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An Exploration Of Strategic Alignment In Higher Education

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AN EXPLORATION OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

LINDA JIMENEZ

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

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TECHNOLOGY

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Juan Carlos and Lela, who inspire me to be the best role model as a mother and a professional. For my husband, Salvador, whose unwavering love and support kept me grounded throughout our marriage; his daily humor, creativity, and wisdom helped me reach new levels and better versions of myself. I am grateful for my brother, Roy, who helped me with caring for our parents and for always sending me positive affirmations. For my parents, Rogelio and Minerva, who set a life-long example for a tireless and strong work ethic, perseverance, and having compassion for others; I hope you are proud of my accomplishments. It is my sincerest hope that I honor my family for their willingness to be understanding, loving, supportive, and patient over the last five years of this journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Strategic Alignment

Institutions of higher education are increasingly pressured to employ improvement methods to align mission statements with stakeholders and revenue (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). The common terms of “strategic planning,” “strategic thinking,” and “strategic leadership” are prevalent within for-profit and nonprofit sectors, yet most organizations fail to implement strategic business development to attain profitable growth or value (Nica, 2013; Zook & Allen, 2010). Faculty are aiming to be successful and productive in research, teaching, and service; however, the accountability of higher education is under mounting pressure to change and improve, thereby causing role ambiguity (Schulz, 2013). Performance improvement literature supports that strategic alignment is vital for organizations, large and small, to build an ecosystem of effectiveness, yet there is very little recent research examining strategic alignment and its experience or perspective by faculty (Walter, Kellermanns, Floyd, Veiga & Matherne, 2013). Faculty, as critical members of the institution, engage in a variety of activities that contribute to the institution’s mission and are essential for institutional effectiveness. As the role of higher education faces increasing challenges to be more accountable, efficient, and impactful (Alexander, 2000), it is crucial to develop a better understanding of faculty experience and perspective as it relates to strategic alignment.

Strategic alignment and implementation are an essential part of business strategy in today’s globally competitive market. Numerous empirical studies have established a link between strategic alignment and organizational performance (Dooley, Fryxell, & Judge, 2000; Pagell & Krause, 2002; Rapert, Velliquette, & Garretson, 2002; Walters, Kellermanns, Floyd, Veiga, & Matherne, 2013). Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017) define strategic alignment as a purposeful

linkage of initiatives and activities to an organization's strategic objectives, and Walters, Kellermans, Floyd, Veiga, and Matherne (2013) define it as the "level of fit between an organization's strategic priorities and its environment" (p. 305).

Most of the research on strategic alignment is focused on commercial organizations (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Dobni & Luffman, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Jiang & Carpenter, 2013; Okumus, 2003; Pechlaner & Sauerwein, 2002; Wilden, Gudergan, Nielsen, & Lings, 2013). Different scholars have conducted empirical research, and others have completed a conceptual analysis of the gap between strategic formulation, implementation, and the various factors of impact for success (Luftman, Lyytinen, & ben Zvi, 2017). The impeding factors to strategic implementation and alignment are planning concerns, organizational issues, managerial issues, and individual issues (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015; Beer & Nohria, 2000; Dobni & Luffman, 2003; Okumus, 2003; Pechlaner & Sauerwein, 2002). Freedman (2003) explains that the strategic implementation process must be comprehensively aligned to drive the overall structure. The author outlined that structures to formulate strategy must align with the organization's competitiveness, workflow, processes, geographic nature of the business, primary product, market segment, decision-making authority, monitoring and evaluation, and compatibility with the organization's culture and leadership style.

There have been empirical studies in business and corporate environments suggesting that a positive correlation in strategic alignment can have a positive effect on achieving strategic priorities (Hambrick, 1983; Miller, 1988; Naman & Slevin, 1993). Conversely, when there is a deviation from strategic alignment, studies have shown negative consequences in the long term for organizations (Miller & Friesen, 1982; Zajac, Kraatz, & Bresser, 2000). Although higher education is typically not viewed as a business or corporate environment, prior research shows a

slow, evolving trend that higher education is moving toward a business-oriented model (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; Hearn, Lewis, Kallsen, Holdsworth, & Jones, 2006; Milliken, 1990). Over the past 20 years, universities have slowly implemented an economic and budget model called responsibility-centered management (RCM), and in 1974, the University of Pennsylvania was the first university to implement this system (McBride, Neiman, & Johnson, 2000). The RCM model propels decision making to be directly linked to strategic goals, objectives, and performance-based budgeting as colleges/departments become financial management centers that are responsible for revenue and expenses based on annual reporting indicators (Kallsen, Oju, Baylor, & Bruininks, 2001; Nelson & Scoby, 1998; Whalen, 1996). RCM has a fundamental proposition for colleges/units to enact strategic alignment to institutional goals and to assume ownership of resource allocations, budget transparency, performance targets, and decentralized management of revenue and costs for comprehensive strategic planning (Strauss & Curry, 2002). The Education Advisory Board (2014) attributes this creeping economic accountability trend to decades of increasing costs, decreasing revenue sources, and weak operating performance at higher education institutions. The number of higher education institutions that have adopted the RCM model has dramatically accelerated since 2000, and currently, more than 36 institutions have implemented this strategic budgeting solution (Education Advisory Board, 2014).

For commercial organizations, aligning strategic goals and implementation is crucial. However, many employees are unaware of their organization's strategic goals (Kaplan & Norton, 2005). Research has found that as much as 95% of company employees are unaware or do not understand their organization's strategic priorities (Kaplan & Norton, 1995). Strategic alignment studies have been conducted examining for-profit organizations as it relates to effectiveness (Beer

& Nohria, 2000; Dobni & Luffman, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Okumus, 2003; Pechlaner & Sauerwein, 2002; Wilden, Gudergan, Nielsen, & Lings, 2013). The recent studies have been conducted by Walters, Kellermans, Floyd, Veiga, and Matherne (2013) in the United States, Jiang and Carpenter (2013) in the United Kingdom, and Hilman and Siam (2014) in Malaysia; however, none of these studies have examined alignment from a faculty perspective. Higher education is distinctive from other organizations. Its structure and purpose are vastly different from product, service, or commercial industries because higher education institutions serve to fulfill complex roles of teaching, service, research, and career preparation for students (Cortese, 2003; Owen-Smith, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Johnson et al. (2016) outlined six key trends, six critical challenges, and six critical developments that are impacting the core missions of universities and faculty. The key trends include the acceleration of technology adoption in higher education, redesigning of culture, innovation, and learning outcomes. The notable challenges include competency models, digital literacy of students and faculty, and the need to keep higher education relevant. The known imminent developments include learning analytics, augmented and virtual reality, and the evolution of mobile devices. These disruptions and transformations require significant monetary resources to implement (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). The climate of funding reduction in higher education and essential financial criterion of success is undergoing systemic changes (Pereira, 2015; Altbach, 2015). Presently, higher education faces institutional issues that are unique with varying contexts and where strategic alignment has a vital influence on organizational performance (Walter, Kellermans, Floyd, Veiga, & Matherne, 2013). Faculty have diverse responsibilities that span from preparing students for admission to preparing them for a profession to introducing

them to research and the academic discipline (Becher & Kogan, 1992; Baxter, Hughes, & Tight, 1998; Hilman & Siam, 2014). Higher education has an inherent structure and environment that can pose a challenge for strategic alignment and performance improvement since these institutions have competing policies, fixed budgets, operations, and diverse constituents (Taylor & Machado, 2006). Geiger (2010) states that higher education institutions are facing hardships that are resulting in economic issues, capacity, and new perspectives on improvement strategies of operations. However, performance improvement is not limited to exclusively financial measures, and much progress has been made to expand performance management systems to encourage proactive rather than reactive management (Bitichi, 1994; Guerra-Lopez & Leigh, 2009; Pershing, 2006; Rothwell, 1999; Stolovitch & Keeps, 1999; Tangen, 2004).

Although faculty's core activities are service, teaching, and research, the enduring and prevailing challenges in higher education require faculty to expand their roles of core activities and engage in broader strategic initiatives of institutions (Harrill, Lawton, & Fabianke, 2015). Williams (2016) explains how higher education, historically viewed as providing a public good, has evolved to an expectation of providing graduates individual social mobility, higher employment earnings, and job security in addition to technical knowledge. Ramaley (2014) explains that the growing number of challenges in higher education requires a fresh consideration of how faculty impact the overall institution. Faculty play a vital role in shared institutional governance and need active participation for structures and processes to work effectively (Heaney, 2010; Tierney & Minor, 2004).

Research Purpose

Faculty are charged with core activities related to research, teaching, and service, although alignment with the priorities of the institution is challenging. However, there is a shortage of

evidence about whether and how faculty view and experience this as an essential part of their work. Therefore, this study aims to explore the faculty's experience and perspective of the alignment between their research, teaching, and service to the institutional priorities. The guiding research questions are:

1. What is the faculty's experience and perspective of institutional, college, and department priorities?
2. How do faculty feel about strategic alignment?

The following are the labels for the research questions:

- Faculty perspective of institutional priorities – RQ 1.1
- Faculty perspective of college priorities – RQ 1.2
- Faculty perspective of department priorities – RQ 1.3
- Faculty perspective of strategic alignment – RQ 2.0

Conceptual Framework

General system theory (GST) is the overarching theoretical underpinning for this study. Von Bertalanffy (1968) is recognized as one of the lead authors of GST in the field of biology, which later expanded to education, psychology, sociology, business, and various other fields of study. GST is viewed as a structure of intersected and interdependent components working synergistically for optimal outcomes. In human behavior, systems are interdisciplinary that are a circular link of social systems of environment, learning, cognition, psychology, and subjective experiences (Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2003). Organizational structures and cultures are embedded in GST (von Bertalanffy, 1968) as well as the basis of strategic alignment. Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017) state that strategic alignment requires the integration of an entire system

as a way of discerning how people, processes, and structures work together within an organization for performance. Holistic views of relationships and interactions are critical to performance improvement as these factors are dynamic and interconnected (Guerra-Lopez & Hicks, 2017).

Organizational structure and performance are influenced by how individuals experience their environment, organizational learning, the adaptation of goals, attention to aspirations, and enforcement of action (Gavetti, Greve, Levinthal & Ocasio, 2012; Shinkle, 2012). Behaviorism theory demonstrates observable actions that can transform into new behavioral actions repeatedly done until the behaviors are ultimately automatic. Skinner (1960) set out to identify the processes which made certain operant behaviors more or less likely to occur to understand behavior in his approach called operant conditioning. In organizational applications, early contributors began to apply concepts of behavioral learning using the theoretical foundations of GST, communications, learning, design, and organizational improvements in performance improvement (Gilbert, 1978; Harless, 1970; Kaufman, 1977; Kirkpatrick, 1979; Mager, 1975; Rummier & Brache, 1988). The main objectives of organizational development, performance support systems, human resource management, and strategic planning are to enhance measurable performance and structure elements toward a results-oriented system that leads to performance improvement (Gaba & Joseph, 2013; Rothwell, 1999; Stolovitch & Keeps, 1999).

Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017) describe a paradigm shift in talent development and performance improvement to ensure a value-add framework wherein an organization can achieve strategic objectives with relevant data that impact the underlying organizational system as depicted in Figure 1 — in other words, influencing systemic, progressive change that fuels long-term sustainability and success. However, due to the complexity of higher education, the influence of strategic alignment to priorities, change, and impact is difficult to assess with a single instrument.

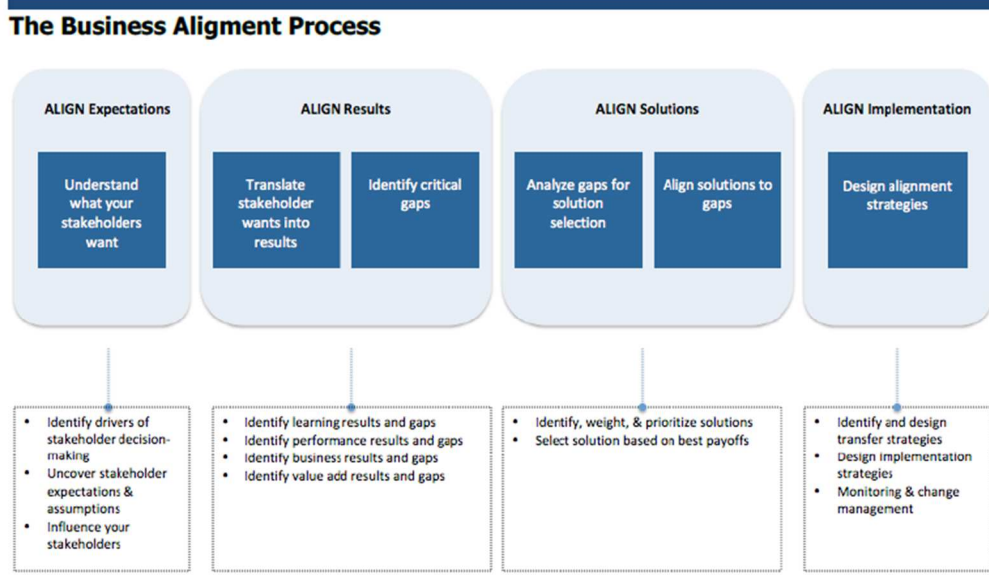


Figure 1. The Business Alignment Process. From Partner for Performance: Strategically Aligning Learning and Development (p. 26) by I. Guerra-Lopez and K. Hicks, (2017), Association for Talent Development. Copyright 2017 by the Association for Talent Development.

Significance of the Study

The desirability of achieving strategic priorities is highly idiosyncratic; therefore, measuring the fit between priorities and organizational performance on a large scale is difficult (Kraatz & Zajac, 2001; Zajac, Kraatz, & Bresser, 2000). Cameron (1978) and subsequent studies examined core measurements in higher education, such as student satisfaction, academic development, personal and career development, teaching, research, employee satisfaction, and access to resources and information. This study will contribute to the understanding of how faculty perceive their role in the attainment of strategic priorities at their institution. Strategic alignment is strongly dependent on measurements of well-designed, practical organizational efforts that are communicated throughout an entire organization and in the workplace (Guerra-

Lopez, 2010; Guerra-Lopez & Hutchinson, 2013). Pereira (2015) studied how constraints by the increasing financial cutbacks in higher education are leading to contemporary, paradoxical trends among the relationships of epistemic, financial, change, continuity, compliance, and critiques. Leadership in strategy within higher education is complex yet interdependent (Nica, 2013; Taylor & Machado, 2006). However, poor implementation strategies are far more frequent (Neumann & Larson 1997; Rowley & Sherman 2002). It is important to note that strategic planning and strategic alignment are viewed as different constructs for this study. Strategic planning using systems, such as Balanced Scorecard, allow organizations to plan shared strategic vision mission, values, and logic to create internal and external value (Kaplan & Norton, 1995). Strategic alignment provides a distinct feature to design financial and non-financial measures and varying perspectives to translate strategy into a set of performance improvement measures (Chenhall, 2005). For organizational decision making to be effective, performance improvement requires accurate and timely data (Guerra-López & Hicks, 2015).

Definition of Terms

- (1) **Strategic alignment** is a dynamic state of linking what the organization uses, does, produces, and delivers to its strategic objectives (Guerra-Lopez, 2018).
- (2) **Strategic objectives** are an applied mechanism for implementing change toward an organization's strategic goals and realize the value (Too & Weaver 2014).
- (3) **Primary core activities of the faculty** are research, teaching, and service (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007; Norbeck, 1998).
- (4) **Faculty** is a community of members of higher education working together from different disciplines as a campus community with the broader society to educate students (Ramaley, 2014).

