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Institutional Factors That Prolong The New Degree Program Approval Lifecycle: Insights From Continuing And Professional Education Administrators In Higher Education

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INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS THAT PROLONG THE NEW DEGREE PROGRAM APPROVAL LIFECYCLE: INSIGHTS FROM CONTINUING AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Continuing or professional education administrators regularly participate in their university's degree program approval process, as their schools serve adult learners who desire career-oriented education. Speed and efficiency to market are critical factors in ensuring high-quality, relevant, continuing or professional education programs; however, higher education decision making can be process laden and time consuming. There is limited scholarly research about the institutional factors that constrain and contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the new degree program approval process and its cycle time, even though it plays a critical role in institutional new product development. This phenomenological study foregrounds the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that continuing or professional education administrators have regarding their university's new degree program approval process and cycle time. The findings advance our understanding of their lived experiences and emphasize that the new degree program approval process performs suboptimally; it is foremost a people-centered process, and governance and organizational autonomy influence its cycle time. Specific recommendations to streamline decision making and increase agility are offered, and suggestions for future research are presented.

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For Rico and Lily

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Chapter 1: Overview of the Study

Higher education institutions (HEIs) operate within an increasingly competitive landscape, so universities need to be able to advance in line with their missions and vision statements, with a commitment to their core audience (Tierney, 2002). An institution's effectiveness is defined by its ability to (a) meet stakeholder needs, (b) keep its promises, (c) ensure its health and well-being, (d) serve the public good, and (e) be accountable (Suskie, 2014). In short, a quality institution is one that is not merely excellent but also fulfills the institution's commitment to the stakeholders they serve.

Quality is often called a relative concept because it means different things to different people. While a standard of quality can be measured at a single point in time, an organization's quality practices and continuous improvement initiatives should not be fleeting, but rather constant and ongoing (Suskie, 2014). As the external environment continues to put pressure on HEIs to demonstrate the value of postsecondary degrees, HEIs have a greater responsibility to offer an education that is high quality and relevant to students. Continuous improvement in education suggests ongoing development and adjustment of policies and practices that create strong conditions for student success inside and outside the classroom.

The characteristics of 21st century college students are more diverse than ever in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and disability (Sandoval-Lucero, 2014). Additionally, the growth of the adult student learner market continues to transform higher education, so continuing and professional schools at HEIs across the country are driving many innovations on their campuses to meet the needs of adult learners. Schools of professional or continuing studies in higher education act as an on- and off-ramp for education, where adult students can search for new learning opportunities and shorter credentials that adapt

to evolving career interests over their long professional lives. Thus, schools of professional or continuing studies and their administrators continually seek to expand educational access and generate new revenue for their universities by developing and launching new, innovative academic programs that meet market demand and regional workforce needs (MacDonald, 2015).

Faster pace decision making in consequence of a rapidly changing external environment is progressively required by HEIs. One challenge to higher education's shared governance model is that decision making can be process laden and time consuming. A shared governance model, common only in higher education, requires university administrators to engage campus academics to ensure a mutual set of priorities and goals. Conflicting viewpoints may result in a lack of consensus and lead to a paralysis in which decisions are delayed or not made at all (Pierce, 2014). In a dynamic external environment, HEI internal structures and processes need to be more flexible and agile to ensure HEIs advance in their missions and vision statements and offer an education that is high quality and relevant to students and industry. This way, HEIs will not be merely excellent, but also fulfill their commitment to their stakeholders. An HEI's ability to embrace a culture of continuous improvement is vital for ensuring long-term viability.

Background of the Problem

American doctoral universities have deep historical roots in propelling society through discovery and innovation. The leading framework to categorize the diversity of HEIs is the Carnegie classification system (Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University School of Education, n.d). The two top tier classification for research institutions are very high research activity doctoral universities (R1), and high research activity doctoral universities (R2).

While the primary focus and commitment of R1 and R2 universities is their research agendas, the continuing education (CE) schools, and the field of adult education, have a

divergent focus because of the adult student population served. CE at a research university is typically offered through its CE school in the most accessible and affordable way. These CE schools, such as Harvard Extension; University of California, Irvine, Division of Continuing Education; Georgia Tech Professional Education; New York University School of Professional Studies; the University of Chicago Graham School; and the Northwestern School of Professional Studies continually seek to expand educational access and generate new revenue for the university by developing and launching new, innovative academic programs that meet market demand and workforce needs.

