the research on motivation that focuses on the need for organizations not only to provide challenging and rewarding environments for their staff, but also one that provides clear direction and understanding to the overall objectives (Honroe, 2009). Responses to questions about motivation and the elements of people’s work that were identified as drivers for motivating the participants also included the opportunity to have a voice and to be able to provide input to decision makers. The majority of the participants highlighted the opportunity to engage with senior management on key decisions and to be invited to bring their experiences and knowledge to the decision-making process as a major element of their respective roles that aided in keeping them motivated and committed to the organization. Research confirms that higher levels of engagement can increase not only job satisfaction but productivity as well (Lawler, 1986).

There was also an agreement among participants that demands and constraints being placed on universities in terms of both transparency and on outcomes were changing and that as a result the skills and demands being placed on those responsible for the strategy and delivery of university operations was also changing. The global nature of education (Bradley, 2016) and the fact that the core responsibilities of the university, previously categorized as teaching and research have shifted whereby there is more demand for institutions to also be providing a broader set of skills and abilities amongst
their graduates. This has led to an additional set of institutional priorities. This was evident in many of the interviews who spoke about the additional requirements and responsibilities of the institution with regard to their students and the broader stakeholder groups they were now being required to service, that being parents, industry and a broader sense of community whereby graduates are expected to become independent and productive members of society and how that links back to the identity of the institution overall. The idea that the changes in the higher education sector requires a different set of skills and experiences (Whysall & McTavish, 2015) to lead and set priorities was echoed by the interviewees. In highlighting this however, they also felt that a gap still exists between how universities recognize and acknowledge this through management practice. Many roles such as Department Head or Manager are still held in many cases by individuals who also hold an academic appointment and who are not necessarily focused on the development of their human resources nor do they see that as their main responsibility given that the evaluation of their success or failure in those roles isn’t tied to that function. This is compounded by the fact that these positions are very transitory in nature and this often leads to a consistently shifting set of goals & objectives. There was also evidence that perhaps the changing nature of higher education was putting more pressure on executive leadership to manage more external factors, leaving little to no time to focus on the professional development of the staff who reported to them.

**Tools and Resources for Professional Development and Growth**

The practices inside an organization that are often linked to sophisticated talent management practice as outlined in the literature (Baer et al., 2012) were referenced both directly and indirectly throughout many of the interviews. The definition of talent
management as defined within the literature refers to the process that acknowledges the importance of managing people and positions at multiple levels within the organization (Bradley, 2016, p. 14).

Some of these practices included the presence of mentoring, feedback, performance reviews and training. While all participants highlighted these as elements, they felt were available to both themselves and their direct reports, there was consensus that there was very little promotion of this nor was it tied in any way to things like promotion or advancement. Not one of the participants could articulate any form of specific plan by which someone could effectively track their development within the institution nor understand which professional development opportunities or training might provide them with the necessary skills for future advancement. According to Baer et al. (2012) a high-performance work system is the bundling of human resource practices that provide a strategic approach to not only recruitment & selection, but also in terms of training, recognition & development opportunities to motivate employees. Honroe’s (2019) conclusions that a motivated and productive workforce is one that feels valued, supported and challenged, with a clear direction and an understanding of the important role they play in the achievement of company objectives was challenged in terms of the findings in this study. While the majority of the participants had no problems clarifying the overall goals and objectives of the institution, they were not as easily able to identify how they specifically played a role in its direction or were able to reference any sort of system or infrastructure that enabled this kind of clarity.
**Implications for Policy and Practice**

At the end of this process, through the review of the literature, the research itself and completion of the analysis, I have three recommendations for policy and practice. These include a) the development of a development plan for professional staff to provide better transparency for career progression opportunities; b) define metrics for academic leaders to be measured on the success of their human resources; and c) establish some consistency in terms of coaching and mentoring opportunities and access across the university. These three recommendations are explained in further detail below.

Firstly, while it is impossible to draw sweeping conclusions about the presence or absence of a career development plan for professional staff in universities from the examination of just one, the absence of literature about them and the presence of studies focusing on academic roles within higher education would suggest that this is likely the case for most universities. To that end, there is an opportunity for the development of more clearly defined pathways, roles and training for individuals who are looking to build a career in higher education outside of the traditional academic functions of teaching and research. There are several indicators that the changes taking place with regard to the education landscape will continue to shift as will the skills necessary to lead this change. The ability to not only understand the talent required to lead the change, but also the ability to be able to train and retain it will become ever more important. The first step is to really understand what skills and competencies are required to lead within the unique culture of the university and from there design robust training and development opportunities to prepare people for those roles. In addition, the link between the
completion of this training combined with performance should be made to advancement and promotion.

There is also a need to examine the connection in terms of evaluation of academic faculty who also hold an administrative position such that the evaluation process not only includes their contributions to the academy in terms of teaching and research, but also by the growth and development of their staff. This would require a very significant shift in the culture combined with the difficulty of measuring their specific impact on the performance of others, however simple steps could be taken in the short term to provide more formal training to academics on basic practices such as regular performance reviews, the importance and availability of training programs as well as leadership & mentorship advice or training themselves as a starting point, particularly for those who are new to administration.

