

ONBOARDING/INTEGRATING NEW LEADERS IN A PANDEMIC

Onboarding and Integrating New Leaders: A Model for Pandemic Times

by

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Abstract

This thesis explored the question: How might a healthcare organization best onboard and integrate a senior leader in the context of a pandemic? A series of sub-questions were used to help with this inquiry: (a) how are pre-pandemic models of senior leadership onboarding and integration applied in my workplace; (b) what senior leader onboarding and integration activities were modified in the context of the pandemic, and how successful were these modifications; (c) what senior leader onboarding and integration activities could not happen or did not happen successfully; (d) how might this analysis inform the development of a new model of senior leader onboarding and integration; and (e) how might this new model be useful to other senior physician leaders stepping up during the pandemic? Using a first-person action-oriented framework, nine participants participated in two phases of interviews, in full adherence to the Royal Roads University *Research Ethics Policy*.

My analysis of the data led to four core conclusions: (a) the *Onboarding Isn't Enough* (OIE) scale was a useful tool for helping participants conceptualize, evaluate, and reflect upon their experiences with senior leader onboarding and integration; (b) the organization's onboarding and integration processes for senior leaders were highly, but not wholly, resilient to the challenges of the pandemic; (c) participants managed pandemic-induced risks to the successful onboarding and integration of a new senior leader by consciously choosing to expend considerable effort and energy to curate connections between them and others in the system; and (d) the system is still moving out of chaos, and careful decision-making processes and scholarly practices are of critical importance. My research led me to apply Johnson's (2014) model of polarity management to classify recommendations in terms of problems to solve and problems to be managed. In the former category were recommendations to (a) continue practices that foster

resiliency, (b) implement virtual sessions on critical issues, (c) curate and share emerging novel and good practices in virtual onboarding and integration processes, and (d) integrate an adapted OIE scale into future practices. In the latter category, several polarities were identified to be managed going forward: (a) centralized versus departmental-led practices, (b) institutional versus individual-led practices, (c) blurred versus well-delineated work–life boundaries, and (d) structured/sequential onboarding practices versus ones that arose organically or were offered just-in-time. Moving forward, there are ample opportunities for future inquiry. These include an economic analysis of these findings, conclusions, and recommendations and consideration of how best to evaluate and support the psychological well-being of senior leaders in the organization in pandemic and post-pandemic times.

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Chapter One: Focus and Framing

Stepping into a new senior leadership role comes with many opportunities, including the chance to apply skills of self-awareness, self-care, and behavioural choices (McGonical, 2011) in a new organizational context. Most companies have processes of orientation and onboarding (Byford et al., 2017), and in my practice to date, I've observed that these processes have focused on introducing new leaders to processes, procedures, priorities, and problems. While onboarding attends to administrative arrangements, business orientation, legal, and procedural processes, most organizations underdeliver support in aligning expectations with teams/bosses, organizing meetings with stakeholders, and facilitating culture familiarization. For some leaders, this onboarding can leave them unready to take the helm, set a new course, and manage their crew. Integration, as coined by Byford et al. (2017), describes the end goal of the process of making the new leader a fully functioning member of the team as efficiently and effectively as possible. Further, they reported that it can take up to 9–18 months for leaders to transition into a place of effective leadership. They also found that 80% of leaders identified explicit support for integration, as opposed to onboarding, as a critical factor in their success. Transitions demand that new mental models need to be formed, habitual reactions monitored, leadership theories and frameworks considered and applied, networks developed, and of course, tasks completed. At their core, new leadership opportunities provide an opportunity to grow and develop the self while providing service to others.

This thesis was inspired and informed by my own leadership transitions in 2020. My experience was complicated, or perhaps enriched, by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020) has created chaos around the world and incredible challenges and opportunities for medicine (NEJM Catalyst, 2020). I also began to

connect with a provincial healthcare organization, hereafter referred to as Institution X (for anonymization purposes), in March 2020. They, too, were going through a transition and were actively recruiting, onboarding, and integrating new senior leaders. Our shared experiences took place at a very complex, and frightening, phase in the pandemic, as little was known about the new strain of the coronavirus and the nation was well-engaged in its efforts to flatten its epidemiological curve. Institution X was sensitive to the need for mindful onboarding; however, mandatory training and orientation had not transitioned to virtual methods, many of the key players were mostly sequestered in their homes, and staff were working off-site. Few processes were virtual, which was a particular challenge for Institution X as their procedures were heavily paper-based. Leadership at Institution X believed that developing relationships with external stakeholders was important, but this was particularly challenging given the incredible demands being placed on everyone to manage their own organizations' responses to the pandemic.

Observing Institution X's situation, while also going through my own leadership transition, made me aware of the potential risks of the onboarding and integration process to us both, leading to the genesis of this thesis. This research led to my analysis of stepping into my new leadership role, my reflection upon my own ongoing onboarding and integration process, and findings from this research with Institution X as we explored their pre- and intra-pandemic experiences.

Ultimately, this work led to several conclusions and recommendations to inform future models of senior leadership onboarding and integration that may be of unique relevance in a pandemic.

My thesis question was: How might a healthcare organization best onboard and integrate a senior leader in the context of a pandemic? A series of sub-questions were used to help with this inquiry:

1. How are pre-pandemic models of senior leadership onboarding and integration applied in my workplace?
2. What senior leader onboarding and integration activities were modified in the context of the pandemic and how successful were these modifications?
3. What senior leader onboarding and integration activities could not happen or did not happen successfully?
4. How might this analysis inform the development of a new model of senior leader onboarding and integration?
5. How might this new model be useful to other senior physician leaders stepping up during the pandemic (provincially, nationally, internationally)?

Significance

Institution X is aware of the importance of the onboarding process as demonstrated in their efforts to design and implement a highly individualized program. This has involved socially distanced and virtual sessions with key leaders. However, some established parts of the organization's onboarding processes were unavailable. External sessions, such as those with provincial and national stakeholders and partners, were cancelled, largely due to their need to divert attention and resources to chaos in the broader system. Further, specific skill-oriented sessions (i.e., cultural safety and humility, media training, diversity awareness and training) were cancelled, as external consultants were unavailable or had not yet developed processes for virtual engagement. Finally, building new relationships between new hires and their peers, direct reports, and partners across the healthcare system was challenged by the social restrictions and the need for everyone to shift attention and energy to managing the personal and professional challenges of the pandemic.

The organization was interested in reflecting on the onboarding experience of senior leaders in order to potentially design and implement a new model for future use. To do so, there was an opportunity to identify what existing processes worked well, what modified processes were of value, what processes that either did not occur or did not occur successfully, and what gaps can be closed in future. This also allowed me an opportunity to reflect on my own efforts to influence and shape onboarding and consider to what degree these have been successful and identify what work remains. As I set out on this research, I opined this work would be of benefit to internal and external stakeholders and, most importantly, bring value to the citizens of the province in which Institution X was based.

New onboarding and integration processes are both urgent and important. While there are now vaccines that signal the start of the end, there will continue to be leadership transitions across the system in the context of a worsening pandemic. Opportunities to develop and test new models of onboarding are ample and of interest to many.

Organization Context and System Analysis

Institution X was incorporated to oversee a specific role with respect to medical practitioners in the province (Institution X, 2020c, para. 1). The mandate of Institution X is defined by both legislation and organizational bylaws (Institution X, 2020b). There is an overarching piece of legislation that provides a common framework for a number of recognized health professions in the province. The provincial government has also enacted Regulations (Provincial Regulations, 2016) for each profession, including medicine. Institution X is also governed by its bylaws (Institution X, 2020a). These pieces come together to offer laser-like clarity on the mission of Institution X (Institution X, 2020a, p. 72).

All practicing members of the medical profession in the province must be connected to Institution X. In 2020, this amounted to approximately [number withheld for anonymization purposes] active practitioners, postgraduate residents, and fellows and medical students (Institution X, 2020b, p. 6).

Institution X has several other programs that implement other duties described by Provincial Legislation (1996). All programs are subject to oversight by Institution X's Board of Directors and committees. Institution X has operational departments, including finance, human resources, and corporate services. The Human Resources department has traditionally supported the onboarding process and is looking for ways of further adapting to the pandemic.

Pre-pandemic onboarding and integration activities for new senior leaders were managed by Institution X's Chief Executive Officer, the organization's Human Resource department, and the new leaders themselves. Senior leaders report directly to the Chief Executive Officer, who would take the lead in designing, implementing, and evaluating an onboarding and integration process. Typically, this would involve high-level review of task descriptions, identification of organizational priorities and challenges, connection of the new leader to peers within and external to the organization, their preferred reporting and supervisory processes, and co-development of learning goals. The Human Resource department has a checklist approach to ensure key topics and areas are covered, such as compensation and benefits, policies and procedures, cultural and behavioural expectations, and internal and external educational sessions. It was expected that most new senior leaders would also identify their own approach to onboarding and integration with appropriate oversight and support in their implementation, reflection, and revision. All processes were delivered face to face with the exception of a small number of paper-based activities (i.e., review of policies and procedures).

Externally, Institution X is part of a provincial network of similarly mandated organizations. This network (Institution Y, 2020) includes other professions, such as dentists, nurses, occupational therapists, and others.

Institution X also has a close relationship with the regional health structures of the province (Province X, 2020). Other government bodies often engage with Institution X. Typically, onboarding included specific activities with each regional health structure and external organization, but this too has been challenged by the pandemic.

Finally, Institution X sits in both natural tension and alignment with other physician organizations. These include the Canadian Medical Protective Association (our profession's liability insurance carrier) and its provincial/territorial partners, educational organizations such as the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and the College of Family Practice of Canada, and regulatory networks in Canada (i.e., Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities of Canada). Onboarding has typically involved sessions with these bodies, but these were also placed on hold. In this thesis, I will summarize Institution X's efforts, as well as my own, to overcome such barriers and also consider how a new onboarding model that could curate relationships in the context of the pandemic. Not only has this encouraged me to better understand my new role, but I also hope that this work will be of value to other physician leaders as they address the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic or other equally disruptive ruptures in organizational systems.

Two other emergent system issues are relevant to this study on leadership onboarding. First, Institution X has declared its commitment to anti-racism, decolonization, and cultural safety and humility. Leaders acknowledge that systemic racism is evident in the province's healthcare system and fully support the province's independent investigation into Indigenous-

specific discrimination (Government X, 2020). Onboarding programs have, in the past, involved opportunities to build upon existing relationships between Institution X and Indigenous leaders and communities. However, these were curtailed given the pandemic. Second, the healthcare system was largely shut down upon my arrival and, in the process of reopening, had a dramatic and sustained shift to virtual care. This had a major impact on many aspects of Institution X's activities, processes, and procedures.

Innovation and change are not new constructs for Institution X, as they changed their workplace model in the late fall of 2019. For many reasons, including worker preference, a work-from-home model was piloted. The organization's approach to onboarding and integration of new senior leaders did not shift with this transition. While no one could have predicted the inherent value of this pilot, the organization did anticipate that many tasks could be completed outside of the office setting. That said, Institution X operates in respectful and strategic relationship with others, benefiting from engagement with a diversity of cultures, professions, and perspectives. These relationships have been lived in face-to-face personal contacts, such as interviews, committee meetings, joint commissions and taskforces, and networking opportunities over food or drink. Social engagement has been a cornerstone of collaboration and innovation at Institution X and within its broader system of influence and engagement. The organization chose not to pursue an entirely virtual workforce in recognition of the value of social connection, but then suddenly needed to accept the natural consequences of public health orders that included social distancing and decreased presence of staff at workplaces. Further, Institution X's internal and external context is influenced by efforts in social justice, a context that has been particularly energized during the pandemic. While operational tasks can be done virtually in a pandemic, meaningful and adaptive change efforts need to be done in community. The pandemic has

created remarkable barriers for social connection and community engagement, some of which can be addressed by technology and some of which will need to be carefully managed.

Onboarding and integration efforts need to not only carefully consider how tasks can be completed, but also consider how best to nurture relationships and build community as processes adapt to the pandemic.

Overview of the Thesis

The goal of this engagement was to identify how a healthcare organization might best onboard and integrate a senior leader in the context of a pandemic. The inquiry topic and research process, proposed within this project, aligned with Institution X's (n.d.) values. This thesis capstone also reflected the leadership competencies as set by Royal Roads University (n.d.). The chosen methodology and methods, to be discussed later, were selected with the intention to engage senior members of Institution X as well as a sample of external stakeholders.

This research was grounded in the action research engagement (ARE) model (Rowe et al., 2013). First person action research methods of data collection and analysis were selected to complement the core characteristics of the ARE model. I conducted a literature review to deepen my understanding of the investigated topic and to help refine the conclusions and future recommendations. This research captured a story within part of the system in which Institution X operates. Participants were able to celebrate their successes, acknowledge their challenges, and identify practical and meaningful change initiatives for future consideration. Selfishly, this research also enhanced my own onboarding and integration experiences in ways I could not have fully anticipated. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to partner with Institution X and hope this work will be of value to the organization during the pandemic and beyond.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

My pandemic-enveloped leadership stretch afforded much opportunity for research. My primary professional practice has shifted from academic leadership and clinical practice in a largely national orientation to a unique leadership portfolio operating in a provincial context. I am stepping into the shoes of a well-respected leader and applying my own perspective, style, and approach. Yet, the challenges were diverse: supporting and developing existing pools of talent, protecting and sustaining a healthy corporate culture, developing a relationship with members of a senior membership team, building new collaborations with partners in the province, and considering the challenges identified in my mandate. My review of the literature helped me conceptualize key definitions; learn about models of transition, transformation, and decision making; explore the typical pre-pandemic state of onboarding and integration in the health sector; consider the impact of the pandemic on onboarding and integration processes; learn about the potential role of the decision-making Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007); and discover Byford et al.'s (2017) Onboarding Isn't Enough (OIE) scale, an instrument organizations use to self-assess their onboarding and leadership strategies.

Defining Onboarding and Integration

Onboarding is proposed as one of the oldest and most important tools to facilitate successful corporate governance and has been defined by Badshah and Bulut (2020) as the “management of the early stages of a relationship between an organization and a new employee” (p. 321). While history has many references on the topic of socialization in the workplace, the work of Van Maanen and Schein (1979) was amongst the first published papers postulating an integrated theory of the onboarding experience. In their work, they offered a descriptive conceptual framework and hoped that it could be used to generate theoretical and practical

research on organization socialization. In their framework, they identified six major dimensions of organizational socialization. The first dimension describes socialization activities from an individual level, with unique and curated experiences, to a collective level, typically homogeneous in content and delivered in a large-group setting. The second dimension speaks to the range of formality of socialization activities, from placing new staff into a work role with little or no differentiation from their peers to being formally separated into segregated newcomer groups. A third dimension speaks to the degree organizations design identifiable onboarding steps for new hires (i.e., sequential vs random). A fourth dimension speaks to the duration of the onboarding process, noting it may be fixed or variable. A fifth dimension considers the role of a mentor in the onboarding process. Serial socialization sees new hires paired with a mentor who stewards their onboarding into the organization's culture, while disjunctive socialization speaks to a situation where a new hire may not have a mentor or may not be expected to follow the behavioural expectations of their predecessors. A final dimension considers the unique characteristics of a new hire along a spectrum of investiture (i.e., using their positive skills to contribute to the organization) to divestiture (i.e., rejecting or removing characteristics that interfere with employee assimilation into the workplace culture).

Jones (1986) later reconsidered this research and argued that it could be reconceptualized as having two categories: institutionalized and individualized socialization. Organizations leaning on institutionalized efforts were described as utilizing highly structured, mentor-supported, staged, and group-based activities. On the other hand, individual hires are largely left to their own devices to seek out information, build new relationships, and create their own socialization models to onboarding.

There have also been specific efforts to conceptualize the unique factors of onboarding for senior leaders. M. Watkins (2003) proposed that onboarding could be conceptualized as the process by which a new leader shifted from consuming resources to injecting new value into the mission and deliverables of the organization. He further argued that the ultimate goal of onboarding was to help new leaders achieve a break-even point quickly and effectively.

In 2007, Bauer et al. attempted to describe a new model of onboarding. They postulated a four-lever model for onboarding success, with the individual levers identified as specific programs that facilitate self-confidence, clarify new roles and deliverables, curate and nurture social integration (particularly with their supervisor), and provide formal training to understand and internalize the organization's culture. Lombardi (2011) proposed a new definition of onboarding that acknowledged corporate goals of employee compliance, efficiency, standardization, and productivity. However, she also noted that onboarding ought to also inspire engagement, facilitate productivity, and curate meaningful relationships between the new hire and the system around them. Lombardi further argued that onboarding ought to be standardized, centralized, and even automated where possible (i.e., self-directed virtual tutorials) to optimize performance.

In recent decades, authors have argued that the construct of integration needs to be considered as a natural next step to an onboarding process. Denis et al. (2000) considered the literature on workplace socialization and postulated that integration could be defined as a mutual adjustment process between the organization and a new leader. They articulated four possible integration outcomes: (a) assimilation of the new leader into organizational culture, (b) accommodation of differences between the organization and the new leader,

(c) transformation of the organization by the new hire, and (d) failed integration, referred to as parallelism and associated with subsequent separation.

Yip et al. (2020) emphasized that integration requires leaders to construct and integrate their new organizational identity with their other valued identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, marital and family status, or professional status. In this light, integration speaks to the degree to which the organization supports, encourages, and values a process by which a new leader conceptualizes and unites their various selves. This dynamic process, if successful, allows a new hire to shift through phases of identity development and emerge as an authentic leader in an inclusive new community. Their work speaks to the value of onboarding and integrating new leaders from underrepresented communities, such as women, visible minorities, sexual and gender minorities, and others who do not fit a traditional leader stereotype.

In his work, Majid (2014) provided a cross-cultural approach to considering metaphors of integration, particularly his description of the concept of barzakh from the Qu'ran. He wrote:

It is either a region that dives fresh and saltwater or the space between life and death. In the aquatic sense, barzakh refers to the transition zone between layers of fresh and saltwater. . . . In the life and death sense, it is a transitional state that embraces both the human and divine aspects of creation at ones. (p. 7)

Integration as barzakh emphasizes the importance of the initial and ongoing intersection of the new leader and the host organization and emphasizes the need to be mindful of activity in the transitional journey of both. The potential for original and creative insights as an entirely new space is co-created.

It is estimated that up to 40% of leaders do not achieve success in integration by the 18-month mark (Bradt et al., 2006). Further, Dávila and Piña-Ramírez (2018) described several risk

factors associated with an unsuccessful integration, many related to the organization's conceptual and practical approach to onboarding. They emphasize that onboarding and integration essentially begins at the interview stage, when the organization and the potential leader begin to determine how, and if, they can begin to align synergistically. They also pointed to North American data. Filipkowski et al. (2017) reported that 75% of leaders believed onboarding processes were underutilized, just under 25% of organizations had no articulated onboarding framework for new leaders, only 33% of organizations were prepared to offer onboarding processes virtually, and just under 50% of organizations described their onboarding processes as successful in retaining new leaders.

That is not to infer failure is purely the result of poor processes; rather, scholars have emphasized leader transition is a complex issue, with organizational, individual, and systemic factors contributing to an interplay of tensions and dynamics (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012; M. Watkins, 2003). Steps have been taken to make sense of such complexity, including the work of Manderscheid and Harrower (2016), who hypothesized that polarities may provide a construct on which transitional success and failure can be understood. They defined polarity as a position where an idea or tendency may be viewed along a continuum, creating inherent tensions that are often unrecognized or unacknowledged by new leaders and their organizations.

Johnson (2014) also spoke of polarity in his research into how leaders conceptualize, solve, and manage challenges in their mission. He considered "problems to solve" (p. 81) as those that are clear cut, have binomial options, and hold to defined time horizons. "Polarities to manage" (p. 81) involve issues whose potential outcomes fall along a spectrum with the terminal points in opposition. Further, polarities to manage can be more chaotic, complex, and unbound from clear timelines. Johnson concluded that polarities demand ongoing management, whereas

problems demand solutions. In a time of transition, new leaders may not appreciate how an organization, or its contextual system, frames such challenges. Leaders who treat polarities as problems, or vice-versa, tend to experience failure more often (Terry, 2001), suggesting this critical vulnerability ought to be considered in the development of new models of onboarding and integration.

Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) identified factors in onboarding and integration associated with leadership success, which included collaboration, learning, talent development, self-reflection, and decision making. They recommended that organizations have a significant role to play in facilitating such factors into their onboarding and integration processes. For example, collaboration may be a factor assessed at time of hire and explicitly nourished in mentoring or coaching processes. Support for learning about the culture, context, and construct of the organization ought to be included in onboarding activities. Further, support for leader-identified learning needs must be nurtured to allow new hires to attend to gaps they have identified in their skill set. Constructs of talent development speak to the process of leaders delegating tasks, building relationships and networks, and experiencing trust across their teams. Decision making was contextualized as a strength when done with deliberation, careful timeliness, and evidence. Finally, a deep commitment to an action/reflection cycle was identified as a source of resiliency and success.

Finally, there have been calls for the concept of integration to include factors related to occupational health, particularly as they relate to stress management and mental health (Richardson, 2017). Specific efforts to complement onboarding efforts with specific programs can help new leaders consider how to best manage multiple demands, prevent and manage burnout, promote the value of social support from peers and leaders, seek and engage in health-

promotion activities, and value time away from work. Scholars have also identified new challenges to successful leader integration, including stress caused by technology, known as technostress (Ayyagari et al., 2011), telepressure (i.e., the preoccupation and urge to immediately respond to work-related communications) as coined by Barber and Santuzzi (2015), multigenerational workforce with differing perspectives on work–life integration (Milligan, 2016), and workplace incivility (Giumetti et al., 2013).

Consider Transition and Transformation

A visual of onboarding is not particularly complex, recalling the journey a person takes from land in order to enter a ship or a plane. For some, the journey may be effortless and efficient. For others, however, onboarding may involve considerable preparation, sacrifice, complication, and disorientation. Majid (2014) provided rich metaphors for the subsequent integration process, emphasizing cross-cultural models of transition and transformation. Exploring these constructs raises several relevant findings in the literature.

Gabarro (1979) was one of the first scholars to look at transition models for leaders. He proposed the process had five core stages: (a) taking hold, (b) immersion, (c) reshaping, (d) consolidation, and (e) refinement. The taking hold phase is dedicated to understanding the new leadership situation by participating in orientation, completing an initial evaluation, identifying corrective actions, and setting expectations with team members. Later, Gabarro (1987) described leadership challenges in this phase as time-based: should the new leader act too fast, they risk appearing impulsive, or, alternatively, should they act too slowly, they risk appearing indecisive. The immersion phase speaks to the process of developing a more robust understanding of the context of the work and the team members involved in the mission. Tasks here are often focused on filling out one's mental model of the workplace, resolving performance

issues with key personnel, and preparing for strategic change. The reshaping phase sees the leader begin to reconfigure the organization to deal with change, address underlying quality issues, and identify emerging problems. In consolidation, the leader consolidates change initiatives, deals with any unanticipated consequences of change, and remains open to new developments. Finally, in the refinement phase, the leader's energy is committed to the refinement of operations, identification of new opportunities, and generation of succession planning.

Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) studied leadership transition to develop a contemporary model of onboarding. They concluded that five polarities were relevant in the onboarding and integration process. First, leaders described tension between a drive to create change and resistance, generating a tendency to maintain a status quo. Second, leaders described concerning threats to their own health and well-being, as they struggled to manage the tensions of work–life integration. Third, newly onboarded leaders spoke of the polarity created by the tendency to use former strategies when a circumstance demanding new ways of doing things emerged. Fourth, leaders described a tension between finding time to reflect on organizational behaviours in the context of the demands of the job. Finally, leaders struggled with the need to focus on getting things done and taking the time to build healthy relationships across their workplace and its external system. These five core polarities were contextualized as potential risk factors, with leadership failure a costly outcome.

Bridges (2003) suggested that leadership transition has three phases: (a) an ending, (b) a neutral zone, and (c) a new beginning. Ending speaks to a phase where the leader engages in a mindful process of moving away from prior assumptions, knowledge sets, and behaviours. Inherently, this demands openness, curiosity, reflection, and feedback. The neutral phase is the

core of transition, described by Bridges as the most problematic due to a lack of recognition and acknowledgment of the disruption, discordance, and distress that may arise. Onboarding may infer high expectations, specify particular leadership outcomes, direct new behaviours, and emphasize new value sets. This phase has been linked to earlier models of organizational psychology that suggested leaders experience shock, defensive retreat, acknowledgement, adaptation, and change in this phase (Fink et al., 1971). The neutral zone appears, in fact, to be anything but neutral. Defining and applying evidence-based strategies to facilitate reflection and, where appropriate, resolution of a leader's internal tension has been linked to the final phase: a new beginning. In this phase, a leader has acquired new skills, perspectives, mental models, and ways of behaving that herald full integration. This process of letting go, shifting, and emerging is one worthy of study given the stakes involved for all parties.

Manderscheid and Ardichvilli (2008) completed an extensive literature review and formulated a model of the dynamics and factors involved in transitioning a new leader into an organization. They described several factors of the new leader as essential to success: an ability to manage impressions, seek feedback from subordinates, and align expectations of all parties early and openly. They further emphasized the importance of nurturing the meaningful connections between the new leader and others in the system, proposing that such relationships were a way of reducing stress, increasing alignment, and enhancing productivity. They warned that unsuccessful transition carries with it a high cost, with components including lost opportunity, reputational risk, and direct costs. They encouraged more research be conducted on the impact of structured onboarding and integration processes, leadership characteristics, and organizational dynamics at play during times of transition.

In a North American context, Byford et al. (2017) suggested that new leaders ought to consider having five core transitional tasks. First, they should assume operational leadership and build credibility by demonstrating increasingly mature awareness of operational issues, solving urgent problems, and achieving some early wins. Second, they ought to take charge of the team with the goal of building genuine, safe, constructive, and healthy relationships from which trust can be earned. Third, they need to align with stakeholders, such as those identified above, and learn how influence, power, and decision making occur across the system. Fourth, they should engage with culture, learning the factors (i.e., values, norms, guiding assumptions) that define acceptable behaviour. This will provide context upon which they can consider change opportunities. Finally, they ought to articulate strategies to address the critical issues their department and organization need to address.

The concept of transformation was originally illustrated by Burns (1978) to describe a leadership practice that engaged followers to achieve significant and socially-uplifting outcomes. Bass (1985) expanded on this work, suggesting transformative leadership was exemplified in a leader's capacity to demonstrate idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Scholars in change theory and practice have continued to push the boundaries of transformative leadership, arguing that leaders continue to fail to lead change successfully across cultures, countries, and systems. Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010) made the point that transformation change demands that both the organization and its leaders commit to radical changes in their cognitive, behavioural, and relational practices. Creating change in organizations requires leaders to have a clear vision of a future state and lead people in its co-creation. They further argued that radical change requires a high degree of consciousness. Their definition differs from that familiar to me in medical

practice (i.e., where consciousness is a state where a person is awake, alert, aware, and able to respond to a stimulus) in that it references insight (i.e., a deeper appreciation of the dynamics of one's self and the dynamic of self/other relationships). Regardless of the term, Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson emphasized that one's awareness of self is a critical factor in the leader's ability to deeply appreciate human and organizational dynamics, and those with insight are consciously practicing change leadership. They also articulated a model of competency development that emphasizes the importance of insight. At the earliest stage, leaders are unconsciously incompetent and have no awareness of their lacking skills. With insight, they become consciously incompetent, a state of discordance that may trigger insight and pursuit of additional training and development. At that stage, leaders achieve a conscious competence, with key awareness that their skills are still fresh and not fully automatic. The model identified unconscious competence as the ultimate outcome of learning, with an ability to perform leadership tasks without conscious awareness.

Transition is a delicate, important, and essential task for a new leader to complete, and the depth of support offered by their host organization has the potential to support, or sabotage, success. In the onboarding and integration experience, transformation starts with the leader and ends with their impact on the organization. Done well, both the individual and the organization may be transformed with a positive impact on the success and sustainability of the other.

Pre-Pandemic Models of Onboarding and Integration

I surveyed the literature in the decade prior to the pandemic and was struck at the paucity of scholarly work in this area. Kotter (2012) proposed a model contextualized in change management, which proposed several specific stages formed a process of onboarding and integration: creating urgency, forming coalitions, creating a vision, communicating the vision,

removing obstacles to successful change, creating short-term wins, building on change, and anchoring changes in organizational culture.

Dai et al. (2011) raised questions about the success of traditional onboarding practices, emphasizing that effective programs ought to be tailed to address specific transition issues rather than take a more general and broad approach. Further, they proposed a conceptual framework of onboarding outcomes along a spectrum of derailment, retention, acceleration, and optimization. To foster success, they argued that senior leaders coming into an organization would benefit from six specific onboarding activities: (a) addressing the imprint left behind by their predecessor, (b) setting clear performance and contribution expectations, (c) exploring what parts of leadership may not be readily transportable to their new role, (d) helping external hires appreciate internal perspectives and mental models, (e) preparing the organization for change, and (f) helping the new hire connect and contribute to the effectiveness of the senior leadership team.

More recently, Becker and Bish (2019) considered learning theory to develop a new model of onboarding. Their approach proposed that unlearning is a critical component of onboarding, social engagement facilitated both unlearning and learning, and organizations ought to design bespoke programs that address specific learning and unlearning needs of new external hires. The American College of Healthcare Executives (2019) published a position statement advocating that healthcare executives ought to be onboarded using a systematic approach and have updated this statement in 2014 and 2019. They advocated that the organization had a primary responsibility to design and implement an onboarding and integration experience that was longitudinal and phased in its approach. They also called for opportunities for leaders to demonstrate success as early as possible, with the goal of facilitated development of credibility.

Finally, they called for processes to support the leader in their monitoring of their onboarding processes.

There is no similar position statement in the Canadian context; however, the LEADS framework (Dickson & Tholl, 2020) is a Canadian model describing components of leadership capability. Engagement and achievement in the LEADS competencies (i.e., leads self, engages others, achieves results, develops coalitions, and supports system transformation) is widespread in Canadian healthcare systems. Fenwick and Hagge (2015) completed a literature review of performance systems and recommended the LEADS framework be used to guide the development of indicators of high-performance leadership across systems of onboarding, integration, and subsequent performance management.

The Cynefin Framework

One of the competencies in the MALH program is identified as systems change and defined as understanding “one’s own sphere of influence within a system and demonstrates comprehension and application of systems thinking and complexity theory through action towards systems change” (Royal Roads University, n.d., para. 5). The impact of the pandemic on the practice of medicine, as well as all aspects of social functioning, has been unprecedented to most living leaders. We have all been challenged to make complex and serious decisions in our personal, professional, and civic lives. In all spheres, the Cynefin framework of Snowden and Boone (2007) has been a meaningful, practical, and inspirational framework as I engaged in this capstone project. While preparing to take on a new leadership challenge in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, I consulted the framework in my reflective and decision-making practice. Indeed, an image of the framework sits framed on my desk at both home and at work.

Snowden and Boone (2007) identified six core features of a complex system: (a) it involves lots of interacting parts, (b) the interaction of these parts is non-linear and prone to unpredictable consequences, (c) these parts come together to facilitate the emergence of a new whole, (d) this dynamic new whole is itself on a journey of interaction and evolution, (e) the entire dynamic is not subject to external constraints, and (f) the constant shift of elements in the system makes prediction and imposed order impossible. They proposed that decision makers would benefit from a framework that offered a conceptual framework on which they could consider their perceptions of the system in which their practice is engaged. At its core, the Cynefin framework considers the relationship between cause and effect to define five contexts, and leaders can use the framework to sense which decision-making context they find themselves in.

The first context is clear, as the relationship between cause and effect is self-evident and system restraints are rigid. Leaders sense or assess the facts of the situation, categorize them into sensical constructs, and respond based on established best practice (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 70). This sense-categorize-respond pattern depends heavily on accurate categorization, otherwise the risk of oversimplification or complacency may appear. The second context is complicated: While there is a clear relationship between cause and effect, it may not be known to all in the system (p. 71). Often, experts are required to analyze the facts collected by a leader, and it is their analysis that guides decision making. This sense-analyse-respond model is familiar to physicians, as they are often engaged in making sense out of complex signs and symptoms. However, such familiarity may make physicians prone to analysis paralysis: a state in which a response is not deemed possible in the absence of careful and thorough analysis. The complicated and simple contexts are considered parts of an ordered world, where leaders can use

facts to guide their responses. However, there are two other contexts considered parts of a yet-to-be ordered world, where leaders look to emerging patterns to guide decision making. One of these, the third context, is complex in that the relationship between cause and effect is only appreciated retrospectively (p. 74). This requires leaders to be deeply curious, probe for data, and allow patterns to emerge from the collection of facts. Patience and creativity often facilitate emergent practice. The fourth context is that of chaos, where relationships between cause and effect are impossible to identify given the lack of recognizable pattern and unpredictability of events (p. 74). In this domain, leaders must act first to address emergent issues, while working to create enough stability to move the system into the complex domain. Decision-making practices in this domain are novel and without any clear restraints.

Beyond the ordered and unordered elements of the world is a fifth context, aptly called confusion. These are the dark moments of leadership practice, described by Snowden and Boone (2007), where “multiple perspectives jostle for prominence, factional leaders argue with one another, and cacophony rules” (p. 72). Leaders are discouraged from remaining in this space and challenged to break their situation into reasonable parts and assign them to each of the other four contexts. The framework is a living one (Snowden, 2021), with updates to the model taking place over the course of this capstone project. In this latest iteration, Snowden further described the context of confusion as a state of “aporia or authentic confusion” (p. 78) and emphasized the value of being knowingly confused.

Scholars have applied the Cynefin framework to the COVID-19 pandemic since its earliest days. Sturmberg and Martin (2020) described the pandemic as “a classic example that demonstrates how suddenly changing dynamics can destabilize a system and tip it into an unstable state” (p. 1361). In considering various early national responses to the pandemic, the

process of leadership practice generally followed the flow of the Cynefin model. Governments quickly moved from disorder to unordered contexts and are now moving towards ordered good or, in some cases, best practices. Altman (2020) proposed that the impact of COVID-19 on the United States of America, as compared to all other developed nations, is linked to two core decisions by the Trump administration. First, the federal government maintained disorder by identifying its role as backup to that of the individual states. Second, the administration failed to apply novel, emerging, good, or best practices to their decision-making policies for political, not scientific, reasons. It will be curious to see how scholars unpack the final days of the administration given the insurrection at the capital and the subsequent impeachment of the President (Fandos, 2021).

Rubin and de Vries (2020) applied the Cynefin framework to their analysis of the Danish response to the pandemic. They concluded that the model was also evident in decision-making practices, with their government using the principles of decision making in a chaotic context to guide their novel practices. They observed health systems used the principles of decision making in a complicated context, creating tensions between the two systems. Further, they concluded that the divergence of decision-making processes put the entire system at risk of moving back into disorder. Their work recommended that leaders in systems participate in training to better identify and apply sensemaking frames, such as those of the Cynefin model, and that communication strategies in a crisis need to be increasingly mindful of the sensemaking frames of others in the system.

In Canada, the federal government created new e-learning resources to help civil servants and other leaders understand and apply the Cynefin framework to their pandemic decision making (Government of Canada, 2020). As decision makers now turn to the complexities of

vaccination rollout, there are calls to use the framework to challenge “our own existing structures, ideas, assumptions, certainties, fallibility’s, and complexities” (Prabhakar, 2021, Final Thoughts section, para. 2).

Impact of COVID-19 on Onboarding and Integration

Driscoll and M. Watkins (2020) surveyed leaders early in the pandemic and reported that only 17% of North American organizations had developed virtual models of onboarding and integration, and 45% of organizations have slowed their recruitment processes pending the design and implementation of pandemic-appropriate processes. They suggested that organizations ought to consider the following six elements in their virtual models: (a) make short- and long-term objectives crystal clear; (b) transition to succinct and curated briefings on critical issues; (c) provide explicit descriptions of cultural issues and ways of relating; (d) assign an onboarding buddy as an internal combination of coach, translator, and advocate; (e) provide training in virtual team building; and (f) encourage external coaching.

Groysberg (2020) emphasized that organizations need to be even more deliberate in developing onboarding strategies and double their investment in such processes. He emphasized a need for careful assessment of information technology needs (e.g., home/mobile office) as well as information technology orientation and training. He also suggested a point person be assigned to curate an orientation of the new leader to organizational culture, human resource processes, and potential land mines across the system. Groysberg suggested this point person, or point people, quickly build a rich relationship with the new leader, rapidly facilitate their integration in the workplace community, and provide both coaching and mentoring.

Learning organizations seem to be taking such advice to heart. The University of Pittsburgh, Office of Human Resources (2020) published one of the first policies guiding

onboarding and integrating new hires remotely in the COVID-19 pandemic. They identified seven principles to steward the process: (a) ensure new hires have the hardware, software, and office supplies needed for remote work; (b) ensure new hires understand how to use essential communication tools, online meeting solutions, and file-sharing applications; (c) help new hires understand culture; (d) challenge supervisors to set specific goals and expectations for new team members; (e) arrange frequent meetings with key employees to facilitate relationship development; (f) schedule frequent calls to touch base; and (g) be or provide a mentor.

There has been little research on how these onboarding, integration, transition, and transformation models apply in the context of the current pandemic, although this is a rapidly emerging area of scholarship. Graves et al. (2020) argued that the pandemic will create new opportunities to improve the onboarding and integration processes. They anticipated that some new processes such as shifting from a checklist approach, to onboarding (i.e., based on the completion of paperwork, review of documents, focused meet and greets, and orientation to office organization), to a system focused on a conscious and curated approach to relationship development, facilitation, and engagement may carry over into a post-pandemic world.

The Onboarding Isn't Enough Scale

Research into best practices for pandemic integration of new leaders is an emerging area of scholarship. Pre-pandemic, Byford et al. (2017) developed a tool to assess a company's onboarding effectiveness. Their work identified five core tasks of onboarding. First is the task of assuming operational leadership by showing their awareness of essential operational issues and solving a few urgent problems quickly. Second is the task of taking charge of the team and confirming or modifying its composition and goals. Third is the task of aligning with stakeholders or people over whom they have no authority. They need to quickly assess decision-

making practices in the organization and consider sources of influence and power. Fourth is the task of engaging with the organization's culture, including its values, norms, and assumptions. This can be a delicate dance as new leaders are often charged with changing culture while also working within its nuances. Finally, is the task of defining strategic intent. New leaders need to articulate their vision and shift resources within the organization to achieve implementation. This requires the leader to clearly communicate their intent, often before starting in their new role.

In Byford et al.'s (2017) tool, each task, or domain, is ranked at one of three increasingly sophisticated levels of achievement: (a) basic orientation (level one): sharing policies, evaluations, structural descriptions, strategic documents, and expectations of organizational deliverables; (b) active assimilation (level two): accelerating a transfer of deeper knowledge about the organization by adding meetings with key internal and external stakeholders; and (c) accelerated integration (level three): curated experiences that enable the new leader to integrate rapidly and more deeply. The tool identified level three as ideal and emphasized the value of immersive workshops, team-building exercises, and deep-dive discussions. Byford et al. also acknowledged the concept of a level zero, described as a sink or swim. While not an explicit part of their scale, it essentially refers to onboarding practices that are limited to providing space and basic resources only. Byford et al. concluded that 5% of global companies evaluate their onboarding efforts at the sink-or-swim level, while 67% offer a basic orientation, 25% endorse active assimilation, and 2% offer accelerated integration practices. Finally, their research noted that there may be variability in the levels of achievement of tasks: that is, an organization may offer a basic support to the task of assuming operational leadership while also offering accelerated integration to the task of aligning with stakeholders.

The elements of Byford et al.'s (2007) Onboarding Isn't Enough (OIE) scale are presented in Table 1. The first column lists the distant tasks or domains new leaders are expected to achieve as they move through an onboarding and integration process. The middle columns list the specific items of each domain, organized by placement on a spectrum from basic orientation, to active assimilation to accelerated integration. The presence of an item is awarded one point, allowing for scoring of elements both by domain or task (in the horizontal column) and by placement on the spectrum (in the vertical columns). Each domain or task is eligible to earn up to five points, while spectrum totals may reach 5 or 10 points, depending on the level of onboarding activity.

