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Faculty Experiences Teaching In An MBA Program In the Context of COVID-19 A Sensemaking Approach

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FACULTY EXPERIENCES TEACHING IN AN MBA PROGRAM IN THE

CONTEXT OF COVID-19

A SENSEMAKING APPROACH

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Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership and Administration

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Dedication

I dedicate this to the MBA faculty members who trusted me to share their stories. I also dedicate

this document to my mother, Juana Nuñez, for the sacrifice and the courage to leave her family

and her country so my brother and I could live in the United States of America. My father, Jesus

Nuñez, for teaching me the importance of reading and for the love of the printed word. My

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the love of my life and my partner on our journey. My children, Amanda, Samantha, and

Cristian, whom I love with all my heart- as they continue getting after it! To my granddaughter,

Kalani-no words, just emotion.

FACULTY EXPERIENCES TEACHING IN AN MBA PROGRAM IN THE CONTEXT OF

COVID-19

A SENSEMAKING APPROACH

by

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Go, Miners!

Abstract

The Sensemaking framework is often utilized when disruptive events create ambiguity and force individuals to make sense of things differently, personally and professionally, by "structuring the unknown" (Waterman, 1990, p.41). By way of example, the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant disruptor to the education sector. Institutional decisions driven by the initial crisis kept daily functions and the educational process moving forward in 2020 by faculty members leveraging existing technology to continue teaching their students. The pandemic disrupted the daily routine of brick-and-mortar operations and many institutions' face-to-face delivery of academic content. The implications of the pandemic forced every faculty member to make sense of the health crisis in their own particular way based on their individual situation. Despite the disruptive jolt of the pandemic, it also provided faculty the opportunity for personal and professional growth as they reflected on themselves and the lessons they learned amid the pandemic.

After several months of living the experience of online learning and virtual engagement, faculty and students returned to brick-and-mortar institutions to resume their educational roles (Husserl, 1970). Questions regarding safety, responsibilities, lessons learned, innovation, and sustainability were top of mind as faculty members returned and shared the same space and place with their colleagues and students. As such, to capture the essence of the faculty's interpretation of their pandemic experience, Heidegger's (1962) phenomenological approach was employed to provide context and to help understand the faculty's personal experiences as they tried to reconcile their previous role of teaching and learning with their newfound utilization of technology in their courses.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Table of Figures

x

Chapter 1: Introduction

COVID-19 brought upon a worldwide pandemic that transformed and affected human beings' perception of health, family, work, social relationships, and education. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted mass school closures, as many education system stakeholders were ill-prepared for the following disruption (Quezada et al., 2020). An estimated 1.3 billion learners (all levels) from 142 countries went into lockdown mode (UNESCO, 2020). Simultaneously, academic institutions had no choice but to react to the pandemic by transitioning academic coursework to an online delivery model to accommodate their existing student bodies (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). As the crisis quickly unfolded, the leadership focus switched from providing academic excellence to maintaining the educational function (Karalis, 2020). Faculty from K-12 and higher education mobilized and transitioned academic services and instruction from brick-and-mortar to online delivery (Ranf et al., 2021).

Faculty with minimal or no online instruction experience, who never expected technology would be an essential function in their job description, quickly transitioned their face-to-face courses to online modalities (Ranf et al., 2021). Overwhelmed online instructional designers supported faculty by moving their course content into their academic institution's Learning Management Systems, such as Blackboard or Canvas, to manage and track online teaching and learning (Weaver et al., 2008). Replaced were in-person lectures, class discussions, and team projects with synchronous (simultaneous-occurring during the same period) and asynchronous (non-simultaneous-not occurring during the same period) online interactions with enrolled students. Thus, faculty did their best to re-engage with their students, and students continued the learning process, albeit virtually. Some faculty quickly adopted and leveraged Microsoft Teams,

Blackboard Collaborate, and Zoom, for example, in an attempt to increase student engagement in their newly transitioned online courses.

What faculty experienced in Spring 2020 was a reactive response to keep the educational process functioning (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). For example, a satellite site of a local academic institution in El Paso, Texas, closed its storefront doors on March 19, 2020, after the first presumptive case of COVID-19 in El Paso, Texas, was recorded (El Paso Times, 2021). This facility housed the following academic programs: Full-Time MBA, Accelerated MBA, Executive MBA, and the Master of Accountancy. Overnight, all four programs reactively transitioned operations and teaching from a purely brick-and-mortar delivery to an online model—subsequently testing the flexibility and fortitude of all stakeholders associated with the institution. The initial period of the pandemic provoked reactionary measures from senior leadership, staff, and faculty to ensure the educational process continued. Initial efforts to maintain operations included transferring desktops from office to home, staggered staff work schedules, and deploying instructional designers to facilitate workshops for faculty to learn how to teach online (Piotrowski & King, 2020). Institutional resources such as Creative Studios, Teaching Online Academy, and Blackboard Institute hurriedly assisted faculty in creating or recalibrating their courses and developing their online delivery skillset to sustain the educational process.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since the onset of the pandemic and initial lockdown, the narrative has transitioned from isolation to vaccination, as faculty returned to their brick-and-mortar institutions for a semblance of getting back to "normal." This binary paradigm of rushing back to normal may prove detrimental to the sustainability of many brick-and-mortar educational institutions due to faculty

and students experiencing the flexibility of remote working, teaching, and learning. Therefore, it also warrants faculty to reflect on the past year and provide insight into how they made sense of themselves and their role while leveraging technology to deliver academic content through various delivery modalities to remain relevant and sustainable.

Inderbitzin and Storrs (2008) suggest that it behooves institutions to focus on developing and implementing more innovative pedagogies and curricula due to the fierce competition for students in an age of dwindling resources. In addition to increased competition in the marketplace, the bundled model of educational experience tied to time units, such as credit hours and semesters, is becoming dismantled by shorter, more affordable certification programs. These subscription-based, not credit-based, education providers emphasize and promote competency-based learning for non-traditional students (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021).

Further, market forces and student choice continue to challenge traditional higher education and the brick-and-mortar structures where they reside. Levine and Van Pelt (2021) liken students to consumers who will have an abundant choice of "what, where, when, and how they consume information and entertainment" (p.1). Thus leaving behind buildings they did not occupy, unattended events, and required courses, perhaps deemed "just in case" instead of "just in time" in relation to their applicability in the labor market (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021, pg. 10).

Keep in mind that these challenges to traditional higher education existed before the pandemic. Nevertheless, the pandemic has allowed faculty to reflect and ask themselves, "who are we?" and "how do we do things?" How faculty answer these sense-making questions can provide insight into their identity and relationship with the academic institution (Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). Thus, restoring their agency to create and innovate in this new world and educational landscape.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As the pandemic endured, academic institutions wanted to retain current students despite the ongoing health crisis. The University of Texas at El Paso, in particular, strived to maintain its current student population experiencing a 15% increase in summer 2020 enrollment; this increase was followed by a slight 1.2 % decrease in enrollment from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 (UC Staff, 2020). However, credit hour production experienced a slight increase of 0.4% from Fall 2019 (263,739) to Fall 2020 (265,924). Despite students living in the pandemic environment (UTEP Reports Steady Enrollment, Increased Retention in Fall 2020, n.d.), the data indicates that students in 2020 enrolled in more coursework. Some of these retained student enrollments may account for a latent population of students who preferred online education instead of face-to-face engagement without realizing it, perhaps due to the flexibility inherent in online course delivery. The institution's numbers trended well in 2020. However, as an administrator in the institution, the following questions have surfaced relating to sustainability: What did the pandemic teach us regarding online teaching and learning? What did we learn as an academic institution to maintain and increase our enrollment numbers?

By employing an interpretive phenomenological approach, I aim to interpret, identify and analyze faculty's interpretation of an unknown event as they attempted to make sense of their role and environment through prior context and shared language (Heidegger, 1962). Questions will also be explored regarding how they leveraged existing technology, online teaching methods and how they found innovative ways to keep the educational teaching and learning process relevant and sustainable in an MBA program in Southwest Texas. Further, by underpinning the Sensemaking framework, faculty can provide a narrative of how they made sense of themselves

4

personally and professionally in an unknown environment (Ancona, 2012) and transitioned back to "normal."

Thus, the following overarching research question guided this interpretive phenomenological approach: In the context of COVID-19, what were faculty's experiences teaching in an MBA program, and how did they make sense of themselves and their role during the transition back to "normal"? Additionally, were any lessons learned that could be integrated into their teaching and learning?

Therefore, from an organizational standpoint, higher education institutions continued navigating the pandemic landscape as academic content delivery changes made during the pandemic integrated themselves into the institution's fabric. These changes allowed students to continue their academic progress while faculty redesigned their courses to accommodate both synchronous and asynchronous online delivery. Accordingly, it is imperative to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a disruption of day-to-day business but also an accelerator of change in education (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021). As such, the following questions are pertinent as we continue to move forward: What are the outcomes and implications of lessons learned from a faculty standpoint as we return to normal? How do we leverage the lessons learned to create new systems and processes in teaching and learning?

Recapturing the past is not a sustainable strategy. By citing Boin and Lagadec (2000), Karalis (2020) notes, "In many organizations, the amnesia syndrome occurs, i.e., the questions raised by the crisis are not addressed, the data are not analyzed, and ultimately the organization does not learn from the crisis" (p.188). Therefore, the MBA program can learn from the implications of the pandemic through a critical stakeholder in the academic institution. For this reason, I employed the sense-making framework because it provided faculty "the freedom to

5

define themselves and present themselves as flexible or inflexible" in an unfamiliar environment

(Naumer et al., 2008, p. 2). These reflections and revelations provided insight into recalibrating

the MBA program's features, delivery method, and pedagogy for the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The coverage of COVID-19 in the education sector is extensive, stemming from the personal and professional impact it made on all stakeholders in academic institutions to the rapid decision to transition all educational content from a brick-and-mortar delivery model to an online platform at the onset of the pandemic. This literature review explores the early and current impact of the pandemic on faculty in higher education, from making sense of themselves and their role to the existing technology employed to deliver academic content to students.

This chapter reviews the literature on the features of both brick-and-mortar and online delivery models and the implications embedded in online teaching, learning technology, and pedagogy. Key themes in this section include sense-making in teaching, technology, market forces, sustainability, and the future of teaching and learning in a post-pandemic environment. I conclude the chapter with a description of the Sensemaking theoretical framework, which serves as the foundation for this interpretive phenomenological inquiry.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRICK AND MORTAR AND ONLINE EDUCATION

A brief history of brick-and-mortar and online education provides context to the study. According to McFarlane (2011), "brick-and-mortar schools have been around from the dawn of man's fascination with learning and the need to create a safe, sheltered, and special environment where learning could become an intimated social process between teachers and students" (p. 8). Citing Katz and Aspen (1997), McFarlane (2011) noted, "brick and mortar schools facilitate greater richness of friendships" (p. 17), indicating the value of interaction between human beings who inhabit the same place and space. In addition to the friendships that develop in a brick-and-mortar classroom, the shared space allows teachers to assess student progress through in-class discussions and assignments (Anderson & Hira, 2020). Since the structure and engagement in

brick-and-mortar classrooms are confined to a specific time frame and place, the instructor can occupy that space and serve as the center of interaction to answer questions and provide immediate guidance to students during the session (Graham, 2019).

Conversely, with online education, the interaction and engagement between faculty and students are conducted virtually; as, Harasim (2000) reports, "online education was one of the first progeny of the invention of email, and its development is intertwined with the history of computer networking" (p. 42). These early communications systems were the results of visionaries striving to create a broad, interconnected platform for social and cognitive communities (Hafner & Lyon, 1996; Harasim, 2000) that culminated with the first entirely online noncredit "mini-courses" and executive training courses in 1981 (Harasim, 2000). McFarlane (2011) added that "technology utilized for online learning grew from the adult education movement" (p. 3).

Further, Reinhart (2008), as cited by McFarlane (2011) "many programs were created throughout major residential universities and colleges from the 1960s and early 1970s" (pg. 4). These early online programs served as a springboard for education to create academic content in cyberspace to teach traditional and non-traditional students who had access to computer-based technology and the internet (McFarlane, 2011). Therefore, the structure and engagement of online education are not tied to a specific point in time or place but to a flexible communication arrangement between teacher and student where "emails, discussion boards, chats, and web conferencing" are all utilized in the learning process (Graham, 2019, p. 146). Further, Graham (2019) notes that instructors experience a paradigm shift when delivering online education as their role transitions from a lecturer to a facilitator when providing all learning activities and resources from a distance.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOMS

The conversion of academic content from brick-and-mortar delivery to online platforms during COVID-19 prompted technological tools that were used sparingly to ramp up their utility to keep the education process moving. Increased emphasis and utilization of the institution's Learning Management System (LMS), such as Blackboard, became the primary communication and content delivery conduit between faculty and students (Quezada, Talbot, & Quezada-Parker, 2020). In addition, senior leadership and administration contracted cloud-based video conferencing services such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to aid faculty in synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning (Quezada et al., 2020). To illustrate, Zoom's peak number of daily participants in December 2019 was 10 million; in March 2020, the participant number increased to over 200 million (Zoom Revenue and Usage Statistics, 2020).

With the purchase and licensing of education technology secured, many schools continued the teaching process with virtual or hybrid content delivery models in tow (Kingsbury, 2021). The urgent deployment and utilization of technology in the classroom kept the educational process moving forward. However, the rapid convergence between pedagogy and technology and the potential scenario of creating a seller's market in the education technology sector became areas of concern (Teras et al., 2020). Citing Harwell (2020), Teras et al. (2020) cautioned, "Quickly jumping on board with learning platforms and online learning has also raised concerns about privacy and surveillance and the impact on student's lives and human dignity" (p. 865). For example, Zoom's rapid growth created a situation where they transmitted unauthorized data to Facebook without user consent and stored user data as calls were routed through mainland China, thus becoming subject to their jurisdiction laws (Zoom Revenue and Usage Statistics, para. 9).

Still, faculty had to learn to leverage this technology to keep the education process moving forward and reconcile its utility and risk with their prior teaching practices (Fairchild, Meiners, & Violette, 2016). Moreover, as McGhee and Kozma (2007) offered, faculty had to assimilate into unfamiliar roles such as "trainer, collaborator, or consultant" during their asynchronous class sessions (p.3).

DELIVERY MODELS

In March 2020, faculty were tasked with adapting their course content and teaching practices to an online environment overnight and with very little training. The change in the modality of content delivery between the brick-and-mortar and virtual environments was a significant challenge in many ways (Kingsbury, 2020). Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) added that transitioning from face-to-face to online learning was uncommon for both learners and faculty. Nevertheless, faculty had no choice but to adapt and adopt technological platforms they were unfamiliar with to keep the educational process moving (Pokhrel, 2021). Further, a significant factor of teaching online required educators to grasp the content thoroughly and be deliberate in what they were teaching their students while engagingly presenting the structured and curated material through technology (Smith, Passmore, & Fraught, 2009).

Moreover, issues regarding prior constructs of place, space, time, and student engagement were challenges faculty suddenly faced as they tried to deliver their content in the virtual space. McFarlane (2011) indicates that the significant tradeoff between brick-and-mortar and virtual learning is the confines of physical space where learning takes place "brick-and-mortar schools are edifices bound by specific time and space or geography" (p.22). Unlike virtual learning, which can take place at any time in cyberspace at the learner's discretion.

Further, the difference between physical space and cyberspace also impacts the interaction between faculty and students concerning the speed at which feedback and engagement occur; in the physical space, feedback and engagement are immediate compared to the time to respond virtually (McFarlane, 2011). Not to mention the often reduced tuition cost and increased convenience that virtual delivery provides. Table 1. Provides The Factors of Perceived Differences between Virtual and Brick-and-Mortar Schools

Table 1. Perceived Differences between Virtual and Brick-and-Mortar Schools

FACTORS of Perceived Differences between Virtual and Brick-and-Mortar Schools

SCHOOL DIFFERENCE FACTOR	VIRTUAL	BRICK-AND-MORTAR
Location	Virtual or cyberspace: anywhere, anyplace	Physically or geographically confined to place
Class Size	Extremely large	Small or limited by physical space
Program Offerings	Few/limited and often specialized	Broad curriculum with many different programs
Time	Varies with ongoing enrollment and completion; Shorter duration	Established schedule for enrollment, graduation, program completion and class attendance
Level/Type of Interaction	Impersonal; limited personal communication in some cases	Personal (Face-to-face); limited impersonal communication
Technology Dependency Cost	Highly dependent	Moderately dependent
Communication/Delivery	Electronic (Internet and Computer-based); limited personal communication	Chiefly face-to-face (personal communication), with limited electronic communication
Number of Faculty	Usually small; varies from school to school	Usually large number of faculty; varies from school to school
Convenience	Very convenient	Affords little convenience
Feedback	Sometimes delayed	Immediate in face-to-face contact

Allen and Seaman (2003) provide another nuance to the online/virtual delivery of academic content by considering the percentage of online content compared to brick-and-mortar content delivered in a course. Thus, course categorization ranges from *Traditional, where academic content is delivered purely 100% face-to-face in a brick-and-mortar structure, to Online,* where

over 80% of the content is delivered virtually without face-to-face meetings. Somewhere in the middle of the table is where flexibility lies for both the students and faculty. Below Table 2 provides the Proportion of content delivered online, the Type of Course, and the Typical Description.