Lastly, it was evident from talking to employees from across the university that there is great variance across the institution with regard to opportunities to contribute, the extent to which people have opportunity to provide input and or guidance as well as an understanding of the benefits of things like coaching and mentoring. The establishment of informal networks as evidenced by the research indicates that people are interested in what others are doing and in the absence of more formalized structures are seeking it anyway. The institution could benefit from providing a more formalized structure in this regard, both to ensure consistency

**Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research**

Upon review of the completed study, there are four key limitations to the final work. These include the single-institutional focus, the variability in terms of specific
faculty culture, the overall sample size and the extent to which my own biases may have impacted both the interviews and interpretation of the data during analysis.

During the initial design of the study, there was some thought given to completing a comparison between how different institutions of a similar size and structure might manage their respective career development, however in consultation with members of my committee, it was decided that a comprehensive review of one institution would be a more realistic goal given the timelines and duration of Master’s program and that perhaps a broader comparison may be better suited to a longer time period like those more consistent with doctoral study. It was also agreed that considering one specific context for the study might be a good starting point and that the results of the work could help to provide a starting point for comparison for future work. As institutions in Canada tend to be categorized by both their size and institutional focus (comprehensive, primarily undergraduate or research–intensive), one could assume that there would be characteristics among similar institutions that for future study could be used as a starting point for comparison.

Culture plays a significant role in the structure and practices adopted by any organization, universities are no different; what is unique about the university however is that the organizational culture is also impacted by the specific culture of academe as well. In addition, the decentralized nature of the organization leads to the development of a unique culture within each faculty and potentially each department. To that end, while attempts were made within the sample to include representation from across the various faculties and centralized offices of the institution, the study is limited to the perspectives of only a portion of the different offices and departments within the institution. Future
research could also segment the staff population by department, function and or structure as a means of comparison across the organization. Analysis of the number of professional staff members vs. faculty leaders and the impact of this could also be examined to further the understanding overall. A larger number of participants would also provide a more comprehensive voice to the topics discussed and may have served as a broader representation of perspectives. In addition, future work could also look to compare the perspectives of those individuals who had built their careers within the university or higher education more broadly versus those who had held career-quality positions both at another institution and outside of higher education altogether.

Lastly, as was referenced in the beginning of this paper, my own time as an employee of the institution within which I conducted my study may have resulted in bias in both the design of the study as well as in the interpretation of the data. I was sure to disclose my connection to the university during interviews and incorporated an external researcher to assist in the coding of the data in an effort to create some triangulation in the analysis as a way to combat these biases.

**Final Thoughts**

I embarked on this study as a way to try to determine the specific phenomenon that senior managers accredited to their professional growth and career development within the university environment. I will say that my experience with one specific individual in my own career, who was a career academic, was a strong catalyst for me to try to determine if others had experiences similar to my own or whether there were other factors that they attributed to their professional development. During the course of my master’s study I changed work positions 3 times, all promotions, and have since
developed a broader understanding of the things that have influenced me over my 20-year career working in higher education. Additionally, since the beginning of the study, there have been what I would categorize as meaningful changes to the development infrastructure for senior managers. This includes the creation of more formalized mentoring programs with the establishment of a formal coaching program that senior staff can apply for; leadership development training in the form of a Foundational Leadership Program that provides opportunities for cross-functional team projects; and recognition infrastructure through the adoption of a merit-based performance review process and the creation of a competency library that staff can be measured against. In addition, the landscape continues to shift with more volatile funding support, the dynamics of the global political environment and an ever-increasing focus on outcomes with regard to the education sector. Because of the ever-changing environment, I still believe that much work can be done to provide a more clearly defined career path within the university environment overall to both attract talent and also to ensure that those currently holding managerial-level roles within the institution are well supported and well informed to meet the needs of the organization.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear Colleague,

My name is Kerri Regan and in addition to being a staff member here at Queen’s, I am also a master’s candidate at the Faculty of Education. My focus in the program has been specifically on administration and leadership in higher education and the research I am doing for my thesis looks to examine the experiences of the non-academic staff community here at Queen’s as it pertains to their professional growth and development. I am looking for members of the non-academic community and specifically those in the newly defined Queen’s Professional and Managerial Group (QPMG) (formerly identified as the 10-14 group) to participate in an interview which will provide the data for this research project. I myself have been working at Queen’s for the last 15 years and am curious to learn about the career paths, successes, tools and stories of others.