Table 1*The Elements of the Onboarding Isn't Enough (OIE) Scale*

Task or Domain	Basic Orientation	Active Assimilation	Accelerated Integration	Average Score
Assuming operational leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured introduction to key business areas Introductory visit to key company locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to sit in on critical business meetings before day one Immersive experiences in unfamiliar areas of the business 	X/5
Taking charge of the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career histories for key team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance and/or assessment data in team members Briefings to provide confidential insight on team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefings on team dynamics and history Facilitated workshop with the team 	X/5

Table 1 continued

Task or Domain	Basic Orientation	Active Assimilation	Accelerated Integration	Average Score
Aligning with stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant organizational charts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of key internal stakeholders • Introductory meetings with internal stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of key external stakeholders • Briefings on stakeholders 	X/5
Engaging with culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of company philosophy and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing on culture and ways of getting things done • Structured events to attend in order to understand culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cultural interpreter to provide insight • Assessment to highlight differences between current and former cultures 	X/5
Defining strategic intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic plans for the business • Conversations with key stakeholders on strategic challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to participate in an off-site strategic meeting • Dedicated workshop on strategy and existing plans 	X/5
Average score	X/5	X/10	X/10	X/25

Compiled from Byford et al. (2017)

I have carefully considered these multiple models of onboarding and integration have as they have been applied in pre-pandemic times. This thesis explores their utility to organizations shifting operations as a result of the pandemic, which will, hopefully, contribute to solutions for Institution X in its future efforts.

Chapter Summary

In summary, my literature review stemmed from my inquiry question and sub-questions, leading me to look into the definitions of onboarding and integration; consider constructs of transition, transformation, and decision-making processes; review models of onboarding and integration prior to the pandemic; understand how organizations have begun to adapt their models in the context of the pandemic; and review models that articulate and measure onboarding and integration tasks. I found that most organizations appear to offer onboarding and integration programs at a basic level. The literature suggested that more sophisticated levels are associated with enhanced outcomes for both the organization and the new leader, and models have been developed to guide evolution in organizational practice.

I also found that the pandemic has had profound impacts on current onboarding and integration practices and organizations are in early phases of adapting to this new context. Snowden and Boone's (2007) Cynefin framework is helpful to consider what decision-making processes may be required to best address onboarding and integration practices. Organizations may be aware of being in a state of chaos, embracing the value of novel practice, and moving their contexts towards a complex or complicated domain. Others may continue to apply best practices to onboarding and integration; however, this appears to be in the context of a conscious decision to act in a chaotic context, rather than misreading a context as simple. Over time, I anticipate best practices to onboarding and integration in a pandemic will emerge. However, the applicability from the COVID-19 pandemic to other pandemics is not at all predictable.

Finally, I found there are few frameworks that organizations can use to reflect upon and evaluate their organization and onboarding processes. Byford et al.'s (2017) OIE scale provides

one such model that I will consider in the methods of exploring my thesis questions and sub-questions, articulated further in chapter three.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As I began to co-conceptualize this project with Institution X, I leaned on philosophical concepts and models of inquiry embedded in the MALH curriculum (Royal Roads University, 2018). Tuli (2010) emphasized that ontology, epistemology, and methodology were the foundations of all inquiry, as these elements include “beliefs about the nature of reality and humanity (ontology), the theory of knowledge that informs the research (epistemology), and how that knowledge may be gained (methodology)” (p. 106). The work of scholars such as Hay (2002) was shared to illustrate how these elements have a natural order in the inquiry process, with ontological perspectives shaping epistemological positions that help investigators identify methodological approaches to their work. In my context, both Institution X and I needed to have frank and open discussions about how we understood our perspectives on onboarding and integration as part of moving forward with a research study.

Ontology

Tuli (2010) articulated key differences between the ontological worldviews of objectivism and constructivism. Objectivist perspectives assume that there is an independent reality between investigators and participants. Constructivist perspectives assume that reality emerges from co-constructed social dynamics. Aaltonen (2009) encouraged leaders to be open to multi-ontological approaches and noted “this recognition helps us to understand why we comprehend what we do and not something else, and also helps to make sense of what tools, techniques and interventions to use.” Snowden and Boone’s (2007) scholarship emphasized the complex nature of interpersonal dynamics of individual and system-level social relationships. Bearing these perspectives in mind, I chose to pursue a constructivist perspective in my research and acknowledged that it would be impossible for me to be fully objective in the process. Not

only was it a research study being designed, implemented, and evaluated under my own leadership, I was also living my own onboarding and integration experience with the organization being studied.

Epistemology

Grix (2002) described epistemology as a process by which we acquire knowledge, contrasting two positions: positivism and interpretivism. In my training as a physician, a positivist position was dominant, using what Tuli (2010) identified as quantitative concepts to inform the knowledge-building process. In my later training as an educator, I was introduced to a new way of considering learning: that of an interpretivist position. My initial reaction to qualitative research was quite dismissive. Tuli's proposal that reality could be viewed as socially constructed and open to divergent interpretation was both destabilizing and liberating. By the time I engaged in the MALH, I had come to appreciate the value of both perspectives in the learning process. In this particular study, I elected to follow an integrative process where both interpretive and constructive perspectives would inform my approach.

Methodology

Tuli (2010) described methodologies as ways of observing and measuring reality and differentiated qualitative and quantitative approaches. My initial familiarity with quantitative methodologies came from my work as a scientist, deeply rooted in the basic science methods of hypothesis testing, experimentation, and generation of conclusions. Qualitative methodologies shifted my perspective radically; I was now able to identify as a participant, co-create models of inquiry, and consider the value of data that were not purely mathematical in nature.

Considering these concepts, I elected to ground this research in the action research engagement (ARE) model (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 20). This scholarship provided principles and

practical steps to engage organizational members and prepare for change. Rooted in a process of curious inquiry, open dialogue, and thoughtful deliberation, the goal of the model is to curate change initiatives that are meaningful, practical, viable, and sustainable. My research focused on transformational change opportunities in onboarding and integration of new leaders. Rowe et al. (2013) spoke to this as “being most interesting to us because it involves a radical shift of culture, behaviour or mindset” (p. 8). They emphasized that transformational change can have particular meaning for the new leader; onboarding can influence the behaviours of the leader in their practice as well as shape their personal goals and vision of success. At a systemic level, this model highlights that transformational change can enhance system dynamics in multiple spheres, including learning, relationships, and sustainability.

Using Rowe et al.’s (2013) ARE model, my first steps focused on framing the organizational context of my research. Looking at the importance of onboarding, I carefully considered the mission and structure of the organization, the system in which it is situated, and the current external forces demanding change. However, in keeping with step two of the ARE model, I did not do this in isolation. I had multiple conversations about my research with my research partner, as well as my own peers and subordinates, external collaborators, and other stakeholders. These discussions shaped my research in ways beyond my initial conceptualization and brought value and utility to the work. For example, initially, I had not planned to interview people outside of Institution X, thinking that this might not be acceptable to their organization. However, the Chief Executive Officer of Institution X raised a number of questions inquiring about the value of external consultation, particularly given the collaborative nature of their organization. Thus, stakeholder engagement led to a modification of my proposal in ways that were unanticipated.

I engaged in analysis and reflection on both the process of research and the data generated. This is in keeping with stage three of Rowe et al.'s (2013) ARE model, which articulates the opportunity for the investigator to actively reflect on action taken. These reflections were shared with my organizational partner and inquiry team, allowing for additional deliberation on interpretation of data, consideration of meaning, identification of areas of confusion, and considering optimal go-forward strategies in the onboarding process. It is humbling to be, at this point, at a stage where my role in ARE facilitation will close. However, the ARE model includes two additional phases. First, what the authors called a transition zone where the other parts of the organization's system engage in the process of implementing new onboarding processes; and second, the organizational ownership phase to allow for cyclical processes of implementation, evaluation, recontextualization, and reconstruction. I look forward to contributing this research to Institution X to inform their future efforts in these two phases.

This research was initially conceptualized as possible using a "first-person action-oriented inquiry plus" (Royal Roads University, 2020, p. 1) framework, a novel descriptor created by Royal Roads University in response to the educational challenges posed by the pandemic. Many learners, myself included, saw our original partner institutions withdraw their willingness to support and engage with our research efforts, as they were understandably preoccupied with developing their COVID-19 response plans. Further, many of my potential participants of research (i.e., colleagues and organizational leaders) signalled their inability to protect time to participate in research activities. Finally, the nature of SARS-CoV-2 meant it would be dangerous to bring participants together for research activities, particularly for methods involving group approaches. In the absence of specific participants and partner organizations, Royal Roads University decided to allow learners to study participants they had easy access to—

themselves. Other participants could be included in the research work, provided they were engaged remotely, thus removing any risk of transmission of the virus. As this project moved forward, Institution X gave consent to allow me to interview participants both virtually and in socially distanced settings, allowing me to let go of the first-person action-oriented inquiry plus model. However, in keeping with the directives of Royal Roads University (2020), the invitation to participants made it clear that interviews would only be done virtually. The School of Leadership Studies, Institution X, my thesis supervisors, and my proposal all continued to be committed to action research and to use first-person methods in my research work. Breaking down the meaning of these terms was carefully considered in early phases of my research design and later analysis.

Action research as initially conceived (Lewin, 1946) was oriented to tackling challenges in social and organizational structures, using systematic processes to generate practical and meaningful strategies. Action research purposely played with the concepts of traditional research, acknowledging the value of studying the interplay between researcher and participant in design, methodology, implementation, and analysis. Further, action research is committed to what Schön (1983) described as reflective or practical rationality. This lens can be used by researchers to apply methods of systematic collection and reflective analysis of data to find solutions for complex, real-time, and practical problems.

In the first person, researchers are mindful of their curiosity, assumptions, and bias as they reflect on self-learning and inquiry of organizational behaviour. They also demonstrate awareness of their dual roles as investigators and members of a particular practice community. Finally, to be successful, they use their political skills (i.e., consideration of interpersonal dynamics amongst themselves and others and between others) and personal authenticity to

promote genuine and effective engagement. In the second person, researchers see their perspective shift to developing a community of inquiry across their organization, mastering the practical elements of their collaborative study, balancing roles and responsibilities, and moving within and across political dynamics. In the third person, researchers push their new knowledge beyond the confines of their own system and translate new knowledge into useful language for practice evolution, generate new knowledge to be considered at a system level, and influence behaviours across networks or larger systems (Coghlan & Shani, 2015).

Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2018) expanded on the characteristics of first-person action research, emphasizing multiple ways researchers may create knowing as an “extended epistemology that includes experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowledge” (p. 54). They also emphasized that there is no agreed-upon or fixed methodology, and it is up to the researcher to experiment with the tools of inquiry, based on their own unique situation and context. At its core, the shift in relationship space between the researcher and the situation fades, the connection of self to context deepens, and a participatory consciousness develops.

Awareness-based action research (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2015) is a conceptual model that directly challenges the assumption that leaders and followers in systems have an inherent capacity to assess their own lived experiences and apply them to personal and organizational growth.

Scharmer and Kaufer (2015) utilized this perspective to generate theory U, a conceptual framework that can be applied to help leaders generate awareness of their sense of self, how that relates to their praxis, and how to utilize such reflections to create new ways of visioning,

embodying, and performing, such as new ways of onboarding physician leaders.¹ These constructs are not limited to scholarly work. Indeed, concepts of self-awareness are often referred to in popular culture using the descriptor “woke.”² This reflects a cultural shift that increasingly normalizes and expects efforts at self-awareness for practical and professional purposes. Being woke, thus, is a concept that links to the underpinnings of action research, which is inherently personal, practical, and useful.

Knowledge generated by action research has been described by Reason and Bradbury (2008) as having four core characteristics: (a) the pursuit of worthwhile practical purposes, (b) the participation of those involved or affected, (c) significance for further development of the situation under investigation, and (d) the connection of theory and praxis. First, Carr and Kemmis (1986) described high-quality action research as having three goals: (a) improvement of the understanding of practice, (b) improvement of practice, and (c) improvement of the situation in which practice takes place. McTaggart (1997) emphasized the scientific or positivist tenets of action research, including the development of research questions, systematic review of current knowledge, rigorous collection of data, analysis of data including deliberation of validity and applicability, and ability to show and defend evidence used to generate conclusions.

¹ Scharmer and Kaufer (2015) also emphasized how this model practically defines four states of awareness: (a) the typical numb or habitual state, (b) the intellectual awareness of the ego as it lives in a system, (c) the affective composition of a self in relation to all other stakeholders, and (d) the deep and broad integration of an evolving self in a complex ecosystem of networks. Awareness, particularly in the sense of action-oriented research, may be considered to have core stages (i.e., seeding, co-initiating, co-sensing, co-inspiring, co-creating, co-shaping, harvesting), principles (i.e., engagement with the whole system, collaboration using all forms of intelligence, application of system thinking), and methods (i.e., deep immersion journeys, future prototype analysis, activation of intention, integration of first/second/third person knowledge).

² This term evolved from social justice language in the United States in the 1960s (Kelley, 1962, p. 45), became more firmly rooted as a social construct by inclusion in popular films like the Matrix (A. Wachowski & L. Wachowski, 1999), and has been more recently referenced by the Black Lives Matter movement across North America (“Stay Woke,” 2017).

Second, action research is collaborative and participatory at all stages and phases. This research has allowed me to deeply consider Schön's (1983) concepts of reflective practice, which, at their core, involved collecting data about my onboarding experience, searching for meaning in my data, and drawing conclusions about how the data can inform future integration paradigms. This process was made stronger by the involvement of an inquiry committee composed of colleagues, external advisors, and others who acted as critical friends (Stern, 2014), all of whom provided critical reflection and coaching during my research process.

Third, action research is meant to be developmental and responsive, using iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to understand and refine practice. These cycles can facilitate learning from experience (Winter, 1989), allowing for the active reflection of existing onboarding activities to inform the development of a new model.

Finally, action research connects theory and praxis by allowing testing of theory in real-world settings and generating solutions to specific challenges. Applying double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978) in this process was practical. Argyris and Schön (1978) further emphasized four processes in action theory learning: (a) consideration of established theories and mental models of practice, (b) invention of new meanings, (c) production of new actions, and (d) consideration of generalization of new behaviours. Double-loop learning involves the active application of each of these processes to itself. Underlying assumptions are challenged, current views questioned, and new behaviours are hypothesized, tested, and evaluated publicly. Ultimately, double-loop learning develops decision-making skills, promotes self-acceptance and discovery, and is aligned with authentic and genuine learning outcomes.

Not only have I had an opportunity to play with the results and consequences of my onboarding efforts, I have also had an opportunity to dig up my underlying assumptions, move

beyond my cognitive errors, and re-evaluate my fundamental goals and interests. I have also had an opportunity to generate data from interviews with key stakeholders. Ultimately, I hope this product of action research may shape new ways of enhanced onboarding for Institution X and other health organizations.

This research has involved primarily qualitative methods, including individual interviews with various internal stakeholders, discussion with my inquiry team, and analysis of research journals. Specific details about these methods are provided in this chapter.

Data Collection Methods

I used two data collection methods: journal reflections and interviews. While my initial plan for journaling and analysis of journal data did not fully evolve, I did collect a large amount of data related to my leadership, research practice, and my reflections on such work, and I benefitted from discussing these reflections with my feedback partner. Interviews took on two forms: (a) two rounds of semi-structured interviews with the same group of participants from Institution X, and (b) semi-structured interviews with my feedback partner regarding my journal reflections. I will briefly comment on these activities with full details discussed in chapter four.

Journal Reflections

In my first year of studies in the MALH program, I began to keep a research journal, extracting and shifting ideas of application for my thesis. Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio (2009) emphasized the value of the reflective journal in development of researcher metacognition, but also emphasized the importance of engagement of others in the interpretation of data. My journals have been of invaluable support during my graduate work, particularly as I processed the many challenges faced in the thesis process. My journals, which I continue to maintain, have been a valuable source of idea generation, course correction, and scaffolding (Engin, 2011),

particularly when I have shared the findings with my cohort-peers, faculty members, and fellow thesis students. As such, I attempted to continue to collect data using a reflexive diary, with a goal of capturing data at least weekly in the form of written reflections, digital communications (i.e., poems, images of artwork, quotations, summaries of policies and procedures), and my own poems and drawings. I also structured opportunities to share my reflections on the data with members of my inquiry committee as often as possible. I had hoped that these journals would contain my daily reflections on onboarding experiences, such as meetings with internal and external leaders and consideration of educational materials (i.e., readings, webinars, courses and workshops, and engagement in COVID-19 leadership scholarship). However, during the two-month period of data collection, I realized the full achievement of this task would be aspirational at best.

A typical workday in my new leadership role has been approximately 10 hours long. I was tasked with completing a large volume of educational training to enhance my skills to assist with my integration with my new organization. I also was dealing with my own experience with the pandemic, along with my family. While I continued to maintain daily journals, my comments focused deeply on operational tasks and goals with minimal dedication to reflective practice. While these did not follow any particular structure, I did use them to inform my questions for supervision, themes, and queries to take to my feedback and project partner. In that respect, I had initially planned for my journals to be semi-structured and become highly evolved sources of data. However, the pressures of both my practice and the pandemic limited my ability to meet this aspirational goal. That noted, my supervisors and feedback partner were available to help ensure at least some opportunity for reflective practice was afforded to this research experience.

Comments on those learnings will be presented in chapters four and five and reflect how methods are influenced by the environment in which they are applied, such as the pandemic.

Interviews

Interviews have been part of action research since its inception (Stringer & Aragon, 2020). Seeking ideas, opinions, reactions, and ideas from others allows researchers to honour, respect, and harvest wisdom. Stringer and Aragon (2020) encouraged investigators to carefully consider interview design, format and delivery in advance, and craft an interview guide to assist in their data collection processes. Interviews create an experience for both the investigator and participant, and it is reasonable to curate the experience with safety, respect, consent, and clarity of purpose in mind. The two main types of interviews in qualitative research are unstructured and semi-structured. Unstructured interviews are purposely free from investigator-initiated limitations and can bring forward new and innovative ideas and concepts. The downside, of course, is time, focus, and practicality. Semi-structured interviews contain a list of key questions to be posed to participants, but allow for a degree of openness for the investigator to pose supplementary questions within a reasonable scope. Semi-structured interviews served my study well, allowing for consistency in inquiry across participants while also encouraging divergent ideas and opinions.

Patton (1987) suggested investigators ought to ensure interview questions align with specific purposes, such as exploring interviewees' background or demographics, experiences, behaviours, beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. I used this framework in my interview design. Kvale (1996) spoke to the process of the interview. He recommended investigators focus on the experiences, ideas, perspectives, and suggestions of the interviewee, monitoring boundaries; being mindful of body language, word choice, and tone; and promoting interviewee comfort and

safety. He discouraged questions, other than some demographic stems, that infer binary answers; rather, questions ought to prompt opinion or recollection, probe when needed, prompt clarity or context, or facilitate structure. Kvale also emphasized the value of silence, which allows interviewees time to collect and communicate their thoughts at their own comfortable pace and also allows researchers to reflect on the data stream, consider follow-up questions, or transition to another topic area.

I completed two rounds of interviews with the same set of internal participants. Once my literature review was completed, I concluded that the OIE scale had had strong elements of scholarly rigour, including tests of dimensionality, reliability, and validity. Further, this OIE had moved beyond the pilot phase to large, real-world, multi-sectorial application and evaluation. It also allowed me to avoid developing an entirely new instrument, which I feared could derail my research timelines and be a methodological challenge given the difficulties of recruiting participants to my research in the context of the pandemic. Finally, this OIE was structured in a way that allowed for real modification to include open-ended questions that facilitated participants' criticism of its structure and content and to also identify new or alternative constructs. The first round assessed participants' perspectives of the usefulness of the OIE scale developed by Byford et al. (2017) to see if it helped them assess Institution X's pre-pandemic onboarding and integration process. It was modified slightly to allow participants an opportunity for qualitative reflection. The second round saw stakeholders consider their own onboarding and integration experiences, describe how those experiences influenced their own onboarding and integration practices, consider the impact of the pandemic on those processes, and identify quality-improvement ideas for Institution X's future processes. Each of these interviews was

piloted in advance with a member of my inquiry team and delivered with the assistance of an interview guide (Appendix A).