Societal and workforce challenges are more dynamic now than in the past. As the nation continues to move from a manufacturing-based economy to a more knowledge-based economy, the demand for a skilled and knowledgeable workforce is greater than ever before. According to Carnevale et al. (2013), 65% of the 55 million job openings in the economy through 2020 required postsecondary education. The fastest-growing occupations, such as STEM, healthcare, and community services, also have the highest demand for postsecondary education and training (Carnevale et al., 2013).

A common theme in the field of CE is ensuring that educational programs meet the needs of industry and the adult student population, who desire to upskill or reskill to maintain their competitiveness in the job market. CE actively listens to industry needs and seeks to react accordingly by ensuring educational programs are cutting-edge. However, CE's ability to enact immediate change is in tension with HEI's traditional research culture and organizational structure. A HEI must be flexible to adapt to a changing external environment. There is a growing need for HEIs to create capacity and act swiftly by creating new, restructuring existing,

and sunsetting irrelevant programs without being obstructed by obstacles and bureaucratic restrictions (Salmi, 2001).

Schools of professional or continuing studies in higher education at research institutions are often closely tied to the needs of the workforce and working professionals because of the adult student body they serve. CE schools are at the forefront of an unprecedented change in how education is delivered, how students access learning, and how learning is valued and measured. Increasingly, higher education will use technology to deliver shorter, more targeted, and more affordable personal learning experiences. Certificates, stackable credentials, massive open online courses, and micro-master's degrees are all on the growing agendas of HEIs, and CE schools are well-positioned within their university systems to design, develop, and launch these new educational offerings. University processes that promote agility and quick decision making are best suited to bringing new, cutting-edge educational programs rapidly to market.

Statement of the Problem

Speed and efficiency to market are critical factors to ensuring high-quality, relevant, career-oriented education, which is a desirable feature for adult student education. Because of this and the increasingly competitive nature of the higher education market, opportunities for shortening the development lifecycle through greater efficiency warrant further examination. The new degree program development lifecycle in higher education is rarely cited in academic literature but plays a critical role in an institution's ability to offer educational programs that are relevant, current, and career-oriented.

Due to the lack of academic literature, this study leverages a universal and proven methodology from the business discipline called lean. This study uses the principles and philosophy of lean management which is a foundational paradigm for continuous process

improvement (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). The prominent and influential factors that impact institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement include institutional identity, organizational culture, organizational structure, and the people who work for the institution. The literature review will foreground the organizational, cultural, and process challenges that may prolong a new program or product lifecycle. The literature review will also highlight institutional considerations and opportunities for shortening the lifecycle through high-performing cultures and efficient processes within higher education. This study brings cycle time data to the forefront by examining and exploring how HEIs and CE administrators can continuously improve their institution's degree program approval processes.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of CE administrator experiences within their university's new degree program approval cycle. The qualitative methodology selected for this study was phenomenology, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of university administrators as they lead or take part in their university's new degree program or product lifecycle. This study gathered information related to CE leaders' organizational structures, approval processes, cycle time, obstacles, and pain points.

The CE administrators' journey through the new degree program or product lifecycle is generally defined as their experiences with the organizational, cultural, and process factors that they encounter as they lead or take part in the process. This study intended to formalize best practice frameworks around high-performing cultures, efficient approval processes, and a reduced launch cycle time. The study's participants were primarily, but not exclusively, CE leaders at universities who are members of the University Professional and Continuing Education

Association (UPCEA). Participants were from a mix of R1 and R2 public and private institutions nationwide, and all had first-hand experience with their institution's new degree program approval process. R1 and R2 institutions were the selected Carnegie categories as CE administrators were more likely to have a shared experience in serving industry and the adult student population while navigating a university's traditional culture and organizational structure.

Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

This study has developed a deeper understanding of CE administrators' experiences with their university's new degree program approval cycle through the following questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of continuing education administrators with their university's new degree program approval cycle?

RQ2: What organizational, cultural, or process factors have influenced or affected continuing education administrators' experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time?

RQ3: How do continuing education administrators who lead or take part in the degree program approval lifecycle feel and think about their university's process and its cycle time?