Selection criteria includes:

Current members of the non-academic staff community (staff members not holding an academic contract with Queen’s)
Hold a position within the Queen’s Professional and Managerial Group (QPMG)
Have worked at Queen’s for a minimum of 5 years (you do not need to have worked within the QPMG for the last five years)

If you would be interested in participating in this study, I would like to ask you to complete the survey below as an expression of your interest. Those selected to participate will be provided with a letter of information about the project as well as a consent form.

http://queensu.fluids surveys.com/surveys/kregan/kregan-master-thesis/

If you would like to discuss the project further or have any questions. Please feel free to contact me directly at 3klrr@queensu.ca or by phone at 613-533-6856.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to contribute to this work.
Appendix B: Ethics Approval

May 25, 2015

Ms. Kerri Regan
Master's Student
Faculty of Education
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Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-777-15; Romeo # 6015530
Title: "GEDUC-777-15 Examining the Institutional Structures and Forms of Leadership that Best Support the Growth and Development of Non-academic Professional Staff in Universities"

Dear Ms. Regan:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-777-15 Examining the Institutional Structures and Forms of Leadership that Best Support the Growth and Development of Non-academic Professional Staff in Universities" for ethical compliance with theTri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D 1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or an unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gal Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. B. Denise Stockley, Faculty Supervisor
   Dr. Chris DeLuca, Chair, Unit REB
   Ms. Erin Wicklam, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research
Appendix C: Ethics Amendment

July 20, 2015

Ms. Kerri Regan
Master's Student
Faculty of Education
Queen's University
Duncan McArthur Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7M 3R7

Dear Ms. Regan,

RE: Amendment for your study entitled: GEDUC-777-15 Examining the Institutional Structures and Forms of Leadership that Best Support the Growth and Development of Non-academic Professional Staff in Universities; ROMEO# 6015530

Thank you for submitting your amendment requesting the following changes:

1) To change the recruitment methods to use the list-serve for the Queen’s Professional and Managerial Group (QPMG) (formerly identified as 'salary grade 10-14');

2) To use the revised recruitment e-mail (v. 2015/07/15);

3) To administer the Eligibility Survey (v. 2015/07/15).

By this letter you have ethics clearance for these changes.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.: Dr. B. Denise Stockley, Supervisor
Appendix D: Letter of Information

Letter of information for members of the non-academic, professional staff community

“Examining the structures and forms of leadership that best support the growth and development of non-academic professional staff in universities.”

Principal Investigator: Kerri Regan, Master’s Student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University, Kingston, ON Canada, (613)-449-1352, Email: 3klrr@queensu.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Denise Stockley, Professor Queen’s University, Kingston, ON Canada, phone (613)-533-6000 x 74304, Email: stockley@queensu.ca

Dear Participant:

This research is being conducted by Kerri Regan, for a graduate thesis in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen’s policies.

What is the study about? The purpose of this study is to examine the forms of leadership and institutional structures that best support members of the non-academic professional staff in an Eastern Ontario university in their career development. Using a series of semi-structured interviews, I will seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the personal and professional values that motivate you as a member of the non-academic professional staff community?
2. What tools and resources have been available and useful to you in your own professional development?
3. What forms of leadership do you think you respond to most? Which have you adopted into your own leadership practice?
4. What institutional structures and strategies do you feel have best supported your growth and development?

Participation in this study will require you to be interviewed by the principal investigator. The questions will revolve around the topics outlined above but will be conversational in nature. Your responses will be audio recorded using a program called Garage Band which has been installed on a password-protected computer as well as with the use of an iphone that is also password-protected as a backup. The interviews will be transcribed by the principal investigator for analysis following the interview. The interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and you should not feel obligated to answer any questions you feel are inappropriate and will mostly require you to reflect on your experiences as a staff member in a higher education environment. Specific information related to actual position titles, departments and/or supervisors will be omitted in an effort to maintain anonymity. If reference to any of the above is made throughout the
interview, these will be adjusted to codes in the transcript that will be sent to the participants for review prior to analysis. The transcribed text will be sent back to you for your review prior to being finalized for analysis. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded and transcribed at a later date for the purpose of analysis.

**Is my participation voluntary?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary, you have been recommended by another participant as someone who may be able to provide something to this study, but you can definitely decline the request. You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without pressure or consequence of any kind. You should not feel obliged to respond to any questions you feel are inappropriate or make you uncomfortable. To withdraw from the study, please contact the principal investigator directly at 3klrr@queensu.ca

**What will happen to my responses?**

Your responses will be kept anonymous and your identity confidential. Only the principal investigator and faculty supervisor will have access to your responses. The data may be published in a research paper, but any such publication will be of general findings and will maintain individual confidentiality to the extent possible. Data will be retained for five years on a password-protected computer, after which time it will be destroyed. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings.

Please check here if you would be interested in receiving a copy of findings: ☐

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** You will not receive any form of compensation for your participation in this study.

**What if I have concerns?** Through the process of member checking, participants will have the option of requesting the removal of any of their responses from the transcript. Any questions or concerns about study participation should be directed to the researcher: Kerri Regan, at 3klrr@queensu.ca, or 613-449-1352, or my supervisor: Dr. Denise Stockley at stockley@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 x 74304. Any ethical concerns about the study should be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

Thank you for your participation, it is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kerri Regan  
MEd Student  
Faculty of Education, Queen’s University