Inquiry Team Discussions

Over the course of the seven-week data collection period, I met virtually with my feedback partner twice: once after each of the two phases of the interview process. I used a team discussion agenda provided by Royal Roads University to guide our discussions (Appendix B: Feedback Partner/Team Discussion Agenda; Appendix C: Information Letter–Feedback Partners). This allowed me to structure my approach so I could share early reflections of my experience in the research process, my early observations of potential codes and themes in the data, and my plans for next steps in the capstone project. Each meeting was audio recorded and transcribed, either by myself or by my research assistant. The research assistant signed a confidentiality agreement prior to assisting in the research (Appendix D). My feedback partner reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcript.

Project Participants

Both the internal structure of Institution X and the system in which it is situated informed the identification of project participants. The organization was cautious about involving large numbers of staff in the interview process, particularly given the unique and multiple demands being placed on senior and non-senior staff due to the complexities of the pandemic. The Chief Executive Officer spoke to members of the senior management team to explore their openness to collaborating in this research, with a clear message that participation was voluntary. The senior team were keenly interested and suggested that it would be essential to carefully sample other staff in the organization. Consequently, all members of the senior management team were invited to participate, given the interplay of the various structures of the organization. This included the

entire senior leadership team. Given the nature of this thesis, it was essential to involve the Directors of both Human Resources and Communications, who do not sit on the senior leadership team, but have a critical role in onboarding. These participants had been with the organization for at least four years, with most being with the organization well beyond that. With one exception, all these participants joined the organization from external organizations; the Chief Executive Officer had been promoted to their role from another internal senior position. Finally, several staff members from outside the senior management team were invited to participate given their valuable role in onboarding activities and their unique perspective. Given that we had a pre-existing relationship, careful consideration had to be given to how their perspectives were to be gathered. I will address the ethical considerations of engaging these participants in the next section. All potential participants had also been with the organization for at least three years, with several serving for well over a decade. These individuals were all invited to participate in two sets of individual interviews (see Appendices E and F). A total of 12 internal invitations was sent out. No leaders in the organization were excluded from participation, and a total of nine participants consented to and fully completed both interviews.

Externally, I had proposed that individual interviews be held with an organizational representative from at several institutions. Unfortunately, of the invitations sent, only two received a response, and in both cases, participation was declined due to competing demands from the pandemic.

Discussions on findings, conclusions, and recommendations have been held with my partner, the Chief Executive Officer of Institution X. In collaboration with the senior management team, they have the authority to direct the implementation of project

recommendations should they choose to do so. The responsibility to lead future onboarding lies with Institution X's Human Resources department.

My inquiry team has been kept small, by design, given the size of the organization, the challenges of meeting with others during the pandemic, and the design of the research. Members of the inquiry team received an information letter describing their responsibilities during the research (see Appendix G). I hired a research assistant who, in recognition of potential conflict of interest and/or power-over issues, was able to seek the participation of, and subsequently engage, two out of the four staff who were outside of Institution X's senior management team. As noted previously, the research assistant signed a confidentiality agreement prior to assisting in the research (Appendix D). The research assistant also completed two sets of interviews, transcribed them, and removed any identifying information prior to submitting them to me. I was also grateful for the support and skill of a peer from the MALH program, who met with me regularly, provided support and feedback, and served as a test participant for draft interview questions.

Study Conduct

Once my proposal was accepted by the thesis committee, they submitted my ethics application to the Royal Roads University Ethics Review Board. Approval to proceed was granted on November 5, 2020. The study was verbally announced by my partner to potential internal participants; my partner also approved the invitation to participate to be sent to potential external participants. They were clear that participation was voluntary and free from duress (see primary researcher's invitation in Appendix E). In the case of participants with whom I had a potential conflict of interest and/or power-over relationship, my research assistant then sent potential participants an invitation to participate by email and asked them to confirm their

interest by way of reply (see Appendix F). Once received, I (or my research assistant) scheduled all interviews to take place between mid November 2020 to mid January 2021.

Consent was requested and documented at the outset of each interview (see Appendix H), and an interview guide was used for each interview (see Appendix A). Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed by myself or a research assistant. Transcripts of each interview were sent to participants for confirmation of accuracy, with only minor errors (i.e., spelling, duplication of words, verb tenses) identified, corrected, and once again approved by participants. At that point, they were considered finalized and ready to be analyzed. No participants withdrew from participation.

Once an initial analysis was completed of both rounds of interviews, findings and draft recommendations were shared with my feedback and organizational partners. The goal was to reflect on my experience and effort; seek confirmation on emerging findings, conclusions, and themes; and explore next steps in process: themes. I observed that this process has facilitated a sense of ownership of the recommendations arising from this study for those within Institution X best positioned to implement change.

Data Analysis and Validity

My approach to analyzing data from two main sources is summarized in this section. First, my journals provided reflections for analysis with my feedback partner and my own reflection processes. Second, two phases of interviews with participants were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Percy et al., 2015), with triangulation discussions with my feedback and project partners (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Journals

Marshall (1998) articulated an everyday process of first-person action research called living life as inquiry. By this, she referred to a range of beliefs, strategies, and ways of being that foster critical thinking, emergent ideation, and self-monitoring. Marshall described making explicit inquiry questions that allowed her to modify her behaviours while simultaneously heightening her level of curiosity and awareness of the responses of others. For example, when faced with new challenges, she would generate alternative leadership behaviours (i.e., choosing to focus on individuals, later choosing to focus on systems) and test the impact of various choices on outcomes (i.e., taking a coach approach, leading with power, influencing with affect). These in-situation and what she described as in-the-minute queries were tracked, documented, and reflected upon.

In subsequent work by Marshall (2004), methods of tracking examples of practice were further illustrated. Data collection was structured in two phases. First, she would explicitly summarize the intent of the inquiry as a single or series of questions, generate “alive rich and multi-faceted” written accounts (p. 5) of her lived experience exploring the inquiry activity, and link such practice to research approaches and relevant literature. In her second phase, a determination of inquiry saturation is made based on self-reflection and consultation with trusted others. Once Marshall was satisfied that her original inquiry was saturated, she would then step back and reflect on her engagement with her data, often by engaging peers for their input.

I used daily journals to collect and share my experiences, reflections, and draft analysis, conclusions, and recommendations with my feedback partner, and I used a semi-structured process to garner feedback on two occasions. These discussions were recorded, transcribed, and used to inform my personal application of the look, think, act, and reflect cycle (Coghlan &

Brydon-Miller, 2018) and the phases of appreciative inquiry (J. Watkins et al., 2011) to fully consider my onboarding and research experiences.

Interviews

Inductive thematic analysis (Percy et al., 2015) was used to analyze interview data. As inductive analysis is data driven, I did not attempt to fit the data into pre-existing categories. Once the transcription of each interview was approved by the participant, it was carefully read two to three times. I then noted my initial impression of the main ideas and themes of the data. Once I had exhausted that process for each transcript, I turned my attention to identifying elements and variables within the data, linking them to the question that was originally posed and the overall questions of this thesis.

Open coding, or the process of assigning units of meaning to the data found in each interview (Goulding, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), was used. This led to preliminary conceptual labels being assigned and a running list of concepts from each interview to grow. In the phase one interviews, much of the data were binomial in nature (i.e., an element was affirmed as present or absent). However, qualitative questions generated considerable data as well. These data were read and re-read, with codes being assigned to discrete elements. Once a list of codes was developed, I reviewed them for patterns, leading to identification of recurrent themes that could be applied in my synthesis of the overall data set. The long list of codes, shorter list of patterns, and proposed short list of recurrent themes were shared with my feedback team and organization partner for feedback. At all stages, affirmation was received as to the face validity of the data, with some useful reflective questions and feedback to add practicality and clarity to the language used.

Ethics

I acknowledged my responsibility to adhere to the research standards set by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2014), which had also been specified by Royal Roads University (2011) in their ethics policy.

Consideration for participants was demonstrated by respecting autonomy (i.e., participants had the ability to deliberate on their participation in the absence of duress or fear of consequence); seeking their free, informed, and ongoing consent (i.e., across all phases of the proposed study); and demonstrating a commitment to accountability and transparency (i.e., sharing phases of data analysis for accuracy and briefing participants on the conduct of the proposed research as well as addressing any concerns they had during the research process).

Consent was a critical component of participation, and duress was minimized by providing opportunities for participants to decline or withdraw from participation at each stage of engagement. Participants were able to withdraw up until final approval of their final interview transcript in each round of interviews. At that point, they agreed that data integration could proceed and affirmed their understanding that subsequent withdrawal made it near-impossible to parse out their individual contribution to both the organizational evaluation and overall coding framework and analysis.

With respect to justice, there were no known power-over relationships between the primary investigator and most participants. However, I had a pre-existing relationship with four potential participants, presenting a potential conflict of interest and/or power-over condition to be carefully managed. Thus, I arranged for a research assistant to obtain consent as well as conduct, transcribe, and confirm the accuracy of transcription of those two interviews. Further,

they ensured all identifying data were removed prior to my receipt of the final transcripts.

Finally, they have agreed to store the recordings of these interviews under password protection independent of my records per the terms of an agreement template provided by the Royal Roads University Ethics Board (see Appendix D).

I also strived to protect the confidentiality of participants throughout this project. Data were analysed in the absence of any names or titles, and participants were assigned a number to tag and track their data. All interviews took place using Microsoft Teams, removing the risk that data would be subject to the USA Patriot Act. Audio recordings were captured on an iPhone and immediately transferred to an external password-protected USB, with one redundant backup. Once transcribed, the draft and approved transcript were stored on the same USB keys and both stored in a locked cabinet. Per my ethics application, data will be securely stored and then destroyed one year after my completion of the MALH program in June 2021.

Of note, Institution X requested anonymity in my final thesis publication. However, they agreed to be identified in all stages leading up to the post-defense publication so as to ensure Royal Roads University is aware of their support and collaboration. This condition was accepted by my supervisors, the MALH thesis program, and the Royal Roads University Ethics Board.

Outputs

Royal Roads University allows for a number of possible outputs in a capstone project. One path sees the generation of a thesis, while another may see an organizational report, infographic, policy brief, workshop, presentation, or other practical and creative methods of sharing findings and recommendations.

It is possible that this thesis may result in papers suitable for peer review and publication or workshops for peers. Finally, this process has helped inform my ongoing professional development plan.

Contribution and Application

I hope that this thesis will be a useful contribution to the literature, both in Canada and abroad, in keeping with third-person perspectives in action-oriented research (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2018). There are ample opportunities to influence leadership at multiple points in the healthcare system as well as to enhance the scholarly output of such work. Thus, this capstone may have a practical and useful application to the people of the province where Institution X and I operate, as well as for my peers across Canada and beyond.

Chapter Summary

An overview of the key steps in my research process, starting with consideration of the constructs of ontology, epistemology, and methodology, has been provided in this chapter. Methodology was then described, including the processes of data collection, a description of project participants, a summary of the study's conduct, a summary of the approach to data analysis, and careful consideration of the ethical issues at play. The systematic review of the literature, the methodology, the methods of data collection, and the process of analysis have generated new knowledge and understanding about the onboarding and integration processes at Institution X, including pre-pandemic and pandemic models as well as potential ideas for future pandemic and post-pandemic processes. The findings and conclusions that evolved from these efforts are thoroughly discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings and Conclusions

I divide this chapter into four discrete sections to review findings generated from my analysis of qualitative data (summarized in Table 1) and quantitative data, detail conclusions I have drawn from my analysis, and outline the scope and limitations of my capstone experience. These efforts serve to communicate what I have learned from the data in order to answer my thesis inquiry question: How might a healthcare organization best onboard and integrate a senior leader in the context of a pandemic? A series of sub-questions were used to help with my inquiry:

1. How are pre-pandemic models of senior leadership onboarding and integration applied in my workplace?
2. What senior leader onboarding and integration activities were modified in the context of the pandemic and how successful were these modifications?
3. What senior leader onboarding and integration activities could not happen or did not happen successfully?
4. How might this analysis inform the development of a new model of senior leader onboarding and integration?
5. How might this new model be useful to other senior physician leaders stepping up during the pandemic (provincially, nationally, internationally)?

Study Findings: Phase One Interviews

Phase one interviews provided an opportunity to explore participants' perspectives on pre-pandemic onboarding and integration processes. Participants included nine staff members at Institution X, five at the senior leadership level and four at the senior management level. These nine participants were interviewed using a modified version of the Onboarding Isn't Enough

(OIE) scale (Byford et al., 2017) that allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data gathering.

Two findings resulted from analysis of the phase one interview data:

1. The Onboarding Isn't Enough (OIE) scale (Byford et al., 2017) was viewed as a useful and accurate tool to facilitate participants' reflections on the pre-pandemic state of onboarding and integration at the organization.
2. The organization's pre-pandemic onboarding and integration efforts achieve the goals of active assimilation.

These findings will be discussed in detail in this section. No names or roles will be assigned to quotations referenced in order to protect the anonymity of participants, but their participant number will be noted (e.g., participant 1 will be identified as P1, participant 2 will be identified as P2 and so on).

Finding 1: The Onboarding Isn't Enough (OIE) Scale was Viewed as a Useful and Accurate Tool to Facilitate Participants' Reflections on the Pre-Pandemic State of Senior Leader Onboarding and Integration at Institution X

As outlined in Chapter 2, the OIE scale (Byford et al., 2017) was developed to allow organizations a structured opportunity to assess their comprehensiveness and effectiveness at onboarding. This instrument identified five core tasks: (a) assume operational leadership, (b) take charge of the team, (c) align with stakeholders, (d) engage with culture, and (e) define strategic intent. These tasks are then clustered along three levels of increasing sophistication: (a) basic orientation, (b) active assimilation, and (c) accelerated integration.

The primary goals of the phase one interviews was to use the OIE scale to facilitate participants' descriptions of the pre-pandemic state of onboarding and integration at the organization. Using the OIE for this purpose was a helpful strategy, particularly given that

focused discussions or reflective processes related to onboarding and integration activities were described as relatively uncommon. Providing a framework allowed participants to consider a diversity of onboarding and integration components. Further, inviting participants to comment freely on any other onboarding and integration activities provided an opportunity for participants to think about their experiences and observations beyond the OIE scale.

All participants agreed that the elements of the scale were conceptually useful, with one participant adding, “They are very good ways of articulating . . . high-level dimensions to onboarding a new leader” (P6). Further, a majority of the participants (67%) described the concept of a spectrum (i.e., basic orientation, active assimilation, accelerated integration) using adjectives such as reasonable, good, logical, or making sense. These comments generally suggest that the OIE scale is a useful instrument for organizations to use as they consider their onboarding and integration processes.

The OEI spectrum concept also raised some statistical questions for participants. First, several participants perceived the theme as ordinal and not interval, with one offering, “The problem with this spectrum is that they have problems with ordinal numbering. The interval like the space between [level] 1 and 2 is the same as between [level] 2 and 3, and that poses challenges” (P6). This was amplified in other participant’s comments: “I think there is a huge gap between levels two and three” (P1), and “there is a gap between active and accelerated” (P2). Other than that, participants were satisfied with the structure of the spectrum. One participant reported that the inference of a level as having intrinsic value, such as good or bad, was problematic:

If the job is completely new and innovative. . . . Maybe level zero is what it should be. . . . Maybe you need to forge new frontiers and that doesn't mean it is bad or a failing of the process. (P6)

While this thesis is not focused on the psychometric properties of the OIE, these comments may be of value to future research that involves the application of the OIE.

Participants generally did not identify any other tasks based on their experiences with Institution X, with two exceptions. A senior leader identified a task they felt would make the scale even more relevant to the organization's mission:

[A possible missing element is] a good working knowledge of the law . . . taking a piece of legislation and learning how to make it come alive. The legal knowledge gap is one thing that I think is not particularly captured in this framework. . . . I expect maybe it is in the "operational leadership" domain. (P4)

Another participant suggested the value of demonstrating respect and sensitivity to the existing state of the leader's department ought to be emphasized in the scale: "not sort of slamming what's done and not making radical change without being respectful of sort of why things are the way they are" (P3). This comment aligned with others made by participants who described Institution X as having a deep commitment to promoting psychological safety in all aspects of its activity.

Considering all other comments, I conclude that participants found the scale generally useful to facilitate their reflections and evaluations of pre-pandemic onboarding and integration activities at Institution X. Several suggestions to further enhance the comprehensiveness and utility of the instrument were offered and will be discussed further in chapter five.

Finding 2: The Organization's Onboarding and Integration Efforts for Senior Leaders Achieve the Goals of Active Assimilation

Bearing the framework of the OIE in mind, a participant identified the pre-pandemic state of onboarding and integration at Institution X as “at least active” (P2). Another senior leader stated, “It is easy for me to check off that we are at least up to level two in terms of having active assimilation because we do it intentionally” (P5). This was not a universal sentiment. Five participants estimated Institution X’s functioning at level two, while four others suggested this level was still aspirational. One participant’s comment emphasized this perspective: “I think we’ve got some room for improvement in terms of turning our efforts into a more structured program” (P3). This observation is consistent with the work of Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and their descriptive formality of onboarding and integration being along a spectrum, with positive outcomes associated with a considered and appropriate amount of structure. Jones (1986) also spoke to this spectrum, along a continuum of individual-led to institution-led, with positive outcomes associated with the right balance between the two poles.

Overall, the mean score of the completed instrument was 18.17 points (out of a potential of 25), with a range of 11.5 and median score of 19.0. Considering basic orientation, participants identified a mean score of 3.94 points (out of a potential of 5), with a range of 3.0 and a median score of 4.0. Considering active assimilation, participants identified a mean score of 7.89 points (out of a potential of 10), with a range of 5.5 and a median of 8.0. Finally, accelerated integration was scored at a mean of 6.33 points (out of a potential of 10), with a range of 6.0 and a median of 6.0 (see Table 2). The data were skewed to the left due to one participant whose scores were particularly lower than others. Another way to consider these findings is to consider that participants reported the presence of 80% of the elements of a basic orientation, as compared to

79% of those elements associated with active assimilation and 63% of the elements of accelerated integration.

Table 2

Results of the OIE Scale: Overall and by Spectrum

Level	Mean	Range	Median
Basic Orientation (/5)	3.94	3.0	4.0
Active Assimilation (/10)	7.89	5.5	8.0
Accelerated Integration (/10)	6.33	6.0	6.0
Total (/25)	18.17	11.5	19.0

Several themes arose in the analysis of the individual elements of the scale (see Table 3). In considering the current state of the organization, participants reported the most robust orientation and integration activities fell into the *defining strategic intent* elements, followed by *aligning with stakeholders*, *engaging with culture*, *assuming operational leadership*, and lastly, *taking charge of the team*.

Participants had little to add in their assessment of the *defining strategic intent* element, with only one participant suggesting an area of improvement for existing Institution X onboarding and integration processes:

There is very little engagement . . . with the [organization's] operational plan. [Current onboarding and integration efforts are] really only about your own area, and you don't have a lot of input into other areas. I think the amount of input into the organization's operational plan is limited. (P2)

Table 3*Element Results of the OIE Scale*

Element	Total mean (/5)	Basic (/1)	Active (/2)	Accelerated (/2)
Defining strategic intent	4.72	1.0	1.83	1.89
Aligning with stakeholders	4.44	1.00	1.67	1.78
Engaging with culture	3.11	0.77	1.78	0.56
Assuming operational leadership	3.00	0.89	1.45	0.67
Taking charge of the team	2.89	0.28	1.17	1.44

In considering the tasks of the element *aligning with stakeholders*, several participants emphasized that the organization's approach to connecting to external stakeholders was purposely just in time as opposed to planned in advance: "We don't formalize a lot of these debriefings in advance. . . . They are just-in-time" (P2); "We do a lot of work, . . . but often in real time" (P4); and "In my experience, information on external stakeholders is not proactively provided" (P8).