W. Edwards Deming, a pioneer in the field of quality management and lean principles and practices, developed a framework for process improvement and greater efficiencies within the private sector (Braughton, 1999). Deming's 14-point management theory articulates how to improve an organization to improve business success. A lean-thinking organization focuses on constraining factors, such as bottlenecks or hindrances in operations or organizational structure, to improve information flow. Lean concepts imply a long-term elimination of waste and continuous improvement that involves all stakeholders (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). The

application of lean concepts within higher education, and specifically to the new degree program approval process, may result in increased procedural efficiencies and overall improvement of academic programs in higher education.

Significance of the Study

Striving for more efficiency in processes that are key to an HEI's success and working to eliminate unnecessary steps and non-value-added activities could be a competitive advantage for universities. As the external environment continues to put pressure on HEIs to demonstrate the value of postsecondary degrees, HEIs have a greater responsibility to offer an education that is relevant to both students' and employers' needs.

One concern is that private industry educational programs will outpace solutions offered by higher education unless schools can shorten their curriculum and new program development cycle. By gaining a deep understanding of the roadblocks that affect CE organizational agility, specific tactics may be developed and instituted to streamline decision making, increase agility, and help create a culture that is less risk averse. Because CE schools are a part of a large university system, they must work within the structure of shared governance and other traditional frameworks to receive approvals. Shared governance in higher education is a form of checks and balances between faculty and administrators that prevents the latter from making decisions for the institution in a vacuum. However, the need to respond quickly to market needs and ensuring programming that is cutting-edge is in tension with traditional culture and organizational structure (shared governance) that is not particularly agile, flexible, or risk seeking.

While there are academic studies covering the need for innovation and a high-performance culture in higher education, as well as about the characteristics of academic leaders who are innovators, there is limited research on frameworks and organizational processes or

structures within higher education that yield efficiencies related to exploring, proposing, approving, and implementing new programs. This research explores the internal degree program development and approval processes for CE schools at R1 or R2 universities to gain a more thorough understanding of the internal organizational structures and roadblocks to the new degree program development and approval cycle. The desired outcome is an improved plan, process, organizational alignment, or culture shift that CE schools and leaders may implement, allowing for quicker decisions on internal academic program development and increased speed to market. Individuals influence innovativeness through the decision of whether and when to embrace a new idea (Scott & McGuire, 2017). CE leaders can use the results of this research to choose to enact change within their units and on their campuses.

Definitions of Terms

new degree program approval process: a university's internal policy and established procedure that is built around steps required to offer a new degree.

cycle time: The amount of time it takes for a new degree program to be approved through a university's new degree program approval process.

lean methodology: Lean concepts focus on creating customer value through the elimination of waste (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). Waste is anything that does not add value to an organization or benefit an organization financially.

Organization of the Study

Five chapters organize this study. Chapter 1 has provided the background, purpose, research questions, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 will review current literature that encompasses the scope of the study, including the theoretical framework of W. Edwards Deming that grounded the study. Institutional identity, organizational culture, organizational structure,

and the people who work for the institution—the prominent and influential factors that impact institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement—help the reader gain a more comprehensive understanding of the scholarly research in these areas. Chapter 3 will detail the phenomenological qualitative research methodology and design for this study. Chapter 4 assesses and analyzes the data and results. Lastly, Chapter 5 outlines recommendations and highlights institutional considerations and opportunities for shortening the lifecycle through high-performing cultures and efficient processes within higher education. The limitations of the study will be addressed, as will recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A common theme in continuing education is ensuring that educational offerings meet the needs of adult students, who want to continuously upskill in their professions to maintain their competitiveness in the job market. University administrators who are responsible for new program execution, whose charge or desire is to launch programs quickly face organizational, cultural, and procedural challenges that prolong the new degree program or product lifecycle. A prolonged process or decision making timeline impedes responsiveness to prospective students' wants and needs. This literature review examines the institutional factors that influence a prolonged cycle.

Since the new degree program development lifecycle in higher education is rarely cited in academic literature, this review uses the lens of lean principles and practices to offer a broader understanding of the factors that influence institutional effectiveness and achievement in launching new degree programs. The principles and philosophy of lean management from the business discipline is a foundational paradigm for continuous process improvement and is used worldwide in both private and public sector organizations (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). The prominent and influential factors that impact the efficacy of institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement include institutional identity, organizational culture, organizational structure, and the people who work for the institution. This literature review will foreground the organizational, cultural, and process challenges that may prolong a new degree program or product lifecycle and will also highlight institutional considerations and opportunities for shortening the lifecycle through high-performing cultures and efficient processes within higher education.