Table 2. Percentage of Online Content Compared to Brick-and-Mortar Content

Proportion of content delivered online	Type of Course	Typical Description
0%	Traditional	Course with no online technology used - content is delivered in writing or orally.
1 to 29%	Web facilitated	Course which uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. Might use Blackboard or WebCT to post the syllabus and assignments, for example.
30 to 79%	Blended/Hybrid	Course that is a blend of the online and face-to-face course. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, typically has some face-to-face meetings
80+%	Online	A course where the vast bulk of the content is delivered online. Typically has no face-to-face meetings.

Additionally, asynchronous and synchronous delivery elements are embedded in the Course Types above. According to McFarlane (2011), brick-and-mortar institutions can lose their flexibility to accommodate students due to their educational delivery model anchored to a physical or geographically confined place, time, and space. Scheiderer (2021) suggests that asynchronous learning allows students to learn on their schedule. Asynchronous delivery provides access to coursework such as videos, lectures, readings, homework, and assessments at any time of the day. Rehman and Fatima (2021) add that asynchronous learning consists of pre-recorded lectures of academic content, videos, assessments, and assignments uploaded to an online platform.

In comparison, synchronous learning implies that the delivery still occurs from a distance; however, students attend firm-scheduled virtual course sessions simultaneously with their instructor and classmates that are rarely rescheduled (Scheiderer, 2021). The engagement occurs between students and faculty with higher-order learning activities, such as problem-solving during the synchronous component of the course. Scheiderer (2021) reinforces the previous statement where online synchronous learning goes beyond a live video lecture or instructor-led discussion. Often, students contribute in the classroom by leading class discussions or sharing their own presentations.

Another learning method option that warrants further exploration is the concept of multi-access learning. Multi-access learning is a framework that enables face-to-face students to engage with remote or online students in the same course (Irvine, Code, & Richard, 2013). The principle of the multi-access framework is that it enables the student to choose a combination of delivery methods (face-to-face or online) to engage with the course content and participants (Irvine et al., 2013). See Table 3.

Table 3. Learner Multi-access Table.

COURSE DELIVERY		LEARNER ACCESS		
		DISTRIBUTED ONLINE	VIDEO CONFERENCE	FACE-TO-FACE
	F2F	✗	✗	✓
	BLENDED	✗	✗	✓
	ONLINE/BOL	✓	✗	✗
	MULTI-ACCESS	✓	✓	✓

The student participates in the course with faculty and students, who have also chosen their modality preference when engaging. Thus, Irvine's (2013) multi-access matrix above indicates how learners can access a course by the delivery modality. Further, the Multi-access framework is tiered into four preference segments to allow students to choose how they want to consume their academic content based on location and delivery modality. See Figure 1. :

Tier 1 Access: Face to Face [Student synchronously learning in a brick-and-mortar environment] Tier 1 can also be combined with the other three tiers.

Tier 2 Access: Synchronous Online [Student is online but can synchronously join the brick-and-mortar students and faculty virtually through a webcam]. A student can share his content and ideas. Tier 2 encompasses two tiers of delivery.

Tier 3 Access: Asynchronous Online [Students access the course on their own time]. A significant feature of Tier 3 is the ability for students to access archived content when they cannot attend synchronous sessions. Tier 3 has many opportunities course designers and faculty can explore, such as overlapping different tiers to make the asynchronous course more engaging between participants.

Tier 4 Multi-Access: Open Learning and the MOOC [Student has access and enrolls in global noncredit courses]. One innovative idea to consider is the "fishbowl" design, where learner discourse is observed by surrounding open learners through live streams, breakout rooms, text chat, and online platforms. (Irvine et al., 2013, p. 177)
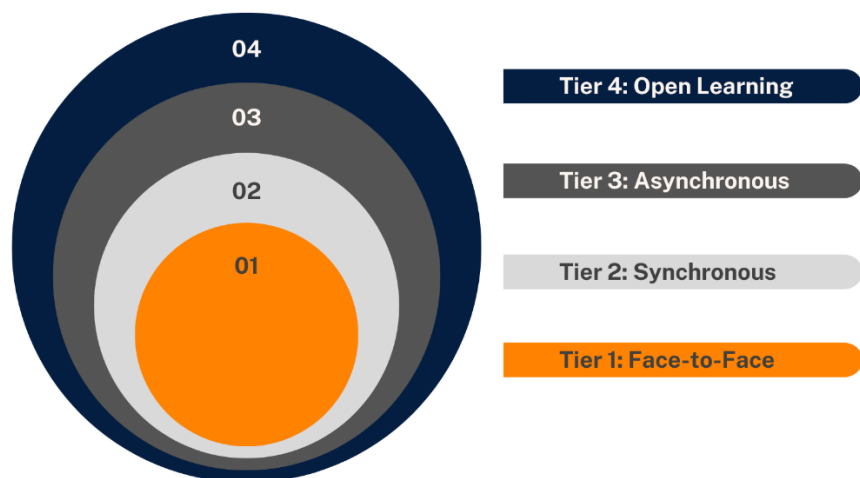
Figure 1. Various combinations of face-to-face and online delivery options.

A multi-access model is a viable option for higher education institutions and 21st-century faculty due to the varied options available to provide and deliver academic content (Irvine et al., 2013). The multi-access model is focused on student choice and preference, thus potentially increasing enrollments by exploiting the different tiers of access (Irvine et al., 2013). Amid the second year of the pandemic, education's initial reactive mode to transition all course content to a purely online platform is now in the past. Hence, what are the lessons learned from the first year as students return to the classroom? Is it possible to inject the "digital DNA" from the past year into the brick-and-mortar delivery model and redesign existing academic programs using the multi-access model (Sawhney, 2021)?

The Hybrid-Flexible course design has elements of the multi-access model. However, the HyFlex model challenges faculty members to pre-design their learning exercises for both online and in-class delivery for the entire course duration (Beatty, 2019). This format allows faculty to pilot fully online teaching while maintaining face-to-face physical and virtual student

interactions. HyFlex enables students the flexibility to attend courses in class or online without missing any critical information while providing them the agency to control their engagement with the course content. The HyFlex model has significant benefits for students in terms of access to coursework. However, the faculty member must invest substantial time on the front end to create a course that "supports multiple and simultaneous modes of student participation" (Beatty, 2019, p.26).

Therefore, established brick-and-mortar academic institutions will have to invest resources to redesign their portfolio of programs and delivery methods (*What Lies Beyond*, n.d.) to remain sustainable. Zoom fatigue is real, and all academic stakeholders have experienced it. (Bailenson, 2021). However, online conferencing and the online platform have also provided significant benefits to the education sector. Zoom features include online breakout rooms and virtual social events (speed networking). The technology can also deliberately connect students or conference participants with people they typically would not associate with, based on their professional roles and industry.

Similarly, faculty can reimagine the delivery method with a camera and microphone to produce a TV show with many learning activities and delivery models embedded within the course (*What Lies Beyond*, n.d.) (See Table 4.). One option is for faculty to meticulously program every minute of their 90-minute course with bite-size videos, presentations, lectures, and breakout rooms. These mini-modules allow students to learn from different modalities in the same course session. This approach is methodical and deliberative, utilizing various teaching activities to increase interaction and engagement between faculty members and students. Table 4 below indicates how faculty can break down each class session into mini-modules of learning.

Table 4. REDESIGN: FROM LEGACY PROGRAMS TO HYBRID EXPERIENCES

REDESIGN: FROM LEGACY PROGRAMS TO HYBRID EXPERIENCES

TIME		MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
	At least two weeks prior - Register - Download advance materials - Add all Zoom meetings to Outlook calendar	Week 1, Day 1	Week 1, Day 2	Week 1, Day 3	Week 1, Day 4	Week 1, Day 5	Week 1, Day 5
MORNING		Welcome Engagement - Purple Hug / Program Orientation	Opening Engagement + Reflections	Opening Engagement + Reflections	Opening Engagement + Reflections	Opening Engagement + Reflections	Opening Engagement + Red Thread
MORNING	- Get to know the team	Leadership sessions in a VUCA World	The Wisdom of Less	Valuing Business Strategy	Strategic Decisions in Operations	Resurgence: Four Stages of Market-Focused Reinvention	Creativity & Innovation in Teams
BREAK	N/A	15 min	15 min	15 min	15 min	15 min	15 min
LATE MORNING	- Submit 30sec intro videos for Daily Spotlight in Course Site - Take Pre-Survey - Sumit Pre-work for design project	Leadership sessions in a VUCA World	The Wisdom of Less	Valuing Business Strategy	Strategic Decisions in Operations	Resurgence: Four Stages of Market-Focused Reinvention	Creativity & Innovation in Teams
BREAK		10 min	10 min	10 min	10 min	10 min	10 min
		Leadership sessions in a VUCA World	The Wisdom of Less	Valuing Business Strategy	Strategic Decisions in Operations	Resurgence: Four Stages of Market-Focused Reinvention	Creativity & Innovation in Teams
BREAK		N/A	10 min	10 min	10 min	10 min	10 min
END OF DAY ENGAGEMENT/ DELIVERABLE	Attend Virtual program Onboarding with Program Team	Day 1 Debrief Interactive Engagement / Team Office Hour	Micro Learning: Designing your Own Competitor	Activity 1 for Micro Learning	Activity 1 for Micro Learning / Team Office Hour	Activity 1 for Micro Learning / Team Office Hour	Project Debrief / Evaluation / Program Closing Engagement

Faculty who invest time on the front end to create these types of engagements may differentiate themselves from their colleagues. As Langen (2012) indicates, program success is inextricably tied to the interaction between students and faculty.

Conversely, faculty who explore these different teaching modalities must be aware of the inherent tension these new technologies bring into a classroom's social and physical space (Lim, Lee & Hung, 2008; Fairchild et al., 2013). The tension derives from the faculty's willingness or unwillingness to integrate new technology into their courses with their existing skillset and tenets of pedagogy (Russel & Schneiderheinze, 2005) in either a physical or virtual space. Moreover, failure to adapt new technology and its delivery modalities can raise questions about academic programs' sustainability and relevance in the marketplace. Accordingly, in the following Sustainability/Market Forces section, we explore the marketplace and its existing offerings.

SUSTAINABILITY/MARKET FORCES

Early online adopters (University of Phoenix) rapidly expanded to a worldwide platform, even with the stigma of "less value" than a brick-and-mortar education (Goralski & Falk, 2017). Shea (2002), as cited by Goralski & Falk (2017), stated, "In 2002, the University of Phoenix Online had enrollment in the baccalaureate and graduate degree programs of approximately 50,000, indicating an increase of 70% from the previous year" (p. 271). However, McKenzie (2018) indicated, "The University of Phoenix's enrollment is plummeting while Western Governors and Southern New Hampshire near 100,000 students" (p.1). One reason for the UOP's plummet is due to spending millions of dollars on technology that was never utilized (McKenzie, 2018). Western Governors attribute their growth to referrals from friends and family, adding 80 to 100 new employees monthly; many new employees are faculty members (McKenzie, 2018).

In contrast, Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) targets the non-traditional learner, typically the 37 million adults who have some college education but have yet to earn a degree. McKenzie (2018) adds that SNHU is working on expanding its learners' pool and creating partnerships with community colleges and high schools while providing access to refugees and DACA recipients. Clearly, these universities have significant differences regarding admission from state-funded academic institutions. However, these institutions warrant exploration as higher education's teaching and learning landscapes continue to change. These universities offer students applicable skill sets with added flexibility without the traditional university brand name.

The previous examples dealt with leveraging emerging or existing technology to provide academic content to anyone worldwide. Alternatively, Klein-Collins and Travers (2020) also

focus on the future of education through the human element. Klein-Collins and Travers (2020) assert that "no longer is it enough for higher education to create and disseminate knowledge" (p. 2).

The new goal is to prepare students for an ever-changing marketplace. To do this, Klein-Collins and Travers (2020) employ the concept of Learning Recognition. Learning Recognition assesses the experiential value acquired through learning outside formal educational institutions and set by learner competency, learning assessments, credit by exams, and other evaluations based on life experience. Moreover, these credentials can be utilized for formal academic credentials (Klein-Collins & Travers, 2020).

Similarly, Doyle and Somers (1980) reference the critics' concerns over the impression that experiential learning is likened to selling credit. This concept is not new, as Doyle and Somers (1980) indicated over 40 years ago that "the experiential learning movement has gained considerable momentum over the past decade" (p. 648). Moreover, Doyle and Somers (1980) suggest that "learning from experience lacks the theoretical underpinnings of basic knowledge of a particular discipline" (p. 648). Further, individuals who have acquired significant experiential learning credits may find themselves in a difficult situation as they work through more advanced coursework. Interestingly enough, Doyle and Somers' (1980) highlight a study conducted at Central Michigan University to test the validity of academic credit for life experience. The study results indicated that "there is no difference between students who earn a portion of their academic credit through experiential learning and students who earn all of their credit in a classroom" (p. 648).

Thus, if the Learning Recognition concept has withstood the test of time, it behooves traditional academic institutions to further explore the features and benefits of such concepts.

Further, Klein-Collins and Travers (2020) address the disruption by indicating the significant contrast between today's and the future workforce and the skills needed to compete in a rapidly changing world. Citing McGowan and Shipley (2020), Klein-Collins and Travers (2020) note, "Where we once saw the future of work unfolding over the years, we now believe that with coronavirus as an accelerant, everything we have predicted about the future of work will unfold in months" (p.3).

Klein-Collins and Travers (2020) envision the future of work as a learning ecosystem where individuals easily transition from work and learning. Thus, providing individuals the ability to change their careers many times over. Based on the literature, the Learning Recognition concept seems like a viable option for academic institutions to consider due to technology's ubiquitous nature and the ever-changing environment in the world of work (Klein-Collins & Travers, 2020). Higher education must catalyze the creation and certification of a new credentialing system to capture the extra-institutional learning from students' lives to cast a wider net for student enrollment.

For example, in 2012, online learning platform Coursera co-founder Daphne Koller indicated that her one-year-old company had no intention of offering degrees (Adams, 2012). However, fast forward to 2021, Coursera has partnered with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and several other state universities (Adams, 2012). They now offer a fully online MBA for $22,104.

Notwithstanding, one institution provides its brick-and-mortar MBA for $21,424. Both of these universities are accredited by the AACSB (Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), and despite the differences in delivery modality, they are both competitively priced. Further, revisiting the experiential learning credit argument, the University of Washington has begun to

offer credit for Coursera coursework for an additional fee with added coursework from the faculty member (Adams, 2012).

State-funded brick-and-mortar universities have weathered the pandemic, and some have retained their students. However, enrollment for future semesters may look completely different if students look elsewhere for added flexibility to earn their degree. The brick-and-mortar modality may be too constricting for current and future students. Thus, acquiring that flexibility will become paramount to students (Akyıldız, 2020). Therefore, exploring the delivery models described and looking beyond the binary approach of brick-and-mortar or fully online learning delivery is imperative to remain relevant and sustainable in a post-COVID world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The final element of this literature review explores how the Sensemaking theoretical framework will support the phenomenological approach in the research and serve as the underpinning for understanding how faculty in the institution made sense of their experiences, roles, lessons learned, and contribution to the MBA program during, and after the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

SENSE-MAKING

Maitlis and Christianson (2014) describe sense-making as a "process to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some way violate expectations" (p. 1). Brown, Stacy, and Nandhakumar (2008) delve deeper and describe Sensemaking as a process of organizing by "using the technology of language-processes of labeling and categorizing, for instance- to identify, regularize and routinize memories into plausible explanations, and indeed whole narratives" (p. 1055).

Further, Dervin (1998) reinforces how assumptions are embedded in the sense-making framework, as humans assume the nature of reality, information, and knowledge. Accordingly, sense-making makes the inference that people operate between states of certainty and uncertainty by using ontological and epistemological assumptions to identify "certainty, simple patterns, and order" (Naumer et al., 2008, p. 3). Conversely, these same assumptions can identify uncertainty, complications, and confusion in people's perceptions of a situation (Naumer et al., 2008).