Gabarro (1979) described the importance of a gradual process of immersion being associated with onboarding success as opposed to rapid reshaping of relationships too early in the tenure of a new leader. However, Gabarro's scholarship preceded the pandemic and may have limited applicability to the current state of Institution X. One participant emphasized that the pandemic has negatively impacted the ability of new leaders to develop useful connections to external stakeholder peers:

COVID . . . it has really set that back. We are a unique population—not many people in our industry. You just can't go down the street and find a peer who does what [our leaders] do for a living. Having that connection to peers is important. (P5)

A different participant also emphasized this challenge: “Given COVID, it's been really difficult to connect new people with the system” (P4). Connecting to internal peers was also affected by the pandemic, with one participant noting, “Pre-pandemic, we were very good about introducing new leaders to other leaders in the organization. . . . Well, it has been harder to do that easily” (P1). As such, there may be an opportunity for future research on the phases of immersion and reshaping of new leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants had little to add to the *engaging with culture* element, with the exception of three specific points, all of which speak to the challenge of the pandemic on assimilation and accommodation (Denis et al., 2000). First, one participant emphasized how these activities have become more difficult in the pandemic: “It's tougher with COVID but we've been mindful to include [new leaders] in meetings, email lists, introductions . . . all to help [new leaders] understand culture” (P4). Second, another commented on how the role of a cultural interpreter may, in fact, be addressed by the organization, but referred to by a different title: “You're invited to find a mentor, but then there are people that, I think, you know, take initiative to be a mentor” (P6). Finally, a participant emphasized the importance of new leaders checking their emerging mental models of integration with several other peers in the organization:

I think we have conversations about our values and our mission statement and things that are more formal in terms of culture, and I ask them to check in with other peers. . . . My experience in the role may not fully reflect what others experience. (P7)

In considering the element of *assuming operational leadership*, a participant raised how the organization strives to enhance ongoing communication between physician-leaders and the operational directors and managers within their department and across the organization (i.e., finance, human resources, communications, information technology): “Once initial orientation is completed, there is certainly a welcoming atmosphere where ongoing communication is encouraged and feedback is provided as requested” (P8). Otherwise, participants did not identify additional themes.

The final element, *taking charge of the team*, did not raise any additional comment by seven of the participants. However, one participant reported:

We really emphasize goodness of fit over particular technical knowledge. So, whereas we used to think that we had to hire the absolute brightest, whether it be a clinical or technical area. If they could manage at team that was a benefit, whereas now we’re really intentional about hiring someone who is going to be a good leader. (P5)

This comment suggests that the participant holds a model of leadership that values goodness of fit as a predominant characteristic associated with success. This was echoed by other participants, suggesting that this element of leadership is widely valued across the organization. A second point was raised by another participant, who described the organization as consciously allowing leaders to drive their own onboarding and integration experience: “You know . . . it is important to let the new leader drive the process, let them define how they want to enter into the relationship” (P1). This is reminiscent of the work of Manderscheid and Harrower (2016), as they concluded that the new leader ought to play a significant role in setting and implementing their own onboarding and integration goals in collaboration with goals set by the organization. Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010) similarly concluded that there was value in providing

new leaders with space and support to move from unconscious incompetence, along several stages, to an end point of conscious competence. Finally, another participant emphasized how the organization proactively invested in technology that allowed new leaders to take charge of their team during the pandemic:

This year has been so tough during the pandemic because normally the [new leader] would actually physically be in the office, but [the workplace] has really set up tools and technology to make sure that everyone is still connected day to day. (P9)

Finally, five points arose from the participants during their final OIE-inspired reflections of pre-pandemic onboarding and integration processes at Institution X. First, several emphasized the value of taking an organic approach to onboarding and integration: “We are open and supportive to new leaders in letting them define how they want to guide their own onboarding” (P1); “You’re given a lot of free reign on how to do your own [onboarding]” (P6); “We support new people to identify what they would find helpful and recognize that it falls on the individual to do this work themselves” (P9); and:

All of the things you’ve talked about just make a really wonderful experience and make good sense to me, and I expect the leaders we hire are pretty good at taking initiative, frankly, and sort of figuring out who they have to know in order to be successful. We look for people who can take the bull by the horns and make that happen. (P3)

This perspective aligned with Jones’s (1986) concept of individual socialization and Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) concept of limited formality in onboarding, whereby they described a current state where new leaders are encouraged to have considerable influence on design and implementation of their own immersion processes. These ideas shaped a polarity (Manderscheid

& Harrower, 2016) of organic versus structured onboarding and integration, which I will address further in chapter five.

Second, one participant suggested that the organization focused a lot on building relationships: “It’s really to try to get [the new senior leader] to get to know the other people more than it is about what they are doing. It’s really about building relationships—that is what makes the work better” (P2). Third, another emphasized how the organization supports new leaders in their self-identified needs: “[We are] pretty generous with supporting [new senior leaders] in whatever they think they would like to do for their own professional development. For the most part, we recruit [new leaders] who are for purpose” (P4). Fourth, a participant emphasized how much onboarding and integration has evolved over the course of their tenure: “We have really moved away from level zero, we have really moved away from basic, we are really moving towards a sophisticated onboarding and integration process” (P8). Finally, a participant emphasized that experiences beyond the basic level were less directed centrally and more influenced by the new senior leader’s direct supervisor, which was similar to Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) description of the value of mentorship. This participant stated, “I think it depends a little bit on who that person reports to in particular as to how far that active assimilation level goes and how curated it gets” (P4).

My conversations with my feedback partner during and at the end of the phase one interviews allowed for useful reflection on the process. They were curious as to how the OIE scale had been studied in healthcare, particularly in a Canadian context where financial resources may be more focused on direct clinical care than the onboarding and integration of new senior leaders. Further, they were curious as to the evidence of how senior leaders coped with the demands of an active assimilation agenda, particularly when it was on top of expected

deliverables and the personal demands of adjusting to a new role. Indeed, they urged further research into the potential harmful effects of an onboarding and integration process at the level of active assimilation. My feedback partner also hypothesized that centralized processes may, in fact, limit the important recognition of the individual's skill, responsibility, and presence in their leadership practice. Our discussions helped me approach the levels of OIE scale more objectively, seeing more clearly that all serve a purpose and carry with them unique benefits and risks.

The phase one interviews generated considerable data about the pre-pandemic state of onboarding and integration of new senior leaders at Institution X. The OIE scale provided a rich scaffold on which participants could consider their experiences and engagement in pre-pandemic processes, and adding open-ended questions generated opportunities for participants to identify additional tasks, share models of successful leadership, and emphasize how organizational values have influenced the evolution of pre-pandemic efforts. As these interviews reached their conclusion, my journal entries became increasingly preoccupied with curiosity about whether the level of active assimilation was maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study Findings: Phase Two Interviews

I invited participants to reflect on their own onboarding and integration experience at Institution X during the second phase of interviews, which generated context for the current state of the organization and complemented the data generated in the phase one interviews. Phase two also welcomed participants to consider how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected current processes, including the identification of risks and application of risk-mitigation strategies. Finally, participants considered what, if any, future changes they would recommend to onboarding and integration processes. My journal notes during the phase two interviews

reflected my observation that all of those who participated in phase one quickly agreed to participate in phase two. Further, all participants appeared enthusiastic, open, and curious about the how my research was going. All indicated they were supportive of our work and looking forward to learning about findings at a later date. Finally, I see that participants were quick to review and approve transcripts of their interview, often commenting on how much they had learned from their own reflections in the process. From my perspective, it felt like we were fully collaborating in a project of shared interest and action research had fully come to life.

The findings from this phase are:

3. Institution X's current onboarding and integration processes are partially, but not wholly, resilient to the challenges of the pandemic.
4. While virtual processes are helpful, they pose risks to organizational and individual resiliency.
5. Participants' lived experiences deeply influenced innovation in both pre-pandemic and pandemic-based onboarding and integration initiatives.
6. The full impact of the pandemic on onboarding and integration may not be fully evident for some time.

Finding 3: Institution X's Current Onboarding and Integration Processes for Senior Leaders are Partially, but not Wholly, Resilient to the Challenges of the Pandemic

Participants stated that Institution X is well-positioned to demonstrate the resiliency of its current onboarding and integration processes to the challenges of the pandemic. "We have a very structured and formalized orientation, with good procedures, documents to review, people to meet with and presentations to be done. It's a well-oiled machine and it's getting better" (P2). These efforts are in keeping with the recommendations of the American College of Healthcare

Executives (2019) and aligned with the tasks defined in the LEADS competency framework (Dickson & Tholl, 2020; Fenwick & Hagge, 2015). Another senior leader stated,

Our processes have, generally, adapted well to the pandemic. . . . Some have had to go virtual, but we have been able to welcome [a new senior leader], a director and several managers. I worried that things could be disastrous, but I was wrong. (P3)

Further, eight of the nine participants felt the organization continued to function at the second level of onboarding and integration as defined by the OIE scale: “We really do all of the same things. The way in which we have done them has changed, of course, but we have been able to keep things on track” (P8). Another participant noted,

We had to cancel important sessions in diversity, equity and inclusion and others on cultural safety and humility. Sessions on psychological safety in the workplace were also deferred. This didn’t feel right, but they were all offered by external consultants who only offered in-person, experiential, small group events. So, we did some of this in 1:1 meetings, and offered an [Institution X]-wide workshop, but it wasn’t the same as the small group experience of the past. These are important missing pieces. (P9)

Participants identified several themes with respect to the impact of the pandemic on onboarding and integration, many keeping with Graves et al.’s (2020) emphasis on consciously curated connections. First, many participants spontaneously spoke of how proud they were of Institution X for continuing to deliver on its mission during the pandemic. Many linked this aspect of resilience to the work-from-home pilot project that had been implemented several months before the pandemic impacted the province. In response to requests from staff, the organization invested in technological resources and nurtured a flexible and adaptable mental model of the workplace. Consequently, participants described the organization as uniquely well

positioned to shift to a heavily home-based workforce once the pandemic arrived. For new leaders arriving at Institution X, this meant there was already a mindset that work could be safely and effectively done remotely, processes and procedures to orient new staff to remote work were in place, technological solutions were already in place to virtually orient new leaders, and there was a familiarity and comfort with virtual processes that one leader said, “inspired confidence that the new job was not going to be impossible in a pandemic” (P3).

In my journals from March to August 2020, I tracked onboarding and integration activities that had been both mandated by my new organization and identified by myself. All internal tasks were completed readily, while tasks that depended on interactions with external organizations were not completed. People were generally difficult to connect with, as they were understandably preoccupied with the challenges of the pandemic and largely focused on stabilizing activity in their immediate domain.

Finding 4: While Virtual Processes are Helpful, They Pose Risks to Organizational and Individual Resiliency

While most participants spoke highly of the ability of the organization to onboard and integrate virtually, they also noted the limitations of the medium. One participant concluded:

Now there is not the same direct interaction with people coming on, so it's very difficult to meet and get to know them. . . . You don't get as good a sense of the person or how they are performing as you used to. (P2)

There was a clear lamentation of the loss of spontaneous social interaction during the pandemic, with one participant offering: “You don't get a sense of how the whole team interacts with each other because they're not all there” (P9). Several participants emphasized that they have needed to be very conscious to “make an extra effort to touch base with people beyond Teams or email”

(P1); “leaders are being much more deliberate to make people feel welcomed and included, calling people on the phone, sending tips by text, dropping off a coffee, making extra time to get to know them beyond their Teams background” (P7); and “It takes effort. It takes a lot of extra effort” (P1). These comments align with Groysberg’s (2020) observations that organizations will need to be even more deliberate in their onboarding and integration strategies in the pandemic.

Almost all participants emphasized that the virtual working environment in place during the pandemic posed a real threat to engagement and morale, with one describing the major risk as: “In a virtual workplace you miss the big picture . . . how people interact, and this may affect your ability to lead, see gaps, see where to focus on improvement or recognize success” (P5). Another noted: “You can’t identify some of those who may be struggling and give them the help that they need” (P2). A third observed: “It is really difficult to get somebody to be part of a team when 80-90% of the work is virtual, to make them feel really included. . . . You just miss that human connection” (P3). Others spoke to legal and reputational risks, such as those that could arise from privacy breaches, communication errors, or incompetent practice: “The biggest risk is that something happens, something bad, because there wasn’t anybody around to consult with . . . or [the new senior leader is] more of an introvert, which only magnifies the problem” (P8). Another senior leader stated,

It can be harder to ask for help virtually if you don’t feel safe and connected with people. Some people just don’t want to ask questions because they think they will look dumb. That’s why we say things like “There’s no such thing as a stupid question,” right? And yet, really bad things can happen because people simply didn’t feel safe asking for help. I think this is really amplified in the virtual world of COVID. (P4)

Finally, there were serious concerns raised about the threat to work–life integration posed by the pandemic-induced shift to virtual work environments. One participant stated, “We have people who have just let the workday blur into their whole life. . . . Me too, I have to stop this, and we need to impart that on the organization” (P2). Another participant said,

I worry a bit about how we onboard people to work in a virtual space out of their home and it seems that quickly their home becomes all about work. It’s like we are normalizing something that isn’t healthy, and it really isn’t what I intend. (P7)

While another senior leader said,

I started to worry that my team was responding to texts and emails I was sending out at nine o’clock at night. Then I caught myself. They were responding to me, and together we were extending our workday well into the night. This just didn’t happen so much before COVID. Having work embedded in my home hasn’t been really healthy for me or my team. We have to address this. (P3)

These observations were consistent with those of Manderscheid and Harrower (2016), particularly with respect to their proposed polarities related to work–life integration and drivers for change. Further, these perspectives illustrate Ayyagari et al.’s (2011) concept of technostress and Barber and Santuzzi’s (2015) description of technopressure. While virtual platforms have allowed Institution X to continue to meet its mission during the COVID-19 pandemic, they also come with a human cost and have very real limitations.

Finding 5: Participants’ Lived Experiences Deeply Influenced Innovation in both Pre-Pandemic and Pandemic-Based Onboarding and Integration Initiatives for Senior Leaders

The fifth finding was that participants’ lived experiences (i.e., their individual experience being onboarded and integrated into Institution X as well as their efforts to onboard and integrate

others) deeply influenced both pre-pandemic and pandemic-based onboarding and integration initiatives, with particular attention paid to providing new leaders with context, connection, and community. I will report on this in two parts: first, I will summarize efforts participants made in the pre-pandemic period; and second, I will reflect on how these efforts have been of value during the pandemic.

From a pre-pandemic perspective, most participants spoke to working hard to help new leaders appreciate the context of their role within and external to the organization, with one commenting, “I work hard to provide them with a picture of how their role fits into [Institution X] and the system, so they get an understanding of the bigger picture” (P9). This comment was in keeping with Bauer et al.’s (2007) work that emphasized that role clarification was an essential component of onboarding and integration success. Several other participants emphasized how they began to recruit differently: “We work hard to choose people for fit” (P5); and “We farm talent and grow it carefully; our people start with good fit and part of that is being flexible and adaptable to organizational needs and challenges” (P4).

Several participants have been with Institution X for several decades and had come aboard under different senior leaders and workplace cultures. These participants were clear that in their early years with Institution X, onboarding and integration processes were limited, unstructured, and self-directed. One participant described that: “Back then, the physicians would all have formal tea in the middle of the afternoon. They all had a pool of secretaries. They were all men. Fiercely independent. Different times, different values” (P1). These same participants were equally clear that much change has occurred under current leadership. One participant emphasized: “There was no structured onboarding whatsoever. It changed a lot. It’s a wonderful experience, I think, to join [Institution X] today” (P3). Most of the more seasoned participants in

my capstone echoed these observations, suggesting that Institution X's processes had moved well beyond Byford et al.'s (2017) concept of basic onboarding.

Across the participant pool, people spoke of how their onboarding experiences inspired them to create change. As the organization grew in scope and size and diversified its leadership team to include non-physicians, senior leaders purposely focused on reducing hierarchy and enhancing skills. Practically, this meant implementing a senior leadership model of physicians working closely with directors and managers who may or may not have a clinical background. One participant noted,

Having a co-leadership model really allows the physician to contribute their clinical skills, non-physicians contributing their organizational skills, and both to contribute to leadership. That has made it so much easier, and safer, to meet our legislative responsibility. (P5)

Others emphasized that they have increasingly encouraged cross-departmental collaboration. For example: "People really get to know each other better when they work together and, frankly, you get better outcomes the more perspectives you have on tough issues" (P9). Finally, one participant noted, "I take personal pride in turning [Institution X] into a learning organization, one that values employee engagement, quality improvement, being humble and open to change" (P1).

Participants described several specific elements in their onboarding and integration experiences that were particularly helpful. First was the ability to seek out and engage with peers they experienced as warm, open, and skilled. Indeed, several participants emphasized the value of peer support as a critical factor of success: "One individual helped me understand the culture, helped me navigate through critical steps" (P3); "I had a mentor in a similar position in [a

different organization], and she became my mentor for years” (P4); and “I had two individuals with a ‘phone any time’ policy and they literally checked in on me. . . . That was extremely helpful as, frankly, there’s not too many people who do what we do” (P5). Second was the sense that there was permission to take time to learn about the organization and deliverables specific to their leadership role: “It wasn’t like after a week you were just expected to suddenly understand everything” (P4). Third was the value ascribed to active and self-directed learning, which several participants identified as a crucial factor in developing new collaborative and trusting relationships.

Participants who had joined Institution X in the past five to seven years could not identify anything that was particularly unhelpful in their onboarding experiences. However, one participant recalled that:

Well, on my first or second day, I was thrown into a meeting about [topic] that I had no context for. I think this [memory] has a bit of trauma to it. I recall it so vividly. . . . Being expected to participate in a meeting where I had no context, no history and no understanding. It was a whole lot of unknown. Unknown context, maybe not the best briefing process, maybe not the best group of advisors for the time and not being certain of the impact of the decision being made. (P1)

Gabarro (1987) warned that placing new leaders in a position of decision making prior to being fully immersed in organizational culture and process could lead to failed integration.

Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) also warned that putting new leaders in a position of decision making in the absence of context and culture was a very real threat to successful onboarding. In their four-factor model of onboarding success, Manderscheid and Harrower emphasized the need to ensure new hires are supported by peers and leaders, provided with

relevant organizational history and a description of dynamics and culture, and guided to the boundaries of their role and authority. Further, Manderscheid and Ardichvilli (2008) emphasized the value of facilitated quick and early affirmative experiences for new leaders, concluding that early traumatic experiences were associated with reputational risk at the organizational level and a sense of trauma on the personal one.

As I reflected on these data and observations in my journals of my own onboarding and integration experience in the first few months in my new role, it was clear to me that the lived experiences of my predecessors and colleagues led to the development of a thorough, rigorous, and respectful onboarding and integration process. First, every senior leader, director, and almost all managers reached out to me to build a personal connection. My notes seem to contain as much information about recommended restaurants, hiking trails, bookstores, and day trips as they do details about procedures, policies, or precedents. Second, my leader arranged to meet with me for an hour twice a week, with the agenda primarily crafted by me and augmented by what they referred to as secret handshakes—or critical information that may not be overtly addressed in my formal orientation processes. Third, my team made arrangements for me to meet with key stakeholders across the system and provided just-in-time orientation prior to each contact and debriefing afterwards. Fourth, my team arranged for me to join networks of colleagues holding similar office across North America and facilitated my introduction and integration into each. Fifth, as I identified gaps in my skill and knowledge set, staff at my new organization arranged for me to access specific professional development activities and ensured I had protected time to adequately engage. Finally, our communication team arranged for me to present at a number of provincial webinars, and I was thoroughly briefed, practiced, and oriented. I also noticed that I was always accompanied by both a communications and content

expert and encouraged to lean on both as needed. All of this support was offered in the context of the pandemic: always socially distanced, sometimes virtual, and (other than the medium) exactly what I would have expected from a healthy, mature, and psychologically safe organization.

Questions in the phase two interview progressed from inquiring about pre-pandemic experiences and practices to those reflecting a deep curiosity about how Institution X pivoted its practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many participants recalled ample experience with improving onboarding and integration processes and realized they needed to quickly make more. A senior leader cautioned, “We need to think carefully about our pace while there is a COVID cloud over us. Being modest in our expectations is wise” (P4). This reflection is reminiscent of the work of Bridges (2003), who warned that the phases of onboarding could be complicated by inappropriately high expectations of both the leader and the organization.