Theoretical Framework of W. Edwards Deming

Companies respond to the changing desires of their customers to ensure loyalty. Higher education institutions are embracing a changing landscape where administrators increasingly view students as consumers of the education created and offered. While the notion of student consumerism is accepted to varying degrees, the field of adult education, given its primary purpose, has historically been consumer-centric.

Adult students have different characteristics and motivations for seeking and persisting through formal education than traditional-aged students. Adult students frequently juggle multiple roles, such as spouse, parent, and employee outside of a student role, and they are concerned with advancing professionally and remaining competitive in the workforce (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015). A national longitudinal study conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) that followed baby boomers through their employment years found that, on average, people in that study held 11.7 jobs between the ages of 18 and 48 (BLS, 2019). Additionally, the BLS reported that the median tenure of employment of workers with their current employer is 4.2 years (BLS, 2018). As global competitiveness accelerates the pace of the workplace and job changes are more frequent, adult students continually need to learn new skills and adapt rapidly to new job roles to accelerate their success further so their lives may be improved. Practically speaking, job security and increased income are examples of why adults are drawn to formal education. These motivations of adult students are practical, while those of traditional students tend to be aspirational (Rothes et al., 2017).

To serve the adult student population, educational offerings provided by higher education institutions should be relevant, current, and career-oriented. New academic program approval plays a critical role in an institution's ability to offer such programs. As the world economy has

put a premium on an educated workforce, it has become more fluid, characterized by more frequent job and career changes for the workforce (Kazis et al., 2007). The higher education system, especially as it relates to adult program offerings, must be responsive and should strive for speed and efficiency when serving adult learners and the employers who hire them. Because of this, and the increased competitive intensity of the higher education market, opportunities for shortening the development lifecycle through greater efficiency is a vital consideration for institutions.

In higher education's current era of resource constraints, increased competition, and growing demand for career-oriented education where adult learners and hiring organizations desire relevant and timely curricula, speed to market becomes key to organizational and student success. Striving for more efficiency in processes that are key to an organization's success and working to eliminate unnecessary steps, and non-value-added activities could be a competitive advantage for universities. W. Edwards Deming, a pioneer in the field of quality management and lean principles and practices, developed a framework for process improvement and greater efficiencies within the private sector (Braughton, 1999). The application of the Deming framework in higher education is worth further evaluation, especially as it relates to shortening new program development cycles.

Deming used his mathematical background to center his professional endeavors on improving how things are created and how to iterate and improve for the next cycle. Deming worked for the U.S. government during World War II, using statistics to improve quality in war material manufacturing. After the war, he wanted to bring his ideas to the American auto industry; he was unsuccessful in Detroit, the center of America's auto industry, because many manufacturers dismissed his proposition that statistical analysis could improve not only

production but also the management of an entire organization (Nowicki, 2006). Deming famously helped Japanese organizations change the public perception that Japan produced cheap goods into a perception of Japan producing high-quality, innovative products. Deming's ideas on how to improve an organization to achieve business success have been distilled into 14 points, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Deming's Management Philosophy

Appendix A: Deming's 14-Point Management Theory

Deming (1988) articulated the core values of his management philosophy in his now famous "14 points":

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, with a plan to become competitive—to stay in business and to provide jobs.
2. Adopt a new philosophy. We are in a new economic age. We can no longer live with commonly accepted levels of delays, mistakes, defective materials, and defective workmanship.
3. Cease dependence on mass inspection. Require instead statistical evidence that quality is built in to eliminate need for inspection on a mass basis.
4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag alone. Instead, depend on meaningful measures of quality along with price.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service. It is management's job to work continually on the system.
6. Institute a vigorous program of education and retraining.
7. Adopt and institute leadership. The responsibility of supervision must be changed from sheer numbers to quality. Improvement of quality will automatically improve productivity.
8. Drive out fear so that everyone may work effectively for the company.
9. Break down barriers between departments. People in research, design, sales, and production must work as a team to foresee problems of production that may be encountered with various materials and specifications.
10. Eliminate numerical goals, posters, and slogans for the workforce that ask for new levels of productivity without providing new methods.
11. Eliminate work standards that prescribe numerical quotas.
12. Remove barriers that stand between the hourly worker and his or her right to pride of workmanship.
13. Encourage education and self-improvement for everyone.
14. Create a structure in top management that will push every day on the above thirteen points.

Note. Taken from Braughton (1999, p. 456).