- (5) **Tenure** is “the basic concept that faculty members who have served a proper period of apprenticeship shall enjoy security in their posts and be subject to removal only for ‘adequate cause’” (Byse & Joughin, 1959, p. v).
- (6) **Non-tenure** is all other faculty who have not achieved tenure or are on a tenure-track.
- (7) **Higher education institutions** are categorized according to The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2013-14), the “Classifications include Title IV eligible, degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States represented in the National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS system that conferred degrees”.
- (8) **Value measurement** is a method to evaluate, monitor, and improve an institution or its employees (Kim & Lalancette, 2013).
- (9) **Governance** is a formal process around decisions used at strategic, tactical, and operational levels (Luftman, 2003).
- (10) **Partnership** is a set of principles of cooperation and collective agreements (Dobbins, Knill, & Vögtle, 2011).
- (11) **Technology scope** is an internal cost-efficiency measure and provides a competitive advantage that adds value (Avison, Jones, Powell, & Wilson, 2004).

Summary

Strategic alignment as a construct is comprehensive and dynamic, causing difficulties in detecting alignment and priority measurements and gaps using theoretical frameworks (Avison, Jones, Powell, & Wilson, 2004; Chen, Mocker, Preston, & Teubner, 2010). As higher education institutions adopt a greater emphasis on transparency and accountability, such as the responsibility-centered management (RCM) model in which revenue and expenses are the responsibility of colleges/units, faculty’s role of teaching, research, and service plays an active part in business

operations. The strategic alignment literature demonstrates that aligning activities at a variety of levels is effective in overall governance and performance improvement. In higher education, there is limited research on faculty's experience and perspective of strategic alignment or priorities, although Walter, Kellermanns, Floyd, Veiga, and Matherne (2013) found that consensus is vital for influencing organizational performance. This study aims to explore the faculty's experience and perspective of strategic alignment and institutional priorities at varying levels. Using the Business Alignment Process of Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017), the investigator seeks to understand how faculty feel about the alignment process at their institutions.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

Introduction

Performance measurement and management systems are critical tools to monitor continuous improvement and effective use of time within any organization (O'Driscoll, 1999). This review of literature aims to synthesize current, empirical research focused on the role of strategic alignment in higher education as it may be positively associated with organizational performance on a larger scale.

Higher education institutions are defined by The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2013-14). There are many consequential challenges facing higher education in the United States. Mehaffy (2012) states that the state-funded support model has been in a rapid decline and is reflected by 44 states in fiscal crisis with budgets in the red. The author also states a traditional university model is an outdated form of operation where students receive knowledge by long lectures that are within an archaic calendar timeframe. The university structure of instruction, faculty governance, departmentalization, summer recess, athletics, general education requirements, majors, tenure, and externally supported research is unsustainable for the future economic landscape (Mehaffy, 2012). There are evident and apparent restraints with rapid implementation of systemic change across institutions of strategic initiatives since faculty are vital human capital with merit-based research, teaching, and service. Kellermanns and Floyd (2005) state that decision-making groups need consensus on strategic priorities at all levels, top to bottom, to improve coordination, cooperation, and implementation, thus leading to overall organizational performance.

Despite convincing evidence of needed restructuring for efficiency, transparency, and accountability, substantial changes are difficult to initiate and maintain in higher education because

faculty are facing various barriers and increasing work demands. Hudson et al. (2015) stated that change takes time and leadership beyond the normal scope of duties of a typical faculty member. The authors noted that faculty struggle with finding the time to engage in course redesign projects while balancing various mandatory university commitments of teaching, service, and research. Moreover, many faculty are intimidated or overwhelmed at the new technologies often implemented in redesigned courses. Examples of educational technologies that are commonly used as learning management systems in higher education are Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, and Brightspace. Therefore, in the early weeks of the semester, some students tend to rely heavily on the course instructor to provide appropriate troubleshooting support, making another new role of the university professor as a technology specialist (Vaughan, 2007). While faculty are balancing the intricacies of research, teaching, and service, higher education is increasingly implementing innovation and sustainability plans as an integral part of its operating system (Lozano, 2006; Lozano, Lukman, Lozano, Huisinigh & Lambrechts, 2013; Sherry, 2002).

Systems Theory

General systems theory is the basis of performance improvement, and the impact of the intervention must be measured and monitored to enable progression toward the intended outcomes (Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger, 2004; von Bertalanffy, 1975). Guerra-Lopez (2012) examined the entire monitoring and evaluation process to understand better the interdependence of the many factors of an organization, such as human capital, resources, and operations. A critical value of needs assessment is to enable the design of the most effective intervention that accurately addresses the closing of gaps in performance between current and future outcomes. Guerra-Lopez (2012) outlined a systemic monitoring and evaluation process to guide data-driven decision-making. The initial step is to identify the stakeholders and understand the mission of the

organization. The next step is to determine the objectives and measurable indicators of those objectives, followed by determining the data sources. These data must be relevant and related to clear decisions and evaluation questions, which in turn should be clearly related to both specific initiatives being evaluated and to the organizational results to which they should contribute. The entire implementation and execution of the strategic performance improvement plan generally rely on effective communication methods and continuous feedback on the monitoring and evaluation process, driving the decision-making process as adjustments are needed to strengthen the success of the endeavor and to uncover warranted adjustments.

Human Performance Improvement

Human performance improvement is a body of study focused on improving human performance in the workplace where the current status of an organization is assessed, desired outcomes are defined, and performance gaps are identified (Pershing, 2006). The performance of an individual within an organization relies heavily on organizational policies, practices, and design of implementation (Anitha, 2014). The foundational selection of proper interventions, support, and solutions should be designed with well-defined specifications for optimal employee engagement (Saks, 2006). The interventions should be supported by a wide range of systems of implementation and measurement processes to ensure sustainability, as the never-ending pursuit for efficiency hinges on adaptability and improvement (Langdon, 1991; Pershing, 2006).

Performance improvement approaches are based on the notion that organizations are systems made up of interconnected subsystems at various levels—individuals, teams, organizations, and society (Foshay, Villachica, & Stepich, 2014). There are also several cross-cutting activities, processes, and initiatives that are hypothesized to support performance at every level and, ideally, in a state of strategic alignment (Guerra-Lopez, 2018). Van Tiem, Moseley, and

Dessinger (2004) depicted human performance improvement as foundational competencies informed by decisions utilizing data and validated tools, thereby linking business goals to applied strategies using interventions as a catalyst to improve performance in organizations for change management. Using the Performance Improvement/Human Performance Technology Model by Van Tiem, Moseley, and Dessinger (2004), it is essential to understand the work environment of leadership and relationships, the input of strategic priorities, the process of skill and knowledge, expected outcomes, learning, and reception to initiatives, as depicted in Figure 2.

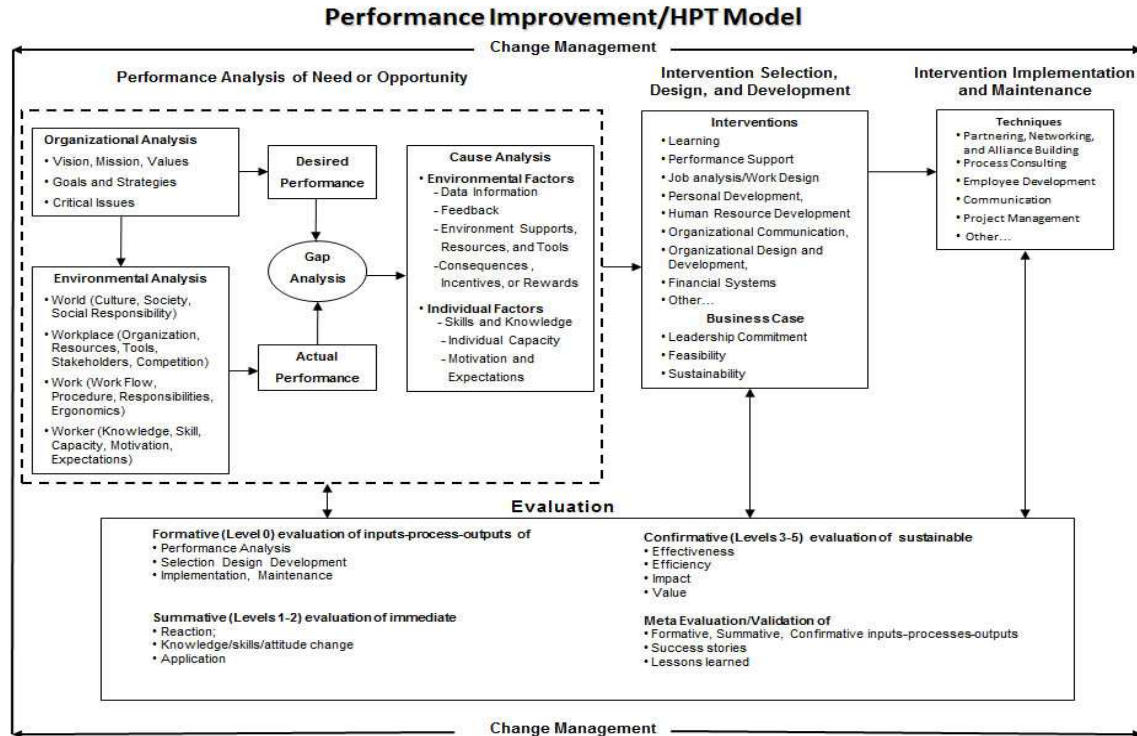


Figure 2. A Comprehensive Model of Performance Improvement. From *Fundamentals of Performance Technology: A Guide to Improving People, Process, and Performance (2nd Edition)* (p.7), by D.M. Van Tiem, J.L. Moseley, and J.C. Dessinger, 2004, Silver Spring, MD. Copyright 2004 by International Society for Performance Improvement.

Although human performance improvement grew out of instructional systems design to improve learning, learning alone is often insufficient for improving performance (Guerra-Lopez, 2010). Systems theory is a shared framework for instructional systems design (ISD) and human performance technology (HPT) practitioners, and, as noted by Foshay, Villachica, and Stepich (2014), both involve the foundational influences from learning theory, cognitive psychology, communication theory, and evidence-based evaluation design. ISD uses a reiterative process of analysis, design, implementation, and evaluation with interwoven formative and summative evaluations focused on improving learning outcomes. In essence, ISD is a systematic approach to create, design, and develop learning experiences. On the other hand, HPT aims to create or refine performance systems, which enable consistent performance outcomes that align with an organization's mission and desired societal impact. Similarly to ISD, HPT is guided by a system approach that includes needs assessment, causal analysis, intervention design and implementation, and formative and summative evaluations (Richey, Klein, & Tracey, 2010).

Tamez (2016) noted that systems theory plays a critical role in the fields of ISD and HPT as a problem-solving framework needed in workplace learning and performance. Broad knowledge of theory and application allows a practitioner to assess better the needs, situation, intervention, and evaluation of an organization. ISD and HPT aim to demonstrate value, focus on solutions, and leverage collaboration within an organization. According to Tamez (2016), there is an evolving perspective for the need for critical thinking of applied strategy and data mining; therefore, systems theory provides a systemic approach to creating added value and alignment with goals and objectives.

The field of performance improvement and practice appears to be closing the translational gap between empirical research and professional practice. Colbert, Rynes, and Brown (2005) studied human resource managers' use of informational sources and corroboration with empirical research findings and found that managers will not apply research findings into practice if they do not agree with the findings of the study. The study found that the source of information was obtained from academic journals; however, only 2% of the participants reported regularly reading one of the journals listed, and 75% reported never reading any of them. In addition, the approach to scientific inquiry and implementation has been examined by Guerra-López and Leigh (2009). The authors performed a content analysis of articles published between 1997 and 2006 in the field's primary journals, Performance Improvement Quarterly (PIQ) and Performance Improvement Journal (PIJ). They found an increased focus of 34% on rigorous performance measurement in PIJ articles related to performance measurement, while PIQ showed 75% focused on performance measurement inclusive of evaluation articles. These data suggest there is an overall commitment to evidence-based practices for performance improvement and consultants.

The role of the performance consultant in supporting strategic alignment serves as the backbone for defining and measuring performance, identifying significant performance gaps, and determining what solutions are appropriate given strategic priorities (Chew & Chong, 1999; Jin, Hopkins, & Wittmer 2010; Valle, Martin, Romero, & Dolan, 2000). Over time, performance consultants can support a highly aligned and strategic partnership with the business, increasing the organization's ability to deliver value and contribute to the business and its goals (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). Performance consulting, whether supported by internal staff or external experts, and its processes have found a consistent, structured way to develop trust and build strong relationships with leaders (Guerra- Lopez & Hicks, 2017; Lawler, Jamrog, & Boudreau 2011,

Stewart, & Ruckdeschel, 1998). Excellence in performance consulting is one of the top capabilities distinguishing organizations use to grow their profits three times faster than their peers (Bersin & Deloitte, 2013). According to Ferrer-Balas, Lozano, Huisingh, Buckland, Ysern, and Zilahy (2010), higher education is working to ensure sustainability by engagement of sustainability by administration and faculty.

Faculty in Higher Education

Tenured and tenure-track faculty participate in a variety of activities that directly and indirectly contribute to the institution's mission and institutional effectiveness. Faculty's core performance metrics are based on service, teaching, and research; however, prevalent challenges in higher education require faculty to expand their roles across broader strategic initiatives of institutions (Harrill, Lawton, & Fabianke, 2015). Faculty have diverse responsibilities that begin from admission to preparing students for a profession and introducing them to research in an academic discipline (Baxter, Hughes, & Tight, 1998; Becher & Kogan, 1992; Hilman & Siam, 2014).

There are increased expectations of faculty to prepare students beyond technical preparedness for careers and more accountability in higher education governance (Dougherty, Natow, Bork, Jones, & Vega, 2013). While faculty are balancing the complexities of research, teaching, and service, higher education is increasingly implementing innovation and sustainability plans as an integral part of its operating system (Lozano, 2006; Lozano, Lukman, Lozano, Huisingh & Lambrechts, 2013; Sherry, 2002). Legon, Lombardi, and Rhoades (2013) stated there are three characterizations of faculty in university governance, which include additional involvement of employers as stakeholders, respect for open debate, and a central role in inclusive and deliberate governance of the institution.

Although the three pillars of a faculty member's occupation are teaching, research, and service, it is clear there is a rise in expectations of performance culture and systems to meet the overarching strategic goals of higher education (Austin, 2002; Decramer, Smolders, & Vanderstraeten, 2013). Faculty are aiming to be successful and productive in research, teaching, and service; however, the accountability of higher education is under mounting pressure to change and improve, thereby causing role ambiguity (Schulz, 2013). Walters, Kellermans, Floyd, Veiga, and Matherne (2013) examined the role of strategic alignment and found that a combination of well-aligned strategies is most effective when high organizational performance is achieved with high levels of strategic consensus. Therefore, as the role of higher education faces increasing challenges to be more accountable, efficient, and impactful (Alexander, 2000), it is crucial to develop a better understanding of faculty experience and perspective as it relates to strategic planning and strategic alignment.

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

It was necessary to review the existing literature on the role of strategic planning within higher education. Strategic thinking is utilized and applied in various aspects within organizations for operational and performance improvement. Kaufman, Oakley-Browne, Watkins, and Leigh (2003) state that an organizational alignment model of strategic planning includes an extension that included societal impacts. Actions in strategy are routinely enacted in the business world. Renowned management expert Peter Drucker (1974) stated that:

The task of thinking through the mission of the business, that is, of asking the questions, “what is our business and what should it be?” leads to the setting of objectives, the development of strategies and plans, the making of today’s decisions for tomorrow’s results. (p. 416).