Therefore, the sense-making framework disciplines the discord between complexity and normalization in unknown situations (Dervin, 1998). Moreover, sense-making lies within humans' need to make sense of reality in an often incongruent and "gappy world" (Naumer et al., 2008, p. 3). The sense-making moment occurs when a gap is identified between a context-laden situation and the situation's outcome. Naumer et al. (2008) offer that sense-making allows bridges to be constructed by people in unfamiliar situations who want to articulate what they are experiencing while moving through time and space. These bridges fill the gaps and connect particular situations with outcomes using "ideas, thoughts, emotions, feelings, hunches, and memories" (Naumer et al., 2008).

Similarly, Dervin's (1998) foundational sense-making principles include "time, space, movement, gap, step-taking, situation, bridge, outcome" (p.39). By leveraging the elements below, questions can be crafted to reveal a person's perception, gaps, bridges, and outcomes regarding a situation.
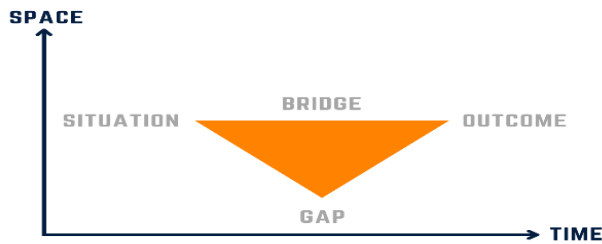
Figure 2. Bridging the Gaps between Situation and Outcome

Further, Naumer et al. (2008) provide questions based on their sense-making experience construct. These questions will help bridge the gaps between a situation and an outcome while serving as signposts in crafting the research queries for the study. (See Figure 2)

Situation
1. What issue were you dealing with?
2. What led you to confront this issue?
3. What did you hope to achieve?

Gaps

4. What was confusing about this situation?
5. What prevented you from better understanding the situation?

Bridges

6. What answers better helped you understand the issue?
7. What ideas or conclusions came to your mind?

Alternatively, Dervin (1998) looks deeper into the construction of questions through the Sense-making questioning method. Dervin (1998) indicates that Sense-making questioning minimizes nouns in the query process and asks questions such as: "What happened that brought you here? What question are you trying to answer? What help would you like? If I was able to help what would you do with it?" (p. 44). These questions allow the participant to provide deeper and richer descriptions of the help they are requesting and hindrances they are experiencing in

the time-space movement while offering them the agency to ask for support if resources were available (Dervin, 1998).

Dervin's (1998) Sense-making questions are markedly different from Naumer et al.'s (2008) questions: "What helped? What hindered? What are the barriers? What do you conclude? What emotions/feelings relate? What would help? What things need to be discussed here that are not being discussed? Whose voice needs to be heard that is not being heard?" (p.44).

Dervin (1998) identifies several instances where the Sense-making questioning method was applied in libraries between the library reference desk and the user. For example, librarians are trained to ask noun-based questions:

User "Do you have any books on Renaissance Painters?"

Librarian: "Yes, we do. Do you have a particular painter in mind or a group of painters?

Do you want copies of art or biography? Do you want art in color or black and white?"

(p.44).

These noun-based questions have an embedded transactional quality that lacks context as to why the user is there. Further, Dervin (1998) indicates that reference librarians who employed the Sense-making questioning approach insist that their exchanges with users have become "more efficient and more effective" (p. 44). Dervin (1998) also demonstrates that sense-making questioning can also be utilized in groups and academic courses.

In another example, various representatives of an organization were tasked to create their first intranet. Their meetings consisted of each participant speaking uninterrupted for a certain amount of time. The rest kept a dialog sheet with things they agreed with, disagreed with, and things they found helpful. The representatives were assigned to connect their answers to their own life and work environments. Once again, representatives were given agency to describe

what worked well for them and what hindered them from asking and answering the following question: if I could have my druthers, this is what I would want. Dervin (1998) noted that the representatives' initial hostility toward one another dissipated by the end of the day as they devised strategies to help each other. Dervin (1998) concludes this example by specifying that "the day's proceedings – both written and taped – were collated and used as a basis for system design" (p. 43). Dervin's (1998) example fortifies the importance of asking questions that will provoke the respondents to answer analogically and take action instead of in a reasoned linear fashion, thus, shoring Naumer et al. (2008) assertion of focusing on "processes and verbs rather than descriptors and nouns" (p. 3).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

Phenomenology is defined as exploring the essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experienced it, followed by questions of "what they experienced and how they experienced it" (Neubauer, Witkcop, & Varplo, 1970, p.91). The philosophical origins of phenomenology are traced to Edmund Husserl, who believed phenomenology is the essence of consciousness that defines the intentionality to find meaning in a lived experience within a particular phenomenon (1970).

The phenomenological approach is best aligned with studying faculty's rare and unique lived experiences teaching in an MBA program in Southwest Texas during the initial onset and current situation of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. Husserl (1970) believed the only way to extricate the meaning of lived in experiences was through one-on-one conversations between the researcher and the participants of a study. Therefore, to garner such understanding, the following technique was used for the study: semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to provide faculty a platform to provide a rich narrative of their Sensemaking experience. This approach allowed me to listen, interact, and observe the faculty's lived experiences as MBA program educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wojnar and Swanson (2007) indicate that it is essential to note that there are two features embedded in phenomenology: the descriptive and interpretive approaches to inquiry. Descriptive phenomenology emphasizes the description of universal essences without prior experiential knowledge and bias. In contrast, interpretive phenomenology attempts to understand the phenomena primarily through the concept of context, culture, practice, and language through

past experiences. As such, phenomenology has many facets and nuances, and its utilitarian nature is employed to research many industry sectors.

However, for the purpose of this study, I will primarily use the interpretive phenomenological approach. Interpretive phenomenology emphasizes that individuals cannot remove themselves from the context that gives meaning to their experiences (Heidegger, 1962). Further, Wojnar and Swanson (2007) indicate that an interpretive phenomenology foundation stems from a place where the "researcher and the participants come to the investigation with forestructures of understanding shaped by their respective backgrounds" (p. 175). Thus, by utilizing a central tenet of the interpretive phenomenological approach, I was able to collect meaningful insight into how the pandemic impacted the MBA faculty's emotions and perceptions as educators when they transitioned from face-to-face teaching to online teaching during the disruptive event. As such, the unique nature of the COVID-19 pandemic provided rich and deep insight into how faculty initially reacted, dealt with, and ultimately adapted to the challenges embedded in the health crisis from March 2020 to December 2021.

However, elements of the descriptive approach invariably surfaced within the data analysis since I was not a faculty member, and I wanted to understand what the faculty members experienced during the disruptive lived event without any preconceived notions. Further, I tried my best to free my bias as an administrator as I listened to the faculty's unique experiences during the disruptive lived event that both the faculty members and I both shared simultaneously.

PARTICIPANTS

Prospective participants consisted of 20 faculty members invited to participate in the study through an email invitation. The email invitation identified me and my role, the study's objective, and the study's relation to their experience teaching in the MBA program during a

specific time frame (Lin, 1976). Faculty members who met the following criteria were eligible

for participation: 1) taught in the MBA program during the 2019-2020 academic school year; and

2) taught in the MBA program during the 2020-2021 academic school year

The participants consisted of ten male and four female faculty members. Table 5

indicates that MBA faculty had over 300 years of overall teaching experience, with 187 years of

teaching experience at the University of Texas at El Paso. Only three participants had prior

experience teaching in an online environment.

Table 5. MBA Faculty Teaching Experience

Faculty Member #	Teaching Experience (years)	Teaching at UTEP (years)	Teaching online prior pandemic (years)	Gender
1	36	14	6	M
2	11	11	0	M
3	14	9	0	F
4	18	6	0	M
5	40.5	10.5	0	M
6	11	3	0	M
7	34	26	0	M
8	27	13	0	M
9	20	20	2	M
10	18	13	0	M
11	20	17	0	F
12	24	20.5	1	M
13	22	18	0	F
14	8	6	0	F
Total	**303.5**	**187**	**9**	**F-4/M-10**

Setting

The University of Texas at El Paso sits on the U.S.-Mexico border in the El Paso-Ciudad

Juárez binational region of more than two million people. UTEP's R1 designation puts it in the

top 5% of research colleges and universities nationally at The University of Texas at El Paso.

(n.d.) : *Welcome to The University of Texas at El Paso* (http://catalog.utep.edu/university/).

UTEP's student body is 84% Hispanic and enrolls over 24,000 students in 169 bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs in 10 colleges and schools The University of Texas at El Paso. (n.d) *About UTEP* (https://www.utep.edu/about/?utep-home).

The UTEP Graduate Business Center is the brick-and-mortar facility where faculty taught their face-to-face MBA courses in the following formats: Full-Time MBA, Accelerated MBA, and Executive MBA. In March 2020, all academic programs transitioned operations and teaching from purely brick-and-mortar delivery to an online model.

Data Collection

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 14 faculty members who self-selected to participate. I interviewed 14 faculty members (10 male and four female) from the original sample of 20 who met the academic teaching time frame criteria mentioned above and had a history of teaching experience in the MBA program. The 14-faculty member sample size sufficed to acquire saturation (Doyle, 2006; Graham, 2019). Saturation typically occurs during the first 12 participants as responses to the queries become superfluous (Graham, 2019; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

During the interview process, I took what Lin (1976) considers the role of "participant as observer" (p. 207). The participant-as-observer role allowed me to reveal my true identity to the participants throughout the interviews as I asked them to share their experiences of how they began to make sense of their personal and professional reality during the early and current stages of the pandemic.

Mills, Thurlow, and Mills (2010) note that sense-making occurs when routines and practices are disrupted by uncertainty through a particular event. Through this interpretive phenomenological inquiry, the COVID-19 pandemic was the specific event that all MBA faculty

encountered simultaneously. Each MBA faculty member's previous experience provided insight into how they internalized the unknown and unexpected implications of the pandemic and created frameworks for their new world, even with limited information on how to move forward. Curated questions explored participants' initial reactions, reflections, and resourcefulness toward the pandemic, their role, and their contribution to the institution. Thus, creating insight into new teaching approaches that transformed their concept of pedagogy and their contribution to the MBA program through innovation and technology.

The time frame for the recorded interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes during the Spring 2022 semester through the Microsoft Teams virtual conference platform. The interviews were conducted in English. The interview protocol consisted of 16 questions aimed at MBA Program faculty and their interpretation of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on their personal lives, teaching roles, and contributions to the institution.

Moreover, I examined how the utilization of technology impacted the faculty's role in teaching and learning within the MBA program (Howcroft & Trauth, 2005). Further, I examined how MBA faculty created new and novel ways to deliver academic content while emphasizing the permanence of their lessons from the pandemic. Interview questions were crafted with the help of Naumer et al. (2008) approach to Sensemaking. This approach was used to elicit action-based answers from faculty that covered certain fundamental areas of the COVID-19 event and their reactions to it, such as:

- What COVID-19 pandemic issues have personally impacted you?

- What COVID-19 pandemic issues have professionally impacted you?

- How did you feel about your role at the onset of the pandemic?

- What challenges did you immediately identify at the onset of the pandemic? How did you address them?

- Were you able to fulfill your responsibilities by leveraging technology before the pandemic, during the pandemic, and now?

- What personal and professional lessons from 2020-2021 will endure in the MBA program beyond the pandemic?

These questions provided a platform for the MBA faculty to tell their individual stories from their perspective (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). According to Jonasson and Hernandez-Serrano (2002), these narratives "are the oldest and most natural form of sense-making"(pg. 66). The description of their experiences was an essential component of the study. I wanted to explore how MBA program faculty reconciled and made sense of the world and their place in it with the implications of a worldwide pandemic. Further, interview questions were designed to allow the MBA Faculty to recollect and share their actions during the unprecedented event by intentionally eliciting verb-based answers about how they implemented the lessons learned from their online delivery training into their classrooms (Dervin, 1998; Naumer et al., 2008).

Additionally, related questions regarding leveraging new teaching methodologies and technological resources such as hardware (iPad, interactive displays, cameras, microphones) and software (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard) provided insight into creating new systems and processes within their respective teaching and learning roles and responsibilities. I also asked faculty if they explored and discovered ways to leverage technology to institutionalize their innovations into the MBA program.

DATA ANALYSIS

Glesne's (2011) Thematic Analysis framework aligned well with the interpretive phenomenological approach and interview protocol. The thematic analysis framework allowed me to identify themes and patterns embedded in the participant's answers to the specified questions. Participants' responses were organized in a manner that "reflects the situation and meanings of the respondent and provides answers to our prior research questions" (Lin, Burt, & Vaughn, 1976, p. 10). Thus, assigning a particular code to words and expressions helped organize and conceptualize the data collected during the interviews (Lichtman, 2013). Elements of similarity helped to group the data into coded categories to identify the patterns and relationships within the data collected (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Moreover, a specific codebook created early in the data collection process facilitated the coding method and drew attention to the evolution and structure of the interpretive phenomenological methodology (Glesne, 2011). As such, the coding process had a dual purpose. The first was to organize the collected data, and the second served as a starting point to look for patterns, make comparisons, produce explanations, and build models (Glesne, 2011). Further, each participant was assigned a pseudonym and particular code indicating their inclination or aversion to technology and their thoughts on innovation. Further, these specific codes in the findings identified themes and patterns from the broad-based to a granular level when mining the data collected (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). This data provided information regarding how the MBA program faculty identified lessons learned as they made sense of their role and leveraged technology in their role, among other key findings.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

The validity, reliability, and ethics components served as the foundation of the research project (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity deals with how closely aligned the research findings are with real life. However, according to Maxwell (2013), reality can never be captured or proven, followed by his notion that validity is relative to the interviewee's construction of reality.

Therefore, to increase trustworthiness within the study, I listened to and transcribed the participant's responses, then compared responses and cross-checked my findings with each participant's viewpoint on integrating technology within their respective roles. I also asked them to identify institutional resources, such as new hardware, software, systems, and strategies they learned or created during the pandemic. These strategies were not difficult to employ due to my relationships with the interview participants.

Reliability of research refers to the replication of the findings. In qualitative research, the crux of this notion is not in replicating the findings but in the alignment between the research findings and the data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The audit trail served as a chronological and systematic resource for learning how a study is conducted and its findings are analyzed (Bowen, 2007). The phenomenological approach focused on each interviewee's exact words regarding the COVID-19 phenomenon and their respective experience living through the pandemic as faculty members in the MBA program (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Deliberately including precise and selected excerpts from the participant interviews into the narrative provided rich detail and context of their experiences during the pandemic (Glesne, 2011).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicate that the ethical stance of the researcher is inextricably tied to the validity and reliability of the study being conducted. Therefore, being aware that ethical issues may have existed and surfaced during the interview process prepared

me to employ strategies to mitigate that risk while protecting myself and the interviewee by sharing working drafts throughout the research process (Glesne, 2011).

As an employee of the academic institution, I understand that I must hold my ethics and integrity in the highest regard due to my role and the institution I represent. Therefore, ensuring the interview participants that their responses will not be detrimental to their personal and professional lives is paramount in achieving credibility and trust between the participant and me. Finally, by employing the following four questions from Glesne (2011, p. 210), my interpretation of the interviewee's responses were tempered with reflection and perspective regarding my position in the institution:

1. What do you notice?

2. Why do you notice what you notice?

3. How can you interpret what you notice?

4. How can you know that your interpretation is the "right" one?

POSITIONALITY

I currently serve as Director of MBA Programs for the institution where the research for the phenomenological inquiry was gathered. Therefore, I realized my strengths and biases were embedded in my research, based on past experiences, skillset, and background as an administrator and doctoral student during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conversely, my access to the MBA faculty and administrators to gain their trust was reached relatively quickly based on personal and professional interactions with them for over a decade. Due to my role and responsibilities in the MBA program, I witnessed firsthand how faculty, students, and administration transitioned and adjusted to the virtual environment by leveraging technology to resume institutional operations and instruction. Nevertheless, I

analyzed my own role and responsibilities and how they changed as an administrator throughout the pandemic. I examined my research findings not from an administrator's lens but from a researcher's perspective and took a holistic view of the MBA program.

Moreover, I realized the inherent power mechanism in the Director of MBA Programs role. Due to ten years of experience as an administrator of an academic program, I was fully aware of the influence I carried on students, faculty, and staff in both professional and personal capacities, as well as in the research I was conducting (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Further, my professional experience communicating with MBA program faculty regarding academic program systems and processes gave me insight into identifying patterns and approaches for problem-solving (Solem, 2003). However, this professional experience was tempered by transforming from an administrator to a researcher for this phenomenological inquiry.