Over time, Deming's points and principles were applied globally in manufacturing, and they have since been expanded upon and adapted to service organizations, such as hospitals, consulting firms, and nonprofits. In the business environment, where improving stockholder return is one of the main drivers, it has become increasingly difficult to gain advantages over the competition because of technological advances and how quickly information is created and shared. All companies seek to improve their competitive edge, and one action companies take to pursue that edge is to undertake efforts towards business process improvements. Lean concepts focus on creating value through the elimination of waste (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). The ultimate goal of a lean organization is to repeatedly bring value to the customer through processes that have zero waste: "The lean concept focuses on the reduction of non-value-added activities, thereby shortening the production cycle, eliminating inventories, reducing costs, and making many process improvements visible" (Antić & Čečević, 2015, p. 913). To accomplish this goal, a lean-thinking organization focuses on constraining factors, such as bottlenecks (or hindrances) in operations or the organization structure, to improve information flow. Lean concepts imply a long-term elimination of waste and continuous improvement that involves all stakeholders.

Lean Concept Implementation in Higher Education

The often-decentralized university environment is different from that of a manufacturing organization, but the idea of continuous improvement is not new in the field of education. In education, educators seek to improve their teaching and administrators seek to develop curriculum or departmental effectiveness. Arguably, the application of lean concepts to the new program approval process may result in increased procedural efficiencies and overall academic program improvement in higher education.

As the higher education system strives for quicker responsiveness and speed in introducing new adult program offerings, elimination of waste within processes should be examined. Lean principles and practices underscore the need to eliminate waste. In manufacturing, waste may indicate product defects because of ineffective machinery or excess raw material inventory because of poor production forecasting (Maguad, 2007). Lean principles and concepts are suited for both manufacturing and service organizations, and the literature suggests they can also apply to the higher education setting. Adding value to the customer is a key concept of lean. If waste is a non-value added step in a process, then how does waste reduction relate to the field of higher education?

Maguad (2007) offered several examples of waste within the field of education that correspond with manufacturing terms like inventory, defects, overproduction, motion, waiting, processing, and transportation. Funds tied up in excess inventory like office supplies or food supplies are more appropriately invested in more productive areas of the system. Defects can be incomplete or missing registration forms; student petitions; or financial forms used by faculty, administrators, and staff. Defects lead to rework, which leads to lost profit and overproduction (Maguad, 2007). Overproduction, or making more than is needed for the current state or process, can lead to waste. Schutta (2006) believed overproduction could have a detrimental effect on higher education, because it often leads to significant expenditures of both money and time. Motion waste means unproductive steps in a process that add labor costs. Waiting or wait times are also forms of waste that affect the customer experience; examples in higher education include the wait time to get an appointment with an academic adviser or receive a registration confirmation. Multiple signatures on a work order or a petition form are examples of over-processing (Maguad, 2007). Institutions hire employees for their knowledge, education, and

expertise. Underusing their talents is wasteful for an institution (Maguad, 2007). Lastly, transportation waste occurs when people or materials are moved around campus, and processing waste is caused by either having too few or too many people to get a job done.

The application of Deming's theory of total quality management to achieve continuous improvements in education is appropriate, even though it is rarely implemented at the institutional level. The University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) and the University of Minnesota are two examples of lean principles being successfully tailored at higher education institutions.

Due to funding reductions, budget constraints, outdated administrative processes, and low levels of productivity and employee job satisfaction, UCO took steps to transform itself into a lean-thinking organization in the early 2000s. The university had overworked staff, and the administrative processes were not customer-centric. The primary focus of lean implementation is to identify and eliminate waste from products and services provided, so UCO initially surveyed stakeholders and concluded that most issues were complaints based on "non-value-added" activities or waste (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). The university used a four-step model to implement its lean initiative, which began with training at all levels to create a shared understanding and collaboration of the lean transformation. Cristina and Felicia (2012) outlined this four-step model as follows:

> Step 1: Identify the Opportunities – Complete an organization-wide diagnostic search for issues, problems, and opportunities. Step 2: Solution Design – Create a draft for success that involves all employees: training, mapping, and planning. Step 3: Implementation – Use kaizen events, core teams, and metrics to implement and illustrate change. Step 4: Continuous Improvement – Monitor performance after projects are completed. (p. 280)

In Step 1, UCO conducted campus-wide surveys and prioritized where immediate action had to take place to improve customer satisfaction. In Step 2, the administrative support staff was trained on the usage and benefits of implementing lean principles. In Step 3, departments implemented changes to identified processes and employees gathered to understand the intended change affects. Lastly, in Step 4, the newly implemented process was continuously reviewed for improvement opportunities. Overall, student satisfaction with services increased (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). The result of UCO's lean implementation was an empowered staff, improved productivity, and improved customer experience.