The aim of designing a plan to achieve desired performance outcomes is sound logic. Brubacher and Rudy (1997) suggest, however, that “higher education in the United States was nearly 200 years old before any considerable number of educators took occasion to give an explicit statement to its underlying philosophy” (p. 287).

Martin (2014) states that strategic plans have three major parts, which include a vision or mission statement that lays out the overarching goal, the initiatives to accomplish that goal, and the financial conversion of those initiatives to obtain the mission statement. There are more than 7,000 postsecondary education institutions in the United States (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2016), and there is a wide range of missions, visions, values, and strategic plans that facilitate the decision-making process of the administrators within each school.

Although many higher education institutions have or develop strategic plans, some scholars suggest that strategic planning may not be effective for colleges and universities. Barrow (1996) expressed that “higher education administrators are poor strategic planners...administrators lack the political will to implement strategic plans...and administrators are short-term, but strategic plans are long-term, usually with a five- to ten-year horizon” (p. 78). O’Donovan and Flower (2013) write that some “deny the value of strategy, arguing that organizations need agility above all else” (para. 7). As Martin (2013) suggests, those who resist strategic planning hold on to the belief that “the present is too uncertain to make any strategic decisions about the future” (para. 4). The need for effective strategic planning, outlining priorities, and implementation is undeniable, especially as higher education is being scrutinized for the allocation of resources (Martin, 2013).

Data-Informed Decisions

Organizational leaders must make critical decisions regarding budget and expenditures while remaining cognizant of financial pressures, risks, and shortfalls (Gioia & Thomas,

1996). Guerra-Lopez and Thomas (2011) examined how performance-based evaluation can impact and influence the decision-making process of a leadership team. The authors outlined a framework for systematically determining the utility of performance indicators used to measure results and examine pertinent data. The initial step for an organization is to begin with the end in mind. In other words, clarify and articulate the desired outcomes or intended results. The authors used the organizational elements model (OEM) developed by Roger Kaufman (1992). The OEM framework supports a systemic approach to defining desired results at various organizational levels and identifying any gaps based on relevant data about current results. Guerra-Lopez and Thomas (2011) caution about the challenges with the oversaturation of data available and recommend four areas of criteria to use for evaluating the utility of data for decision-making. The four dimensions include relevancy, reliability, validity, and completeness. In this way, the most useful data are used to support sound decision-making and desired outcomes. Business operations, by necessity, have a high level of accountability built within their operational processes, while higher education, on the other hand, is inundated with multiple separate entities of accountability that function to create oversight and non-economical decision making (Guerra-Lopez & Thomas, 2011).

In higher education, the allocation of resources is increasingly scrutinized and reduced, and questions are posed to the intangible returns on investment for college debt (Martin, 2014). Institutions of higher education are increasingly pressured to employ strategic, tactical, and operational methods to align mission statements with revenue. Powell, Gilleland, and Pearson (2012) examined the pressures of college and university administrators to justify the rising cost of tuition in a stringent economic environment, compounded with political pressures, that demands transparency, accountability, and efficacy. The researchers found those cost structure models were not available; therefore, they developed the Benchmark Model of Institutional Efficiency and

Effectiveness (BMIEE). The BMIEE allowed an analysis of linking institutional characteristics, expenditures, efficiency, and effectiveness using systems theory, which provides institutions with a model that is needed to improve institutional efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. This study demonstrates unilateral decision-making in which the organizational culture of higher learning is not one that emphasizes using cost analysis data as a basis for financial decision making. The technological advancements of the recent decades have imposed a greater interdependency on, and increased complexity of, information that can be leveraged for sound and fact-based decision making (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017; LePeau, Hurtado, & Davis, 2018; Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

This complexity must be understood by leaders and managers because of the increased ability to obtain, track, and measure data demand a new approach to decision making. Guerra-Lopez and Blake (2011) examined how leaders made decisions based on their decision-making approach. The authors interviewed 22 organizational leaders and explored two distinct approaches to decision-making consisting of using “discovery” as an open-ended decision-making process or “idea imposition” as a pre-determined course of action. The study concluded that both the discovery and idea approaches had advantages and disadvantages, and researchers can benefit by exploring the decision-making process in long-range financial effects.

Having a shared understanding of the organization’s performance priorities can have several positive outcomes for the organization. For example, Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2015) used a participatory approach to develop a strategic performance measurement framework for a national farmer trade union in an African country that outlined the organizational results frameworks, measurable indicators, and primary activities. The authors found that organizational members improved their understanding of how their organization operated, clarified relevant indicators for

various areas of work, and aligned performance improvement efforts from the bottom up and the top down. Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2015) state that it is vital that systems of measurement and evaluation are integrated into strategic management from the start to ensure the organization's success and sustainability.

It is essential that communication, tracking, and management of the organizational strategy is readily available for the decision-making opportunities at critical junctures (Eckerson & Hammond, 2011). Performance dashboards are an increasingly utilized tool to monitor metrics and milestones of performance improvement plans (Worthen & Sanders, 1991). These dashboards, when implemented effectively and correctly, can provide a clear performance indicator map to mitigate organizational risks, which is imperative with large, global institutions (Eckerson & Hammond, 2011). Guerra-Lopez (2013) outlined the elements of a systematized performance indicator map that organized complex systems and operations for ease of management. The larger the organization, the faster relevant data and information can be overlooked and neglected. The author noted that one-third of the performance monitor and feedback interventions had a negative impact on an organization's performance when the performance dashboard was ill-constructed (Guerra-Lopez, 2013). Systems theory should be interwoven throughout many levels of any large-scale, complex operation, especially for decision-making situations (Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger, 2004). Guerra-Lopez (2013) outlined that the most vital tenets of a performance indicator map include leadership and commitment of engagement of clearly defined roles, strategic, tactical, and operational objectives that are defined and understood, accountability and reporting systems to track measurement and evaluation, and communication of progress. It is important to note that there is a linkage of the entire performance improvement strategy with systems of operation to gauge how well the organization is moving

toward the desired result. Strategic management involves monitoring progress and, equally important, specifying any lack of progress to be identified quickly and addressed at appropriate times to avoid any counterproductive consequences or divergence of the planned outcomes.

Porter (2008) states that strategic management can be defined as ensuring an organization's vision, mission, goals, objectives, and internal operations are linked, thereby translating to sustainability and long-term growth. Since the 1980s, Porter's pivotal work in defining strategy has been widely accepted as a way to leverage a competitive position by using a plan and assessment to improve overall performance. Although Porter and several authors since that time confirm that strategy is critical, there remains a translational gap among strategy, planning, and execution (Sull, Homkes, & Sull, 2015).

Strategic Alignment

Many strategic alignment studies are based on proposed models (Luftman, Lyytinen, & ben Zvi, 2017). The strategic alignment maturity model instrument has been validated and is one of the most cited for strategic alignment in the field of information technology (Luftman, 2003). The instrument assesses alignment criteria in communications, value measurement, governance, partnerships, technology, skills at higher education institutions, and information technology to understand the factors of strategic alignment and its effectiveness (Luftman & Kempaiah, 2007; Sabherwal & Kirs, 1994). Walters, Kellermans, Floyd, Veiga, and Matherne (2013) examined the role of strategic alignment and to what extent decision-makers impacted the external environment demands and to identify the relationship between consensus and performance. This study included a sample of 349 university faculty in 63 academic departments as they relate to theories in strategy content and outcomes in strategic management research. The study found that a combination of a

well-aligned strategy with high levels of strategic consensus was associated with high organizational performance. The theoretical origins of matching an organization's strategic focus to its external environment and resources are rooted in the strategy paradigm structure of opportunities and threats (Andrews, 1971; Chandler, 1962). It is vital to understand better the impact of strategic alignment in higher education and how the faculty perceive it in order to explore progress in performance improvement.

Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017) describe a paradigm shift from an almost exclusive focus on training solutions and toward a consultative process focused on aligning relevant practices and solutions to strategic objectives. In other words, there is an underpinning, systemic change that supports long-term sustainability and success. The authors proposed a thoughtful implementation and change management plan that should include communication and change management strategies, and monitoring and improvement mechanisms. The success of the process depends on active and collaborative partnerships between the practitioner (e.g., performance consultant), management, and organizational stakeholders using a systematic approach (Pearce & Robinson, 2000).

Leadership for Strategic Alignment

Leadership is a highly sought-after skill that the workforce often touts as an employment requirement. Garcia-Morales, Jimenez-Barrionuevo, and Gutierrez-Gutierrez (2012) examined the theories of transformational leadership, which emphasize emotions, values, and boosting the creativity of employees. The authors examined how organizational performance could be affected by transformational leadership in a manner that strategically promotes the learning, change, and innovation of CEOs to measure the relationship, if any, of transformational leadership, organizational learning, organization innovation, and organization performance on a five-factor

hypothesis. The results showed “significant and positive correlations existing between and among transformational leadership, organizational learning, organizational innovation, and organizational performance” (Garcia-Morales, Jimenez-Barrionuevo, & Gutierrez-Gutierrez, 2012, p. 5). The authors concluded that transformational leadership is most impactful to organizational performance when there is a systemic, intentional design for employees to learn, be creative, and become inspired to be innovative.

Studies can confirm that top leadership and management can cultivate a work environment for performance improvement to benefit the organization entirely (Dooley, Fryxell, & Judge, 2000; Pagell & Krause, 2002; Rapert, Velliquette, & Garretson, 2002; Walters, Kellermans, Floyd, Veiga, & Matherne, 2013). Employees can be influenced to achieve more significant results when the worksite is positive and job expectations are clearly defined; however, it was not known if that translated into satisfied employees. Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, and Frey (2013) sought to examine transformational leadership, defined as reaching specified outcomes, and its impact on individual job satisfaction and team performance. The authors concluded that transformational leadership must be mindful of the difference between the mechanism of teams and individuals and clearly articulated outcomes, respectively, and a need for training and coaching on implementation approaches of transformational leadership theories in an academic setting. They found that academia is often tasked with organizational improvement; however, not in a formal, systematic manner.

Communicating Strategy Execution

Organizational improvement and strategy are predicated on communication, tracking, and management for effective governance (Eckerson & Hammond, 2011; Luftman, 2015; Luftman, Lyytinen, & ben Zvi, 2017). Higher education plays an essential and vital role in forging social

transformation through its leadership and governance as it serves its constituents (Astin & Astin, 2000; Nica, 2013; Ruben, 2007). There is a rise in expectations of faculty to prepare students beyond technical preparedness for careers and more accountability in governance (Dougherty, Natow, Bork, Jones, & Vega, 2013). In the private sector, business acumen, accountability, governance, and lean operation are standard practices. Programs such as Six Sigma, Kaizen, and Lean Manufacturing are designed to build a sustainable infrastructure to reduce non-productive activity, remove frivolous costs, eliminate duplication, increase customer recruitment and retention, and increase profits. Communicating strategic business alignment is vital, and it includes everyone in the organization (Luftman, 2015). Higher education may need to adopt this same data-driven, evidence communicative practice because reports show trends of increasingly difficult financial challenges, increasing operational costs, and declining sources of revenue and resources while student debt surpassed the \$1 trillion mark (Chopra, 2013). Wolff, Baumol, and Saini (2014) describe the rising cost of education as the “cost disease” and examined the causes of the explosive and increased costs in education.

The allocation of resources is increasingly scrutinized, and questions are posed to the intangible returns on investment for college debt, rising tuition costs, and accessibility for all. Higher education is slowly changing to a business revenue model (Kinman & Jones, 2004; Kolsaker, 2008). Strategic business development initiatives require systems of operation and communication strategies that lead to sustainability while understanding the importance of human capital and support. Critical success factors of academic intuitions are comprehensive, as many as 38, which include a range from student academic growth, student and faculty relationship, and support from government and industry (Sabherwal & Kirs, 1994). Wilden, Gudergan, and Nielsen (2013) conducted an empirical study using structural equation modeling on strategy execution and

understanding the conditions in which dynamic capability enhances performance. Dynamic capacities, as defined by Teece (2007), include distinct organizational skills, managerial processes and procedures, decision rules, and disciplines that provide a micro foundation to an organization. Their empirical findings support that organizations must align internal structure, capacity, and external opportunity to achieve higher performance from dynamic capacities. Furthermore, research suggests that organizations with finite resources have a better chance of sustainability if the communication and capacities serve as the basis to adapt to shared goals of leadership (Koen & Bitzer, 2010; Lucas, 2000; Teece, 2007).

Summary

The environment of higher education has been described by Middlehurst (2002) as a “turbulent environment” with the increase in social impact demands and economic climate. Moreover, higher education is pressured to seek ways to be more accountable, efficient, and effective while expanding and managing financial limitations (Chan, 2001; Pollitt & Bouchaert, 2004). Although the three pillars of a faculty member's occupation are teaching, research, and service, it is clear there is a rise in expectations of performance culture and systems to meet the overarching strategic goals of higher education (Austin, 2002; Decramer, Smolders, & Vanderstraeten, 2013). Kwiek (2000) stated that the function, role, and future outlook of higher education are complex and in a delicate situation as present cultural, political, and economic transformations undermine long-standing functions of higher education.

The importance of strategic alignment has been increasingly deemed as an essential tenet of organizational improvement (Galliers & Newell, 2003; Labovitz & Rosansky, 1997; McLean, 2006). Avison, Jones, Powell, and Wilson (2004) state that strategic alignment can benefit organizations by achieving competitiveness, providing direction, and enabling reactive flexibility

for new opportunities. Performance improvement analysis, strategic data-driven decisions, and communication are critical issues with the escalating expectation of individual faculty members to meet their university's strategic mission (Cullen, Joyce, Hassall, & Broadbent, 2003). Systems theory, as the underpinning theory of strategic alignment, within higher education requires a fresh understanding with respect to practices in higher education (Smulowitz, 2015; Trowler & Knight, 2000).

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore faculty experience and perspective of alignment between the institution's strategic priorities and objectives and their research, teaching, and service. Faculty in higher education may not be familiar with strategic alignment or strategic priorities (Ruben, 2007). Faculty are mainly focused on performance metrics that benefit their roles and responsibilities to be successful as higher education (Hendrix, 2010). However, as important human capital at institutions, faculty play a vital role as change agents. As higher education faces increasing financial, digital, and global pressures, strategic alignment can enable a more systemic approach to improved performance (Martin, 2013). According to Deloitte Insights (2018), common elements of leadership, systems, culture, financial models, and clear communication are desperately needed for the evolution of change. The significance of this study is to illustrate how faculty understand and experience strategic alignment and strategic priorities. With this foundational understanding of perceptives, it will enable the researchers to fully comprehend the complexity of faculty roles and potential avenues for future strategic alignment research. Performance indicators in higher education serve as a method to monitor efficiency and quality; however, the practical implementation is daunting because of the complex environment (Harvey & Green, 1993; Orton & Weick, 1990). The guiding research questions are:

1. What is the faculty's perspective of institutional, college, and department priorities?
2. How do faculty feel about strategic alignment?

Research Design

This dissertation is a qualitative investigation to interview faculty on personal experience and interpretations to draw thematic analysis conclusions. The aim was to collect and analyze

faculty experience and perspective of strategic alignment as members of a large higher education institution who are charged with core activities such as teaching, research, and service. In essence, the faculty's experience and perspective of strategic alignment contribute to the critical functions of the residing college/unit as teaching, research, and service that are tied to performance indicators of institutional priorities and lead by administrators. It is not known whether faculty understand or are aware of the importance of their role in strategic alignment and how their academic duties are linked to a more significant transition of higher education. The aim was to understand better how faculty experience strategic alignment through in-depth interviews at their institutions. It is intended to uncover preliminary insight and meaning in perceived strategic alignment in a complex organization such as higher education. Creswell and Creswell (2017) describe key principles as guiding rationales for using a qualitative approach in research, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Principles of a Qualitative Research Approach

Research Component	Qualitative Approach
Nature of the research question	Understand the issue/phenomenon
Purpose of the study	How or what the issue/phenomenon is and the need to be explored
Participants	Purposeful representation for the study in a natural setting
Analysis	Intended to be interpretive and narrative
Researcher role	An active learner and storyteller

Note: From Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, by J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell (2017). Sage Publications.