LIMITATIONS

I was fully aware of the inherent limitations that could affect the outcome of this interpretive phenomenological inquiry. First, the educational landscape has moved from isolation to vaccination, and the directive from senior leadership in the MBA program was that all classes were be delivered face-to-face starting in the Fall of 2021. Therefore, any innovation and lessons learned regarding program operations, teaching delivery, and learning outcomes may regress to a pre-pandemic business-as-usual paradigm. Time continues to pass, and memory is fallible. Therefore, faculty may not be interested in reliving certain aspects of the pandemic personally and professionally. More importantly, asking the MBA program faculty how they made sense of and experienced the pandemic could have been intrusive based on delicate elements of mental health, survival, and loss of life—coupled with more questions about their continued contribution to the institution.

35

As an administrator in the MBA program where the research was conducted, I knew that some faculty may not have been comfortable sharing their teaching practices and thoughts on utilizing technology to deliver their academic content. Second, other faculty/administrators in the MBA program may have felt intimidated or annoyed by the research questions as they returned to work in a brick-and-mortar environment when their responsibilities were getting done virtually.

With the realization that the academic institution continued to operate in an uncertain environment, faculty and administrators may have felt obsolescent. They may not have wanted to share what they had learned to ensure their contribution and role remained in their acumen. Therefore, I was responsible for safeguarding their anonymity if they felt compelled to address these feelings.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings from 14 MBA program faculty members who chose to share their personal and professional stories as the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded and eventually shifted from isolation to vaccination. During the interviews, I empathized with faculty as they shared their stories of physical and mental hardship, the loss of loved ones, and the uncomfortable learning curve they experienced when transitioning their teaching style from face-to-face to online delivery. Conversely, the interviews also provided hope and a newfound optimism as faculty began reflecting on their roles, craft, and the future by exploring and experimenting with technology and learning new methods to reconnect with students and deliver their academic content differently. I am humbled and grateful for each faculty member's candor and transparency during our conversations. Therefore, participant descriptors will not be utilized in the findings to uphold the highest standard of confidentiality.

This chapter is organized into the following four cascading yet intersecting themes: (1) Making Sense of it All; (2) The Learning Curve; (3) The Disruption of the Communication Structure and Unexpected Connections; and (4) Lessons Learned and Moving Forward.

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

During the initial phase of COVID-19, faculty tried to make sense of the pandemic based on their personal and professional situation. The participants in this study attempted to define the situation through prior experience and language to understand and create structure in their personal and professional lives during an unknowable event that created insurmountable stress and anxiety. As Faculty Member # 8 stated:

> Just like everybody else, it impacted me personally and professionally. Just like many
>
> people, we had to stay at home. We had to adapt and learn how to combine family and

work. I still have kids at home, so we had to find a way to make it work for all of us and

at the same time adapt my teaching to online. It changed the way I prepared for my

classes. It changed the way I delivered my classes. It changed the dynamics at home.

The pandemic's far-reaching disruption interrupted familial roles, professional responsibilities,

and living situations overnight. Faculty had no choice but to pivot and adapt to accommodate

their current living situations and meet their professional obligations. Further, the pandemic did

not offer any reference points or comparable experiences to refer to help faculty make sense of

the situation and allay the confusion. As Faculty Member #5 shared:

One of the problems everyone was having was that no one knew exactly what the disease

was, or what the situation was. It was changing so rapidly that we were getting news from

different sources, and it was changing almost daily.

In addition to the anxiety of an unknown situation, COVID-19's fatality rate further complicated

the situation, as Faculty #5 continued sharing his thoughts regarding his teaching responsibilities

during the early days of the pandemic by evading the virus and striving to remain healthy from a

physical and mental standpoint, despite not having concrete evidence or assurances of what they

were dealing with:

We were truly afraid that we would get COVID. It was an unknown, a very unknown

thing at the time. We really did not know what would happen if we got COVID. So you

did not just fear for how you taught or whether you were going to do a good job, but you

were also afraid about your personal health, safety, emotional stability…

As the fear of the unknown health ramifications persisted from days to weeks to months, it drove

other participants to reevaluate their daily activities and explore methods to cope with the raw

lived experience of the situation by focusing only on the things they could control, such as

mental and physical health. As Faculty #10 shared his experience:

> I was simply seeking coping strategies and then started basically maintaining. I would try to
> exercise outdoors too. I knew being outdoors was beneficial, so I went for walks and bike rides
> around my house to feel the fresh air. I was in a permanent state of stress, and I tried to combat
> that with good nutrition, exercise, and meditation. I actually started meditating during the
> pandemic.

However, not all faculty had the flexibility and opportunity for mobility. For example, Faculty

Member #4 faced preexisting health conditions, aging parents, having their own kids in school,

differing narratives regarding vaccination, and the challenge of maintaining social relationships.

> I am somewhat immunocompromised and have many conditions that can make it bad. So
> it was a little bit frightening at first. My parents are also older, and I have kids in school.
> Even now, I am careful; my father, for example, is on medications because we do not
> know what is wrong with him, and he is immunocompromised. So, I wear my mask all
> the time, even now, in case I need to go and help him. I guess it caused a lot of changes in
> our family situation, my kids, and my interactions with others. I am also part of a
> religious community, and it has been interesting because they have very diverse views
> about vaccinations and masks and how serious this is or not serious. It is also that way in
> my family situation, so you know it has been stressful:

In addition to faculty striving to process the virus's physical, mental, and familial effects,

significant concern regarding isolation began to surface. With travel restrictions firmly in place,

Faculty Member #13, for example, described her estrangement from family as she could not visit

her parents abroad or celebrate significant milestones during the early isolation phase of the pandemic:

> I have not been able to visit my family [abroad] with all the restrictions that started. The last time I visited my family was in the summer of 2019, and I missed my mother's 80th birthday celebration.

Consequently, because of the travel restrictions and no initial vaccination in sight, Faculty Member #11 shared how she could not be at the bedside of a beloved family member who passed away abroad from the disease: "On a personal and deep level, my mother got COVID on Day 1; on Day 10, she passed away."

> Dealing with the death of a loved one is hard enough without the added anxiety of continually facing an unknown situation. Such painful experiences impacted faculty on a visceral level and initially left them with a diminutive capacity to move forward and adopt a business-as-usual attitude. Further, the paralyzing effects of the pandemic reduced Faculty Member #3's capacity to act and develop meaning from the situation, thus mentally incapacitating the execution of routine tasks:

> I, and probably many people, were in denial at the beginning. I thought that it would not be as big as it was. Then once we were in the midst of it, it was like, oh, is this ever going to end? So, for me, it was hard mentally to want to do something, anything, like turn on my computer.

Moreover, the uncertainty of the situation extended to the university as the institution's leadership pondered and then enacted the directive to initially send staff and faculty home to mitigate the risks of spreading the disease. Faculty Member #8 explained the confusion regarding the utilization of his office on campus and his decision to transition their workspace to their home, ultimately creating a workplace to meet their professional obligations and teaching responsibilities:

> Something interesting happened. I did not know if we could actually come to the office and work

from the office. So, in the beginning, there was also a lot of uncertainty about the location I was

going to use for my job. I was actually commuting and coming to campus. Then we were told

that nobody could come to campus. Then we were told we could come to campus, but we needed

to report when we were on campus. So I was coming in and not, and then eventually, I just

decided to move to my home, so I took everything home, and that worked better.

While most faculty hurriedly relocated their office equipment to their homes to work remotely, some

faculty did not want to blur the lines between work and home obligations. In addition to their office

space, faculty considered the classroom their workspace to practice their craft while home served as

their personal refuge. Faculty member #5 shared how he managed his self-imposed demarcation of place

and space to maintain his faculty member identity while fending off the effects of isolation despite

working in a desolate brick-and-mortar facility.

I live alone, and my job was actually most of my life. It was my social life as well as my

work life. When COVID came along, and they closed campus to the students and

everybody. I pretty much went into the office every day. That is where I worked. I tried

to keep home and office separate. It got me out of the house, out of bed, and into work

mode. So I just went to work. Much of the time, I was one of maybe two or three people

in the building. Even though there were other people there, I did not see them. So I did

not really change much in terms of my pattern of working. What changed was who I

talked to, who I saw, and so on because nobody else was around.

With the majority of employees of the institution confined to their homes, Faculty member #7

quickly identified the impact isolation was causing and led mobilized communication efforts. By

creating support systems and engagement opportunities, he deliberately reconnected faculty

peers and newly hired faculty members to help them navigate their roles in the isolated
environment.

> We had many faculty members who did not have any family around. I felt those faculty members
> needed the most support because they did not have anybody to lean on. They could not see their
> colleagues at the office or school and could not talk to human beings face-to-face. So I tried to
> make it a habit to try to reach out to everybody at least once or twice a week and make sure that
> whatever issues they were facing, we would address those issues even with small talk. I asked
> them how they were doing, if they needed anything, and whether there was anything I could do
> for them. So, keeping communication open was very important.

Faculty Member #7's deliberate initiatives to reengage and relate with one another provided faculty with
sensible albeit virtual environments to share their experiences and reconnect personally and
professionally with their peers. These conversations reinforced the support and trust for one another
while mitigating any miscommunication and assumptions between themselves and the surrounding
stakeholders in the institution. As Faculty #5 shared:

> Well, one of the things I did with a few of my colleagues I would go out of my way to
> call them or zoom with them just so that we would touch base so that we were trying to
> keep up with the information that was coming from the university or the department or
> the college. If there were some message or something that came from an administrator,
> we would talk about things and try to get on the same page about our interpretation of
> things.

As the interaction between faculty increased, they began to share the same language regarding
their strategies and processes to support one another in the virtual classroom. These
conversations regarding their craft and role served them to begin to regain their identity and

agency as educators. Faculty Member #10 shared the questions faculty would ask each other to help make sense of the situation and to provide context to what they were learning and doing as educators during the isolation phase:

> I recall having these long conversations with my closest colleagues. Well, what are you doing? What is working? What is not working? We would share best practices.

As faculty continued sharing their firsthand experiences in the pandemic-laden environment, they also discussed and confronted the issues related to their identity, role, and the disconnect between their past experience and the new teaching and learning landscape. During the Spring 2020 semester, as the shutdown occurred, faculty realized they could only employ their existing skillset in the current situation. Hence, they did their best to complete the semester based on their prior teaching and learning experience. Faculty Member #8 explained the difficulty of aligning his past experiences to the pandemic environment and his attempt to link his past teaching preparation and existing skillset to deliver academic content. Questions regarding academic delivery models, student engagement, and course preparation were top of mind as he faced the balance of the 2020 academic year.

> Then after that semester, we also had some uncertainty for the next [Summer] semester. What are we going to do next? There were some mixed messages; at the time, we did not know if we were going to be online or going to be hybrid. We decided we were going to go online, and then the question when we went online was, Is it going to be asynchronous, or is it going be synchronous? That also created confusion. It is a different way to prepare a class asynchronous and a synchronous class, and it seemed that there was no uniform guidance on what we needed to do.

Conversely, after working through the initial anxiety and fear of the situation, Faculty Member #1 organized his thoughts and began leveraging his 36 years of experience as a scholar to reframe his

teaching and learning acumen. This exercise helped him move forward optimistically and find opportunities for what to do next.

> In the beginning, I felt overwhelmed, but then I changed my attitude and said, well, this is an opportunity to learn to grow in something that I have not done before. And that is usually what I discuss in my class, right? My classes are quantitative, and we always discuss continuous improvement opportunities. So after a few days of frustration and feeling overwhelmed from the big change, I started looking at this as an opportunity.

These optimistic paradigm shifts prompted many faculty to take action and begin the process of reconstructing their course content and delivery for their students. In The Learning Curve section, I provide an overview of how faculty began exploring and learning the technology to re-evaluate their teaching. This learning exercise helped them recalibrate their role and skillset during the pandemic's initial shock while they gradually transitioned their academic content to a virtual environment.

THE LEARNING CURVE

As faculty continued the process of reorganizing their personal lives, their professional obligations related to their teaching and learning acumen also experienced a transformation. Again, the isolation component prompted a significant change in the teaching and learning landscape requiring faculty to rethink what to teach and how to teach their content to their students. Their rethinking and reflection consisted of reviewing their courses and redesigning them from scratch for an online environment with the added challenge of ensuring students would learn in a new environment they did not sign up for. Despite having 18 years of teaching experience, Faculty Member #10 shared his course redesign experience as he pondered the learning curve and the work that came with it:

I did not just move my regular face-to-face teaching to Blackboard. We did that when we went on lockdown in the middle of the [Spring] semester. However, for the summer and afterward, when we went remote, I had to learn a lot of new stuff and reflect on redesigning my teaching. It was an immense amount of work—just the sheer amount of time it required….

Moreover, to continue their teaching and learning responsibilities, faculty were challenged to acquire and utilize cameras, microphones, speakers, and lighting, among other technological hardware, to aid in their online teaching and learning. Based on their existing skillset and familiarity with online teaching and learning, the faculty did their best to quickly transition their teaching from a face-to-face to a virtual environment, despite many faculty members not having the proper training to execute their teaching role in this new reality. Faculty Member# 7, for example, delved further into the challenges of acquiring the hardware to teach online while simultaneously learning the different modalities and nuances of how to deliver their content virtually:

Many faculty did not have the technology to do those kinds of things from home and tried to figure out how to get mikes and webcams and things like that. So, there was the technical side of doing things, plus the pedagogical part of teaching asynchronously online.

Moreover, to teach asynchronously, many faculty started at zero, and therefore, they sought the tools and training to communicate and deliver their course content to students in a virtual environment. Faculty Member #11, for example, reflected on her lack of online teaching and learning experience and what she did to remediate the gap when asked if she faced any challenges at the onset of the pandemic:

Yes, absolutely. My complete lack of skills to deal with that challenge. So, to tackle that deficit, that need, or that challenge, I got right into training. So, during the two weeks, we had. As you recall, in 2020, we had two weeks of spring break instead of one, and during those two weeks, there were several different trainings, and I took a few of them to get into the pace of the online environment. It was like learning a new language, learning to interact with students in a completely different way, and learning to interact with people generally at work in a different way.

Prompting the quick mobilization of the university's online teaching resources to address the faculty's skill gap reduced their anxiety about moving their course content to an online environment. However, the paradigm shift faculty experienced also magnified their uncertainty about what content they needed to curate from their existing library and how to present it to students through a virtual modality. Faculty Member #7, for example, explained the uncertainty of navigating the unknown waters of the pandemic while trying to categorize and understand the vocabulary associated with online learning and delivery:

There was no manual you could consult to tell you what to do in those situations because we had not faced it in the past. Nobody expected that we would go completely online and teach classes asynchronously from one day to the next. The first thing we tried to figure out was what does asynchronously really mean? How do we do that?

Conversely, some faculty did have previous experience using online tools in their classes, such as posting announcements and assigning homework in the institution's Learning Management System [Blackboard]. Faculty Member #6, for example, shared his past experience of leveraging the features of the Learning Management System to a certain extent without having to fully teach in an online environment during his eleven years of teaching.

For me, using online tools was not really new. I integrated most of my content and

outreach to students through Blackboard, so I had already adjusted portions of my class

to online. What I really had not done was online delivery.

As Faculty Member #11 previously mentioned, to address faculty's various online teaching

instructional gaps, the University quickly ramped up existing resources such as Creative Studios

and Teaching Online Academy to support faculty in structuring their online courses in the

Learning Management System-Blackboard. All faculty were required to attend the intensive one-

week-long Teaching Online Academy seminar to learn how to structure their content for their

courses and learn the basics of online teaching, learning, and engagement. The Blackboard

Institute was another week-long engagement that supported Faculty with creating their courses

and learning additional features embedded in Blackboard. Further, UTEP Edge and the Extended

University provided a mini-series of videos. With topics related to effective remote teaching and

learning and how to use the lockdown browser Respondus for use in the assessment portion of

the teaching. Even with eleven years of teaching experience, Faculty Member #2 took full

advantage of the internal and external opportunities to upskill their teaching, sharing a specific

resource sponsored by the university.

It is the Association of College and University Educators. There are several different

modules to go through. It is all structured, and it involves a lot. You watch a video, you

learn from the video, and you critique videos of teaching methodologies. I found it to be

very helpful, and I am starting to bring some of that stuff into the classroom. I am trying

to make the courses more interactive and less just sitting there and listening to me talk.

The internal and external teaching resources supported faculty during their transition to online

delivery. Faculty Member #7 was intent on motivating faculty and served as a champion to

47

explore this new reality with a willingness to test the new ways to transition their content to an

online delivery model despite the challenges of the learning curve:

> I was trying to motivate them, educate them to do certain things, and ensure that we
>
> maintained the high quality of our courses and provided great service to our students.
>
> How do you meet that challenge in an online environment? Everything was very new to
>
> all of us.

Even so, Faculty Member #5, who had over 40 years of teaching experience, defended his

decision to wait and see how things would develop due to his perception of technology's planned

and perceived obsolescence in the education space:

> Over time, I have gotten to the point where I tend to adopt some of this social media and
>
> all that stuff later. I know that it is going to change tomorrow, and so rather than
>
> investing a great deal of time and effort into building a course, I will wait until sort of the
>
> last adopter to do so.