Over half of participants described new onboarding and integration activities they have needed to create since March 2020. For example, one participant said, “In spite of going virtual, we’ve built real processes, not overly structured, that focus on building understanding of function, context and relationships” (P2). Others emphasized their efforts, in spite of the challenges of the pandemic, to “make sure new leaders have access to external and internal stakeholders as well as counterparts at different health partner organizations” (P3). Indeed, several participants cycled back to their earlier comments on hiring new leaders based on fit:

We now carefully consider people for fit to [Institution X] and fit to lead during a pandemic. Who knows how long this will go on for? And I am bringing on people who have skill and presence virtually, especially important as they are going to be leading others. (P4)

Another senior leader said, “We now need to onboard people to be virtual leaders. This is a new skill and we have to think about how we help our current leaders be as good virtually as they are in person” (P2). Several other participants spoke to the need to encourage staff to minimize email and shift to communicating via telephone or a virtual platform. A leader observed, “It’s like pre-pandemic when you would just walk into an office, ask a question, and chat about some other things that were happening and just connect” (P3).

As participants reflected on changes they made to onboarding and integration activities during the pandemic, there was a dominant theme: the need to consciously curate connections with new leaders. Some leaders noted their teams implemented virtual water-cooler time; increased the frequency of bilateral and team meetings; or provided entertaining portfolios containing photos, quotes, hobbies, and messages to introduce new leaders to their teammates. One said,

When I came on, I was introduced to over 90 people. I wish I had one of [these portfolios] back then. It would have helped me remember everyone’s name so much easier. It sends a positive message when you begin to recognize your colleagues’ names, interests and so on. (P5)

Another noted that they made connecting in virtual meetings via camera a behavioural expectation:

I had to work hard to get people to turn on their cameras. I mean, some things are really human for people living through the stress of a pandemic. It keeps people taking a shower, having a structure, being part of a community. I don’t care if your dog is barking or if your kids wander in, it’s funny, but being present is important. It’s healthy. I want to encourage presence. (P7)

The concept of participating in meetings with camera-on was mentioned by several other participants as well, also with similar positive intent.

Several participants spoke fondly of a particular senior management team meeting. The Chief Executive officer had kept the meeting agenda free and, after confirming leaders had no items to discuss, invited the group to have an open discussion about how they were, as people and as leaders, coping with the stressors of the pandemic. They also made it clear at the outset that leaders could choose to take a pass, judgement free, should they wish to listen rather than share. Participants described how this was a unique opportunity, and all leaders who were present spoke of how much they appreciated the experience of being able to share vulnerability and express gratitude. One commented,

We need to know that we have support from each other. I don't think we have a history of making ourselves vulnerable with each other, and it is good to see us having the ability to do that. I think it makes us stronger and it gives me renewed energy to give to others.

(P1)

Another commented,

It was a profound moment for me. I hadn't realized how stressed out I had been, how much pressure there was to keep it together at work and at home and personally, and how almost every minute of the day was consumed with coming up with ways of operating in a pandemic. A lot came up for me, and for others. I felt, we felt, safe and I left that meeting feeling like someone had stitched me back together. (P6)

This important experience was similarly described in Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson's (2010) work on transformative leadership. They wrote eloquently about the pain that leaders experience as they undergo profound change experiences. However, after this particular

meeting, it seemed that participants were liberated to share more about how they were working through equally profound change experiences and be open to receiving and giving support to each other. My journal notes over the past year are also peppered with comments about my profound change experiences (i.e., new home, new role, new community, new responsibilities) and my reflections on the pandemic (i.e., Are my children safe? How can I help my parents? How will I stay alive? What will my family's financial future look like? How can I do my job in a pandemic?). I personally had not shared many of those with my new colleagues, choosing instead to lean on my spouse, friends, family, and therapist.

Many participants spoke to the importance of inspirational leadership in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant said, "We need to think about how we inspire people in a pandemic—you know, have a positive outlook, make real social connections, help people feel connected to the corporate space" (P4). These comments are reminiscent of the work of Bass (1985), Burns (1978), and Lombardi (2011), all of whom emphasized that one of the tasks of transformative leadership is inspiring followers to focus on socially uplifting outcomes. This theme led to a lengthy discussion with my feedback partner near the end of the phase two interviews, who heard this quote as a profound reminder of the value inspirational leadership can bring to communities struggling with fear, stress and uncertainty. This encouraged me to consider how my own leadership practice could provide genuine inspiration to my team, leading to a slight re-design of weekly leadership meetings and monthly departmental meetings to include time for the humanities. I briefly read a poem, short passage from a book, a photograph of historical or contemporary art, or video that is designed to acknowledge the reality of the pandemic and illustrate how artists are interpreting this moment in history. Discussion is open and engagement continuously high. I observe that we all strive to support and inspire each other,

with members of the team now offering to bring their own stories, images, and references to keep the discussion going.

Participants identified many innovative ideas to guide the future evolution of Institution X's onboarding and integration process, emphasizing the value of ongoing consultation and engagement in improvement processes. Most common was the notion that there needed to be a more structured approach to senior leadership onboarding and integration, illustrated by this comment: "I think that pandemic has shown there is a bit of casualness about onboarding we need to work on. We have opportunities to make improvements—the secret rules, the checks and balances, the expectations, the sign-offs and so on" (P4). Several suggested that there be a common central process and sharing of best departmental practices, to help generate a more curated experience.

One such innovative idea was to curate a peer support program: "New staff meeting with other new staff helps them make sense of a collective experience. They have a journey in common already and can have each other like a buddy system" (P1). One leader noted that they had put this in place with several of their new leaders and managers, and initial impressions were positive, particularly when it came to supporting and reinforcing learning about complex and multi-stage decision-making processes. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) also spoke to the value of peer support in their dimensional model of organizational socialization as did Jones (1986) in his respect for individual socialization activities.

Finally, several spoke to the importance of the opportunity of integrating cultural safety and humility into the onboarding and integration experience. One participant noted, "There's lots more we can do to make this a daily part of who we are" (P7). During the pandemic, and certainly during this capstone, considerable attention has focused on cultural safety and humility

in the system. Institution X has been heavily involved in cultural safety and humility efforts, to which I will speak further in chapter five. The phase two interviews illustrated that participants were mindful of and engaged in meaningful change in cultural safety and humility, in full partnership with Indigenous Peoples and other minority groups in the province. In their work, Yip et al. (2020) emphasized the value of such efforts, noting that such efforts facilitate the process of transformation on both the leader and the organization.

My journal notes also commented extensively about my observations and reflections about cultural safety and humility in my new role. Realizing face-to-face contact with Indigenous leaders would be limited due to the pandemic, my new organization connected me virtually with a number of Indigenous leaders and supported my participation in a cultural safety and humility education program (Institution Z, n.d.). Due to the pandemic, these virtual experiences were held in one-to-one sessions, rather than small- and large-group sessions that had been previously offered. These conversations introduced me to many important aspects of Indigenous and colonial history; oriented me to a number of pieces of legislation, policies, and treaties; helped me begin to build relationships with Indigenous leaders and allies; inspired me to join the Indigenous Physician Association of Canada as an ally-member; and led to the development of clear key performance indicators related to measuring and improving the relationship between my organization's processes and Indigenous citizens. I also have many pages of notes about my reflections on my cultural heritage and my ancestors' role in the genocide of the Beothuk peoples in what is now Newfoundland and Labrador. The intimacy of my individualized onboarding and integration sessions allowed this to unfold with dignity, respect, compassion, and supportive guidance. If there is a silver lining in the pandemic, these experiences would be amongst the brightest. Indigenous leaders have also encouraged me to explore how healthcare organizations

can integrate restorative justice practices into their processes. As a result, I am now enrolled in the Restorative Justice program at Simon Fraser University and carefully considering what I can bring back to my own organization.

Finding 6: The Full Impact of the Pandemic on Onboarding and Integration Processes for New Senior Leaders may not be Evident for Some Time

Several leaders emphasized how the full impact of the pandemic on onboarding and integration may not be evident for some time. One emphasized:

We're going to need to be mindful of the fact that there are going to be problems and gaps because onboarding has been so much harder. We've got to roll with that and not be too hard on people when issues arise. We just may need to do a little bit of onboarding again in several months. (P6)

This is in keeping with Snowden and Boone's (2007) emphasis on the relationship between cause and effect: At this stage of the pandemic, it is far too early to draw any clear conclusions about the relationship between the pandemic and its impact on the quality of Institution X's onboarding and integration experiences. The system is moving from chaotic to complex, at best, and has not yet moved towards greater order. Further, the dynamic process of partially onboarding and needing to return for course correction or additional training is reminiscent of the dance of leadership transition described by Bridges (2003), particularly the act of letting go, shifting, and emerging with new skills and abilities.

Conclusions

My research with Institution X allowed me to address the inquiry research question, which was supported by investigating five sub questions. My conclusions may be summarized in four core themes:

1. The OIE scale was a useful tool for helping participants conceptualize, evaluate, and reflect upon their experiences with senior leader onboarding and integration. The OIE does not fully recognize the unique tasks associated with virtual leadership, and this is an area in need of further research.
2. The organization's onboarding and integration processes for senior leaders were highly, but not wholly, resilient to the challenges of the pandemic.
3. Participants managed pandemic-induced risks to the successful onboarding and integration of a new senior leader by consciously choosing to expend considerable effort and energy to curate connections between them and others in the system.
4. The system is still moving out of chaos, and careful decision-making processes and scholarly practices are of critical importance.

Conclusion 1: The OIE Scale was a Useful Tool for Helping Participants Conceptualize, Evaluate, and Reflect Upon Their Experiences with Senior Leader Onboarding and Integration. The OIE Does not Fully Recognize the Unique Tasks Associated with Virtual Leadership, and this is an Area in Need of Further Research

Byford et al.'s (2017) OIE scale is a useful tool for conceptualizing, implementing, and evaluating the experience of onboarding and integration. It offers an opportunity to track how the pandemic impacts usual practices and can contribute to risk-identification and implementation efforts. Participants made it clear that they did not have a particular conceptual framework or mental model to define their efforts and deliverables during the onboarding and integration process, suggesting that such constructs are underutilized at present (Filipkowski et al., 2017). However, the OIE instrument was viewed as a useful tool to evaluate current practice and facilitate visioning of an aspirational model. I carefully considered participants' application of

the instrument to organizational practice, which revealed that pre-pandemic models of leadership onboarding and integration met just under 80% of the criteria defined for the basic orientation and active assimilation levels, while approximately 60% of the criteria for accelerated integration were achieved.

Participants described offering the greatest onboarding and integration support to the tasks of *defining strategic intent*, *aligning with stakeholders*, and *taking charge of the team*. Further, they noted that a lesser degree of support was offered for the task of *assuming operational leadership*, and the lowest support provided was to the task of *taking charge of the team*. Participants viewed the organization as resilient, nimble, and adaptive, which suggests that a shift to accepting and utilizing a conceptual framework to guide future onboarding and integration efforts may be easily achieved. Finally, participants demonstrated an openness to use the OIE to help them share best practices and consider how to scaffold new ideas onto existing processes. Indeed, the organization appears to be well engaged in its own processes of transformation in the context of social change pre- and intra-pandemic (Denis et al., 2000).

The OIE model does not appear to fully recognize the unique tasks associated with virtual leadership: This is an area in need of further research (Driscoll & M. Watkins, 2020; Groyberg, 2020). Participants identified a number of challenges to leadership practice in a virtual space, particularly when organizational staff are working from home most of the time. Work–life integration was identified as an important, complex, and difficult issue to modify. This concept would benefit from additional research, given that poor work–life integration poses a serious risk to the safe delivery of organizational deliverables and the sustainability of its human resources, as noted by Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) and Richardson (2017). The efficacy of alternative models of social connection (i.e., structured activities, informal virtual conversations,

selecting virtual calls over email) seems to make reasonable sense, but warrants further evaluation. Further, setting behavioural expectations in virtual corporate meeting spaces (i.e., having participants visible on camera during a meeting) could benefit from integration into the OIE.

Conclusion 2: The Organization's Onboarding and Integration Processes for Senior Leaders were Highly, but not Wholly, Resilient to the Challenges of the Pandemic

Participants were able to acknowledge and celebrate successful onboarding and integration processes as the healthy fruit of hard labour. The organization embedded three practices into its pre-pandemic processes that were particularly valuable: (a) leaders provided new leaders with context for their work across the system, (b) leaders encouraged the new leaders' connections to internal and external stakeholders and peers, and (c) senior staff consciously recruited leaders for their capacity to fit well into the organization's culture.

However, participants were also quick to emphasize that known vulnerabilities, such as an overly casual or unstructured approach to onboarding and integration, or emerging vulnerabilities, such as limited social connection or contextual comprehension, have been amplified in the pandemic. Further, it emerged that accelerated integration activities were modified the most by the pandemic (i.e., immersive experiences, facilitated workshops, and curated connections with internal and external stakeholders). Participants suggested this introduced several risks to the organization, including the possibility of limited leader engagement and low morale, threats to organizational deliverables and reputation, and threats to healthy work–life integration. Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) emphasized the value of preventing or managing such threats carefully, as did Badshah and Bulut (2020) who warned

such threats could lead to disjunction, disconnection, and dissolution of the relationship between the organization and a new hire.

Conclusion 3: Participants Managed Pandemic-Induced Risks to the Successful Onboarding and Integration of a New Senior Leader

Participants managed pandemic-induced risks to the successful onboarding and integration of a new leader by shifting from a disordered system (Snowden & Boone, 2007) to one that was chaotic, requiring leaders to acknowledge that cause and effect were unclear, act to establish order, sense where stability existed, and respond in order to facilitate a shift to a complex state. In spite of the pandemic, leaders continued to onboard new peers using well-established strengths in their onboarding and integration approaches, letting go of what was no longer available, and consciously choosing to expend considerable effort and energy to curate connections between the new hire and others in the system. This consciousness reflects the action and reflection cycle described by Manderscheid and Harrower (2016), while also reflecting a high degree of self-awareness, as well as awareness of their relationship to the onboarding and integration process and desire to support conscious competence across the system (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). While this desire is not a new concept for onboarding and integration processes at Institution X, participants emphasized how much more mindful they need to be as they design and implement their processes given the extra effort and innovative practices that are required. Further, participants emphasized how additional mindfulness requires additional effort, time, and technology as has been noted by other leaders during the pandemic (NEJM Catalyst, 2020). The organization will need to consider these additional resources as the pandemic continues; I will discuss this further in chapter five.

Conclusion 4: The System is Still Moving out of Chaos, and Careful Decision-Making Processes and Scholarly Practices are of Critical Importance

In spite of considerable progress in primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention of complications of COVID-19, as well as related assessment, treatment, and recovery support, the pandemic is far from over. Leaders at Institution X may do well to consider new onboarding and integration practices as novel or emergent (Snowden & Boone, 2007) as opposed to good or best. Leaders will need to continue to apply careful decision-making processes and scholarly skills to continue to move away from chaos towards the complex, complicated, and simple practices.

Scope and Limitations

I conducted this study with the intent to examine the perspectives of participants both internal and external to Institution X. Due to the impacts of the pandemic, it was challenging to engage with external participants. While I had an opportunity to identify and approach leaders in the health authorities, other agencies, and stakeholder organizations, few responded to my invitation to participate. For those who did, it was clear that the pressure of the pandemic was a critical factor influencing their decision to decline. Not only were leaders under incredible pressure to protect their schedules, at least one was following a direction to limit participation in non-essential activities. I am grateful for the participants for their consideration and boundary setting. However, it does mean that there are future opportunities to add to my analysis.

Findings are also limited to a narrow segment of staff at Institution X, specifically senior leaders. Onboarding and integration strategies for other leaders, such as directors and managers, as well as onboarding and integration processes for other staff, are each deserving of their own scholarly considerations.

The scope of my thesis did not allow consideration of perspectives from all staff at Institution X. While the perspectives of one director and one manager were incorporated into the study, there is a rich opportunity to consider how the greater director and manager pool as well as all other staff members perceive successful onboarding and integration of a new senior leader, both before and during a pandemic.

Finally, this study did not look at important cultural, gender, or intersectional issues that are relevant in the successful onboarding of a new senior leader. It is quite possible that my presence, with my own unique blend of intersectional identities, brought a bias to the considerations of participants. In addition, I did not explore with participants how their perspectives may shift as they consider the role of ethnicity, gender, orientation, socio-economic class, educational background, and other factors in the onboarding and integration process. These are all themes of value for future research.

Chapter Summary

A summary of research data collected in two phases of interviews has been provided in this chapter. The first phase gave me an opportunity to use the OIE scale to facilitate participants' reflections on the pre-pandemic state of onboarding and integration of new senior leaders at Institution X. This created opportunities for ample discussion and allowed me to conclude that the organization was functioning at a level of active assimilation pre-pandemic. The second phase allowed participants to share even more history about their own pre-pandemic onboarding and integration experience, telling stories of how they had been inspired to build innovative practices for those who came after them.

Participants affirmed that despite the pandemic, Institution X continues to function at the active assimilation level. Further, they described many innovative practices they designed to

adapt processes given the demands of social distancing. Participants suggested that these innovative practices, particularly virtual processes, may carry unintentional risks to both new leaders and the organization. Participants also expressed concerns that the impact of the pandemic on onboarding and integration outcomes on senior leaders may not be fully appreciated for some time. My personal journal entries complement participant data, illustrating my own process of transition into a new role and professional culture. While my thesis did not benefit from external participants and the participant pool within the organization was limited, data collected suggested that pre-pandemic models of onboarding and integration, as well as innovative adaptations, were of value during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Five: Recommendations and Implications

How Institution X onboarded and integrated leaders, both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been examined through this thesis. I also exam how the data were collected and evaluated to inform onboarding and integration models in the future. In this chapter, I discuss the implications of my inquiry and make four recommendations for Institution X and for future inquiries.

My analysis of the literature (chapter two) and the outcomes of the research methods outlined in chapter three led to six findings:

1. The Onboarding Isn't Enough (OIE) scale (Byford et al., 2017) was viewed as a useful and accurate tool to facilitate participants' reflections on the pre-pandemic state of senior leader onboarding and integration at the organization.
2. The organization's onboarding and integration efforts for senior leaders achieve the goals of active assimilation.
3. Institution X's current onboarding and integration processes for senior leaders are partially, but not wholly, resilient to the challenges of the pandemic.
4. While virtual processes are helpful, they pose risks to organizational and individual resiliency.
5. Participants' lived experiences deeply influenced innovation in both pre-pandemic and pandemic-based onboarding and integration initiatives for senior leaders.
6. The full impact of the pandemic on onboarding and integration processes for senior leaders may not be fully evident for some time.

My additional analyses of these findings led to four conclusions:

1. The OIE scale was a useful tool for helping participants conceptualize, evaluate, and reflect upon their experiences with senior leader onboarding and integration. The OIE does not fully recognize the unique tasks associated with virtual leadership, and this is an area in need of further research.
2. The organization's onboarding and integration processes for senior leaders were highly, but not wholly, resilient to the challenges of the pandemic.
3. Participants managed pandemic-induced risks to the successful onboarding and integration of a new senior leader by consciously choosing to expend considerable effort and energy to curate connections between them and others in the system.
4. The system is still moving out of chaos, and careful decision-making processes and scholarly practices are of critical importance

I shared the literature review, findings, and conclusions with my feedback and organizational partners, along with my reflections on my engagement with this capstone project. This led to a series of engaged discussions and deliberations about how both Institution X and I might unpack our shared work and craft recommendations to consider moving forward. I presented recommendations based on my analysis, which led to a broader conversation in light of my literature review, the business realities of the organization, and alignment with other quality improvement efforts across Institution X. I then refined my recommendations, maintaining fidelity to my findings and conclusions. I organized the recommendations to be practical and meaningful and avoid overwhelming those interested in implementing change.

I then leaned on Johnson's (2014) work, which described how leaders can approach problems. He observed that trends in leadership practice were not associated with significant improvements in the successful integration of new leaders. In spite of reasonable, rational, and

well-considered solutions, some leadership problems presented as unsolvable. He argued that a new mental model for such challenges was needed and suggested that such unsolvable problems ought to be reconceptualized as problems to be managed. He further argued that some challenges, such as the example of a central versus decentralized approach to onboarding and integration, could have relevant elements that were naturally occurring polarities. These elements often presented as de facto opposites, sitting at either end of a themed spectrum. Further, a range of interdependent benefits and limitations could present along the path between the poles. Johnson also emphasized that a polarity approach brought value to leaders and organizations in many ways, such as (a) redirecting energy by not trying to resolve unsolvable challenges, (b) enhancing change management considerations and approaches, (c) anticipating and minimizing problems that arise when polarities are not managed well, and (d) effectively identifying problems to solve and implementing solutions.