The qualitative investigation was selected to adhere to these principles and the researcher's interest in how participants view and understand strategic alignment and strategic priorities. The research design of this study was a qualitative thematic analysis study to explore the faculty's perspective in their natural setting. Qualitative methods are used to answer questions about the

topic that is not well known to understand the experience, meaning, and perspective from the standpoint of the participant (Creswell, 2013; Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016). Faculty's academic duties are the critical front line to an institution's success, and they are influential for growth and expansion of colleges and units, yet they might not understand the larger scale of their impact or play an active role in strategic priorities. Creswell (2013) describes the end goal of a qualitative study as a process of exploration and discovery to describe the nature of a particular issue, phenomenon, or occurrence. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) define qualitative research design as "an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretive process" (p. 16). In essence, it is a way to investigate how faculty construct their interpretations of strategic priorities in their role as a faculty member. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) contend that interacting with others allows the investigator to interpret the meaning and experiences that constitute their realities. Seidman (1998) states the "primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people who make up the organization or carry out the process" (p. 9). Since the purpose of this study is to understand the faculty's perspective, an exploratory research design allows knowledge to be gained and captured by interviewing participants in their workplace as they experience day-to-day, real-world activities (Seidman, 1998; Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016).

Data Collection Procedure

This study followed a qualitative emphasis on meaning and meaning in the context of Seidman (1998, 2013). Seidman (2013) states that the human process of deriving meaning is innate and creates an experience. Furthermore, the meaning people give to a situation creates their experience and attracts their attention thereby affecting behavior and, in a higher education setting,

can have a collective impact (Blumer, 1969; Cameron, 1978; Kraatz & Zajac, 2001; Mishler, 1979; Schutz, 1967; Walter, Kellermanns, Floyd, Veiga, & Matherne, 2013; Zajac, Kraatz, & Bresser, 2000;).

Based on Seidman's (1998, 2013) guidelines, the capturing of data was done using three-series interviews using open-ended questions as a way for an investigator to gain an in-depth perspective. The first interview was conducted to establish the context of the participants' experience in higher education. The second interview was aimed to obtain details of the participant's experience as it relates to strategic alignment and their perspective of strategic priorities. The third interview asked the participants to reflect on their meaning of strategic alignment and priorities. This process allowed the participants to construct details that are important to them, showing subjective meaningfulness, within a beginning, middle, and end framework using Seidman's (1998, 2013) methodology. The three 60- to 90-minute interviews were scheduled at least a week apart, allowing for variations of scheduling and building of a relationship over time between the investigator and the participant. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

The participants were interviewed onsite at their natural work environment to adhere to an authentic investigation. The participants were coded with a non-identifying pseudonym to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word-for-word using the Otter 2.0 software (Otter AI, n.d.), and field notes were kept as a way to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. The interview protocol was not offered as a preview to the participants to solicit authentic, organic responses. In addition, the participants were offered to be emailed the transcription of their interviews for their review on the accuracy of the information, although none selected this option.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer guidelines for establishing trustworthiness with qualitative research by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For credibility, engagement strategies were employed by offering the participants an opportunity to review the interview protocol and review the transcriptions of the three interviews. For transferability, the data was used to provide sufficient and comprehensive information so other academicians can read the study and find relevancy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest triangulation of data to ensure dependability, which was done by using multiple numbers of participants, having three interviews each, recording interviews, and keeping field notes. Lastly, confirmability of maintaining neutrality, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was achieved by employing all the techniques as described for credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Sample

According to The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2013-14), the “Classifications include Title IV eligible, degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States represented in the National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS system that conferred degrees.” Universities that are designated as “R1” have demonstrated “very high research” activity based on aggregated data of faculty and resources (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2013-14). Universities that are designated as “R2” have demonstrated “high research activity” based on aggregated data of faculty and resources (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2013-14). Seidman (2013) states, “People’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives” (p. 16-17); therefore, the following profiles are based on the responses from the first interview. As of 2016, there were 1,314,400 faculty positions listed as postsecondary teachers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2016) in the United States. For this study, the pool of

participants was narrowed down to obtain six interviewees for a total of 18 in-depth interviews to adhere to the qualitative methods of credibility application and consistency (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The limited number of participants in a qualitative research study is due to the vast amount of data collected for each interview and the focus being on quality, not quantity (Hycner, 1985). The intent was to conduct an in-depth exploration of a small sample versus a large scale generalization study. The participants needed to be employed for at least twelve months with titles of professor, associate professor, or assistant professor. Participants were recruited by email to faculty at R1 and R2 institutions in southeastern Michigan. It was essential to sample faculty in Southeast Michigan because participants were met at their places of employment to conduct in-depth interviews to understand their experiences, attitudes, and conditions from their institutional perspectives (Seidman, 1998; Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016).

Several institutions' websites were used to seek interested participants who subsequently were emailed directly to see if they were willing to partake in the study. In all, nearly 100 emails were sent to eligible faculty members. As faculty responded, they were asked to schedule the three interviews based on their availability to meet at their offices. Before each interview, a confirmation email was sent, and after each interview, a thank you email was sent. The email included the title of the study, the researcher's name and email, and details on when the interview would take place. There was a \$10 Amazon card provided to each participant at the end of each interview for their time and inconvenience.

Interview Protocol

The interview questions were semi-structured and asked with a conversational approach, listed in Appendix B, and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The interviews were scheduled and conducted at least one week apart at the faculty's offices on their campuses as part of the natural

setting (Seidman, 2013). At the start of the interview, the participant was asked not to disclose the name of his/her current institution or place of employment, because the interview was recorded and would be transcribed, to ensure the protection of the participant's anonymity. At the end of the interview questions, participants were asked if there were unclear questions, needed additions to their responses, or if there were any other important topics related to strategic alignment that the participant wanted to discuss or add to the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were asked to provide any additional information that he or she would like to share or express.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used as an inductive approach to content analysis for semantic themes for the explicit meaning of these data as stated by the participant (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Liu (2016) states that an inductive approach is aimed at limiting findings to the description of the most important themes and not to build theories. In addition, Thomas (2006) states the underlying development of an inductive approach is to: 1) to condense extensive and varied raw data into a brief summary format; 2) establish links between the research aim and the summary findings; and 3) develop a model about the experiences or perspectives derived from the text data. The interviews were transcribed using the Otter 2.0 software (Otter AI, n.d.) that generated searchable text files. Based on Braun and Clarke (2006), a six-phase thematic analysis was used to report the experience, meaning, and reality of the participants in rich detail as a realistic method for a clear demarcation intention of this study. Braun and Clarke suggest a six-step process of thematic analysis as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Six-Step Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phases	Process
Phase 1 – Obtain the data	Transcribe the data, immerse yourself in the data, note any initial ideas of themes
Phase 2 – Generate initial codes	Begin coding interesting data points and link features to codes
Phase 3 – Search for themes	Cross-reference themes as they relate to codes, and design a thematic map of analysis
Phase 4 – Review the themes	Refinement of themes and filter for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, iteration of thematic map
Phase 5 – Define and name themes	Define the essence of each theme, label it, and explain the distinctive story and how it relates to the research statement
Phase 6 – Generate final report	Produce a scholarly report that demonstrates merit and validity including extracts that go further than a mere description of data; must be a compelling argument and correlate to the research statement

Note. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101, by Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006).

The investigator completed an inductive semantic analysis procedure of coding data from the interview transcripts and field notes from what the participants stated during the interview. As the interviews were conducted, the researcher was cognizant of self-preconceived understandings or biases in seeking to understand the faculty to document the richness within a social context to preserve the key indicators of quality, credibility, ethics, and coherence (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003; Tracy, 2010). Data were organized in an Excel document to identify patterns and themes. The Excel document included the following categories: participant's code, title, college, institution classification, institution priorities, college priorities, department priorities, communication, responsiveness to change, strategic priorities' importance to you, strategic priorities' value to you, and ideal strategic alignment. Transcripts were used to extract quotes and understand the experience and perspective of faculty to answer the research questions. The key findings of themes were identified if three or more of the participants responded with a common

answer. The summaries of analysis categorized by the institution, college, department, response to change, importance, value, and ideal alignment are listed in Appendices C through J.

Summary

Faculty are essential human capital at institutions and play a vital role in organizational performance improvement in higher education. This qualitative investigation aimed to interview faculty on personal experience and interpretations of strategic priorities to draw thematic analysis conclusions of experience and perspective. Using Creswell's (2013) and Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) qualitative methods as a process of exploration and discovery, the investigator interviewed six participants at their places of employment. Each participant was interviewed three times with a week's time gap between each interview. The interviews were transcribed using the Otter 2.0 software (Otter AI, n.d.), then an inductive semantic analysis procedure of coding data from the interview transcripts was conducted. Data were organized to identify patterns and themes using exact quotes and included the following categories: participant's code, title, college, institution classification, institution priorities, college priorities, department priorities, communication, responsiveness to change, strategic priorities' importance to you, strategic priorities' value to you, and ideal strategic alignment.

CHAPTER FOUR: Results

Introduction

This chapter discusses the profiles of the participants in the study from the first interview and findings related to the research questions from the second and third interviews. The interviewing methodology described by Seidman (2013) consisted of three-series interviews as well as including profile descriptions of the participants as a way of providing a framework for the study. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a non-descriptive overview of each of the participants to structure the diversity and commonality of the interviews at varying universities. The purpose of this study is to explore faculty experience and perspective of alignment between the institution's strategic priorities and objectives and their research, teaching, and service. The guiding research questions are:

1. What is the faculty's perspective of institutional, college, and department priorities?
2. How do faculty feel about strategic alignment?

The following are the labels for the research questions:

- Faculty perspective of institutional priorities – RQ 1.1
- Faculty perspective of college priorities – RQ 1.2
- Faculty perspective of department priorities – RQ 1.3
- Faculty perspective of strategic alignment – RQ 2.0

The investigator explored faculty experience and perspective of alignment among strategic priorities, objectives, and activities as a function of their research, teaching, and service by conducting interviews at the places of employment. The six participants were evenly distributed between assistant professors and associate professors. Two institutions were classified as R1s and two institutions were classified as R2s as designated by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions

of Higher Education (2013-14). Four of the participants resided in the college of engineering and two participants resided in the college of liberal arts. The participants were from R1 and R2 institutions representing the colleges of engineering and liberal arts with the title of assistant professors and associate professors. When the participants' responses were analyzed by title, college, and institutional classifications, no emergence of common themes using a threshold of three responses was found.

The summary of the participants' title, college, and institutional classification are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants Titles, College, and Institutional Classification

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1

The selected interview questions, listed in Appendix B, established the participant's context in his/her natural work setting. The data from the interview was used to depict a summary profile.

1. What influenced you to become an academician and enter this profession?
2. What have been your greatest accomplishments?
3. What motivates you to fulfill your role in research, teaching, and service?
4. How have you changed or improved over the years in this position?

5. Describe your ideal working environment as it relates to research, teaching, and service.

Profile of Institutions

The participants were from R1 and R2 designated institutions representing the colleges of engineering and liberal arts. Universities that are designated as “R1” have demonstrated “very high research activity” based on aggregated data of faculty and resources (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2013-14). Universities that are designated as “R2” have demonstrated “high research activity” based on aggregated data of faculty and resources (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2013-14). These institutions are located in southeastern Michigan because the investigator’s methodology required that the interviews be conducted at the participants’ places of employment. The designations of these universities are earned by adhering to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2013-14) criterion of demonstrating high levels of research activity as an accredited and doctoral degree-granting institution of a minimum of 80 doctorates in 2013.

Profile of Participant AS

Participant AS is a tenure-track faculty member at an R1 institution and has been employed at this institution for five years. The job title of this participant is an Assistant Professor. AS was influenced to become an academician and enter this profession because of teaching and research. AS feels skilled in teaching and research and thoroughly enjoys the profession. This participant mentioned, “The nice thing about teaching is that the harder you work, the better your outcomes, whereas, with research, harder work does not always result in positive outcomes.” AS is fond of the environment of a university and the academic freedom to design research projects with students

and work with other faculty. This participant has previous experience in the industry where “research topics were directed by the administration or top-down.” AS’s greatest accomplishment is being viewed as an expert and working in an autonomous environment on research that is intrinsically fulfilling. When asked to explain motivational factors to fulfill this role, AS stated teaching and research because of the involvement with students. Teaching allows refinement in skills to explain content and research as it relates to coming up with the questions and designing the methodology. This participant stated some improvements over the last few years have been with using instructional designers from a center of learning technology for teaching and securing collaborators for research projects. AS explains an ideal working environment as it relates to research, teaching, and service would be “clear expectations for tenure and total transparency and clarity for what is expected for research, teaching, and service.”

Profile of Participant BT

Participant BT is a tenure-track faculty member at an R2 institution and has been employed at this institution for three years. The job title of this participant is an Assistant Professor. This participant was influenced to become an academician since childhood and was very passionate about research, science, and technology as an undergraduate student. Participant BT stated, “I actually found that research is my passion and career goal. So that's why I choose to do Ph.D. and thought that the faculty position is the most suitable position.” When asked about the greatest accomplishments, the response was the number of publications, book chapters, and two United States patents. This participant stated the motivations of this position include obtaining tenure with publishing early since “publication takes time” and teaching with the opportunity to develop new courses for students within the discipline. In addition, sharing new technologies and new ideas with students adds an element of excitement to theoretical research. Participant BT stated

some improvements over the years have been with self-evaluations of teaching in the middle of the term and immediately implementing students' recommendations. As a result, this leads to "student demographic understanding, better ways to teach, therefore easier to communicate with students." With respect to research, there was an emphasis and shift to making it a priority. In terms of an ideal working environment, Participant BT states that having more physical space to be able to write without interruptions and a graduate program that would matriculate undergraduate students for sustainable involvement in research projects would be ideal.

Profile of Participant CU

Participant CU is a tenured faculty member at an R2 institution and has been employed at this institution for six years. The job title of this participant is an Associate Professor. This participant stated that the most significant influence to enter this profession was the advice from a master's advisor. This advisor provided in-depth mentorship regarding completing a Ph.D., facing difficult challenges, testing character, and the development of human skills. This advisor ingrained the philosophy that "impossibility is something that is not in existence" and purposely provided teaching and research situations that were demanding. Participant CU stated, without hesitation, that student success was the greatest accomplishment: for example, student research projects that have earned national recognition and awards and students that have "actually developed skills and even become entrepreneurs and also leaders in the industry." As for motivation, this participant stated that being impactful with research outcomes that lead to "improving the value of human experience" with the involvement of students. An example of this would be teaching scientific methods that directly translate to actual human applications so that students are able to address issues with research-based solutions. For improvements in this position, this participant stated teaching, since that was the area with the least amount of experience, particularly in online teaching

and the learning process. Participant CU completed a great deal of research as part of the doctoral studies; however, had to “learn how to actually do proper assessment and evaluation and close the loop of student learning.” When asked to describe the ideal working environment, the participant stated that, due to the nature of an academic profession being very dynamic, “an ideal situation for me will be kind of a situation where expectations are clearly defined.” Participant CU stated that although flexibility to conduct research, teach, and provide service is part of the job, there must be a balance and moderation otherwise it leads to “spreading yourself out too thin, then it becomes an issue.”