For the majority of faculty or early adopters, one significant challenge faculty faced was creating

and implementing the video medium as part of their asynchronous and synchronous teaching and

learning process. Initially, many faculty balked at the idea of creating and posting their own

videos on the university's Learning Management System (Blackboard) based on their comfort

level, performance, and technical quality. Faculty Member #7, for example, shared his anxiety

regarding their self-induced expectation of creating aesthetically pleasing videos despite not

having the guidance and training to do so:

> We were not trained to teach asynchronously. We were not trained to record videos
>
> discussing issues with students; we had never done that previously. Many faculty
>
> members did not feel comfortable getting their lectures recorded and did not know what

the consequences of that might be. They did not have time to prepare the lectures and record them as professionally as possible, so quite a few felt embarrassed that they were putting together videos that they did not feel were up to the expected standards. So a major challenge was telling faculty members to put those videos out to their students and not to worry about how slick and professional they looked at the time.

However, as time passed, faculty overcame their trepidation about recording themselves and video production quality. They understood the education process needed to move forward. Hence, they took action and continued the process of learning by doing. Ultimately, faculty realized there were vital elements and nuances when delivering lecture material through the video medium, differences such as video duration between 60-90 minutes [class period] and five to ten-minute videos [concept-by-concept]. Faculty Member #6, for example, shared his thoughts on his newfound videography experience and how his constant refinement of the craft allowed him to create brief and precise course content videos for students:

> Those recorded videos in that very first pass were not the best, and I have gone back and remade them for my online classes that I have taught since then. Initially, I was recording larger form videos, so sometimes they would go for an entire chapter, like an hour-long or hour-and-thirty-minute video. I learned that it is not the best way to deliver the content to students. Instead, I focused on concept-by-concept videos, maybe five to ten-minute videos at most. I was still giving them the same amount of lecture material. It was just in a more digestible way.

Further, Faculty Member #3 reinforced Faculty Member #6's video time-limit assertion. At the same time, she shared her experience creating short videos to teach technical concepts in her quantitative-driven course. She reinforced her content while highlighting the benefits it provided

her students when they rewatched and practiced the concepts independently until they could understand and apply them.

> I learned how to make videos online for the classes, which was the single most helpful thing. It was probably the most useful seminar in terms of teaching because that little seminar taught me to communicate when I was not there with the students. So, I found that to be extremely helpful, especially in a more technical field where I could show them how to do something. One of the good things I took from that seminar is that you cannot sit down and virtually lecture and create an hour-and-a-half video. Nobody is going to sit through it and watch it, so it was about making videos of different processes. If I wanted to show them how to do something in Excel, I would just show that one thing. I would answer that one question I was focusing on. I would not do five questions in one video. I think having chunks of a video where people could go to things they struggled with, and then watch the video to see how to do it was helpful.

Faculty realized that presenting their students' short and precise videos of content provided both the flexibility and reinforcement to catalyze both quantitative and qualitative lessons in their courses. The tradeoff to creating these videos was the front-end time investment by faculty. Not every faculty member had this luxury, so due to time restraints, another strategy faculty employed was utilizing existing material from other virtual platforms to keep the education process moving forward. For example, Faculty Member #14 realized there was insufficient time and resources to create professional-looking videos, so she utilized anything they had on hand and curated existing content, such as YouTube videos. This approach kept the virtual discussion moving forward while buttressing their own existing content as the class shifted online.

If I had been given more time or sufficient time, I could have done a lot better. I could

have designed the course to be better fitted to the online platform, but it was very abrupt.

So I just had to do the best I could. It was quite challenging to put together the videos.

First of all, I had to find some quiet time. During the pandemic, my kids and spouse were

at home. Basically, I had to wait until the kids were asleep. So I put most of my videos

together in the evening when it was quiet.

In addition to the challenges of creating, curating, and posting their videos, Faculty went through

a crash course in learning how to fully utilize the Learning Management System technology to

help structure their online courses. Before COVID, Blackboard was used minimally in MBA

courses. However, since online teaching relies so heavily on the practical structure of a course,

faculty needed to thoroughly learn and apply many of the Blackboard features in this new reality

of teaching, learning, and assessment. Moreover, Faculty Member #2 offered how his investment

in learning the features of Blackboard facilitated the assessment component of specific content in

his course:

It was getting a handle on technology as much as anything. I was coming into Blackboard and

understanding how it worked and how it could also help in teaching. For example, using

assessments during the coursework, especially online. Blackboard offers a lot of flexibility on

how you want to administer an exam or if you want to put time limits on it. It was a new way

that assessments could be distributed. Students would complete the assessment online, and it

would come back to me, and there was no paperwork involved, especially during the pandemic.

I am not sure how we would have addressed that if we did not have that capability with

Blackboard.

Accordingly, isolated faculty continued to spend an inordinate amount of time taking online workshops,

physically garnering the video conferencing hardware, and learning new software to curate their content and restructure their existing courses. Faculty Member #8 described the increased investment of time needed in preparation for a course, including course redesign, student engagement, and assessment:

> The time that I spent on teaching preparation went up significantly. I had to readjust and redesign the course when we first went online. I had to make changes not only because of the policy on grading but also to eliminate some activities that I typically did face-to-face. I had to readjust. I had to create a new syllabus. I think that was more time-consuming. I had to learn how to use the software because, with my face-to-face courses, I did not use all the features that came with Blackboard for video conferencing, grading, and stuff like that. So I had to learn a lot. So I had to invest a lot of time learning and then building. One thing is to know what to do, and another is to do it. It takes a long time to prepare for an online class.

Incidentally, Faculty Member #1's increased investment in course preparation brought forth an unexpected personal awareness of pride in his teaching proficiency and the evergreen academic content utility from his newly created courses:

> Now, I am very proud of what I have because it is high-quality material, and now that I have returned to face-to-face, I also use that material, which is a great advantage because I can go further in my teaching.

Faculty member #3 delved further into the optimization and utility of well-crafted videos to not only reemphasize course content but also to address course housekeeping related to course material and content, thus preventing the inevitable surge of emails from students requesting clarification:

I still use the videos at the beginning of class to show students how to register for the book because you always tell them how to register for the book on the first day, and then you get five or six emails asking, well, how do I get the book? Even though I did it live in class. So, for stuff like that, I just automatically shoot videos now. So I would not call it a paradigm shift, but I will call it an additional tool in my toolbox.

Faculty began to identify the benefits and increased utilization of their videos for their students and their teaching. As faculty began to overcome the technology and online delivery learning curve, a new challenge awaited them as they continued to navigate the online waters. The faculty's crew of students were also in a state of mental and physical preservation as they faced transition and uncertainty in the virtual classroom. Suddenly, the faculty's and students' expectations of this new academic experience became significantly altered by changes in both of their roles and expectations. In The Disruption of the Communication Structure and Unexpected Connections section, I provide an overview of how faculty communicated and connected with students during the pandemic and how it changed or evolved as they moved from isolation to vaccination.

THE DISRUPTION OF THE COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE

The disruption of the pandemic shook the foundation of operations in academic institutions while blurring the roles and responsibilities of both faculty and students. Faculty understood they no longer had the opportunity to share the same physical place and space with students, so they resorted to technology such as video conferencing platforms to replicate a classroom environment and communicate with students as frequently as possible. By leveraging Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Blackboard Collaborate, faculty attempted to simulate a face-to-face or classroom environment. At the same time, they held virtual office hours to connect and

support students throughout the week if they had any questions. Faculty Member #7 reflected on his efforts to create an inclusive and supportive environment despite not having the capability to share the same physical place and space:

> I tried to simulate the face-to-face or classroom environment in a way that allowed students to think that this was a real classroom and to let them know that there was an instructor that is very concerned about how they were doing in class and personally. They [Faculty] are willing to devote the time necessary to bring them up to speed to be successful in the course.

In addition to the faculty's concerted communication efforts to let students know they were available for any support needed, the faculty also began questioning their previous class management practices. In this new virtual environment, faculty realized they needed to find an empathic balance between student attendance, class management, and faculty-student expectations. Faculty Member #8 shared the challenges he encountered regarding student attendance, participation, and the restructuring of the course to address them in an empathetic manner:

> Because we were going through the pandemic, we were told that we should have the flexibility and not penalize them for attendance. So, attendance became optional, not mandatory. I could not penalize students for not being in class, and I could not grade participation. Participation had to be extra credit. Before, I could penalize them and say, you know you are dropping the ball here. I will change your team, or you will do a project on your own. But, that was impossible to enforce because of the pandemic and the flexibility required. It was wrong to penalize students if they were sick or if some family member was sick. So, I eliminated the points for participation and team projects. As soon

as students realized that the class would be recorded and there was no penalization for not being there, some students chose not to be there and thought they could just do the assignments online.

As faculty struggled with student attendance, class assignments, and assessment, they tried to remain empathic to student concerns and challenges. However, not all faculty were attuned to capturing the nuances of communication and empathy between themselves and students in the asynchronous environment. Faculty Member #1 confessed he was unaware of the initial disconnect between himself and his students, coupled with his assumptions of online teaching and learning:

Another gap was my lack of knowledge and sensitivity about what was happening with students in the online environment. So again, this is part of the learning process. Still, I feel I am not very well prepared to detect that. I did not know that I had to be present almost every day with them online, trying to be part of their learning experience.

Faculty had no choice but to face a new reality from one day to the next; gone were the brick-and-mortar classrooms where the faces and the student's body language resided. These student physical markers helped faculty gauge their effectiveness and engagement with their audience. Moreover, in a face-to-face environment, faculty could easily adjust their content or teaching style based on student reactions. This situation became a significant challenge for faculty in an asynchronous online environment. Faculty Member #7, for example, explained how he recalibrated his teaching to a non-time-bound delivery model. At the same time, he leaned on the precision of language when explaining and teaching his course content:

You have to rethink your classes because, all of a sudden, the mode of teaching has changed. You need to think through your class from the standpoint of how students will experience your

class in a different mode; you cannot go into the classroom and adjust things on the fly. You

cannot do things in the classroom as you did in the past. You have to do them in a way that

students can experience them anytime. That is what asynchronous really means.

Faculty understood that their student engagement and teaching flexibility had been curtailed based on

the structural tenets of online courses. Faculty realized the immense preparation needed to execute a

quality online course regardless of the synchronous or asynchronous delivery format. From a student's

standpoint, being suddenly propelled into online courses changed the relationship and expectations

between themselves and their faculty members. The usual personal interactions and engagement

between faculty members and students were lost to a certain extent due to the virtual delivery platform.

Faculty Member #13 shared his challenges during online synchronous lectures where disengaged

students would not participate during the sessions.

Communication and feedback from students were interrupted. Many students did not

participate in class discussions and would turn off their webcam even after

encouragement to leave it on, so the back-and-forth discussion was not there.

Therefore, to remain in contact and engaged with students, many faculty members began to

reevaluate their office hour policies by offering additional days and times to their preexisting

office hours or by extending their office hours during the day into the evening to compensate for

the lack of engagement. Faculty understood they no longer had the luxury of physically meeting

with students face-to-face before or after class to answer questions, dig deeper into the content,

or just visit with students, so web conferencing platforms were leveraged to retain a semblance

of connection. Faculty Member #7 offered to add and extend their office hours into the evening

to create engagement between themselves and their students. Further, as the vaccination eclipsed

the isolation phase, Faculty Member #7 realized the convenience and flexibility that his virtual

office hours provided his students, so he continued to offer his students the choice to attend his office hours in person or virtually:

> It used to be the case that I would teach in the morning and then have office hours right after class; most of the students were already there, and I felt that was the best time to offer office hours. With online asynchronous classes, I offered office hours at different times during the week and one session in the evening because it was convenient to do online. I did not need to stay at the office late to wait for students. After all, I could log in to zoom from home. Typically we would offer three hours for each course of office hours, and I offered three times that number -nine hours for my students. Now I offer office hours over zoom and in-person instead of just in-person pre-Covid, and I doubled the number of office hours. I realized that after going through the pandemic and being in an online environment, it is more convenient for students to get in touch with you. I did give them the option to come to my office and meet me virtually during office hours, and I would say 90% of the students chose zoom. I discovered, based on the response from the students it is much more convenient for the students to meet during office hours through zoom as opposed to, you know, getting in the car, driving to UTEP, parking, and getting to your office to meet with you during office hours. Furthermore, the experience is about the same, whether in person or over Zoom. I asked them to schedule appointments with me so I can have that time devoted to them specifically and personally, the same way I do in-person office.

Unwittingly, during the isolation phase of the pandemic, the extension of office hours by faculty may have created the unrealistic student expectation that faculty would be available 24/7 for engagement, questions, and concerns. True to form, the asynchronous delivery model essentially

removed previously defined class session start and end times and eliminated the structure of defined classroom meetings and faculty availability. This development increased student-to-faculty email traffic throughout the day and night while increasing faculty stress levels. As Faculty Member #8 explained the repercussions of trying to increase access and engagement with students without embedding boundaries or expectations of when feedback or follow-up would be provided:

> Another thing that happened was when courses went online. Students seemed to want to contact you 24/7, expecting the faculty member to be available. When I teach face-to-face, I teach my classes. On the day I am supposed to teach. I have office hours, so students can see me if they want to. If they want to speak with me, we can speak after class, before class, or during office hours. When everything went online, I had office hours on selected days, but students still felt like they wanted to meet at different times. They would be sending emails literally 24/7. That was a bit stressful and frustrating because students did not show up to the (synchronous) class session or did not watch the video the way they were supposed to, so they would send similar questions. So, I would have five emails. I had to answer stuff like that, which took a lot of time, but it was the mental stress of constantly getting emails and students asking, "I took the quiz, but I lost connection. I could not record it. Can you open it again?" Stuff like that, was just distracting.

Faculty Member #3 echoed Faculty Member #8's availability expectations and shared her work-around solution to the email situation by employing the tried-and-true telephone system. The awareness of her email bandwidth prompted the utility of different technology as a mode of communication that was just as effective in connecting with her students:

The task that overwhelmed me the most professionally was dealing with my email at that

time because I would open it up and have so many questions. Just because we did not

have the contact, we would normally have with our students. I gave them my phone

number, and I said, look, I am not going to be the most responsive by email, but here is

my phone number. Call me if you need anything. So I could still address students' needs

but not feel overwhelmed by having to sit down and deal with an hour's worth of email in

a day.

Despite the tension generated by students with their ungoverned late-night emails and their

assumption of faculty availability throughout the day, some faculty continued to develop an

empathy for students that perhaps did not exist prior to the pandemic. Faculty could sense their

student's uncertainty and apprehension as they interacted with them virtually. As faculty tried to

sustain the teaching and learning process with minimal interruptions, they also made a deliberate

effort to create and maintain a connection with students on a more personal level. Faculty

Member #9's increased investment in connecting with students led to learning how to be

empathetic and patient with student issues during the isolation phase:

Before COVID, I was maybe a little insensitive to their personal concerns. So during

COVID and after COVID, I learned that I should be more sensitive to personal situations.

I had to pay extra attention to the students because they were going through a mental

process of how do I learn in this new system. In addition, they had this anxiety, and some

of them had a problem in the family with parents, grandparents, and all these things, so I

basically learned to be more patient with the students.

Seemingly, another phenomenon was occurring in the virtual classroom as students suddenly

began to vanish due to a deluge of emails from the university and other supporting entities.

Moreover, faculty created email campaigns to connect with students to ask how they were doing and to provide support, but some students would not respond, and their absence left faculty concerned. Faculty member #14, for example, explained the disappearance of students in his virtual classrooms, his attempts to reconnect with them, and his concern over their welfare:

> When we went online, I did not see them anymore. I did not see their faces anymore. I did not see why they were not showing up in class. I asked my TA to follow up with messages where students were not showing up and falling behind on assignments, and we would contact them and ask them, "Hey, what is going on? Let's make an appointment. You can still make it. Let's come back. Students were probably receiving a lot of emails from the university, the Career Center, and everywhere, and they would not reply to my emails. So I do not know if I was going to trash or spam or if they were just overwhelmed with the number of emails that everybody was sending them. So I lost that touch with the students, especially in the asynchronous classes.

The lack of student online attendance and engagement during this transactional period of assigned coursework and distribution of grades also impacted faculty members' perception of their role, contribution, and connection with students. Faculty Member #8 shared his feelings of diminished personal contribution and the disconnection he felt with his students in the virtual environment:

> During that time, I actually felt that my role was just a coordinator rather than a motivator and facilitator, and it was more like a coordinator of software. I was just making sure that the assignments were posted, that everything was recorded, and that the website was working correctly. I truly did not feel like an educator anymore. When attendance was mandatory, I could include a lot of things out of my own experience that were more

60

personal, like why I chose the Master's program or what happened when one day when a

transaction did not go well when I was a salesperson. However, I did not feel that I could

post that online. It is nothing super negative, but it felt like I was talking about my

personal life and posting it on Facebook or YouTube. It just did not feel the same.