Similar to the University of Central Oklahoma, the University of Minnesota adopted a five-step lean implementation methodology for its continuous improvement efforts. The five steps are summarized as follows:

> The first step was to find early adopters. The second step was to establish training materials and build an organizational culture that internalizes lean principles. The third step was to create a central improvement office that supports improvement activities. The fourth step was to establish demonstration events that pair up a seasoned lean facilitator and a novice lean coordinator to ensure event completion. The fifth step was to extend lean efforts to other university areas after interest is shown. (Cristina & Felicia, 2012)

Unlike UCO, the University of Minnesota established a central office that operated as a consulting arm to groups within the university. This model helped departments gain efficiency and increase their value (Cristina & Felicia, 2012, p. 281). The centralized arm was efficiently positioned to gather and disseminate best practices, as well as to communicate and promote knowledge sharing across the institution.

These case studies demonstrate the successful application of lean concepts and continuous improvement within a university environment. New academic program approval, as a specific process example, plays a critical role in the life of an institution and a prolonged cycle can impede a university's ability to rapidly respond to changing student demographics and market conditions (Lake, 2003). As internal and external approvals, when required, are needed to ensure quality and compliance, both institutional and agency approvers should strive to optimize their evaluation so that programming can reach students faster. As universities increasingly seek to offer educational programming that is of immediate value to students, a rapid approval process may result in an improved competitive advantage by which a university can differentiate itself by its relevant and highly desired educational programming. As Deming suggested in his 14 points, a combination of organizational mindset and individual belief and action can achieve change within a process. Together, the power of the organization and its people drives continuous improvement and change; for many administrators, this may be a new practice at their universities.

Institutional Identity

Not-for-profit universities have different motivation than private-sector companies. Discovery, innovation, and creating new knowledge, as an example, is a research university's primary focus, whereas the primary goal of private-sector companies is profit. Although motivations differ, similarly they compete within their own market environment of resource constraints and high student or consumer expectations. Just as companies respond to the changing desires of their customers, universities face similar challenges from students.

Institutional identity aligns institutional purpose, future direction, strategic objectives, and school improvement initiatives. It frames, grounds, and guides an organization's decision-

making philosophy, which in turn influences and impacts institutional outcomes. A university's identity is articulated through its mission and vision. Mission and vision are important for higher education institutions because they state why they exist, what they do day-to-day, and what they hope for the future. In contrast to the missions and visions of not-for-profit institutions, for-profit institutions' missions and visions are typically rooted in generating revenue for shareholders. The pursuit of profitability, as a mission, tends to dictate a structure and performance standard that is different from those of universities whose mission is service-focused and whose financial returns are reinvested in the university itself.

The American research university has historical roots in Europe. The German universities that emerged in the 18th century were focused on scientific research, and they had a large influence on Europe's industrialization. Historically, higher education in the United States is rooted in teaching, research, and the public good within the structure of a research university or a state college (Davies, 1986; Weisbrod et al., 2009). In comparison, market-focused universities tend to be classified in the literature as entrepreneurial universities. This aligns such schools with Deming's view of an enhanced competitive position through improved business process improvements. Entrepreneurial universities, according to studies by Burton R. Clark, are summarized as follows:

> Entrepreneurial universities have: (1) an expedient central decision-making body that can react to changing market conditions; (2) a flexible approach to external activities and a dynamic ability to cross organizational boundaries more quickly than traditional academic departments; (3) financial diversification where sources of funding changes on a continuously; (4) academic units with an entrepreneurial ecosystem where administrators and professors have equal power; (5) a university culture fosters

> entrepreneurial practices and that it is a wide-spread belief, which is sustained throughout a university. (Gjerding et al., 2016)

Clark introduced the concept of an entrepreneurial university in his studies of five European universities in England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden in the late 1990s (Gjerding et al., 2016). Clark acknowledged the changing needs of Europe's knowledge-based society and the global competitiveness of the labor market. Higher education in Europe is substantially funded by the government, and governments are reducing funding even though there is increasing pressure on their institutions to produce more highly educated people (Maassen & Cloete, 2006). Clark suggested that universities need to become more financially independent, which means acting entrepreneurially and finding new sources of income through their strategic activities (Clark, 1998).