Profile of Participant DV

Participant DV is a tenured faculty member at an R1 institution and has been employed at this institution for six years. The job title of this participant is an Associate Professor. This participant stated the greatest influence was a passion for mathematics since grade school, and being a faculty “gives me more time to do mathematics, and I also enjoyed the teaching aspect of it.” Participant DV stated the greatest accomplishment was achieving tenure two years early, which was a request of the department. When asked about the motivation to fulfill the role of research, teaching, and service, the response was, “I like interacting with students going into the classroom; being part of their transformation is fun.” With regard to research, the motivation is recognition by the department, by the university, and by the community. The participant stated that “being recognized by the general math community and by engagement with my colleagues at other institutions” makes it more fun to teach and to conduct research. Participant DV stated that the biggest change over the last few years has been to do more “administrative arrangements.” In this sense, the participant said that there is a culture shift in the department at many levels to “repurpose ourselves a little bit” in order to meet demands of the changing field of mathematics to

a greater focus on statistics. The ideal working environment from this participant's perspective is overall less clerical work and more administrative support for teaching and research. For example, teaching and research are very time consuming and taxing on one's time with many details that need to be taken care of in order to be successful, especially with grants.

These are things that can be done by other people. So that's not my training. I feel like if I use my time on those things, I'm not belittling those things or minimizing those things, but the university is paying me to do mathematics, teaching, and research, therefore clerical work has a quality impact on teaching and research.

Profile of Participant EW

Participant EW is a tenured faculty member at an R1 institution and has been employed at this institution for ten years. The job title of this participant is an Associate Professor. Participant EW was influenced to become an academician because of relationships established during the dissertation process. This participant was interested in translational research and being able to teach research methods to students. Participant EW understood early on that "historical relationship to be given subcontracts" was imperative to being successful. When asked about the greatest accomplishments, this participant stated, "I think the best thing is that students like my classes and students' reception of [my] teaching." Participant EW stated that the motivating factors to this role include "being somewhat entertaining and giving some perspective to students" while administratively contributing to progress in the department. This motivation is attributed to good mentorship when this participant was a student. Participant EW stated the improvements over the years have been with an increase in teaching and finding ways of "providing good content in courses" as the industry changes. Regarding an ideal working environment, Participant EW stated that faculty are "dispersed and isolated and stove-piped," and it would be better if offices were structured to promote more emphasis on building relationships. This participant commented

that as “things constantly change in operations” it is difficult to find the needed resources that are vital to faculty.

Profile of Participant FX

Participant FX is a tenure-track faculty member at an R1 institution and has been employed at this institution for six years. The job title of this participant is an Assistant Professor. Participant FX was influenced to become an academician by great mentors while completing a master’s degree, particularly an advisor that “really focused on the step by step process” to completing a Ph.D. This participant worked in the industry and discovered the enjoyment of using the research and learning the theories that applied to the profession. In regard to this participant’s greatest accomplishments, the response was “being an engaged scholar” and “I try to think of work, whether it’s research or teaching, as connected to everyday contact and issues and problems and situations.” Participant FX states that motivation to fulfill this role is creating a “brand” and “take some time to be reflexive, to be mindful of who you are, what you want to be and what you want to do, and try to find ways that you can do this in a way that makes sense for you.” In essence, the notion of branding parlays into bringing resources for teaching collaboration, networks for students, and publishing papers. Participant FX described the improvements over the years include being “partnership-oriented and collaboration-oriented with community partners, which bodes well for both my teaching and my research.” This participant values teaching and bringing mentors to students for projects and feedback as a “multi-pronged way of thinking about who we are as teacher-scholars.” Participant FX stated that an ideal working environment includes connections with colleagues and top-level support for administrative tasks with grants. The entire process for obtaining research grants “takes a lot of time, valuable time, from your intrinsic duties as a teacher-scholar, and needed support does not get a lot of attention from the administration.”

Addressing Research Questions of Faculty Experience and Perspective of Strategic

Alignment

The purpose of this study is to explore the faculty's experience and perspectives of alignment between the institution's strategic priorities and objectives, and their research, teaching, and service. The guiding research questions are:

1. What is the faculty's perspective of institutional, college, and department priorities?
2. How do faculty feel about strategic alignment?

The following are the labels for the research questions:

- Faculty perspective of institutional priorities – RQ 1.1
- Faculty perspective of college priorities – RQ 1.2
- Faculty perspective of department priorities – RQ 1.3
- Faculty perspective of strategic alignment – RQ 2.0

The interviewing methodology described by Seidman (2013) was used in the second interview to obtain details of the participant's experience as it relates to strategic alignment and priorities, and the third interview asked the participants to reflect on their meaning of strategic alignment and priorities. The selected interview questions, listed in Appendix B, were the following:

1. Describe your intuition's strategic priorities (RQ 1.1).
2. Describe the strategic priorities of your college (RQ 1.2).
3. Describe the strategic priorities of your department (RQ 1.3).
4. Describe the communication processes for the distribution of information on strategic priorities (RQ 2.0).
5. Describe how quickly your college or department responds to change (RQ 2.0).
6. How are strategic priorities important or not important to you (RQ 2.0)?

7. Describe how you think strategic alignment of priorities is valuable (RQ 2.0).
8. Describe an ideal way of aligning strategic priorities across many levels of an institution (RQ 2.0).

The three 60- to 90-minute interviews were scheduled at least a week apart, allowing for variations of scheduling and building of a relationship over time between the investigator and the participant. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word-for-word using the Otter 2.0 software (Otter AI, n.d.), and field notes were kept as a way to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. The key findings of themes were identified if three or more of the participants responded with a common answer based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The purpose of the first interview was to establish context, and a key finding was that all six participants indicated that students, student interaction, and teaching were motivating factors to fulfill their role.

Theme 1: Growth

The fundamental origination of the central theme of "growth" was defined as a distinct pattern from the responses from the participants for the research questions of the faculty's perspective of institutional, college, and department priorities. These responses included keywords and phrases derived from the interviews pertaining to increasing student enrollment, recruitment and retention, developing new majors and programs, and diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Sub-Theme A: Student Enrollment (RQ 1.1)

The key findings of the question on the institution's priorities were that four of the participants (AS, BT, DV, and FX) stated that increasing enrollment or recruitment was a priority.

Participant BT stated that the priorities of the institution were to increase research productivity, provide online courses, and increase student enrollment since it “is impacting the budget of the university and there are several budget cuts.” Participant DV stated the strategic priorities of the institution “changes with administrators.” At the time of the study, the focus was on student enrollment and “everyone wonders how he will do it, but that is the number one priority.” Participant FX stated the formal strategic priorities are “probably listed on a nice website where they have the information out there but that’s not necessarily something that we hear talked about.” The participant stated that, informally, the broader issues of priorities are retention and recruitment, graduation rates, “especially for the student of color,” innovation, community engagement, and student success. Although there are strategic priorities, the Participant FX stated,

... for all our wonderful classifications, when you talk to the neighborhoods, the university has not been quite as involved in the social justice aspects and has often been on the side of the planners and the developers and the policymakers. Community members felt that we had been focused on the big guy and not enough focus on the everyday person. That is something that I think is gradually changing.

Sub-Theme B: Recruitment and Retention (RQ 1.2)

The key findings of the question on priorities at the college level were that four participants (BT, CU, DV, and EW) expressed that recruitment and retention were the priorities. Participant BT stated the strategic priorities of the college are student enrollment and recruitment activities, increased donor base, increased research and funding, budget deficiencies, and acquiring lab space. The participant stated that financial metrics are used for “fundraising to overcome this budget deficiency.” Participant DV stated the strategic priorities of the college are enrollment and retention because “we are losing students.” The participant stated that students preferring to go with “concrete job prospects and parents are concerned that students pay attention to that.”

Sub-Theme C: New Majors and Programs (RQ 1.3)

The key findings of the question on priorities at the department level were that four participants (AS, BT, EW, and FX) stated the development of new majors and programs were the priorities. Participant AS stated the strategic priorities of the department are: to add other majors to diversify industry presence; more space and faculty; increasing standards of grades; research funding; restructuring majors to meet industry demand and expansion; and increase course rigor. The participant stated that “being linked to one industry, the problem is when that industry hurts, you hurt,” so the department’s goal is industry diversification. Participant BT stated the strategic priorities of the department are: to develop new majors; reducing course loads; and class size limits. The goal is to provide uniformity to other colleges to “give us some time to do research.” The participant stated that the problem is “if we can increase the class size, it will be good for earning money, but it will reduce the quality of teaching. So, where is the middle point?”

Sub-Theme D: Diversity and Inclusion (RQ 1.1)

There were three participants (CU, EW, and FX) that reported that an institutional priority was diversity and inclusion. Participant CU stated that there were four different strategic goals and “our priorities are focused on our mission.” The strategic priorities are to “develop people,” inclusion and diversity, and community engagement. Participant EW stated that there are seven strategic priorities of the institution and could only remember the following six: community engagement, community outreach, endowments, innovation and entrepreneurship, academic quality, and diversity. The participant stated, “We have a research mission, and we have an educational mission, and we have an engagement mission, and they don’t always align.” Participant FX stated the formal strategic priorities are “probably listed on a nice website where they have the information out there but that’s not necessarily something that we hear talked about.”

The participant stated that, informally, the broader issues of priorities are retention and recruitment, graduation rates, “especially for the student of color,” innovation, community engagement, and student success. Although there are strategic priorities, the participant stated,

... for all our wonderful classifications, when you talk to the neighborhoods, the university has not been quite as involved in the social justice aspects and have often been on the side of the planners and the developers and the policymakers. Community members felt that we have been focused on the big guy and not enough focus on the everyday person. That is something that I think is gradually changing.

Theme 2 Student Focus

Although not tied to a research question of this study, the fundamental origination of the central theme of “student focus” was defined as a distinct pattern from the participants’ responses from the profiles on motivation to fulfill their roles. These responses included keywords and phrases derived from the interviews pertaining to the improvement of teaching methods, increasing research and funding to increase student engagement, ensuring student success, and meeting the industry demand by adequately preparing students post-graduation.

Sub-Theme A: Improvement of Teaching (No RQ New Finding)

Another key finding was that five participants (AS, BT, CU, EW, and FX) reported that teaching was the focus of the most change and improvement over the years in this position. It was clear that these participants truly cared about delivering and facilitating effective teaching practices. Participant AS mentioned, “The nice thing about teaching is that the harder you work the better your outcomes, whereas, with research, harder work does not always result in positive outcomes.” Participant BT stated some improvements over the years have been with self-evaluations of teaching in the middle of the term and immediately implementing students’ recommendations. As a result, this leads to “student demographic understanding, better ways to teach, therefore easier to communicate with students.” Participant FX states that motivation to

fulfill this role is creating a “brand” and “take some time to be reflexive, to be mindful of who you are, what you want to be and what you want to do, and try to find ways that you can do this in a way that makes sense for you.” In essence, the notion of branding parlays into bringing resources for teaching collaboration, networks for students, and publishing papers

Sub-Theme B: Research and Funding (No RQ New Finding)

There were three participants (AS, BT, and EW) that reported increasing research and funding as the priority for students’ benefit. Participant AS stated the strategic priorities of the college are interdisciplinary research and funding, providing solutions to “large scale global problems,” and feedback from industry conducted by “experiential learning outside the classroom.” There is an emphasis that “we need more research expenditures, we need more research expenditures, we need more expenditures,” that assist with experiential learning. Participant EW stated the strategic priorities of the college are to develop new programs, increase recruitment and retention, increase graduation rates, financial stability, and endowments. The participant stated the college wants to be “more adaptable to the changing educational and industrial needs,” which is outside of traditional “departmental stovepipes” in conducting research that involves faculty and students.

Sub-Theme C: Student Success (No RQ New Finding)

All six participants (AS, BT, CU, DV, EW, and FX) indicated that students, student interaction, or student success was a motivating factor to fulfill their role. The participants reported that student mentorship played a vital part in motivation by providing students with positive and beneficial outcomes. Participant CU stated, without hesitation, that student success was the greatest accomplishment by being impactful with research outcomes that lead to “improving the

value of human experience” with the involvement of students. Participant DV stated, “I like interacting with students going into the classroom; being part of their transformation is fun.” Participant EW stated that the motivating factors to this role include “being somewhat entertaining and giving some perspective to students” while administratively contributing to progress in the department.

There were three participants (AS, CU, and FX) that reported that a priority was focused on students or supporting student success. Participant AS stated that the priorities of the institution were shifting because “we just got new leadership, so there could be kind of some changes and strategic priorities.” As of the time of this study, AS reported that the priorities were student enrollment with completing all four years at the institution, interdisciplinary research collaboration within the institution, research funding, and improving student professionalism by “a program to help students not only work on their skills in the classroom but also to work on the soft skills influenced by industry telling us what they want.” Participant CU stated that a strategic priority is to “develop people” as it supports the institutional mission.

Sub-Theme D: Meeting Industry Demand (No RQ New Finding)

There were four participants (AS, CU, EW, and FX) that reported meeting the industry demand, as reflected by the development of new majors or programs, was the general priority. Participant CU stated the strategic priorities of the department are to support the discipline and prepare “academically talented students for the specific profession.” The department aligns with the college and university’s priorities. Participant EW stated the strategic priorities of the department are to increase national ranking, revise degrees’ academic plans and majors for student and industry interests. The participant stated that there is a priority to “adhering to a more common model for the degree delivery.” Participant FX stated the strategic priorities of the department are

being worked on currently with a new chair because they have not done it recently. The new chair is “convening groups of stakeholders, faculty, staff, and students to consider what are our bylaws and strategic mission of the department.” The participant stated that the department is prioritizing professional training and development and student learning.

Theme 3: Perspectives of Strategic Priorities

The fundamental origination of the central theme of “perspectives of strategic priorities” was defined as a distinct pattern from the responses from the participants as related to the research question of the faculty’s perspective of strategic alignment. These responses included keywords and phrases derived from the interviews pertaining to the importance of strategic priorities, individual perspectives of value, how strategic priorities are implemented, and personal impact.

Sub-Theme A: Important (RQ 2.0)

The key finding of the question on the importance of strategic priorities was important in that all six participants (AS, BT, CU, DV, EW, and FX) stated that they felt strategic priorities were important. Participant BT stated that strategic priorities are important, and “it’s a crucial thing, so I think it’s very important as I am a member of the strategic planning committee.” The participant stated, “I see myself as a person who is passionate about research and also teaching, so I push a master’s program.” Participant CU stated that strategic priorities are “very, very important, those are actually like the roadmap for everyone at the institution. Various colleges, departments, and even the faculty translate them to how we actually develop the students.” The participant stated “they [strategic priorities] are actually the backbone of the things that we do because without having strategy put in place and a framework for that, we probably will not be doing what we’re supposed to do, even if we’re doing what we’re supposed to do it is difficult to

measure the effectiveness.” Participant DV stated that strategic priorities are important “if it would impact me directly and they will change part of the curriculum.” The participant stated that priorities on enrollment and facilities are important as: “I know I have to or should pay attention to those details, but I’m already committed to many things, so those parts of strategic planning, I just ignore.”

Sub-Theme B: Valuable but Inefficient (RQ 2.0)

The key finding of the question on the value of strategic priorities is that all six participants (AS, BT, CU, DV, EW, and FX) reported that strategic priorities were valuable. Participant AS stated that strategic priorities are valuable. “My only issue that’s really tough is that within any university, you are going to have very big differences from college to college.” Although they are valuable, “the problem in universities is that sometimes the bigger strategic plans are really based around the bigger colleges and then they’re not realizing that the other colleges are vastly different.” For example, a bigger college has different issues that are then thrust as the priority of the entire institution.