Anyway, I missed that part. I also missed a lot of the energy from the students. You know

that physical energy, their faces, their enthusiasm. It was not there online.

To combat the disconnection and create further engagement in the virtual classroom, faculty

utilized their newly minted online teaching skills by leveraging the Learning Management

System-Blackboard features to better connect with students personally and academically through

discussion boards. Discussion boards were rarely used in the MBA program prior to the

pandemic. However, during their online training, faculty learned how to employ the discussion

board's utility in multiple forms to communicate and connect with students. Faculty Member #14

explained how she leveraged the discussion boards for both academic content and as a platform

for student connection during the isolation phase of the pandemic:

> I felt it was even more important to support the students by letting them know that
>
> we were all experiencing something similar and were all experiencing something
>
> that was quite challenging for all of us. It was the first time I started to use
>
> discussion boards in my classes. I created a couple of discussion boards, one
>
> discussion board; we used to just talk about the pandemic and how it was
>
> affecting us and how to cope with it. We had to support each other, so we had this
>
> very active discussion board where students could talk about their daily lives.
>
> Some students would post pictures of themselves studying in their yards. Those
>
> posts inspired and relaxed me and made others feel good as well. We just

encouraged each other beyond the course material. We also had another

discussion board, but it was more class-related, like Q&A, where any student

could pose questions, and any student could answer them. That discussion board

was very active as well. We all tried to help each other. The students were very

creative and resourceful in using this new software. They were more up-to-date

than I was.

Faculty Member #6 realized the disconnection between faculty and students but also picked up

on the disconnection between the students themselves. Thus, fully utilizing Blackboard's

features, he created a Blackboard shell for students to only engage with each other.

I set up Blackboard Collaborate Ultra sessions not only for my own office hours but I

also set up a student-only session for my graduate-level classes for students to set up a

simple way for students to set up study groups so they could go in to work through

homework problems and chat and make it more social.

As Faculty continued to create engagement opportunities for students, whether through an

asynchronous (discussion boards) or synchronous (live lecture) modality, another challenge

began to surface regarding student assessment of content and the integrity of the classes taught

online. Faculty Member #7 described the assessment challenges he faced in an online

environment despite utilizing the technological tools readily available to curb cheating:

I am really concerned. We have to assume that most of our students are honest and

trustworthy, but many funny things go online, and the opportunities to cheat online

increase tremendously. We need to be aware of that, and there will be students who are

going to find ways to do the things that we do not want them to do, and we need to find

ways to address that. I do not know if we have good solutions for that just yet. One thing

that worries me is that we cannot guarantee the integrity of the classes that we teach online. You cannot eliminate cheating. Whether it is face-to-face, synchronous, or asynchronous classes online, you cannot eliminate it. However, we can do a lot of things face-to-face to minimize that. Online things become much more difficult to monitor; technology does give us some ways to address the issue, like online monitoring during exams, such as Safe Assign or Turnitin for assignments. We realized that there are these services now that can make or do custom assignments for students for a very low price, so when you get an assignment from a student, you do not really know if the student did the assignment or if they hired somebody online to do it for them. Again, I want to emphasize the fact that they can do these both in face-to-face classes or online classes, but the environment online, it seems to me, encourages it a little bit more. That is my impression.

To shore up Faculty Member #7's impression regarding the various concerns regarding scholastic dishonesty, Faculty Member #14 shared her thoughts and experience once students returned to face-to-face instruction in her class and how their performance did not meet previous class scores.

I felt the students did not come back as prepared. I felt they were not as ready when they were in my class as in previous years, I used the same material with very similar exams, but the students did a lot worse than in the previous years. Even though we were back in class, I felt that because of the previous year when everyone was online. I know some subjects are easier to understand from an online platform. However, other subjects with calculations might be challenging for some students by just watching the videos and getting the idea of how to do the calculations. My class has the prerequisite of QMB, so it

63

is a very quantitative course. So, I felt many students were not ready for my class even though we were back to face.

While students passed their prerequisite courses during the isolation phase of the pandemic, they were not prepared for the upper-level courses that followed in their degree plans. Therefore, to prevent and reduce academic dishonesty, Faculty Member #3 changed the structure of her online course and assessment strategy by focusing on students learning the concepts and theories from both a micro and macro level through increased repetition of concepts through hands-on assignments. This cumulative assessment method eliminated multiple-choice exams and quizzes during the course.

> I knew if I gave them more homework, even if they were working with somebody, they would have to go in and actually do the work. So I moved away from tests and more into doing more hands-on work they would have to do between class settings. One thing I changed for this semester was giving them a quiz, but I gave it to them online, open book, and open notes so they could choose any outside resources they wanted. At least this way, it emphasized the theory of the stuff we were doing, and I did not care if they looked it up because these are MBAs. They want to understand the concepts, and they want to understand the theory. So even if they had to look it up online, they still learned the theory and concept.

Interestingly, Faculty Member #2 flipped the magnifying glass inward to reflect on his own faculty bias and personal invisible scripts related to his teaching and the assessment issue.

> It seems like we spent a lot of time trying to defeat cheating. Suppose we could put some of that effort into better teaching. Maybe that would help. That may be sacrilegious, but how do we capture the student's creativity in figuring out how to get around the test?

How do you get that student focused on learning and growing in whatever class they

take?

As the implications of the pandemic evolved over time, faculty continued to address and

overcome the many personal and professional challenges. The Lessons Learned and Moving

Forward section explores the reflections of faculty and what they learned from the pandemic.

This section also explores if these changes have remained after the initial onset of the

pandemic's disruption or have prompted some aspirational initiatives moving forward.

LESSONS LEARNED AND MOVING FORWARD

This section presents the faculty's lessons learned toward their teaching and learning and

their aspirational ideas to support the sustainability and relevance of the MBA program in the

future. As faculty returned to their physical classrooms, Faculty Member # 13 reminisced on how

they taught their classes in the brick-and-mortar before the pandemic:

Usually, I started my classes with an overview first. What will we do today in this class,

and then start with the basic concepts? I would work through the problems related to the

concept or theory and then engage students by working on those end-of-chapter

problems. Finance courses involve a lot of math problems, so you have to practice

reinforcing the concept covered in class. Toward the end of class, students and I would

work on the problems together to reinforce their understanding of the material covered in

class. So basically, that is what I did during in-person learning.

Prior to the pandemic, Faculty Member # 13 led her students through the concepts she was

teaching students face-to-face and was able to reinforce the learning through repetition and

practice in a brick-and-mortar environment. In contrast, during the isolation phase, sharing space

and access to her content expertise was significantly reduced, so Faculty Member #13 shared how she learned to restructure her course.

> During the pandemic, teaching online or remotely, the first thing was to structure the course properly. I needed to decide what topics to cover for the whole course, the due dates of homework and project assignments, or exams, so I had a course calendar. Once those were figured out in the structure of the course, it flowed. I made some minor changes depending on the student's learning pace. However, I would emphasize the importance of self-learning and self-discipline.

Understanding the importance of structure in an online environment allowed Faculty Member #13 to continue her teaching process more methodically while putting the onus of learning on the student. Further, learning the importance of course structure in an online course allowed Faculty Member #9 to be more efficient in his teaching, learning, and assessment practices while providing an agency to students that may not have existed prior.

> As soon as I started teaching summer and then fall of 2020, I realized that I did not have to grade things manually or through a multiple-choice test in our system. I learned how to format a multiple choice test using the Respondus 4.0 version and then how to upload it to Blackboard. I set it up online, so everything was automatically graded, and the score was posted in the Blackboard Grade Center, so that is so good. Before COVID, I was offering printed versions of the test. I moved all the hard copies to online grading. Also, all my resources were now available to my students in one place: my Blackboard Homepage. So students were very happy because they were getting everything in one place. They did not have to go looking for stuff. I posted all the files and assignments on my Blackboard Homepage so they could see them sequentially when things were due.

Everything was great. It is so good that I have continued that process in the fall of 2021 and the spring semester of 2022. So, there is no paperwork; everything is transparent to them. So, I am happy with this learning process during the past 16 to 18 months.

The faculty's newly focused efforts led to the creation of skill sets that permitted them to refine and improve their teaching and learning processes despite the pandemic's lingering effects. Their learning journey also instilled a sense of curiosity and took the pressure off of the expectation that they knew everything. As Faculty Member #10 recollected the freeing effect, he encountered when he sought and found new ways to teach his content without the repercussions of experimentation.

I was willing to make mistakes. I felt that all this experimentation gave us a chance to try things, and if something would not work well, it was justified based on "we are all trying to do something new, and some stuff might work, and some may not." It was really hard, but it was also an experimentation period. I felt we could try new things. I felt more free to try new things than before because this drastic change allowed me to. I mean, I had never recorded a lecture in my life before the pandemic.

As faculty felt free to experiment and explore new ways of doing things while getting out of their comfort zone, they discovered that much of this technology was not new and had been readily available before the pandemic. It was just new to them. Faculty #8 explained getting out of his comfort zone and investigating K-12, online teaching software, the online education sector, and various other resources to help him better teach and connect with his students.

Although I changed the ways I taught my class. I did not reinvent the wheel, so to speak. What I did was explore beyond UTEP to what other faculty members in online programs were doing. I researched the software educators used for different types of courses. Such

as MBA, Ph.D., and undergraduate courses. I even explored what teachers were already

doing in elementary and high schools. Online education and using technology to deliver

classes have been there for decades. However, I had not used it in my face-to-face

classes, so it was new to me. It was not necessarily new to the field. I even signed up for

Coursera, a free resource to take courses online, just to see how those courses were being

delivered, organized, and structured as a template. It helped me to see how I could design

my courses. I did a lot of research, played with a couple of software tools, and then chose

the ones that I thought were easy to use and could benefit the class. So what I am saying

is that although I innovated in my class, I used tools that had already existed and then

adapted them to my class.

Faculty's bandwidth to be uncomfortable was stretched exponentially as they discovered avenues

of teaching and learning they would not have pursued otherwise had the pandemic not occurred.

More importantly, they applied these teaching tools in their classrooms. Faculty Member #7

reflected on his new skillset of creating videos and utilizing the novel technology he learned to

improve and augment his courses.

I needed to find ways to help my students learn in the best way possible. Certainly, the

technology we learned over the past two years gave us opportunities to do that. I never

considered, for example, creating videos for my class and finding different ways to do that. It

took quite a few tries at the beginning to get comfortable with those videos, but eventually, you

learn how to do them, and you become better. Even the videos became better. I know students

like them, and they are there for them to watch them at any time they want to watch them. I think

that is a big advantage. I created the videos in such a way that they were not time-bound. I

created them with the idea that I would be using them in the future in different settings, and as it

turned out, I used them in my face-to-face class in the fall semester, even though those videos

were recorded for my asynchronous class. So I found them useful.

In addition to providing their students with this new flexibility of learning, they also understood the

practicality of utilizing their videos in various settings while realizing that the video medium was just

the vessel to deliver their material. Hence, faculty began to ruminate on their own teaching methods and

the content they provided the students in this new delivery model. They questioned their prior

assumptions regarding online learning through their research and reflection. They concluded that they

needed to be much more structured and precise with their language and the academic content they were

imparting to students. Faculty Member #7 commented on the lessons he learned regarding the benefits

of video time limits, the meticulous nature of online content, and the questioning of his own assumptions

related to online teaching and learning:

> I think it was a combination of two things. It was reading a lot of the pedagogical advice
>
> different experts were giving online. The other was the personal realization: Do I want to
>
> hear myself going on and on for more than 10 minutes or so? I tried to use some rules of
>
> thumb that people were putting out on the proper length of videos at the time. So I tried
>
> to make them short to the point and impactful. The nice thing is that you try to create a
>
> script that is very organized and keeps you very organized. So I would like to say another
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> benefit of the transition to online classes and teaching online is that it forces you to be
>
> much more selective in the kinds of things that you do and be much more organized. The
>
> one thing I believe that I was not very keen on doing before COVID, and honestly, a lot
>
> of people were not doing it, not just me. It wasn't part of our life as teachers, to allow
>
> students to attend class without being in the actual classroom, online synchronously.
>
> Now, I am open to the idea of allowing students to attend classes synchronously online. I

hate to say this, but I am also open to the idea of asynchronous classes if they are done well.

Further, Faculty Member #1 shared his introspection regarding his role, teaching assumptions, student engagement, and teaching methodology prior to the pandemic and how this awareness prompted a significant change in his course delivery during and after the isolation phase.

> In my teaching, I was the main actor in the learning process. I was discussing the material, the slides, and the solution process for problems, so the process was centered on me. I was the main actor, and the students were more passive, so they did not have a very active role. Then during the pandemic associated with this engagement, I was concerned and tried to modify my strategy to make the students more active in decisions. Now, 1/3 of my sessions center on me, and the remaining 2/3 of the session center on the students. They have become the actors. They are the ones that learn by doing. Some of them can identify this, and some of them not, but most of them identify that they are learning by doing themselves. During the pandemic, they became more active in the learning process, and I like that because that was one of my concerns, and I was ineffective in addressing that.

Shifting the agency to the students in the class was a call to action for students to become more engaged in their own learning process. Faculty Member #11 echoed Faculty Member #1's sentiment regarding the recalibration of his teaching and learning delivery method as he reflected on his relationship with students.

> On a professional level, COVID pushed me to improve the way I functioned in the classroom with the students. It pushed me to really think about the nature of the teaching and learning relationship.

As faculty shared their unvarnished reflections of their early technology acumen and teaching and learning methods, some faculty learned to embrace their video content and became comfortable sharing it with students to help keep them on course if they have had to isolate themselves and or prevent them from falling behind as courses returned to a face-to-face delivery model. Faculty Member #6, for example, offered how his teaching and learning skillset grew during the pandemic and how he continues to utilize the content created during that time to support his students:

> The fact that we have all learned to create decently high-quality videos that can explain a lot of our core content and are able to provide that to students when it makes sense is very helpful. It means that you do not have to think about designing an online class when you are teaching face-to-face, but you can still provide content for anyone who has to miss a lecture or maybe a week or two because of isolation. Sometimes, I do not think it is fair to tell students to read the book or read the slides, they are still not getting exactly what the other students are getting, but if you are providing the lecture videos, you are making it as close as possible.

Clearly, faculty gained a newfound sense of empathy for their students and a sense of personal and professional accomplishment through their investment of time, energy, and resources in learning how to teach in an online environment during the isolation phase of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the inherent tension in research institutions between the faculty's investment in teaching and research productivity resurfaced, and some faculty had to pivot once again to reprioritize their research productivity. As Faculty Member #13 shared the tradeoff that came with his increased investment in learning how to teach in a virtual environment while his research productivity plummeted during the isolation phase of the pandemic:

71

Because we had to move from face-to-face teaching and learning to online or remote

teaching and learning, it involved a lot of time to do that. I considered that as an

increased workload. Because we needed to learn, or I had to learn a lot of new

technology, not necessarily new technology, but technology that was new to me. So, from

time to time, that was quite challenging, time-consuming, and sometimes frustrating. So I

spent a lot of time learning new things, making the teaching and learning work, and

making remote work efficient. In terms of doing research, that meant I had less time

available for my research, which is equally important as teaching, but it seems like I

sacrificed my time from research to be a better instructor during this time. During the

COVID time, I had less time for conducting my own research, which affected my

research productivity.

Fully aware of the teaching and research productivity dilemma, Faculty struggled with this

paradox throughout the pandemic. Nevertheless, many faculty chose to stay on course and

continued refining their teaching and learning. Faculty Member #10, for example, shared how

the accolades and the incentives in academic institutions derive primarily from research

productivity first and less from teaching and learning in the classroom:

I thought we needed to focus more on the teaching, at least during that portion, and I just

felt that the incentives to compensate or to incentivize were not there, and I still do not

see them. If we were fully rational and acting on incentives, the incorrect thing to do was

focus less or invest less time in teaching. However, I feel that I did not do that, and many

of my colleagues also did not do that, meaning we felt a sense of duty to the students.

Despite the lack of incentives to compensate for efforts of learning and teaching in an online

environment, faculty continued learning how to teach in the online modality. They continued to

practice what they had learned in the virtual and face-to-face classroom as the institution transitioned into the vaccination phase. Thus, realizing that research was an integral part of his role, Faculty Member #10 shifted his focus from teaching and learning to research productivity.

> I am recalibrating now as we are trying to get back to normal pre-pandemic. These are trade-offs, you know. I have to focus more on my research because that is the main thing that gets rewarded. So I am trying to compensate. I have to consider my research and really try to compartmentalize my teaching.