In considering the findings and conclusions of this capstone, I was mindful of the multiple challenges at play for Institution X and the broader healthcare system in the context of the pandemic. I also wished to remain true to the ARE model (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 20) and curate change initiatives that are meaningful, practical, viable, and sustainable. Thus, I propose two sets of recommendations for Institution X: (a) recommendations for challenges to be solved and (b) a recommendation for challenges to be managed.

Solvable Challenges

Based on my research findings and resulting conclusions, I present four recommendations under the category of solvable challenges. Discussion will include possible next steps for implementation. The four recommendations are:

1. Institution X should continue its efforts to enhance organizational resilience by celebrating, nurturing, and maintaining successful elements of onboarding and integration for senior leaders.
2. Onboarding and integration activities for senior leaders that were cancelled due to the pandemic's impact on face-to-face meeting ought to be rescheduled in a virtual format as soon as possible, and Institution X should consider returning to face-to-face activities post-pandemic.
3. Institution X ought to curate, collate, and distribute emerging novel or good practices in virtual onboarding and integration for senior leaders across the organization.
4. The OIE scale, with additional modification to include virtual leadership practices, may be considered for use as a conceptual framework for Institution X's onboarding and integration processes for senior leaders.

Recommendation 1: Institution X Should Continue its Efforts to Enhance Organizational Resilience by Celebrating, Nurturing, and Maintaining Successful Elements of Onboarding and Integration for Senior Leaders

The findings and conclusions demonstrated strongly how the organization's pre-pandemic approach to employee engagement fostered conditions that enabled a near-overnight transition to an entirely different approach to work. Listening deeply to the onboarding experiences of participants made it clear that leaders have made conscious and deliberate decisions to support, respect, and foster the professional development of their talent pool. This internal culture has contributed to remarkable resiliency in the face of the pandemic and can continue to serve the organization's ongoing evolution. The organization should continue its practices of employee engagement, such as engagement surveys at the department and

organizational levels, performance assessments, forward-seeking goal-setting exercises, and specific evaluation of engagement and IT satisfaction.

Next Steps for Recommendation 1: The organization may also wish to continue newly established practices of virtual town halls as well as opportunities for employees to submit questions to senior leadership in advance on issues related to onboarding and integration and the impact of the pandemic on organizational performance and planning.

Recommendation 2: Onboarding and Integration Activities for Senior Leaders that Were Cancelled due to the Pandemic's Impact on Face-to-Face Learning Opportunities Ought to be Rescheduled in a Virtual Learning Format

Institution X had well-established training opportunities that reflected its core values and performance expectations, such as in-person sessions on cultural safety and humility and diversity and equity in the workplace. Institution X has now mandated a cultural safety training program (Institution Z, n.d.) for all staff and is working with Indigenous leaders to identify other exemplars. Complementing this virtual experience with one that involves dynamic interactivity with Knowledge Keepers would enhance the learning experience and contextualize content for application in Institution X's practices (Institution X, 2020d).

While restrictions remain on in-person learning, virtual sessions that focus on diversity and equity issues in the workplace are also essential, particularly given the social movements that have unfolded in parallel with the pandemic, seeking justice for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (Adams & Wisdom, 2020; Turpel-Lafonde, 2020), as well as those identifying as sexually and gender diverse.

Next steps for Recommendation 2: Given Institution X's deep commitment to truth and reconciliation with Indigenous people as well as its well-established engagement in social equity

and justice practices, it may wish to have specific onboarding and integration processes that connect new hires with established leaders or learning resources from Black, Indigenous, people of colour, and sex/gender diverse communities. This engagement may enhance relationships between Institution X and other in-system communities and organizations, increase the knowledge and sensitivity of Institution X's staff and elected/appointed officials about social justice issues relevant to Institution X's legislative mission, and enhance the capacity of Institution X to serve the people of the province in a culturally safe and humble manner.

Recommendation 3: Institution X May Wish to Curate, Collate, and Distribute Emerging Novel or Good Practices in Virtual Onboarding and Integration for Senior Leaders Across the Organization

Participants identified diverse steps they had already taken to minimize the impact of the pandemic on onboarding and integration, including virtual water-cooler time, shifting to virtual queries over email, normalizing “on-camera” expectations, increasing frequency of bilateral and team meetings, and creating social committees in various departments. This suggests that Institution X is prepared to act in a chaotic situation and equally prepared to move practices towards good or best-level efforts.

Next steps for Recommendation 3: Institution X may wish to consider developing a practical, focused, and summative infographic of best virtual practices for internal dissemination, perhaps using the University of Pittsburgh, Office of Human Resources (2020) as an exemplar. Moving forward, this curated set of emerging practices may be managed in a wiki fashion, allowing direct access for all employees and easy updating.

Recommendation 4: The OIE Scale, with Additional Modification to Include Virtual Leadership Practices, may be Considered for use as a Conceptual Framework for Institution X's Onboarding and Integration Processes for Senior Leaders

As reported, participants described the scale as helpful, practical, and useful in their conceptualization of onboarding and integration processes. There was support for adopting a conceptual framework, such as the OIE scale, to the design, implementation, and evaluation of future activities.

Next steps for Recommendation 4: The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this capstone project will be presented to the full senior management team of Institution X and to the directors of human resources and communication. A deeper presentation on the utility of conceptual frameworks, including findings of this project that relate to the OIE scale, will be offered to the human resource team. This group is particularly well placed to consider how a conceptual framework could serve the onboarding and integration needs of new staff to the organization and on what levels, including central, departmental, and individual.

Polarities to be Managed

Under this discussion of polarities to be managed, I present my last recommendation as well as next steps for implementation.

Recommendation 5: Several Polarities Have Emerged, Highlighting an Opportunity for Institution X to Explore How They May Best be Managed

My research has identified the following polarities to be managed:

- Central versus departmental perspectives of onboarding and integration tasks
- Institutional versus individual locus of control of the design and implementation of onboarding and integration tasks

- Blurred versus defined work–life integration
- Sequential and structured versus organic and/or just-in-time onboarding and integration processes.

Next steps for Recommendation 5: Each polarity suggests an opportunity to be managed. First, the central versus departmental polarity suggests an opportunity for human resource and departmental leaders to define the spectrum of activities between the poles and delineate responsibilities and implementation processes.

Second, the institutional versus individual polarity suggests a need to carefully consider what processes are better led by the organization and what are better led by the new leader, as delineated by Jones (1986). Several participants made it clear that they have a deep respect for the value of new hires contributing to their own journey in joining Institution X. The organization considers the cultural fit of new leaders carefully, and the ability to attend to their own onboarding and integration needs is part of that alignment. Moving forward, it may be reasonable to make this polarity overt and invite new leaders, and the organization, to consider how they may each contribute to the management of any potential along this spectrum.

Third, the pandemic’s demands on leadership across Institution X as well as unanticipated consequences arising from the organization’s sudden transition to a work-from-home environment have created dual threats to staff health and well-being. Work–life integration is a persistent challenge in onboarding and integration processes, with drivers of healthy work–life integration being identified as workload and job demands, control and flexibility, social support and community at work, organizational culture and values, efficiency and resources, and meaning in work (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2016). Pre-pandemic, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (Perlo et al., 2017) designed the Joy in Work framework to enhance the resilience

and wellness of healthcare leaders, emphasizing the link between the health of those working in the system on those benefiting from the system. Nine elements of joy in work were identified: (a) physical and psychological safety, (b) meaning and purpose, (c) choice and autonomy, (d) recognition and rewards, (e) participative management, (f) camaraderie and teamwork, (g) daily improvement, (h) wellness and resilience, and (i) real-time measurement. Scholars have begun to study the impact of the framework on healthcare leaders (Reid, 2018), noting the enhancement of onboarding success and reduced rates of turnover. Institution X may now wish to consider how the Joy in Work framework may inform its management of the polarities of work-life integration for senior leaders.

Fourth, the polarity of sequential/structured versus organic/just-in-time onboarding and integration practices needs to be considered. Moving forward, there may be an opportunity for Institution X to more explicitly check with new senior leaders about their perceived readiness for such situations and consider what common elements of onboarding and integration ought to be in place prior to a just-in-time scaffolding of new information. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) spoke to this polarity as one of their six dimensions of organizational socialization. They identified the need for organizations to ensure that their new leaders had just enough socialization to enjoy what Gabarro (1979) may describe as an early win and a leadership stretch. Participants in this capstone project echoed this, noting experiences could be traumatic if such socialization was lacking.

Finally, senior leaders at Institution X may find it practical and meaningful to engage with polarity management practice in a workshop format. The scholarship of polarity science has reached a stage where practitioners are certified and licensed, allowing organizations to access facilitated sessions where they can explore and co-create relevant and meaningful models of

polarities at play in their workplace culture. These models, or polarity maps, may lead to additional insights into onboarding and integration practices at Institution X.

Organizational Implications

Throughout this thesis, my organizational partner was generous with time, ideas for stretch and growth, information and knowledge, and support. They demonstrated a trust in my integrity, commitment, and ability to lead this project with their organization. This helped empower me to build action research engagements.

Our final series of meetings focused deeply on my findings and conclusions to develop meaningful recommendations emerging from participants' insights. This style of engagement reflected Denis et al.'s (2000) descriptions of accommodation and transformation; our collaboration allowed for the differences in our perspectives to co-create mutual understanding while also transforming the project to new and exciting levels of insight. My organizational partner's leadership style has directly influenced the success of this capstone project, as it has successes across the organization and within external systems.

In keeping with my ethical and scholarly obligations to my community of practice as well as Royal Roads University, I will begin the process of sharing findings, conclusions, and recommendations with Institution X. First, my research assistant and I will circulate an update to participants on the status of the project by email, appending both a graphic summary of the results and an invitation to a virtual presentation to discuss our journey together. I anticipate that dialogue will further refine our efforts and guide future steps.

The organization may wish to consider how key stakeholders may move forward with implementation of the recommendations arising from this work. The Director of Human Resources and their team will be of critical importance in that consideration as will the directors

and managers across the organization. This may require new processes of collaboration that complement current activities by which SMT, SMT/Directors, and the entire organization come together. Participants have suggested an opportunity to include managers in further leadership discussions, and given their role in onboarding and integration, the time may have come for new patterns of connection.

There is a risk, however, that without further modification and evolution of onboarding and integration practices, the existing vulnerabilities identified by participants may worsen. In this context, the Cynefin (Snowden & Boone, 2007) framework may be particularly valuable to Institution X in its decision-making processes. The healthcare system hovers on the edge of disorder, with multiple efforts at play to introduce stability. The Cynefin framework can bring clarity to Institution X's approach to decision making as it continues to stretch and adapt to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. Good practices in onboarding and integration during a pandemic are emerging and evolving. Many best practices from pre-pandemic times are also in use, holding up well in some cases and being modified or gradually abandoned in others. Institution X's collective, collaborative, and inclusive values will continue to serve the organization well as it moves forward in the coming months.

Implications for Future Inquiry

I conducted this inquiry to gain a better understanding of onboarding and integration processes for new senior leaders in a provincial health organization at baseline and in the evolving context of a global pandemic. This research brought value to my own onboarding and integration experience, to the challenges faced by Institution X, and may hopefully influence the larger systems in which we operate. In that spirit, I hope that the organization will continue to encourage action-oriented research in its future inquiry and learning activities.

Institution X (2020a) is guided by a strategic plan, with core pillars defining operational expectations and deliverables. There is an opportunity to consider how the conclusions and recommendations in this thesis may be applied to support the strategic plan. Onboarding and integration are dynamic processes, continuously shaped by social and business trends, and requiring ongoing management. I hope that maintaining curiosity, interest, and engagement in these organizational practices will generate future inquiry questions.

This capstone has not examined the economic realities of onboarding and integration processes. There may be considerable factors influencing how the organization chooses to engage with recommendations, including implementation strategies. Institution X is particularly mindful of the financial impact of the pandemic on its operations and is understandably cautious with any short-term change that may not be financially responsible or sustainable. The organization has also been mindful of threats to healthy work–life integration, and it is essential to appreciate that no recommendation in this capstone can be implemented without expending more energy. As one participant noted, it is essential Institution X be mindful of its pace and modest in its expectations during the pandemic. In this light, future inquiry focused on the economic impact of these recommendations may be of interest.

I anticipate an opportunity to look more deeply at the impact of the pandemic on the psychological health and well-being of leaders in Institution X. Participants spoke affectionately of a single experience held as a team where this issue was gently explored. Participants were clear that such sessions ought not to be too frequent. They did not articulate specifically why; however, considering literature on trauma-informed practice (Menschner & Maul, 2016), this caution suggests that there may be opportunities to further enhance psychological safety in the

workplace, including being mindful that exploration of pandemic-related trauma may be a source of secondary trauma if not done with skill, care, sensitivity, and a choice to opt out.

Finally, this capstone has skimmed the surface of the polarity of institutional versus individual leadership in onboarding and integration processes. While the organization recruits people who fit with its culture of individual leadership, there may be opportunities to identify these leadership traits explicitly. It may be worth exploring whether this hiring preference has unique onboarding and integration needs compared to others and if there are any unanticipated consequences on the diversity of Institution X's workforce.

Thesis Summary

Institution X, like all of humanity, has been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In my new role, I have been having my own onboarding and integration experience while also studying Institution X's pre- and intra-pandemic practices. Ultimately, I hope this project will be of value to both parties as we consider the current and future state of such practices. Indeed, considering how practices may evolve post-pandemic has reinforced hope for a safe and less disordered future.

The literature review provided definitions of key terms used throughout this project; outlined models of transition, transformation, and decision making; summarized best practices in onboarding and integration in the pre-pandemic state; and introduced conceptual frameworks such as the OIE scale (Byford et al., 2017) and the Cynefin decision-making model (Snowden & Boone, 2007). The literature indicated that most organizations operated at a basic level of sophistication, with more enhanced models associated with greater achievement in onboarding and integration success.

My analysis of the data generated through interviews led to four core conclusions. First, the OIE scale was a useful tool for helping participants conceptualize, evaluate, and reflect upon their experiences with senior leader onboarding and integration. The OIE does not fully recognize the unique tasks associated with virtual leadership, and this is an area in need of further research. Second, the organization's onboarding and integration processes for senior leaders were highly, but not wholly, resilient to the challenges of the pandemic. Third, participants managed pandemic-induced risks to the successful onboarding and integration of a new senior leader by consciously choosing to expend considerable effort and energy to curate connections between them and others in the system. Finally, the system is still moving out of chaos, and careful decision-making processes and scholarly practices are of critical importance

My research led me to apply Johnson's (2014) model of polarity management to classify recommendations in terms of problems to solve and problems to be managed. In the former category were recommendations to continue practices that foster resiliency; implement virtual sessions on critical issues (i.e., cultural safety and humility, diversity, and equity); curate and share emerging novel and good practices in virtual onboarding and integration processes; and integrate an adapted OIE scale into future practices. In the latter category, several polarities were identified to be managed going forward: centralized versus departmental-led practices, institutional versus individual led-practices, blurred versus well-delineated work-life boundaries, and structured/sequential onboarding practices versus ones that arose organically or were offered just-in-time.

Moving forward, there are ample opportunities for future inquiry. I have flagged a few, including an economic analysis of these findings, conclusions, and recommendations; the importance of intersectional perspectives; and consideration of how best to evaluate and support

the psychological well-being of leaders in the organization in pandemic and post-pandemic times.

This capstone project, much like my experience in the MALH program and my personal experience with onboarding and integration in my new leadership role, has involved much transition. Majid (2014) offered a cross-cultural approach to considering metaphors of integration, invoking the concept of barzakh from the Qu’ran: “It is a transitional state that embraces both the human and divine aspects of creation at once” (p. 7). Indeed, the intersection of the learner/program and the researcher/host has provided many valuable personal, professional, and scholarly insights.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Internal Interview: Round one - Assessing Institution X's onboarding effectiveness

This round will assess Institution X's onboarding effectiveness using the instrument developed by Byford, Watkins and Triantogiannis (2017)³ with an additional open question to capture participant's ideas and perspectives.

Introduction Elements

This interview will invite participants to evaluate how Institution X provides integration support to new leaders in five specific areas, based on the research of Byford, Watkins & Triantogiannis (2017). These areas are: assuming operational leadership, taking charge of the team, aligning with stakeholders, engaging with culture and defining strategic intent.

Assuming operational leadership speaks to the need for a new leader, particularly an outsider, to develop as complete a picture of the organization as possible (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and building credibility by demonstrating awareness of important operational issues.

Taking charge of the team speaks to the need of leaders to confirm or adjust their team's composition and goals. This allows the leader to look at the talent in their department, safely and respectfully, and determine if the skills matrix is aligned to the mission at hand.

Aligning with stakeholders refers to the new leader's need to earn the support of people over whom they have no direct authority. Relationship capital, particularly for an outside hire, is at a minimum and the leader needs to invest energy in building connections. They need to understand how decision-making works in the organization, identify and engage with critical sources of influence and power, and reaching out to people outside of the organization as well.

Engaging with culture speaks to the values, norms and guiding assumptions that define expected and acceptable behaviour in the organization. Missing cues can contribute to a negative impression of a new leader, who also needs to balance working within culture and seeking to change it.

Finally, *defining strategic intent* describes how the new leader will shape strategy. This may require transformation of elements of their team – shifts in the talent pool, redistribution of resources, quality improvement initiatives, and change management efforts. The leader is expected to be clear in intent.

³ Byford., M., Watkins, M., & Triantogiannis, L. (2017, May-June). Onboarding isn't enough. *Harvard Business Review*, 78–86.

Q1. Are there any areas or elements currently used by Institution X that are missing from this framework?

Q2. Are there any areas that you feel should not be included in the integration process?

Concept of a spectrum

The researchers propose that organizations provide support on a spectrum.

On one end is “sink or swim” where leaders are provided with little more than space and basic resources (technology, assistants). This is called level 0 in this framework.

Next up is “**basic orientation**” where organizations share raw data (policies, structure and strategic documents) and the new leader studies and interprets it independently. This is called level one in this framework.

One level up is “**active assimilation**” where the organization organizes meetings with key stakeholders to facilitate the new leader’s knowledge about the organization, team, culture and strategic priorities. This is referred to as level two.

The highest level is called “**accelerated integration**” is sees the organization design, implement and evaluate custom-designed experiences to help the new leader integrate fully and rapidly. These might include team-building workshops, content-rich interactive discussions on strategy, and opportunities to help the new leader identify cultural challenges to be overcome.

Q3. What do you think about this spectrum?

Q4. Is there anything you would add to the spectrum?

Reflecting on each area

We will now consider each of these five areas in turn (add in any additional area identified by participant). I will remind you of the area and its description, then ask you about five specific elements associated with that area. For example, as we explore “assuming operational leadership,” I will ask if integration at Institution X includes a specific element, such as being given operational plans to read. I will then ask about a few more elements that speak to integration efforts higher along the integration continuum. You can offer a straightforward yes or no response and are encouraged to share any additional observations or perspectives you have.

Assuming operational leadership:

After reading the description and confirming understanding, ask:

Are new leaders:

- provided with operational plans to read
- personally introduced to each department
- provided with a personal orientation to the activities of each department
- invited to observe a typical meeting of members of each department
- invited to an immersive session in areas of Institution X that are unfamiliar

Anything else about how Institution X helps new leaders assume operational leadership that you would like to share?

Taking charge of the team:

After reading the description and confirming understanding, ask:

Are new leaders:

- provided with the career histories for key team members
- provided performance and assessment data on direct reports and, where appropriate, their subordinates
- given briefings to provide confidential insight on team members
- provided with a briefing on team dynamics and history
- expected to participate in a facilitated workshop with the team

Anything else about how Institution X helps new leaders take charge of their team that you would like to share?

Aligning with stakeholders

After reading the description and confirming understanding ask:

Are new leaders:

- provided relevant organizational charts
- provided a list of key internal stakeholders
- invited to meetings with internal stakeholders
- provided a list of key external stakeholders
- briefed on all stakeholders (i.e., mission, agenda, relationship status, dynamics)

Anything else about how Institution X helps new leaders align with internal and external stakeholders that you would like to share?

Engaging with culture

After reading the description and confirming understanding ask

Are new leaders

- provided a statement of Institution X's philosophy, values, behavioural expectations
- briefed on culture and 'ways of getting things done'
- invited to structured events to attend in order to understand culture
- provided a cultural interpreter to facilitate or provide insight
- engaged in dialogue to assessment differences between current and former cultures

Anything else about how Institution X helps new leaders engage with culture that you would like to share?