Participant BT stated that strategic priorities are valuable and stated that “if they are not aligned, actually there will be chaos and will not go smoothly.” The participant stated, “if the elements are not there, the goals will not be met.” Participant DV stated that strategic priorities are valuable, “but those terms are losing their meaning.” The participant stated,

We have to have some systematic approach to all these things, put our resources together, that alignment is important to me. The way it is done right now, it is not very tempting because people lose their trust if it comes top-down. If it is just coming from administrators, people don’t get behind them. I think we need to turn it around a little bit more, make it more grassroots, not from top-down.

The participant stated that there is a need to gain loyalty from faculty by having infrastructure since priorities change with administrators.

Participant EW stated that strategic priorities are valuable if done properly. The participant stated that “lots of people spend all their time squirreling around about aligning these priorities, and I’m not sure that we do the process well, but I think it can potentially have good outcomes.”

Participant FX stated that strategic priorities are valuable but they are not interwoven. The participant stated, “they are valuable, but I do not have clout or an administrative role to make an impact. In theory, it is a good idea; in practice, I don’t have input into the process. I don’t see that as necessarily my role.” The participant stated that there is an incredible amount of work being done on strategic priorities; however, the sustainability is questionable and that responsibility rests with administrators.

Sub-Theme C: Enhanced Communication from Faculty (RQ 2.0)

The key findings of the question on an ideal way of implementing strategic priorities is that there were four participants (BT, DV, EW, and FX) that stated better or enhanced communication is needed, and four participants (AS, BT, CU, and DV) reported that having faculty input was fundamental. Participant AS stated that ideal alignment of strategic priorities for the entire university is:

...tricky because you have differences from college to college and departments, so if an institution as a whole wants to come up with, you know, some sort of strategic priority, that they definitely need to elicit input from all of the different colleges.

The participant stated the problem with an open invitation for input is the faculty are busy with research and teaching; therefore, they cannot attend so many planning meetings. AS reported that administrators are staying on top of trends, and “I see that a lot in our administration but there

are different levels of administration from provost, deans, chairs, and there is not one person,” so strategic planning “trickles down, but it flows up in universities” and coordination of a plan is difficult. Participant BT stated that ideal alignment of strategic priorities is done at the department level and stated, “we do surveys, collect data, present data to [the] chair, we do work at the department level; it's just an input, but I don't know how much effect these data have when they make their decisions.” There is a collective decision, and reports from the faculty are submitted but not always followed, and there needs to be more communication. Participant CU stated that the ideal alignment of strategic priorities would have “incentives to merit reviews related to aligning to priorities. There should be a mechanism that triggers the question of what are you doing about the strategic alignment or the strategic goals of your institution may be the end of every semester or the beginning of every semester.” The participant stated that when “we are developing our syllabus or we're developing a plan for the year, we can think about contributions to strategic priorities.” Participant EW stated that the ideal alignment of strategic priorities is to make it simple and continuous by a distribution of flow. The participant stated, “I think there's a good biological analogy, okay. It's the octopus. The octopus has as many neurons and neural connections as a person. The octopus does not, however, have a brain. It has a distributed brain. So it's distributed intelligence.”

Participant FX stated that ideal alignment of strategic priorities should align at all levels from the department, the college, and at the university level. The participant stated, “these strategic initiatives or a strategic area should be discussed in coordination with department chairs and deans, and they should consider that along with the priorities of different departments and colleges.” The participant stated, “it's a matter of process and accountability, ensuring participation, and feedback,

mindful strategizing by asking more questions and what are the intended results with clear deliverables.”

Sub-Theme D: Depends on Personal Impact (RQ 2.0)

There were four participants (AS, DV, EW, and FX) who reported that although priorities are important, integration was dependent on whether the priority impacted them personally. Participant AS stated that strategic priorities are important and is open to hearing about what the administrator decides on priorities. The participant stated that “I don’t always agree with them, but I think from doing this it's made me realize that it is something that I think about and care about. It's just that I didn't think about it in those formal terms.” Participant EW stated that strategic priorities are important “as an articulation of something that I already thought was important to me and my students.” The participant stated that “I look at things that I'm interested in doing and if it aligns with strategic priorities, it gives me some cover or some support, but I would do what’s important to me whether it’s a strategy priority or not.” Participant FX stated that strategic priorities are important, but not explicitly important. The participant stated, “I don’t know that I spend time actually thinking, ‘how does this align with this’ per se, I think it’s more implicitly in the background.” The participant stated that the primary focus is on research, work, and teaching and believes that priorities are relative to being at the university.

Theme 4: Communication

The fundamental origination of the central theme of “communication” was defined as a distinct pattern from the responses from the participants as related to the research question of the faculty’s perspective of strategic alignment. These responses included keywords and phrases

derived from the interviews pertaining to how strategic priorities were communicated to the participants and the participants' perspective of responsiveness to change.

Sub-Theme A: Meetings (RQ 2.0)

For the key findings of the question of how strategic priorities were communicated, there were five participants (AS, BT, DV, EW, and FX) that stated the information was distributed by meetings. Participant AS stated that strategic priorities are communicated and reported in meetings, and workshops, and some information by email. The participant emphasized that "more important big-picture things are in person." There are college meetings, department meetings, workshops to develop strategic plans, and yearly visits from the provost for faculty input. If a meeting is missed, there may be an email, but "no one really reads it." Participant EW stated the strategic priorities are communicated primarily by meetings that are "not mandatory; they are voluntary and enthusiastically attended." The participant stated that there are forums, committees, and sub-committees that circulate reports at meetings. Participant FX stated the strategic priorities are communicated primarily by events and the website at the university level. The participant stated that the college's priorities are not communicated - only retrieved for a purpose such as a grant. The department's priorities are communicated by meetings.

Sub-Theme B: Email (RQ 2.0)

There were four participants (AS, BT, CU, and DV) that reported information was distributed by email. Participant BT stated the strategic priorities are communicated by email and mail to the faculty inboxes. Faculty meetings are where the priorities are reported and recorded in meeting minutes then sent by email. Participant CU stated the strategic priorities are communicated by email from the president almost every week as well as by videos and one-on-

one chats. The participant stated, “There's face-to-face opportunity and emails.” Participant DV stated the strategic priorities are communicated by “tons of emails and meetings.” The participant stated that the priorities are “already decided and not a grassroots process, and they just asked your opinion, but nothing will change.” Participant DV stated that the information is merely an announcement to the faculty.

Sub-Theme C: Good Response to Change (RQ 2.0)

The key findings of the question on responsiveness to change was that five participants (AS, BT, CU, EW, and FX) responded that change was “good.” Participant AS stated that departmental change is good when strong logic and evidence are present because that propels change quickly. If the change proposed does not make sense or “poor logic is used to make that argument for that change, you're going to get a lot of blowback.” Participant BT stated that departmental change is good. When the change is a tech-based system, then change happens quickly. For example, new proposals are submitted by an internal system and “it’s a pretty good system.” Participant CU stated that departmental change is good at the department level because “we are relatively small and change can happen quickly.” The participant stated that change beyond the department is very slow. Participant EW stated that departmental change is good and adaptive. The participant stated that “at the college level, it’s harder to be adaptive because the timeframe is longer and the span is longer.” There are structures and people that are “ingrained” and limit the adaptability and flexibility of the college. Participant FX stated that departmental change is not the most efficient due to “the university has a bureaucracy.” The participant stated that on the practical side, “with perseverance and pushing, you can get some things done.” Although the participant has provided feedback to administrators on some procedures that are not

practical, the feedback is met with no real attempt for change or improvement with a “please continue to do what we've already done” response.

The summaries of comprehensive analysis, categorized by the institution, college, department, response to change, importance, value, and ideal alignment, are listed in Appendices C through J. When the participants’ responses were analyzed by title, college, and institutional classifications, no emergence of common themes using a threshold of three responses was found. A summary of the key findings of themes addressing the research questions is listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Key Findings of Themes from the Participants’ Responses

	Theme 1: Growth	Theme 2: Student Focused	Theme 3: Perspective of strategic priorities	Theme 4: Communication
Sub-theme A	Student enrollment (RQ 1.1)	Improvement of Teaching (No RQ New Finding)	Important (RQ 2.0)	Meetings (RQ 2.0)
Sub-theme B	Recruitment and retention (RQ 1.2)	Research and funding (No RQ New Finding)	Valuable but inefficient (RQ 2.0)	Email (RQ 2.0)
Sub-theme C	New majors and programs (RQ 1.3)	Student success (No RQ New Finding)	Enhanced communication from faculty (RQ 2.0)	Good responsiveness to change (RQ 2.0)
Sub-theme D	Diversity and inclusion (RQ 1.1)	Meeting industry demand (No RQ New Finding)	Depends on personal impact (RQ 2.0)	

Summary

The data for 18 interviews were transcribed and participants were coded for non-identifying pseudonyms for privacy. Each interview, a series of three scheduled a week apart, was

conducted at the participant's place of employment to adhere to Seidman's (2013) qualitative methodology. The responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process to categorize themes to depict the participant's experience, meaning, and reflection. The key findings of themes were identified if three or more of the participants responded with a common answer based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. When the participants' responses were analyzed by title, college, and institutional classifications, no emergence of common themes using a threshold of three responses was found. The data revealed four main themes of growth, student focus, perspective of strategic priorities, and communication. Overall, the participants in this study had a great deal of passion and motivation for their students and ensuring their success, as demonstrated in the themes of growth and student focus. The participants reported that strategic priorities at their institution are important and valuable; however, implementation is inefficient. The participants commonly reported the strategic priorities should include enhanced communication from faculty. Currently, strategic priorities are reported out without little to no solicitation of faculty input; therefore, adherence and active participation in implementation depend on personal impact.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore faculty experience and perspective of alignment between the institution's strategic priorities and objectives and their research, teaching, and service. The intent was to conduct an in-depth exploration of a small sample versus a large scale generalization study. Thematic analysis was used as an inductive approach to content analysis for semantic themes for the explicit meaning of these data as stated by the participant (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview questions were semi-structured and asked with a conversational approach and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The interviews were scheduled and conducted at least one week apart at the faculty's offices on their campuses in their natural environments (Seidman, 2013). The investigator completed an inductive semantic analysis procedure of coding data from the interview transcripts and field notes from what the participants stated during the interviews. The themes from the interviews were aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to organize emergent main and sub-themes.

The study builds upon the relatively little empirical findings on the faculty's involvement and influence in strategic alignment for organizational performance (Walter, Kellermanns, Floyd, Veiga, & Matherne, 2013). Faculty in higher education may not be familiar with strategic alignment or strategic priorities (Ruben, 2007) because they are mainly focused on performance metrics that benefit their roles and responsibilities to be successful in higher education (Hendrix, 2010). However, as crucial human capital at institutions, faculty play vital roles as change agents. As higher education faces increasing financial, digital, and global pressures, strategic alignment can enable a more systemic approach to improved performance (Martin, 2013). This study aims to explore the faculty's experience and perspectives of the alignment between their research, teaching, and service to the institutional priorities. The guiding research questions are:

1. What is the faculty's perspective of institutional, college, and department priorities?
2. How do faculty feel about strategic alignment?

The following are the labels for the research questions:

- Faculty perspective of institutional priorities – RQ 1.1
- Faculty perspective of college priorities – RQ 1.2
- Faculty perspective of department priorities – RQ 1.3
- Faculty perspective of strategic alignment – RQ 2.0

Discussion of Key Findings

The significance of this study is to illustrate how faculty understand and experience strategic alignment and strategic priorities. Faculty are aiming to be successful and productive in research, teaching, and service; however, the accountability of higher education is under mounting pressure to change and improve (Education Advisory Board, 2014; McBride, Neiman, & Johnson, 2000; Schulz, 2013). Although faculty's core activities are service, teaching, and research, the current challenges in higher education require faculty to expand their roles and engagement in broader strategic initiatives of their institutions (Harrill, Lawton, & Fabianke, 2015). With this foundational understanding of perspective from this study, it will enable the researcher to fully comprehend the complexity of faculty roles and potential avenues for future strategic alignment research.

The very first question of the second interview asked the participants to describe the institutional mission as a way to understand holistic views of relationships and interactions that are critical to performance improvement (Guerra-Lopez & Hicks, 2017). All six of the faculty understood the essence of the mission by recollecting a few basic words from the mission statement

and stated that it was listed on the institution's website. Gonzalez (2013) examined how faculty understood the mission statement and found the faculty held closely to norms of higher education and meanings that define legitimacy. In other words, the tendency is for faculty to recite common words such as "excellence in research," "academic preparation," "teaching students," and "research-intensive" as the participants in this study because these words have meaning to them as opposed to knowing the official mission statement.

The strategic alignment, organizational structure, and performance literature supports that aligning activities at a variety of levels is the most effective and is influenced by how individuals experience their environment, organizational learning, adaption of goals, attention to aspirations, and enforcement of action (Gavetti, Greve, Levinthal & Ocasio, 2012; Guerra-Lopez & Hutchinson, 2013; Shinkle, 2012; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The investigator explored faculty experience and perspective of alignment among strategic priorities, objectives, and activities as a function of their research, teaching, and service by conducting interviews at the place of employment. When the participants' responses were analyzed by title, college, and institutional classifications, no emergence of common themes using a threshold of three responses was found. The key findings of themes were identified if three or more of the participants responded with a common answer based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis.

Theme 1: Growth

The key finding was the main theme of growth through increasing student enrollment (RQ 1.1), recruitment and retention (RQ 1.2), developing new majors and programs (RQ 1.3), and diversity and inclusion initiatives (RQ 1.1). Hillman, Tandberg, and Fryar (2015) found that higher education institutions are adopting incentives, a more comprehensive range of outcomes, and governance effectiveness to implement multiple pathways to demonstrate growth. Hardy and

Woodcock (2015) examined an array of diversity and inclusion approaches globally and found that for policies to be impactful, there needs to be systematic policies. Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, and Swanson (2016) found the impact of faculty's teaching, research, and service can lead to enriched engagement of students' learning, academic performance curriculum, interdisciplinary research, and community relationships. Moreover, Kim and Lundberg (2016) found that student-faculty interactions can lead to positive impacts on cognitive skills, classroom engagement, sense of belonging, and the social lives of students.

Theme 2: Student Focus

Although not linked to a research question, a key finding of motivation that emerged was the main theme of student focus of improvement of teaching (No RQ New Finding), supporting student success (No RQ New Finding), and increasing research and funding to benefit student involvement (No RQ New Finding). Laursen, Seymour, and Hunter (2012) found that intrinsic rewards from student interaction by active faculty are essential for research to flourish. In essence, faculty are motivated and driven by their interaction with, and positive impact on, students (Bain, 2011; Beyer, Taylor & Gillmore, 2013) Oleson and Hora (2014) noted that one of the most important factors influencing faculty knowledge and growth of teaching is on-the-job training and experience. Interestingly, these participants did not solely rely on students' evaluation of teaching scores but rather informal class discussions, assessments during the term, and through trial and error. Mitten and Ross (2018) examined ten faculty members who won teacher of the year award at a research-intensive institution. Similarly to the participants in this study, Mitten and Ross (2018) reported that award-winning faculty for their teaching received robust training in their doctoral programs to be resilient researchers, but no substantial training to teach in the classroom. Although the research is the primary driver for performance reviews of faculty, it is clear that

exemplary faculty members devote time to seeking additional resources for instructional improvements.