Faculty's renewed focus on the long-term effort of research productivity was indicative of them moving beyond the crisis as the institution began moving from isolation to the vaccination stage. Nevertheless, the unprecedented pandemic experience increased the faculty's capacity to be uncomfortable in an unknown situation while their learning bandwidth expanded exponentially during the isolation phase. In the Moving Forward Section, faculty shared aspirational ideas for growth and on the MBA program's sustainability and relevance based on their lessons learned during the pandemic.

An academic institution should not be a retail operation where the customer is always right but more of a partnership between the faculty, students, and administration. This interconnected partnership requires every student, faculty member, and administrator to perform their role responsibly to ensure the institution remains relevant and sustainable. In this last section, faculty shared their reflections and identified opportunities for growth and academic excellence for the future of the MBA program. They shared their thoughts and ideas on aspirational initiatives, such as MBA administrators deliberately surveying the market's needs to ask what skill sets they were looking for in our MBA students.

As their reflections turned inward, they explored their own responsibilities to the students and suggested new courses needed to be created to align with market needs. They shared deep introspection on their responsibilities to update their courses and their content. Faculty Member #8 challenged administrators to be the conduit between them and the market. Thus equipped with this information, they could update their courses to better align with the market's needs:

> On a continuous basis, I think the administrators need to keep in touch with businesses to find out what they currently need from new graduates and what they feel is going to be needed in the near future and in the next five to ten years so that it is not a surprise to faculty and administration when it happens. It takes some time to change the curriculum and the things you teach in a particular class, and that communication channel needs to remain open with businesses. There needs to be some mechanism for asking or surveying businesses. What is it that they want students to know? What is missing from recent graduates that they think is critical to their business...I think you could do two things. One is that the curriculum itself might change somewhat by adding new courses. However, the other piece would be faculty incrementally updating their courses to whatever the current needs are in the marketplace.

Faculty Member #9's reflections went beyond curriculum changes to sustainability and market engagement. He also enlisted the administration's support to reach out to the market and ask what particular skill sets were in demand. Sharing this information with faculty would not only help them redesign their courses to meet market expectations, but it would also allow them to add content that was missing from the curriculum. His reflections were deep, personal, and detailed about the faculty's own experience in the market and the applicability of the content they provided students in the classroom

So you can help the faculty through surveys such as asking El Paso industries, not many there, but also asking Dallas and Houston what they want from the students. How do they hire? Faculty should know these things and design their courses accordingly in a direction that does not focus too much on the quantitative algorithms but more on students using the analytical side of their brain to learn methods, get results and analyze them for business decision-making. That should be the key thing. Now, I understand that not all faculty have this experience. Usually, they publish a paper and then go straight into teaching, but there is no industry connection. So that experience is not there. Our audience are managers, CEOs, and high-level managers in the industry. They are the ones who are creating jobs basically for our students. So that connection should be there. I lost that connection after entering the academic world, but I feel it is very important. If you are not in touch, you are out of business. It is as simple as that.

Faculty's retrospection of their past experiences helped them make sense of themselves and their role in a new environment where academic and programmatic changes needed to be made for their craft to remain sustainable and relevant. In addition, Faculty Member #1 shared his thoughts on making the MBA experience holistic instead of course discipline discrete, where a common theme of intersectionality resonated throughout the duration of the program. Moreover, adding the requirement that students apply what they learned about the functional roles of an organization and practice them through real-world simulations, projects, applied research, and finally, a comprehensive project in the physical or virtual classroom. This rigor should be expected from an R1 university and our student body.

I think that we could enhance the program with comprehensive approaches where we can integrate the knowledge students are getting from different courses for a specific project

or activity and see how everything fits together because, in the end, that is what happens

in the real world. Right now, after COVID, I could suggest that we try to go further and

do something else with the students, show them that they are graduating from an R1

university and that their degree has a higher value. However, with that, we expect that

they are not just traditional students doing traditional stuff that is done in other MBA

programs. We ask them to go further and do something different. So how could we be

different right now? Well, the only thing that I can identify is some applied research or

comprehensive project. So, we could do the research, but it will take longer than just one

course. So maybe we could implement a project that overlaps different courses…. I think

that we should give them deeper and different experiences, and that will become the

highlights of the program.

This comprehensive approach would require significant faculty collaboration throughout the

duration of the MBA program. With this approach, students could see the interconnectedness

between all the organization's functional areas. This pedagogical approach could also serve as a

differentiating feature to help market the program.

Moreover, during the isolation phase of the Summer of 2020, the MBA Program staff

were also trying to make sense of themselves and their role during the pandemic. Therefore, with

the support of senior leadership and the College of Business Administration's Technology

Implementation Team, they responded to the situation by creating an ad hoc studio during the

isolation phase of the pandemic and invited faculty back to the physical classroom to teach their

courses. This newly created learning space included an interactive panel, camera, microphones,

and studio lighting and was named the Graduate Business Center studio. The College of

Business Administration leadership supported the GBC studio initiative and invited faculty to

return to their place and space to teach their courses in a classroom environment during the pandemic lockdown. Furthermore, faculty dually used the GBC studio to create their asynchronous video content and uploaded it to their Blackboard shell. As restrictions were lifted and students returned to class, faculty continued to utilize the studio to teach two different student populations in a synchronous modality. One population consisted of students physically sharing the same space with faculty in a face-to-face classroom engagement. Simultaneously, another population of students participated via a virtual/online modality. Faculty Member #1 shared his initial thoughts on the GBC studio experience and his observations about the engagement between the in-class and online students.

> That was a very great experience. In fact, I was very hesitant at the beginning about the results, so I did not know what to expect, but I can say that I was surprised that the students online were really engaged, and it was great. I felt very well teaching because I could see students in the classroom, and at some point, I forgot about the online students, but then they would suddenly ask questions and participate. I think it was effective because it was a combination of a hybrid model and, more importantly, because the students knew each other. The students in the classroom were concerned about their online classmates and vice versa. So at some points, students in the classroom would ask me to do something like you are not being heard by the students online; they do not see the screen or this or that. So I liked the model and the interaction. From my point of view, it was successful, not just because we designed the model and implemented it. It was successful because the students believed in the module and engaged in the model to help each other. The interaction between the students in the classroom and online was extremely important. They [students] were making jokes between themselves, which was

77

extremely important because they felt they were part of the same learning experience. So how was that rapport created? I do not know if you did something to create that rapport between them, but I think that is key if we want to do it again. As a professor, I felt I was not completely responsible for the students online (I was lucky) because the students in the classroom were also helping me keep the engagement with them. I think that is more important than anything I was able to do.

Faculty Member #1's experience using the Hyflex delivery highlighted the fact that the students in both the in-class and virtual modalities had developed a relationship between themselves. That relationship created an environment where students from both modalities actively participated during the course session. Faculty Member #6 shared his thoughts on the different teaching modalities and the tradeoffs and opportunity costs between Hyflex, Online, and Face-to-Face delivery.

I think that incorporating more technology is definitely useful. I enjoy the way it is structured now. I think we do a good job, but we should always be looking at what we could do better or maybe do differently. The hyflex option is something that makes a lot of sense to me. At the same time, I am not completely against the idea of an online version. I wonder if we have an online and a face-to-face version if we miss the opportunity of having the hyflex version. I think the hyflex version gets a little bit of the best of both worlds. I do think it is unfair to characterize the online option as bad. I just feel it is the opportunity cost of the online version for not getting to do the hyflex version, which I believe would be extremely valuable for students.

Hyflex does provide every option of flexibility to the students. However, there is a significant learning curve for faculty navigating between two audiences simultaneously. Unless there is a

strong bond and connection between the face-to-face and online population where audiences look out for each other in the classroom, as Faculty Member #1 previously indicated. Conversely, Faculty Member #12 clearly opted toward a purely online delivery modality for the MBA Program to ensure relevance and sustainability in the marketplace.

> MBA teaching faculty are proficient in online technology, right? It is natural that we move or at least seriously consider having an online option because we want to stay competitive in the marketplace in terms of student recruitment, enrollment, and quality while incorporating new technology.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The Sensemaking framework was utilized to ask faculty how they made sense of themselves and their role as they transitioned back to "normal." Additionally, I wanted to investigate how lessons learned from the event could be integrated into their teaching and learning. Fourteen faculty members self-selected to participate and shared their experiences during an unprecedented event. This interpretive phenomenological inquiry was conducted in the Spring of 2022 through a set of curated questions to prompt faculty members to recall and reflect on the event they experienced. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic served as the unusual single event that all faculty experienced simultaneously.

Therefore, using Weick's (1995) framework, I could align Faculty's experiences with the seven Sensemaking characteristics starting with *grounded in identity construction*. Faculty viewed the pandemic based on their *identity* and how their experiences helped them see the world. Faculty tried to compare the pandemic to past experiences to give it meaning *retrospectively*. Thus, given the pandemic context, faculty could apply an enactive approach of purposeful action to the unknown environment by leveraging the past to enact their future. Thus, the *social* characteristic of Sensemaking was initiated by faculty re-engaging with their peers and students. As the pandemic endured, faculty's Sensemaking shifted based on the attention paid to the several *ongoing* challenges of the pandemic.

Moreover, by faculty focusing on certain *cues of attention and extraction*, faculty focused on critical elements of the pandemic while ignoring others to keep their sanity and support their beliefs regarding their teaching and learning, notably by leaning toward *plausibility* rather than accuracy. The action taken and the results produced did not have to be perfect, they just needed to be good enough. Hence, it was considered unsound if accurate information did not

align with the faculty's sense-making at the time. Further, faculty tried to make sense of the pandemic socially based on their interactions with others. However, due to everyone self-isolating, faculty had to revert to their own ways of making sense of the event and their environment. Subsequently, many faculty struggled with indecision and doubt as the pandemic remained an ongoing phenomenon.

Further, by coupling Naumer's (2018) Sensemaking questioning framework, questions were curated to capture the faculty's personal and professional experiences and interpretations of the event. Through conversations with the 14 participants, the essence of the study began to emerge by extracting four cascading yet interrelated themes from the interviews: (1) *Making Sense of it All*, (2) *The Learning Curve, (3) The Disruption of Structure with Unexpected Connections,* and (4) *Lessons Learned and Moving Forward.* At first glance, these themes fall in chronological order. However, upon further review, there was an interconnection between them, as the embedded learning element they encountered would continuously surface in the findings.

The first theme, *Making Sense of it All*, explored the pandemic's initial shock and isolating effects as it fractured the faculty's identity and role in the institution. Weick (1995) indicates that the *Identity* Sensemaking characteristic is created through the "process of interaction" (p.20). These interactions were either minimized or maximized based on each faculty member's personal and professional situation and obligations at the time of the event. Professionally faculty's interactions were minimized from one day to the next, as their face-to-face engagement with students and their peers vanished. Therefore, faculty sought ways to reconnect with students to reinforce their role as an educator and a resource for students. Personally, for some faculty, these identity interactions were maximized as they spent more time

at home with their families, reinforcing their familial identity role. Thus, reinforcing Weick's (1995) assertion that "identities are constituted by the process of interaction" (p.20).

Further, faculty shared how they had to switch roles between professional (faculty member) and personal (parent, son, sibling) interactions while sharing the same place and space with their families because the physical structures that delineated these interactions also disappeared. Thus, shifting and adjusting their Sensemaking processes and identities to every situation they faced (Weick, 1995).

Faculty tried to create a semblance structure from the unknown event by basing it on prior experience or by accepting plausible information that aligned with how they viewed themselves and their familiar scripts (Ancona, 2012; Weick, 1995). However, due to the isolating feature of the pandemic, there were no reference markers to help them make sense of the situation and course-correct. Therefore, the notion of accurately defining the event took a back seat as faculty began to reconceptualize their environment and act upon an incomplete reality (Naumer, 2018). Moreover, the faculty's action touched upon Weick's (1995) *Driven by Plausibility Rather than Accuracy* characteristic of Sensemaking where "accuracy is nice, but not necessary" (p. 60).

Further, Weick (1995) likens Sensemaking to cartography, where individuals can begin to create maps of understanding based on their language and interpretation of the situation. Each faculty member's observation, interpretation, and categorization contributed to their map's collective topography as they deliberately began communicating with one another despite being isolated.

As faculty recalibrated their teaching acumen and responsibilities, the pandemic also disrupted the concept of work as they learned to work from home and leveraged technology to

ensure their teaching and other responsibilities went unhindered. In addition to their teaching, faculty also had research and administrative responsibilities that needed to be done from home. Thus, as we move forward, organizations will be challenged with providing their employees the flexibility to work from home with fluid time constraints and adopt new ways to get their job done in an ever-changing environment of continuous connectivity (Dean & Campbell, 2020; Shaw, 2020).

Schwarz et al. (2020) note that adopting existing digital platforms has adequately substituted physical interactions for conferences and meetings in the workplace, even as isolation continued to be a social deterrent and hindered the Sensemaking process for faculty to reengage with themselves and their students. Equally, some faculty shared that they did not mind the isolation and preferred to work from home as there was still some uncertainty related to the disease. These opposing views on space and place will test the institution's Sensemaking process on how they will deal with the remote work dilemma as time passes.

Further, Shaw et al. (2020) offered that standard operating procedures regarding absences and remote working will need to be "re-evaluated and revised" (p.300) due to the pandemic's long-term societal impact in the workplace and the social interactions embedded within it. These factors include workplace safety risks, organizational trust, shared working spaces, and productivity measures (Shaw et al., 2020).

Overall, faculty had to make sense of and face the uncertainty of a global health issue while redefining their personal and professional roles and relationships. In addition to navigating in a physically isolated environment, faculty's Sensemaking began to negate or reinforce specific environmental cues as they created new operating structures with themselves, their peers, and their teaching acumen. However, according to Weick's (1995) *Social* tenet, faculty's actions

were not done in isolation "because what a person does internally is contingent on others" (pg. 40); thus, their actions enacted their new reality and their sphere of influence from peers to students.

The second theme explored the *Learning Curve* faculty faced as they transitioned their academic content to a virtual modality. As the pandemic endured, the fear and anxiety that initially froze faculty in place began to thaw as they gained confidence by creating their own maps of teaching and learning by taking action and enrolling in training sessions, creating their own videos, and leveraging and fully utilizing the Learning Management System (Blackboard). These findings reinforced Weick's (1995) Sensemaking characteristic of *Enactive of Sensible Environments*. Faculty began to *act* based on the new information they garnered in their various training sessions to become part of their new environment. Hence, their action prompted an agency of creation and innovation in their teaching and learning acumen.

Weick (1995) indicates that action is a precursor to cognition and vice versa, thus typifying what faculty did during the onset of the pandemic. They were learning by doing. Many technological resources employed during the pandemic were not new; moreover, they were not being utilized or leveraged in many academic institutions before the pandemic. However, once the pandemic arrived, faculty had no choice but to act upon their environment by learning and experimenting with technology through trial and error to try and make sense of how they would keep the educational process moving forward. Unbeknownst to faculty, their actions closely aligned with Twigg's (2003) online teaching and learning models. Below are some examples of alignment between Twigg's learning models and my findings related to the Learning Curve theme:

84

Whole course redesign: Faculty Member #8 shared that they did not just redesign one class session; they redesigned their entire course due to the virtual delivery mandate

Active Learning: Faculty Member #1's narrative of the "main actor" transitioned into a learner-centered engagement with his students when he realized that his quantitative content was better deployed to students by allowing them to do and share their actual work and not just listen to him lecture as the sage on the stage.

Computer-based Learning resources: Faculty Member #14's utilization of discussion boards not only for her teaching and learning but as a platform for faculty and students to communicate with one another on a personal level**.**

Mastery Learning: Faculty Member # 3's course reconfiguration is based on her creation and utilization of videos for content distribution and course housekeeping and her emphasis on the student benefit of having the ability to review her quantitative content video vignettes until they mastered the content.

On-demand help: Faculty Member # 7 communicated how he increased his office hours into the evening to support students during the isolation phase of the pandemic despite incurring an influx of queries with untenable response expectations from students**.**

Alternative staffing: Faculty Member # 6 shared how he created Zoom rooms for students *only* to support each other and connect during the isolation phase.

As faculty gained confidence recording their videos, they began to understand that recording the entire class session was not the most beneficial way for students to engage with the content if they did not attend the class that day. Once again, Faculty Member #3 confirmed Bloom's (1968) claim that a better way to record and share video content was by "breaking down a course or subject into smaller units of learning" (p.9). The benefit

from a physiological standpoint derives from chunking or segmenting the bite-sized pieces of new information to allow students to engage and control the flow of new information (Brame, 2016). These new ways to teach and deliver academic content were not new, but they were new to the MBA faculty.