Defining strategic intent

After reading the description and confirming understanding ask:

Are new leaders

- provided with current business plans
- provided with Institution X's strategic plan (i.e., vision and long-term priorities)
- engaged in conversations with key stakeholders on strategic challenges
- given an opportunity to participate in strategic meetings
- invited to a dedicated workshop on strategy and existing plans

Anything else about how Institution X helps new leaders engage with its strategic intent you would like to share?

The interview will then close. The interviewer will analyze the data using the criteria created by Byford, Watkins & Triantogiannis (2017) while also analyzing any additional qualitative data for relevant themes that may inform the second round of interviews. The quantitative criteria follow:

	Basic orientation	Active assimilation	Accelerated integration	Average score
Assuming operational leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured introduction to key business areas Introductory visit to key company locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to sit in on critical business meeting before day one Immersive experiences in unfamiliar areas of the business 	/5 (one for each endorsement)
Taking charge of the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career histories for key team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance and/or assessment data on team members Briefings to provide confidential insight on team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefings on team dynamics and history Facilitated workshop with the team (i.e., new leader assimilation) 	/5 (one for each endorsement)
Aligning with stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant organizational charts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of key internal stakeholders Introductory meetings with internal stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of key external stakeholders Briefings on stakeholders (i.e., their agendas) 	/5 (one for each endorsement)
Engaging with the culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement of company philosophy and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefing on culture and ways of getting things done Structured events to attend in order to understand culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A cultural interpreter to provide insight Assessment to highlight differences between current and former cultures 	/5 (one for each endorsement)
Defining strategic intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic plans for the business (i.e., vision and long-term priorities) Conversations with key stakeholders on strategic challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to participate in an off-site strategic meeting Dedicated workshop on strategy and existing plans 	/5 (one for each endorsement)
Average score				

Internal Interview: Round two – Considering future models

1. Tell me about your experience on onboarding with Institution X?
2. What was most helpful? Least helpful?
3. Looking back, was there any missing element?
4. What have you done to make onboarding for leaders in your scope of responsibility different to your own experience?
5. How has the pandemic influenced existing onboarding processes?
6. What risks might be relevant for both the organization and the leader if the onboarding process is negatively impacted by the pandemic?
7. How might Institution X mitigate these risks?
8. Considering our discussion thus far, do you feel Institution X needs to make any changes to its onboarding and integration process at this point in time?
9. If no, why not? If yes, what are your top 2-3 recommendations for change?
10. Any other thoughts or comments?

External Interview

1. How has your organization traditionally reached out to new leaders in the system?
2. Is this a planned or ad-hoc approach?
3. Looking back, what factors made that integration successful? Unsuccessful?
4. How have these typical activities been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. How have your practices changed in response to this impact?
6. What might make future efforts in connection more valuable?
7. Any other thoughts or comments?

Appendix B: Feedback Partner/ Team Discussion Agenda

Over the course of the seven-week data collection period, I will meet virtually with my feedback partner/team at least twice: Once after **Round One**, and once after **Round Two**, using Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Telephone, where I will bring forward my analysis of the findings from my Round One and then Round Two (post-change) journaling for their consideration and their suggestions for future actions I might take via feedforward. Each meeting will be audio recorded and transcribed. The following agenda serves as a guideline for these dialogues.

Date & Time: _____
Meeting URL: _____
Round: One _____ or Two _____
Participant: _____

Discussion Topics & Questions	Estimated Time	Who
Land acknowledgement and check-in	5 mins	All
Describe emergent themes or issues related to my _____ practice, including any specific findings/learnings from journaling and my reflective process. Share specific incidents that occurred this past week if additional context is required.	10 mins	student
For each theme, issue, learning and/or specific incident described: 1. What questions emerge for you in listening to my description that might help broaden my perspective? 2. Based on this conversation, what do you feel I have been doing well and what might I put more focus on, in my leadership practice of _____? 3. Have you encountered anything similar in your own practice? If so, what worked well in those situations and/or what learnings might you be able to share with me?	30 mins	Feedback partner/team
Feedforward – Considerations for personal leadership practice going forward 1. What are my most important next steps? 2. What are my action items for the week ahead?/ the next round?	10 mins	All
Check-out	5 mins	All

Appendix C: Information Letter – Feedback Partners

Onboarding and integrating new leaders: A model for pandemic times

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Derek Puddester and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership degree at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [phone #].

This inquiry is an Engaged Leadership Project that looks at the onboarding and integration processes of new leaders at Institution X and is considering how Institution X may adapt existing processes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using first-person action research as my methodology, I plan to engage a feedback partner/team consisting of two peers at Institution X and one peer from the Royal Roads Master of Arts in Leadership program, so as to mitigate my researcher bias and broaden my own perspectives and understandings of my experiences and actions. I will meet virtually with my feedback team once every two weeks for a one-hour virtual [conversation/group discussion] using [platform] over a period of five weeks, where I will bring forward any complex issues I face in my leadership practice for your consideration and your suggestions for future actions I might take via feedforward. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, I will provide my analyses of the data along with my initial recommendations to the feedback team in an effort to ensure it is a true reflection of the participant's experience. I will schedule one final one-hour virtual [conversation/group discussion] for feedback on this initial data analysis, for a total of three one-hour virtual group discussions over a period of two months.

This research will benefit myself in achieving a requirement for my Master of Arts in Leadership program. You may benefit from this research whereby insights into your own leadership practice might be achieved through dialogue with me focusing on a practice of cyclical self-reflexivity and reflection.

It is anticipated that there will be minimal risk to the participants in this study. Participants will not be pressured to share specifics that they do not wish or feel comfortable to share. Data will be collective in nature and will not represent one person's specific thoughts or contributions. If you feel that there are any risks to you in participating in the research, you are welcome to withdraw from the study. Please simply let me know of your decision.

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information collected will be maintained in confidence, identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Hard copies of the interview notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet that only I have access to; electronic copies of files will be kept on a secured network that is password protected. Information will be recorded in hand-written format or audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time

will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data will be kept until June, 2022, at which time hard copies will be shredded and electronic and audio files will be deleted.

In addition to submitting a final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership degree, I will also be sharing research findings with Institution X's leadership and onboarding teams, who may choose to distribute my report as deemed appropriate. This inquiry may also be the basis for a scholarly or professional journal article or conference presentation.

Any data that has been collected from a participant who has withdrawn from the study will be removed from the data as soon as they withdraw from the study, up to the point the data is added to other data, as which time it will not be feasible to remove the data. This will be one week after my transcript of the conversation is sent to you for correction and further feedback.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Derek Puddester

Appendix D: Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement

All personal and other confidential information accumulated by the contractor / research assistant will be used only in the performance of contract / project functions, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during a contract period and beyond it.

Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal information includes names, contact information, opinions, and any other information of identifiable individuals.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the project supervisor.

Contractors and employees who are uncertain whether information is personal or confidential will check with the supervisor.

Statement of Agreement

I have read and understand this agreement.

Name

Signature

Date

Appendix E: Invitation to Participate from Primary Investigator

Dear:

As part of my program at Royal Roads University, I am conducting a research project focused on the onboarding and integration of leaders in the context of a pandemic.

You are invited to participate in an interview that will seek your opinion on Institution X's current onboarding processes. This will involve listening to a description of an onboarding task and determining if it is present, absent or somewhere in-between. This interview is expected to take about 15 minutes and be conducted via Microsoft Teams or telephone. It will be audio-recorded and a summary of your response will be sent to you. You will be asked to confirm, within ten days, if the summary is accurate. If not, you are welcome to send corrections.

About a month after this interview, you will be invited to participate in a second interview. You will be given a summary of data collected from your first interview as integrated into the data from others within the organization. You will also be given a summary of information from interviews with stakeholders from outside of Institution X. You will then be asked about ten questions that will explore your opinions, ideas, perspectives and recommendations on a possible future onboarding process for leaders at Institution X. This interview will take about 30-45 minutes. It will be conducted by Microsoft Teams or telephone. It will be audio-recorded and a transcript will be sent to you. You will be invited to confirm, within ten days, if it is accurate. If not, you are welcome to send corrections.

A summary of draft recommendations from this study will be sent to you for reflection and final thoughts will be invited within ten days of receipt.

I appreciate your consideration of this request. If you are interested, please reply via email and we will schedule a consent discussion and, potentially, an interview.

In these unusual times, I hope this research will be of value in promoting excellence, relevance and reflection in onboarding and integration processes for new leaders.

Thank you,

Derek Puddester, MD MEd FRCPC PCC

Appendix F: Invitation to Participate from Research Assistant

Dear:

Dr. Puddester is a learner at Royal Roads University and conducting a research project focused on the onboarding and integration of leaders in the context of a pandemic. I have been hired as a research assistant to assist him in this work. Our credentials can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [phone #].

You are invited to participate in an interview that will seek your opinion on Institution X's current onboarding processes. This will involve listening to a description of an onboarding task and determining if it is present, absent or somewhere in-between. This interview is expected to take about 15 minutes and be conducted via Microsoft Teams or telephone. It will be audio-recorded and a summary of your response will be sent to you. You will be asked to confirm, within ten days, if the summary is accurate. If not, you are welcome to send corrections.

About a month after this interview, you will be invited to participate in a second interview. You will be given a summary of data collected from your first interview as integrated into the data from others within the organization. You will also be given a summary of information from interviews with stakeholders from outside of Institution X. You will then be asked about ten questions that will explore your opinions, ideas, perspectives and recommendations on a possible future onboarding process for leaders at Institution X. This interview will take about 30-45 minutes. It will be conducted by Microsoft Teams or telephone. It will be audio-recorded and a transcript will be sent to you. You will be invited to confirm, within ten days, if it is accurate. If not, you are welcome to send corrections.

A summary of draft recommendations from this study will be sent to you for reflection and final thoughts will be invited within ten days of receipt.

I appreciate your consideration of this request. If you are interested, please reply via email and we will schedule a consent discussion and, potentially, an interview. Please note that Dr. Puddester will not have access to your recordings and transcripts will have all identifying information removed so as to protect your identity. This is entirely a voluntary activity and he will not know if you have chosen to participate, or not.

In these unusual times, Dr. Puddester hopes this research will be of value in promoting excellence, relevance and reflection in onboarding and integration processes for new leaders.

Thank you,
[Name withheld for anonymization purposes]
Research Assistant

Appendix G: Information Letter – Action Inquiry Team Members

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Derek Puddester and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership degree at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [phone #].

This inquiry is an Engaged Leadership Project that looks at the onboarding and integration processes of new leaders at Institution X and is considering how Institution X may adapt existing processes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using first-person action research as my methodology, I plan to engage a feedback partner/team consisting of two peers at Institution X and one peer from the Royal Roads Master of Arts in Leadership program, so as to mitigate my researcher bias and broaden my own perspectives and understandings of my experiences and actions. I will meet virtually with my feedback team once every two weeks for a one-hour virtual [conversation/group discussion] using [platform] over a period of five weeks, where I will bring forward any complex issues I face in my leadership practice for your consideration and your suggestions for future actions I might take via feedforward. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, I will provide my analyses of the data along with my initial recommendations to the feedback team in an effort to ensure it is a true reflection of the participant's experience. I will schedule one final one-hour virtual [conversation/group discussion] for feedback on this initial data analysis, for a total of three one-hour virtual group discussions over a period of two months.

This research will benefit myself in achieving a requirement for my Master of Arts in Leadership program. You may benefit from this research whereby insights into your own leadership practice might be achieved through dialogue with me focusing on a practice of cyclical self-reflexivity and reflection.

It is anticipated that there will be minimal risk to the participants in this study. Participants will not be pressured to share specifics that they do not wish or feel comfortable to share. Data will be collective in nature and will not represent one person's specific thoughts or contributions. If you feel that there are any risks to you in participating in the research, you are welcome to withdraw from the study. Please simply let me know of your decision.

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information collected will be maintained in confidence, identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Hard copies of the interview notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet that only I have access to; electronic copies of files will be kept on a secured network that is password protected. Information will be recorded in hand-written format or audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data will be kept until June, 2022, at which time hard copies will be shredded and electronic and audio files will be deleted.

In addition to submitting a final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership degree, I will also be sharing research findings with Institution X's leadership and onboarding teams, who may choose to distribute my report as deemed

appropriate. This inquiry may also be the basis for a scholarly or professional journal article or conference presentation.

Any data that has been collected from a participant who has withdrawn from the study will be removed from the data as soon as they withdraw from the study, up to the point the data is added to other data, as which time it will not be feasible to remove the data. This will be one week after my transcript of the conversation is sent to you for correction and further feedback.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Derek Puddester

Appendix H: Interview Handout and Consent Form

Study Title: Onboarding and integrating new leaders: A model for pandemic times

Investigator: Derek Puddester, MD MEd FRCPC [email address]

Supervisor: Dr. A. Harrison - Royal Roads University (Primary Supervisor) [email address]
Dr. P. Cady - Royal Roads University (Secondary Supervisor): [email address]

Project Partner: Chief Executive Officer – Institution X [Information withheld for anonymization purposes].

Introduction

You are being invited to participate in a research study. You are invited to participate in this study because you are either a leader at Institution X (an “internal” participant) or represent an organization identified by Institution X as a key collaborator or stakeholder (and “external” participant).

This consent form provides you with information to help you make an informed choice. Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have. All your questions should be answered to your satisfaction before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Please take your time in making your decision.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the option to not participate at all or you may choose to leave the study at any time. The decision will not affect your employment with Institution X or, for external participants, influence Institution X’s relationship with you or your organization.

Conflict of Interest

Dr. Puddester is completing this thesis as part of his Master of Arts studies at the School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. He is also [information withheld for anonymization purposes]. He has received financial support from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in the form of a non-restricted educational grant to help cover the costs of the program. He has not received any funding support from Institution X [information withheld for anonymization purposes].

[Information withheld for anonymization purposes]. Consent for these individuals will be obtained by a third party who will also interview, transcribe and follow up with these individuals for the duration of the study. Their individual data will be stored by this party and only anonymized and summarized data shared with Dr. Puddester.

You will be invited to identify any other actual or perceived conflicts of interest as part of obtaining your consent to participate.

Why is this study being done?

This study looks at the onboarding and integration processes of new leaders at Institution X and is considering how Institution X may adapt existing processes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How many people will take part in this study?

The goal is to complete 10 internal and 6 external interviews.

It is anticipated data will be gathered over 8-12 weeks. The results should be available to participants on or about March 2021.

What will happen during this study?*Internal participants:*

You will be invited to participate in an interview that will seek your opinion on Institution X's current onboarding processes. This will involve listening to a description of an onboarding task and determining if it is present, absent or somewhere in-between. This interview is expected to take about 15 minutes and be conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or telephone. It will be audio-recorded and a summary of your response will be sent to you. You will be asked to confirm, within ten days, if the summary is accurate. If not, you are welcome to send corrections.

About a month after this interview, you will be invited to participate in a second interview. You will be given a summary of data collected from your first interview as integrated into the data from others within the organization. You will also be given a summary of information from interviews with stakeholders from outside of Institution X. You will then be asked about ten questions that will explore your opinions, ideas, perspectives and recommendations on a possible future onboarding process for leaders at Institution X. This interview will take about 30-45 minutes. It will be conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or telephone. It will be audio-recorded and a transcript will be sent to you. You will be invited to confirm, within ten days, if it is accurate. If not, you are welcome to send corrections.

External participants:

You will be invited to participate in an interview that will seek your opinions, ideas, perspectives and recommendations as to how Institution X onboards its new leaders to your organization. There will be approximately six questions, with an option to share any additional thoughts you may have. The interview will take about 30 minutes. It will be conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or telephone. It will be audio-recorded and transcribed. A copy of the

transcript will be sent to you and you will be invited to confirm, within ten days, if it is accurate. If not, you are welcome to send corrections.

For all parties:

A summary of draft recommendations from this study will be sent to you for reflection and final thoughts will be invited within ten days of receipt.

Audio-recording

A digital recorder will be used to record your interview. Data will be stored in a private computer belonging to Dr. Puddester (or, for those subjects [information withheld for anonymization purposes] his research assistant), given a storage label that is anonymous, and backed up on a server housed in Canada. Dr. Puddester will store his data until June 2022 (one year after his graduation) and his research assistant will store data until his graduation (as per policies and procedures of Royal Roads University).

What are your responsibilities?

If you choose to participate, you are expected to:

- share your ideas, opinions, reflections and recommendations
- seek clarification on any aspect of the study that is not clear
- answer interview questions only if you are willing to do so
- participate in the study in keeping with study timelines
- alert the investigator, his supervisors, or the project partner of your decision to withdraw participation

How long will you be in the study?

Participants can anticipate the study activity lasting approximately eight to twelve weeks.

Can participants leave the study?

Absolutely. You can choose to end your participation at any time without having to provide a reason. You may withdraw your permission to use information that was collected from you at any point up until approval of your interview transcripts. At that point, your data will be integrated with that of others and near-impossible to remove. However, all data will be integrated without identifying information with the exception of “internal” or “external” group identification.

Can participation in the study end early?

Your participation in this study may be stopped early and without your consent if the investigator, project partner, or the Royal Roads University Ethics board withdraw their participation and/or permission for this study to continue.

What are the risks or harms of participating in this study?

You may become uncomfortable while discussing your opinions, ideas, reflections or recommendations. You may choose not to answer questions or leave the interview at any time if you experience discomfort.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

There may be no benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, it is possible that your input will help shape a model of onboarding/integrating new leaders during a pandemic that may be of value to Institution X and, perhaps, other organizations.

How will participant information be kept confidential?

If you decide to participate in this study, the investigator will only collect the information they need. Records identifying you will be kept confidential and, to the extent permitted by applicable laws, will not be disclosed or made publicly available, except as described in this consent document.

Information that is collected about you (“study data”) will include your name, role, organizational affiliation, contact information and your interview recordings.

Your data will be stored in a secure location and accessible only to the investigator and his research assistant. Recordings will be kept only until they are transcribed (turned into written records) and approved by you as accurate. These records will remove any nominal information to further promote your anonymity with the exception of identifying you as an internal or external participant. All data will be destroyed by June 2022.

Please note that your valuable ideas and opinions will appear in the report itself. However, no personal information such as your name or personally identifiable information will be used to attribute those comments to you. No identifying data will be shared with the project partner, supervisors or Royal Roads University. Further, Institution X will not be identified in the final thesis report and will only be referred to as “Institution X” to further protect its privacy.

Your study data will not be used for any other purposes. Even though the likelihood that someone may identify you from the study data is very small, it can never be completely eliminated.

Should you choose to communicate via the Zoom platform there is one additional aspect of confidentiality to consider. The Zoom session may be recorded and the data is stored in the USA. Data stored on servers in the USA may be subject to examination by the US government under the USA Patriot Act. While this likelihood is small, I am required to let my participants know this possible risk.

What is the cost?

There is no cost to you to participate. However, you are consenting to contribute your time which may have an impact on your other roles and duties.

Will participants be paid?

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

What are the rights of participants?

You will be told, in a timely manner, about new information that may be relevant to your willingness to stay in this study.

Your rights to privacy are legally protected by federal and provincial laws that require safeguards to ensure that your privacy is respected.

By signing this form, you do not give up any of your legal rights against the investigator or for compensation, nor does this form relieve the investigator of their legal and professional responsibilities.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form prior to participating in this study.

Who can you contact with questions?

The investigator, supervisors or partner listed above. You can reach Dr. Puddester at [phone #] as well.

Signature Form

Study Title: Onboarding and integrating new leaders: A model for pandemic times
 Investigator: Derek Puddester, MD MEd FRCPC [email address]
 Supervisor: Dr. A. Harrison – Royal Roads University (Primary Supervisor) [email address]
 Dr. P. Cady – Royal Roads University (Secondary Supervisor): [email address]
 Project Partner: Chief Executive Officer – Institution X

SIGNATURES

- All my questions have been answered
- I understand the information within this informed consent form
- I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this consent form
- I agree to take part in this study

 Signature of Participant /

 Printed Name

 Date

 Signature of Person Conducting
 the Consent Discussion

 Printed Name and Role

 Date