Theme 3: Perspective of Strategic Priorities

The key finding was the main themes of the perspective of strategic priorities as important (RQ 2.0), valuable but inefficient (RQ 2.0), and the need for enhanced communication from faculty (RQ 2.0). Leadership in strategy within higher education is complex yet interdependent (Nica, 2013; Taylor & Machado, 2006). However, poor implementation strategies are far more frequent (Neumann & Larson 1997; Rowley & Sherman 2002). Faculty play a vital role in shared institutional governance and need active participation for structures and processes to work effectively (Heaney, 2010; Tierney & Minor, 2004). Performance improvement approaches are based on the notion that organizations are systems made up of interconnected subsystems at various levels—individuals, teams, organizations, and society (Foshay, Villachica, & Stepich, 2014). Despite convincing evidence of higher education needing restructuring for efficiency, transparency, and accountability, substantial changes are difficult to initiate and maintain. Hudson et al. (2015) stated that change takes time and leadership beyond the normal scope of duties of a typical faculty member. Therefore, a structural framework of implementation is most effective for organizational performance improvement (Anitha, 2014, Foshay, Villachica, & Stepich, 2014; Guerra-Lopez, 2018; Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger, 2004).

Theme 4: Communication

The key finding was that the main theme of communication is done by meetings (RQ 2.0), email (RQ 2.0), and if faculty are aware of the strategic priorities, there is a good response to change (RQ 2.0). Faculty in this study reported having to attend many meetings and receiving a

plethora of emails. However, are meetings and emails an effective method for communicating strategic priorities? Pignata, Lushington, Sloan, and Buchanan (2015) studied 193 academic faculty and found that higher levels of emails caused a sense of overload, working after business hours and weekends, and higher frequency of deletion of emails after reading them. It is important that communication, tracking, and management of the organizational strategy is readily available for the decision-making opportunities at critical junctures (Eckerson & Hammond, 2011).

Implications for Practice Recommendations

Strategic alignment as a construct is comprehensive and dynamic causing difficulties to detect alignment and priority measurements and gaps using theoretical frameworks (Avison, Jones, Powell, & Wilson, 2004; Chen, Mocker, Preston, & Teubner, 2010). Since faculty's performance is based on the merits of research, teaching, and service, this may lead to the limited scope of fulfilling any other expectation beyond what serves to achieve his or her own benefit or intrinsic outcomes.

Higher education institutions have numerous levels of administrators such as the provost, deans, and department chairs; thereby, an inherent, multifaceted environment of strategic priorities and strategic alignment is daunting (Orton & Weick, 1990). In addition, it is common for administrators to have transitory positions (Black, 2015); the participants in this study reported a frequent turnover of administrators. Arsenault (2007) examined the distributive leadership principles of higher education administrators that create a climate of shared responsibilities and an outcome of results as well as accountability. However, this study aims to propose implementing a general system of reporting integrated strategic priorities and data on outcomes at faculty meetings, thereby influencing a higher perception of the unified direction of achievement as an initial step. Sull, Turconi, Sull, and Yoder (2017) suggest that strategic priorities that are complex

are best executed with simple, concise information especially within an organization with competing and convoluted goals. Kaufman (1977, 1992, 2003, 2006) suggests that performance improvement efforts are best accomplished when societal outcomes are planned as demonstrated by strategic plans of higher education institutions. This study reflects that the general mission and strategic objectives of higher education are known by faculty as well as perceived as valuable and important; however, this is a disconnect of understanding how these priorities are relevant and executed within a framework.

Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017) describe a business alignment framework to achieve strategic objectives with relevant data that impact the underlying organizational system. In the context of higher education, the business alignment model of Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017) can be used to align expectations, results, solutions, and implementation of the faculty as the primary stakeholders at an institution. It is clear that higher education institutions are increasingly very complex structures with hierarchical layers of administration within bureaucratic systems (Bisbee & Miller, 2006; Barry, Berg, Chandler & Chaharbaghi, 2007). Meek, Goedegebuure, Santiago, & Carvalho (2010) found that deans and chairs are becoming more entrepreneurial and adaptive to articulate strategic planning to ensure missions are achieved. The participants in this study reported that student enrollment, recruitment, and success were perceived strategic priorities at the institutional, college, and department level; in addition, strategic priorities are important and valuable but inefficient. In reviewing the websites of the institutions of these participants, the strategic priorities were broadly focused on student success, diversity and inclusion, and community engagement. This study found that faculty are generally aware of strategic priorities; however, communication of achievement and status is vague and lacks faculty input.

The gaps in strategic alignment found as a result of this study were in communication, faculty input, and data-informed implementation by administrators, deans, and chairs. All six participants reported a change of an administrator such as the provost, dean, or chair within the last year. Verhulst and Lambrechts (2015) reported that human factors of successful change management are linked to the involvement of employees, commitment, inductive learning, organizational culture, and clear communication. Verweire (2018) found that many factors influence a successful strategy; however, two major factors are fragmented information and lack of communication of relevant activities in the implementation process.

A recommendation to address the lack of faculty input is to implement a bottom-up approach to developing strategic priorities. Studies have found that using the bottom-up approach leads to considerably more engagement, a more profound sense of personal investment, expansion of innovative thinking of concepts, consensus, and sustainable governance (Albrechts & Balducci, 2013; Guerra-Lopez & Hicks, 2017; Walters, Kellermans, Floyd, Veiga, & Matherne, 2013; Williams, Dearie, & Schotlaender, 2013). The business alignment model of Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2017) can be used to align expectations, results, solutions, and implementation of the faculty as the primary stakeholders at an institution. The initial step of a bottom-up process is to align expectations by way of involvement and communication between administrators and faculty to facilitate collaboration using general systems theory in higher education (Guerra-Lopez & Hicks, 2017; Black, 2015). Aligning expectations of strategic priorities begins with understanding faculty as the primary stakeholders in the institution to build consensus. Table 5 depicts a systems thinking approach to developing strategic priorities that includes cooperation and corroborative data.

Table 5.

Developing Strategic Priorities Using the Business Alignment Process

	Aligning Expectations				
	Identify Critical Issues	Strategic Priority	Outcome Metrics	Present Status	Current Gaps
Institution	List 2-4	List 1-2	List measurable outcomes	List corroborative data	List identified, measurable gaps
College	List 2-4	List 1-2	List measurable outcomes	List corroborative data	List identified, measurable gaps
Department	List 2-4	List 1-2	List measurable outcomes	List corroborative data	List identified, measurable gaps
Faculty	List 2-4	List 1-2	List measurable outcomes	List corroborative data	List identified, measurable gaps

Faculty and administrators would benefit from having a compilation of data framework that is communicated and reported at meetings; however, the practicality of implementation is daunting because of the complex environment (Harvey & Green, 1993; Orton & Weick, 1990). Powell et al. (2015) suggest that clarity of defined terms to improve relevance and comprehensiveness of implementation strategies is essential for feasibility and translational practice. Lozano et al. (2015) reported that academic leadership's commitment was most effective in implementing sustainable policies and strategies when outcomes are reported regularly. Higher education institutions are increasingly using web-based technologies to demonstrate a commitment to strategic plans with the public (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017; LePeau, Hurtado, & Davis, 2018; Salinas & Lozano, 2017). Martin (2013, 2014) states that strategic plans outlining priorities and implementation of predominant goals are vital as higher education is increasingly under pressure for human and financial resources. Williamson (2019) reports that digital data are increasingly

powerful sources of information for policy, planning, and performance metrics. In a study conducted by Smulowitz (2015), the author found that planned organizational change and implementation had a significant shortcoming of involvement and awareness of planned organizational effort, as similarly found in this study.

Since the participants in this study reported receiving information primarily by faculty meetings, it is recommended that effective meeting structures are implemented as a systemic first step to report and align strategic objectives. This meeting structure of reporting strategic priorities can be followed by faculty meetings, search committees, tenure and promotion committees, and administrators, deans, and chairs. Table 6 outlines a recommended meeting structure to communicate priorities as a way to establish a performance management and assessment system with data using the Business Alignment Process model (Guerra-Lopez & Hicks, 2017).

Table 6.

An Effective Meeting Structure Using the Business Alignment Process

	Aligning Expectations and Solutions		Aligning Implementation and Results	
	Strategic Priority	Outcome Metrics	Implementation	Data on Current Status
Institution	List all	Defined metric	List method	Report on progress
College	List relevant	Defined metric	List method	Report on progress
Department	List relevant	Defined metric	List method	Report on progress
Faculty	List relevant	Defined metric	List method	Report on progress

A precursor step for reporting and alignment of strategic priorities would be a performance dashboard drawing from data on an institution's internal systems to generate the strategic priority, metrics, and current status of achievement. However, Smulowitz (2015) found that a significant

dilemma in higher education is the selection of the most appropriate performance dashboard that generates intended and sustainable results. Although performance dashboards are widely used and accepted in the business sector, higher education institutions are at the start of embracing the need for this kind of internal operation from theory into practice (Smulowitz, 2015; Worthen & Sanders, 1991).

Limitations of the Study

Although nearly 100 emails were sent to recruit faculty members, a limitation of this study is that perhaps these six faculty agreed to participate because of their perceived importance to student success for a doctoral student. Another limitation of this study is that the sample size is very small; therefore, a representation of the target population would require additional participants. The sample size of six faculty decreases the validity and generalization of this study as it was aimed to explore faculty experience and perspective that was found to be a gap in the existing literature. Tenure-track and tenured faculty have limited availability during their nine-month contractual obligation, and data collection of three interviews per participant was an additional meeting in their already demanding schedules. As the interviews were conducted, the researcher was cognizant of self-preconceived understandings or biases in seeking to understand the faculty to document the richness within a social context to preserve the key indicators of quality, credibility, ethics, and coherence (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003; Tracy, 2010). Black (2015) outlines a general model of several leadership approaches that lead to effective practices in higher education; therefore, not all aspects of implementation were examined in this study. It is unlikely that one study could address the extensive layers of operations and systems within a higher education institution (Kezar, 2011). Lastly, when the participants' responses were analyzed by

title, college, and institutional classifications, no emergence of common themes using a threshold of three responses was found.

Recommendation for Future Research

A recommendation for future research is to expand the sample size of this study with additional qualitative studies on experience and perspective of strategic alignment and strategic priorities by title, college, and institutional classifications. Additionally, quantitative studies using a survey could examine the number of strategic priority meetings faculty attend, topics of discussion, data reports, and internal systems of reporting outcomes to examine the challenges of communicating information. Furthermore, a future mixed-method study could examine the strategic priorities and metrics listed on higher education websites as well as explore the exchange of knowledge of strategic priorities at various levels of higher education institutions using performance dashboards. Lastly, subsequent mixed-methods studies can examine the faculty's perspective of strategic alignment and priorities as well as the influence of unions on policies and procedures through collective bargaining outcomes and resources (Cowen & Strunk, 2014).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore faculty experience and perspective of alignment between the institution's strategic priorities and objectives and their research, teaching, and service. The investigator completed an inductive semantic analysis procedure of coding data from the interview transcripts of six faculty from four institutions. The interview questions were semi-structured, lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, and conducted at least one week apart at the faculty's offices on their campuses. The four main themes found were growth, student focused,

perspective of strategic priorities, and communication. Within these four main themes, there were sub-themes of the following:

- Growth
 - Sub-themes - student enrollment (RQ 1.1), recruitment and retention (RQ 1.2), developing new majors and programs (RQ 1.3), and diversity and inclusion initiatives (RQ 1.1)
- Student focused
 - Sub-themes - improvement of teaching (No RQ New Finding), supporting student success (No RQ New Finding), and increasing research and funding to benefit student involvement (No RQ New Finding)
- Perspective of strategic priorities
 - Sub-themes - strategic priorities as important (RQ 2.0), valuable but inefficient (RQ 2.0), and the need for enhanced communication from faculty (RQ 2.0)
- Communication
 - Sub-themes - meetings (RQ 2.0), email (RQ 2.0), and if faculty are aware of the strategic priorities, there is a good response to change (RQ 2.0)

This study, although a small sample size, found that an institutional priority is enrollment, a college priority is recruitment and retention, and a departmental priority is new majors and programs. With respect for faculty perspectives, these participants found that strategic priorities are important, valuable but inefficient, and that there is a need for enhanced communication from faculty. In addition, faculty reported there are far too many meetings to attend and receive too many emails; therefore, information on strategic priorities is often missed or overlooked. Faculty

in this study reported that when strategic priorities are communicated efficiently and implemented effectively, there is a good response to change to address the priority and find a connection with the merits of performance of teaching, research, and service. Since higher education institutions have numerous levels of administrators, such as the provost, deans, and department chairs, multidimensional approaches to communicating and implementing strategic priorities and strategic alignment are difficult.

The result of this study found gaps in strategic alignment in communication, faculty input, and data-informed implementation by administrators, deans, and chairs. Faculty and administrators would benefit from having a compilation of data framework that is communicated and reported at meetings as an effective meeting structure to implement aligned strategic objectives. The investigator's recommendations to address the lack of faculty input is to implement a bottom-up approach to developing strategic priorities by a systems thinking approach that includes cooperation and corroborative data.

APPENDIX A – Human Investigation Committee Approval Form



IRB Administration Office
87 East Canfield, Second Floor
Detroit, Michigan 48201
Phone: (313) 577-1628
FAX: (313) 993-7122
<http://irb.wayne.edu>

NOTICE OF EXPEDITED AMENDMENT APPROVAL

To: Linda Jimenez
Kinesiology, Health and Sport Studies
Kinesiology, Health and Sport

From: Dr. Deborah Ellis or designee M. Taseen, ma/rm
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

Date: February 18, 2019

RE: IRB #: 011819B3X
Protocol Title: An Exploration of Strategic Alignment in Higher Education
Funding Source:
Protocol #: 1901001972

Expiration Date:

The above-referenced protocol amendment, as itemized below, was reviewed by the Chairperson/designee of the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (B3) and is APPROVED effective immediately.

- Recruitment Scripts (2) – Receipt of revised (I) Recruitment Scripts (2) revised because faculty are unable to commit to more than a 60-minute interview. The script will indicate an interview duration of 30-60 minutes and includes a \$10 Amazon card for time and inconvenience.
- Consent Form and Information Sheet – Consent Form and Information Sheet modified to reflect changes due to faculty being reluctant to commit to a 60-90-minute interview. (I) Research Informed Consent (revision dated 2/14/2019) and (II) Research Information Sheet.
- Receipt of revised Protocol Summary Form: Appendix B – Internet Use in Research

Notify the IRB of any changes to the funding status of the above-referenced protocol.

Strategic Alignment in Higher Education

Research Informed Consent

Title of Study: An Exploration of Strategic Alignment in Higher Education

Principal Investigator (PI): Linda Jimenez
 Learning Design and Technology, Wayne State University
 (734) 560-5689

Purpose

You are being asked to be in a research study of perceived strategic alignment in faculty members in higher education because you have been employed for at least twelve months with a title of professor, associate professor, or assistant professor. This study is being conducted at Wayne State University and surrounding institutions in Southeast Michigan. The estimated number of study participants is about nine. **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

In this research study, the aim is to explore faculty perceptions of alignment between strategic priorities, objectives, and activities as a function of their research, teaching, and service. Although faculty's core activities are service, teaching, and research, higher education institutions require faculty to expand their roles of core activities and engage in broader strategic initiatives of institutions. Higher education institutions can benefit to assess and measure strategic alignment and priority perceptions of the faculty since they play vital roles in the human capital to achieve overall strategic goals.