Moreover, significant time and effort were invested by many faculty to find ways to reconnect with their students as they both navigated the new teaching and learning landscape together. Faculty continued taking action without realizing the implications of increased virtual office hours and their newfound empathy for their students. This newfound empathy only strengthened the faculty's resolve to become better educators. Unfortunately, the increased investment of time to become a better educator came at the expense of research productivity. Hence, some faculty realized the unbalance and refocused their efforts with the understanding that their teaching and research productivity obligations became quite challenging during the pandemic. The realization is that faculty's incentives stem from the quality of their research, followed by their teaching, leaving service at the tail end of their efforts, according to Reisman (2017).

The pandemic had an extraordinary impact on teaching in a brick-and-mortar structure. Teaching was no longer confined to a particular space, and specific time frames of activity no longer constrained the nature of work (Dean & Campbell, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the faculty's ability to teach in a brick-and-mortar environment while simultaneously eradicating the physical teaching and learning features embedded in the institution's physical structure. Further, a gap between what the institution knew and what was suddenly needed appeared. Crossan et al. (1999) indicate that as that gap widens, the organization begins to rely heavily on "individual learning and initiative" (p. 530). Thus, the tenets of the Sense-making

framework aligned with faculty enacting, organizing and developing constructs to make sense of their environment as they took action on their circumstances and the events that impacted them (Weick et al., 2005). Even if that meant Faculty Member #8 taking on the identity of "coordinator of software" instead of an educator. Faculty Member #8's comment aligns with Weick's (1995) assertion that "identities are constituted out of the interaction process" (p.20); thus, due to the lack of interaction with students, faculty leveraged technology to serve as the conduit between them and their students.

The absence of a physical structure also prompted a disconnection between faculty and students. Faculty felt they had lost touch with their students and made concerted efforts to connect with them through increased office hours and discussion boards. However, a curious thing happened in the virtual classroom: during the asynchronous courses, faculty felt like they lost contact with their students because they could not physically see them. Yet, during the synchronous sessions, students could connect with faculty but would not participate in discussions or would turn off their cameras. This insight prompted Weick's (1995) *social* Sensemaking characteristic claim that "conduct is contingent on the conduct of others" (p.39). Hence during the asynchronous sessions, faculty disappeared, and during the synchronous sessions, students disappeared unless they were mandated to attend the class session virtually.

Further, the faculty understood that the previous physical constructs relating to assessment no longer applied in the virtual world. Faculty Member #3 recounted how they could no longer proctor exams in a physical classroom and had to adjust and change their assessment structure by removing individual exams from the course and providing shared coursework. Thus emphasizing Bloom's (1968) assertion of having students work and helping each other to set

achievement standards "Cooperation in learning rather than competition was a clear result from this method" (p. 9).

The course structure was paramount among the many lessons faculty learned during the pandemic as they transitioned their face-to-face classes to online delivery. Course structure required faculty to be methodical in what they would teach and how they would teach it to their students. Thus, creating videos to teach their content required an economy of words and precision in communicating their content to students (Bloom, 1968). The pandemic provided faculty a respite from the conventional allusion that they know everything. Thus, faculty had the opportunity to learn and try new things to help their teaching and learning, they were willing to make mistakes, and their sense of curiosity was reawakened. Faculty unknowingly flipped the classroom and put the onus on their students to be responsible for their learning. The pandemic gave faculty time to reflect and question their assumptions. It also made them decide what was most important to them at that time regarding teaching vs. research production and the tradeoffs that come with their decisions. Additionally, through practice, faculty began to learn and understand the benefits of the technology they were using. They began to utilize it to save time in grading and provide structure in their courses by centralizing all their academic content in one designated place, thus restoring student agency and easing their anxiety in the virtual environment.

In addition to the lessons learned, because Sensemaking is an ongoing process that never stops (Weick, 1995), faculty shared aspirational ideas for the future. Ideas related to administration creating deeper relationships with the market to bridge market gaps with faculty's course content to provide students the knowledge to fill those gaps. Faculty shared the following ideas to remain sustainable and relevant:

- Revamp the curriculum

- Create new courses to meet the market's needs

- Create a holistic program with a comprehensive project at the conclusion of the program

- Offer a fully online, hybrid, or hyflex experience for students

Keep in mind that from a student's standpoint, they Zoomed with faculty members and their classmates as they incurred the exact tuition costs as if they had enjoyed the many splendors (football games, homecoming, dormitory life) of academic life (Edwards, 2021). The pandemic stripped these co-curricular features from the brick-and-mortar institution and solely provided the educational content through an unfamiliar platform. Therefore, if educational content is treated like a product and teaching is purely a service, what becomes the differentiating factor for brick-and-mortar universities in a post-pandemic world? Are the accouterments accompanying traditional brick-and-mortar institutions enough to draw in the 21st-century learner? The competition will only intensify in the education sector as all brick-and-mortar students have now experienced the online delivery model and realize there are choices in the market.

To conclude, the disruption that broke the faculty's path of inertia and routine also shook us out of our slumber and allowed us to question our assumptions and invisible scripts as we tried make sense of ourselves and our surrounding environment. These disruptive events put us in an unknown situation where we needed to find the language to understand what was happening in the current time-space continuum. Further, because the event was new and unknown, the inability to understand and define the situation accurately was perfectly fine (Weick, 1995). Moreover, recognizing that there is a trade-off between expediency and accuracy

is a construct we have come to terms with when we attempt to make sense of ourselves and our situation (Weick, 1995).

The MBA faculty, like everyone else, were cast into an unknown environment where the language, definitions, and cues from the past eluded them, and decisions needed to be made quickly. For example, Faculty Member #11 shared her limited online teaching experience. Therefore, to meet their personal and professional obligations, faculty began to take action, and their action either refuted or reinforced how they were making sense of their world (Weick, 1995). Faculty shared how the disruption of roles and responsibilities humbled them as it reawakened their devotion to their craft and their students. This cathartic event allowed them to explore and learn new things they otherwise would not have focused upon in the daily flow of activity. They shared their thoughts on the lessons learned and their aspirational ideas that could elevate their teaching in the MBA program to the next level. Depending on their individual situation, this event allowed them to explore their identities as a scholar, parent, and sibling on a deeper level and reflect on their assumption of what they thought their role as an educator should be and, more importantly, could be. Lastly, the disruptive event gave faculty a respite from the business-as-usual, status quo paradigm. It also allowed them to think about aspirational initiatives for professional growth and value-added features to their teaching and learning acumen by leveraging technology in their coursework.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Future studies should consider how students and administrators made sense of COVID-19 and how they began to make sense of themselves, their roles, and their environment through the lens of Weick's (1995) seven properties of Sensemaking: Identity, Retrospect, Enactment, Social, Ongoing, Extracted Cues, and Plausibility.

Thus, by providing participants with the context, definitions, and examples connected to these seven characteristics, they can better articulate what they are experiencing during their own disruptive event. Therefore, gaining the ability to ask questions to learn and share new information with their peers so they can regain their agency to create structure and context in their world. Thus, bridging the gap between the situation and the anticipated outcome of an event (Naumer, 2008).

Both Dervin's (1998) and Naumer et al.'s (2008) sense-making frameworks and questioning models served as a foundation to develop the questions about the thoughts and actions of faculty as they transitioned from isolation to vaccination. However, the opportunity to widen the Sensemaking lens from individual to organization while incorporating Crossan et al.'s (1999) organizational learning framework model can also help identify facets of sustainability, relevance, and attaining strategic renewal in the MBA program.

Crossan et al. (1999) pointed to "exploring new ways of doing things or while exploiting what the organization is currently doing well and has already learned." (p. 522). Crossan et al. (1999) organizational learning framework can similarly be utilized to explore new ways for faculty to teach and deliver content while exploiting the lessons learned from a legacy and pandemic standpoint. Future studies should consider integrating an organizational learning framework in an academic environment. For example, below is a summary of the 2020 pandemic aligned against Crossan et al.'s (1999) strategic renewal framework:

Premise 1: Organizational learning involves a tension between assimilating new learning (exploration) and using what has been learned (exploitation).

Faculty quickly had to transition their course content to an online space. The technology was not new; however, the learning curve for faculty in brick-and-mortar institutions created tension on many fronts.

Premise 2: Organizational learning is multilevel: individual, group, and organization. Faculty had to quickly learn how to leverage technology to fulfill their role and responsibilities. This learning curve included administrators, staff, and students.

Premise 3: The three levels of organizational learning are linked by social and psychological processes: intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing.

Intuiting-observing and feeling similarities and differences through pattern recognition.

Faculty felt changes were needed to teach their courses and complete their responsibilities during the pandemic.

Interpreting-Precise language is sought to name and explain emotions and hunches to help develop shared understanding.

As faculty expressed their feelings through words and conversations, they began to identify and name the issues (technology, delivery methods, assessments) they were facing to reach a shared understanding with others.

Integrating-Articulate collective action creates coherence and shared understanding within the group.

As faculty in the institution began to understand the issues and challenges they were facing through language and shared understanding, they collectively began to take action and address them as a community.

Institutionalizing-The embedded learning in the organization's structure, systems, and procedures.

Effective action tends to be replicated. The intent is to institutionalize some of the lessons from faculty for the academic organization to remain viable and sustainable in a post-COVID-19 world.

Premise 4: Cognition affects action (and vice versa).

Once faculty in the academic institution understood what needed to be done, they took action. They deliberately reconvened to reflect on any newly acquired knowledge to determine if further action would be taken to fulfill their teaching responsibilities and the institution's goals.

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to illuminate a phenomenon's specificity through the actors' eyes living in the event (Stan, 1999). In order to identify the language and the stories of the event, the Sensemaking framework was utilized on an individual level during a crisis. However, Sensemaking can also be used for teams and organizations to make sense of where they currently reside and question their routines when a crisis does not exist. For example, by applying Weick's (1995) seven properties of Sensemaking to an organization during any breakdown in routines can prevent people from lapsing into plausible familiar scripts to reinforce their identity within the situation and create a crisis or disaster. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in the Mann Gulch Fire (Weick, 1993) and the Tenerife plane crash (Weick, 1990).

Another implication for future research is to analyze the experiences of the participants based on gender to help explore and investigate how their experiences were different and alike

during the isolation phase and their return back to normal. Such analysis would help further disaggregate gendered experiences among faculty.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

As academic institutions returned to their brick-and-mortar spaces, it is imperative to remember what we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Pollitt (2018) indicates that the literature on organizational learning is plentiful, but not much is written about "organizational forgetting" (p. 144). For example, Stark (2018) outlines four explanations contributing to institutional amnesia. The first explanation relates to the rate of staff throughput in an organization. This organizational churn implies that tribal knowledge is lost due to a revolving door of actors in the organization. Many faculty have left the university since the isolation phase. I am not sure what drivers have initiated this exodus, but it is clear that much of the tribal knowledge will not return. Therefore, a deliberate effort from leadership to invest in faculty coaches and instructional designers for the college to support faculty seems plausible.

Moreover, the faculty coach, instructional designer and administration should have conversations to share what the faculty members are teaching and what research they are working on. This type of information will help administrators as they survey the market to identify its needs while also sharing the faculty's research with the market to help them understand the connection between theory and practice. Conversely, administrators can share their findings of the market's needs with the faculty coach and instructional designer to ensure this information is shared with the faculty they support. Hence the faculty coach and instructional designer serve as the conduit between faculty and administration. Further, leadership can provide incentives for current faculty members to learn different technologies and

teaching and learning methodologies and serve in a "train the trainer" role to support faculty in learning new technology and utilizing it in their teaching and learning protocol.

Stark (2018) describes absorptive capacity as the ability for change to be institutionalized. Thus, amnesia occurs when lessons learned are not embedded in the organization promptly. During the isolation phase of the pandemic, the MBA program secured support and funding from leadership to equip every classroom with an interactive panel, cameras, and audio equipment to keep the educational process moving forward. As we entered the vaccination phase and students returned to their brick-and-mortar classrooms. The technology used during the isolation phase that helped to keep the educational process moving forward remains in the Graduate Business Center. However, it is rarely utilized by faculty, with the exception of one academic program format. Consequently, the disparity between the faculty's 304 years of teaching experience and their nine years of online teaching experience continues to grow. Therefore, a concerted effort from leadership to incentivize faculty to teach online courses and engage with technology can reduce the gap between brick-and-mortar teaching experience and online teaching experience. Further, investment in the Graduate Business Center can provide faculty with the resources to create podcasts, hold virtual conferences worldwide, and hold teaching and learning seminars to better acclimate themselves with the technology they choose to teach their classes.

Further, creating a task force of faculty willing to champion online teaching and learning can add structure and accountability to the initiative. Creating simple tools, such as checklists that identify courses where faculty have used different modalities for teaching and learning, can be used as data points for yearly evaluations and promotion. These different online delivery modalities can be used based on course content for a particular class session or for the entire

course. The faculty coach and instructional designer would also be a critical component of these initiatives because they would support the various modalities utilized by faculty during a particular course.

Stark's (2018) third explanation of organizational amnesia describes the strategic and willful abandonment of policies that challenge the status quo and "attempt to make the publics forget about problematic issues" (p. 147). Leadership can create industry centers within the business college to connect with the market and incentivize faculty to run them. These industry centers can serve as an opportunity for faculty to research challenges the market faces while giving the market a platform to share its challenges with the academic institution. The market is everchanging, and as an academic institution, we do not have the luxury of sitting on our hands waiting for students to walk through our doors to provide academic content that has become obsolete. The pandemic has disrupted, and accelerated change in every sector, and education is no exception.

Stark's (2018) fourth explanation recommends that organizations stave off amnesia by supporting the existence of historical storytelling. Historical storytellers can transfer learning and memories through time-space as they legitimize and recognize themselves and their environment while connecting with their colleagues (Stark, 2018). This document intends to serve as the platform where faculty unabashedly shared their professional and personal stories during an unplanned and unprecedented event. By recording and documenting their stories, they move from the ether to the tangible through the written word on paper and language technology.

Pollitt (2000) adds that institutional amnesia also occurs when institutions fail to record and keep critical data, record decisions made, and not use the existing data to tell a story. Pollitt (2000) introduces the institutional paradox, where many organizations struggle to forget or let go

of "precepts and standard operating procedures" that no longer apply to their current situation (p. 6). Academic leadership must understand that returning to doing the same things even though a significant and disruptive event in their environment has taken place can result in obsolescence.

Therefore, conversations regarding short and long-term strategies must be shared with other stakeholders, both vertically and horizontally, in the organization, such as faculty, staff, and administrators. Balogun and Johnson (2004) indicate that the middle manager's role as a change agent will increase as organizations become increasingly complex despite senior management's strategic directions. Therefore it is imperative to understand how middle managers interpret and frame change through their interpretive frameworks to find a common purpose (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

The COVID-19 pandemic forced change upon otherwise static academic institutions (Gibson, 2018). Further, Gibson (2018) adds two metaphors to describe organizational change- "Business as Usual (BAU) and the unfreeze, change, refreeze" (p. 9). The first metaphor indicates that things change and remain stable, and the second alludes to organizations' (frozen) stability and their deliberate "unfreezing." However, Gibson (2018) notes that nothing remains frozen in the current business landscape. These metaphors allude to managing the status quo of an organization and not investing enough resources to equip managers with a skillset to manage continual change (Gibson, 2018).

Hence, as the director of MBA programs, I interpreted the lived event as an opportunity to co-create the GBC studio with peers and faculty to mutually interpret and make sense of the disruptive COVID-19 event in a much more meaningful manner (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

For that reason, the institution must have champions that believe in renewing the MBA program. However, deliberate reflection is needed by both faculty and administration to re-

examine their roles, technology utilization, teaching delivery methods, and opportunities to exploit lessons learned while exploring new and novel things (Crossan et al., 1999). Such as emerging technology in eduation, information and artificial intelligence. In many ways, the pandemic catalyzed faculty to explore and recalibrate their teaching and learning skillset while providing the time for reflection and feedback on how to strategically renew the MBA program while keeping it relevant in a post-COVID environment.

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Vita

Jesus Rolando Nuñez was born in Los Angeles, California to Juana Nuñez and Jesus Nuñez. As a first-generation college student, Rolando earned his Bachelor of Science in Management from the University of Phoenix in 2004 and his Master of Business Administration from the University of Texas at El Paso in 2009.

For almost two decades, he worked in various sales and managerial capacities in the wholesale grocery and fluid milk industry for Tri-State Associated Grocers and Dean Foods. In the Spring of 2011, he began his second career as an academic administrator for the University of Texas at El Paso, serving as the Accelerated MBA/Executive MBA Program Manager. In 2015, he transitioned to Director of MBA Programs and in 2022 became the Director of the UTEP Graduate Business Center.

Rolando served as President of the Vista Hills Rotary Club for two consecutive terms, was a committee member for Race for the Cure, and is a proud alumnus of Leadership El Paso.