Study Procedures

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to complete the following:

1. Participants will begin by answering basic demographic, educational, and employment questions.
2. Participant and researcher will schedule an interview by email.
3. Each of the three interviews will take approximately 30 - 60 minutes.
4. Participants will be asked general, non-identifiable questions regarding their educational and employment background, their experiences as faculty as it relates to strategic alignment and to their strategic priorities, and their reflection on their meaning of strategic alignment and priorities.
5. Participants will be asked to not disclose any identifiable information regarding their employment so as to maintain confidentiality.
6. Participants have the right to not answer some of the questions or end the interview early, if needed.
7. Interviews audios will be recorded. Interview files will be saved as a password protected file on a password protected computer that can only be accessed by the researcher. Upon completion of the study, interview files will be deleted.
8. Pseudonyms will be created for research documents and no identifiable information will be kept or shared.

Benefits

As a participant in this research study, there may be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

Submission/Revision Date: 2/14/2019
 Protocol Version #: 2

Page 1 of 3

Participant's Initials

Form Date 12/2018

Strategic Alignment in Higher Education

Risks

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study. There may also be risks involved from taking part in this study that are not known to researchers at this time. The following information must be released/reported to the appropriate authorities if at any time during the study there is concern that you disclose illegal criminal activities, illegal substance abuse or violence.

Study Costs

Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

Compensation

For taking part in this research study, you will be paid for your time and inconvenience with a \$10 Amazon card for each interview at the end of the session.

Confidentiality

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.] may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study.] You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

The PI may stop your participation in this study without your consent. The PI will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision that is made is to protect your health and safety, or because you did not follow the instructions to take part in the study

Questions

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Linda Jimenez at the following phone number (734) 560-5689 or emailing Jimenez.L@wayne.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Strategic Alignment in Higher Education

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

Time

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Time

APPROVED

FEB 18 2019

**WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Submission/Revision Date: 2/14/2019
Protocol Version #: 2

Page 3 of 3

Participant's Initials

Form Date 12/2018

Research Information Sheet

Title of Study: An Exploration of Strategic Alignment in Higher Education

Principal Investigator (PI): Linda Jimenez
(734) 560-5689

Purpose:

You are being asked to be in a research study of perceived strategic alignment in faculty members because you have been employed for at least twelve months with a title of professor, associate professor, or assistant professor. This study is being conducted using three on-site interviews at your office.

Study Procedures

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to answer general questions regarding your educational/employment background, your experiences as a faculty member, and how you experience strategic alignment and priorities as a faculty member.

1. Participants will begin by answering basic demographic, educational, and employment questions.
2. Participant and researcher will schedule an interview by email.
3. Each of the three interviews will take approximately 30 - 60 minutes.
4. Participants will be asked general, non-identifiable questions regarding their educational and employment background, their experiences as faculty as it relates to strategic alignment and to their strategic priorities, and their reflection on their meaning of strategic alignment and priorities.
5. Participants will be asked to not disclose any identifiable information regarding their employment so as to maintain confidentiality.
6. Participants have the right to not answer some of the questions or end the interview early, if needed.
7. Interviews audios will be recorded. Interview files will be saved as a password protected file on a password protected computer that can only be accessed by the researcher. Upon completion of the study, interview files will be deleted.
8. Pseudonyms will be created for research documents and no identifiable information will be kept or shared.

Benefits

As a participant in this research study, there may be no immediate direct benefit for you. However, information from this study may benefit Higher Education institutions to assess and measure strategic alignment and priority perceptions of faculty since they play vital roles in the human capital to achieve overall strategic goals.

Risks

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

Costs

There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

Compensation

You will be provided a \$10 Amazon card for each interview at the end of the session.

Confidentiality:

You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. There will be no list that links your identity with this code.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Linda Jimenez by calling (734) 560-5689 or emailing Jimenez.L@wayne.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Participation

By completing the interview, you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPROVED

FEB 18 2019

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Subject: Request for Participants in Research Study – Strategic Alignment in Higher Education

Hello, my name is Linda Jimenez and I am a Ph.D. Candidate at Wayne State University. I am conducting a research study to explore faculty perceptions of alignment between strategic priorities, objectives, and activities as a function of their research, teaching, and service.

I am emailing to ask if your colleagues may be interested in being a participant in my research study. If you have any referrals, please share this email with anyone who may be interested.

If they are interested, I will send them an information sheet to obtain consent to participate. I will ask them a few basic demographic questions and schedule a time for three on-site interviews at their office. Each of the three interviews will take approximately 30-60 minutes. Their participation is completely voluntary and all responses will be anonymous. For taking part in this research study, they will be paid for their time and inconvenience with a \$10 Amazon card for each interview at the end of the session. The information sheet is attached for their preview.

If you have any questions, please contact me at Jimenez.L@wayne.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Linda Jimenez, Ph.D. Candidate
Wayne State University

APPROVED

FEB 18 2019

**WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Subject: Request for Participation in Research Study – Strategic Alignment in Higher Education

Hello, my name is Linda Jimenez and I am a Ph.D. Candidate at Wayne State University. I am conducting a research study to explore faculty perceptions of alignment between strategic priorities, objectives, and activities as a function of their research, teaching, and service.

I am emailing to ask if you are interested in being a participant in my research study. If you are interested, I will send you an information sheet to obtain your consent to participate. I will ask you a few basic demographic questions and schedule a time for three on-site interviews at your office. Each of the three interviews will take approximately 30-60 minutes. Your participation is completely voluntary and all responses will be anonymous. For taking part in this research study, you will be paid for your time and inconvenience with a \$10 Amazon card for each interview at the end of the session.

If you are interested or have any questions, please contact me at Jimenez.L@wayne.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Linda Jimenez, Ph.D. Candidate
Wayne State University

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APPENDIX B – Interview Protocol

The first interview is conducted to establish the context of the participants' experience in higher education.

1. What influenced you to become an academician and enter this profession?
2. What led you to teach at this institution?
3. What have been your greatest challenges?
4. What have been your greatest accomplishments?
5. What motivates you to fulfill your role in research, teaching, and service?
6. How have you changed or improved over the years in this position?
7. Describe your working environment on how it supports or doesn't support you?
8. Describe how higher education has changed over the last 10 years from your perspective?
9. Describe unexpected demands that have been placed upon you over the last 10 years – things that were not expected of you when you first started employment but now are?
10. Describe your ideal working environment as it relates to research, teaching, and service.

The second interview is to obtain details of the participants' experience as it relates to strategic alignment and to their strategic priorities.

1. Describe your institution's mission.
2. Describe your institution's strategic priorities.
3. Describe the strategic priorities of your college.
4. Describe the strategic priorities of your department.
5. How is organizational information communicated to you? Email? Meetings?
6. Describe the communication processes for the distribution of information on strategic priorities.
7. Describe how a new organizational change is communicated to you – for example, new technology or a new process.
8. Describe the continuous improvement practices in your college/department? Are you involved?
9. Describe how quickly your college or department responds to change.
10. How adequately are you supported with resources, knowledge, and communication?
11. Describe your work environment. Is it very demanding, constantly changing, or slow to change?

The third interview is to ask the participants to reflect on their meaning of strategic alignment and priorities.

1. How are strategic priorities important or not important to you?
2. Describe the metrics used to evaluate your research, teaching, and service? How do you think they align with strategic priorities?
3. Describe how your roles and responsibilities work toward or not related to the strategic priorities of your department, college, and university.
4. Describe your understanding of how strategic priorities are interwoven.
5. Describe your involvement, if any, with implementing strategic priorities.
6. How important is the relationship of outside stakeholders to you?
7. Describe how you think strategic alignment of priorities is valuable. For example, from your department, to the college, to the overall institution.
8. Describe gaps in your role and responsibilities and strategic priorities of your department, college, and institution.
9. Describe an ideal way of aligning strategic priorities across many levels of an institution.

APPENDIX C – Summary of Institutional Priorities

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification	Institution priorities
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	student enrollment with completing all four years at the institution, interdisciplinary research collaboration within the institution, research funding, and improving student professionalism
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	increase research productivity, provide online courses, and increase student enrollment
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	“develop people,” inclusion and diversity, and community engagement
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	student enrollment
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	community engagement, community outreach, endowments, innovation and entrepreneurship, academic quality, and diversity
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	retention and recruitment, graduation rates “especially for students of color,” innovation, community engagement, and student success

APPENDIX D – Summary of College Priorities

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification	College priorities
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	interdisciplinary research and funding, providing solutions to “large scale global problems,” feedback from industry conducted by “experiential learning outside the classroom”
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	student enrollment and recruitment activities, increase donor base, increase research and funding, budget deficiencies, and acquiring lab space
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	graduate rates, prepare “academically talented students,” community engagement, and “solve real-world problems”
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	enrollment and retention
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	develop new programs, increase recruitment and retention, increase graduation rates, financial stability, and endowments
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	excellence in the arts and stated “I don’t know anything else”

APPENDIX E – Summary of Departmental Priorities

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification	Department priorities
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	add other majors to diversify industry presence, more space and faculty, increasing standards of grades, research funding, restructuring majors to meet industry demand and expansion, and increase course rigor
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	develop new majors, reduce course loads, and class size limits
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	support the discipline and prepare academically talented students for the specific profession
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	enrollment and retention, quality of teaching, and tuition revenue
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	increase national ranking, revise degrees' academic plans and majors for student and industry interests
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	are currently being worked on with new chair because we have not done recently

APPENDIX F – Summary of Communication

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification	Communication
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	in meetings, workshops, and some information by email
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	faculty meetings are where the priorities are reported and recorded in meeting minutes then sent by email
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	by email from the president almost every week as well as videos and one-on-one chats
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	“tons of emails and meetings”
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	communicated primarily by meetings
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	website, events, and meetings

APPENDIX G – Summary of Responsiveness to Change

Participant's Code	Title	College	Institution Classification	Responsiveness to Change
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	good when strong logic and evidence is present
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	good, when the change is a tech-based system
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	good at the department level
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	very slow unless it is directly impacting people
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	departmental change is good and adaptive
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	not efficient, need the perseverance to get things done

APPENDIX H – Summary of Perspectives on the Importance of Strategic Priorities

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification	Strategic priorities' importance to you
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	important, however "I don't always agree with them"
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	important and "it's a crucial thing"
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	important because they are roadmaps for everyone at the institution
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	important "if it would impact me directly and they will change part of the curriculum"
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	important "as an articulation of something that I already thought was important to me and my students"
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	important but not explicitly important

APPENDIX I – Summary of Perspectives of the Value of Strategic Priorities

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification	Strategic priorities' value to you
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	valuable; “my only issue is that's really tough is that within any university, you are going to have very big differences from college to college”
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	valuable, and stated that “if they are not aligned, actually there will be chaos and will not go smoothly”
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	valuable, but misaligned, used as talking points
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	valuable, “but those terms are losing their meaning”
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	valuable, if done properly
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	valuable. but they are not interwoven

APPENDIX J – Summary of Perspectives of Ideal Alignment

Participant's code	Title	College	Institution Classification	Ideal strategic alignment
AS	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R1	faculty input but difficult because they are busy with research and teaching and cannot attend so many meetings.
BT	Assistant Professor	Engineering	R2	collective decision and reports from the faculty are submitted but not always followed and there need to be more communication
CU	Associate Professor	Engineering	R2	incentives to merit reviews related to aligning to priorities and mechanisms that trigger faculty
DV	Associate Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	communication, just see what faculty are capable of doing what they want to do what they want to work on
EW	Associate Professor	Engineering	R1	simple and continuous by distribution of flow of "distributed intelligence"
FX	Assistant Professor	Liberal Arts	R1	discussed in coordination with faculty, department chairs and deans, and they should consider that along with the priorities of different departments and colleges

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ABSTRACT**AN EXPLORATION OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

by

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The aim of this study is to explore the faculty's experience and perspective of the alignment between their research, teaching, and service to the institutional priorities. Presently, higher education faces institutional issues that are unique with varying contexts and where strategic alignment has a vital influence on organizational performance. Although faculty's core activities are service, teaching, and research, the enduring and prevailing challenges in higher education require faculty to expand their roles of core activities and engage in broader strategic initiatives of institutions. The need for this study is driven by a shortage of evidence about whether and how faculty see this as an important part of their work. The significance of this study is to illustrate how faculty understand and experience strategic alignment and strategic priorities. The guiding research questions were: What is the faculty's perspective of institutional, college, and department priorities? How do faculty feel about strategic alignment?

The research design of this study was a qualitative thematic analysis study to explore the faculty's perspective in their natural setting. For the purposes of this study, there were six interviewees and a series of three questions for a total of 18 in-depth interviews to adhere to the qualitative methods of credibility application and consistency. The first interview was conducted

to establish the context of the participants' experience in higher education. The second interview was aimed to obtain details of the participants' experience as it relates to strategic alignment and their perspective of strategic priorities. The third interview asked the participants to reflect on their meaning of strategic alignment and priorities. The six participants were evenly distributed between assistant professors and associate professors. Two institutions were classified as R1s and two institutions were classified as R2s as designated by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

The data from interviews in this study found that an institutional priority is enrollment, a college priority is recruitment and retention, and a departmental priority is new majors and programs. With respect for faculty perspectives, these participants found that strategic priorities are important, valuable but inefficient, and that there is a need for enhanced communication from faculty. In addition, faculty reported there are far too many meetings to attend and they receive too many emails; therefore, information on strategic priorities is often missed or overlooked. Faculty in this study reported that when strategic priorities are communicated efficiently and implemented effectively, there is a good response to change to address the priority and find a connection with the merits of performance of teaching, research, and service. Overall, the participants in this study had a great deal of motivation and passion for their students and ensuring their success, as demonstrated in the themes of growth and student focus. The participants commonly reported the strategic priorities should include enhanced communication from faculty and that strategic priorities are reported out without little to no solicitation of faculty input; therefore, adherence and active participation in implementation depend on personal impact.

The gaps in strategic alignment found as a result of this study were in communication, faculty input, and data-informed implementation by administrators, deans, and chairs. This study

aims to propose implementing a general system of reporting integrated strategic priorities and data of outcomes at faculty meetings, thereby influencing a higher perception of the unified direction of achievement as an initial step. A recommendation to address the lack of faculty input is to implement a bottom-up approach to developing strategic priorities. The initial step of a bottom-up process is to align expectations by way of involvement and communication between administrators and faculty to facilitate collaboration using general systems theory in higher education.

The sample size of six faculty decreases the validity and generalization of this study as it was aimed to explore faculty experience and perspective that was found to be a gap in the existing literature. A recommendation for future research is to expand the sample size of this study with additional qualitative studies on experience and perspective of strategic alignment and strategic priorities by title, college, and institutional classifications.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Linda Jimenez is a lecturer at Wayne State University within the Division of Kinesiology, Health and Sport Studies (KHS). She serves as the program director for the Exercise and Sport Science (ESS) major for the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs. Since assuming the position of the ESS program director, she has led the increased enrollment of undergraduate students nearly 255%, master's by 420%, and Ph.D. by 1100% as of 2019.

In 2005, she founded her corporation as the President/CEO of VIDA Enterprise, Inc., a business consulting and coaching company. In 1997, she founded Get Active Detroit, a 501(c)(3) organization as the affiliate for the Michigan Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports. In 1999, she founded a second 501(c)(3) organization, Detroit After-School All-Stars, as the Detroit chapter of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Youth Foundation. She secured over 3 million in funding by way of grants, sponsorships, and fundraising events during her tenure as executive director of these organizations.

Linda has a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science specializing in athletic training and a Master of Education in Kinesiology from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. She has a second master's in Learning Design and Technology and is currently completing her Ph.D. in Learning Design and Technology. Her publications have been cited by over 87 other scholarly publications.