In the United States, state governments and public institutions also have a mutually beneficial relationship. State institutions place an important role on developing the state's citizens, its workforce, and its overall economy. The state is the primary funder of its own public institutions. The state-university relationship is eroding because of significant cuts in appropriations over the past two decades. Nationwide, state appropriations have declined 40% since 1978 (Weerts & Ronca, 2006), which is leading institutions to seek alternative funding opportunities.

Etzokwitz and Leydesdorr (2000) built on Clark by emphasizing that universities play a critical role in leading innovation efforts within society. Etzokwitz (2003) discussed several academic revolutions that shaped university structures today. The first revolution was the inclusion of research into teaching, and the second emphasized combining those tasks for the good of socio-economic development. This was the foundation of the third mission of a

university: contributing to the community through a range of activities like patenting and licensing.

Institutional identity influences the selection of strategic objectives and how organizational goals are executed and achieved. An institution with an identity that is market-focused, or entrepreneurial, is probably more inclined to value continuous process improvement initiatives that have an ongoing focus on eliminating waste. An entrepreneurial strategic objective or mindset within a structure that is outwardly focused and embraces risk may help reduce new program lifecycles.

Organizational Culture

In discussing institutional effectiveness and a university's mission, the literature is divided among structural and cultural aspects. Departmental relationships within an organizational structure affect achievements and outcomes. Clan, hierarchy or bureaucracy, market (Ouchi, 1980), and adhocracy (Cameron & Ettington, 1988) are different culture types, each with common values. Clans value change, compromise, and leaders who mentor, whereas bureaucracies have leaders who organize organizational goals and center on stability and regulation (Fugazzotto, 2009). Market-focused organizations and adhocracies are similar in that they are externally focused and rely on entrepreneurial leaders to drive organizational innovation. Clan cultures are less competitive than other cultures. Cameron (1985) reported that the clan culture was the most prevalent within a sample of 4-year public and private colleges and universities.

Entrepreneurial universities react responsively to market shifts because they are built upon a flexible structure and a cultural environment that embraces change. Levine (1980) reported that academic institutions are deliberately structured to resist change. Weick (1995)

observed that when universities undertake change, they often make small adjustments easily but struggle with dispersing large-scale change throughout the entire university. Clark's (1998) point of view was that a matrix of academic disciplines and the overall institutional enterprise encourage several kinds of change: grassroots innovation, innovation by persuasion, incremental change, boundary-leaking change, and invisible change. Institutional change is reflected by changes in institutional actions, performance outcomes, shifts in values, assumptions, and approaches to inquiry.

The literature distinguishes between two types of change: change that needs to be sustained and change that is transformational once achieved (Boyce, 2003). Much of the change work in higher education is sustaining rather than transformational, or first-order and double loop (Boyce, 2003). First-order change is gradual, sequenced, and linear (Boyce, 2003). Single-loop learning is different from double-looped learning in that double-loop learning examines assumptions, challenges models, and enacts change based on what is learned:

> It is simple enough when the change needed is detected and corrected within the current institutional framework. Deciding to pay attention to unanswered questions, realizing the current framework is no longer adequate, examining the assuming of the framework, and exploring alternatives are the challenging work of double-loop learning and second-order change. (Boyce, 2003, p. 130)

Institutional culture influences how organizational goals are achieved. All research universities collaborate with their stakeholders in search of innovative opportunities, whether classified as an entrepreneurial university or not (Sam & Sijde, 2014). An institution with a culture that embraces risk and change and places value on innovation is probably more inclined to seek out continuous process improvement initiatives for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Institutions that identify as entrepreneurial employ behavior that assumes risk (Pusser et al., 2005). An organization that can effectively tolerate risk depends on both the culture and the cohesiveness of the people working within the culture. A consumer-centric culture places the customer in the focal point of all activities by providing a superior customer experience, which is the key to the success of today's most innovative companies (Morgan, 2017). Therefore, the new degree program lifecycle, and the shortening thereof, should be approached with a questioning mindset by people who tend to place the goal or consumer first and reduce barriers that impede successful, timely completion.

Organizational Structure

Independence and autonomy make a structure well suited for transformational change. Many degree completion programs in adult professional or continuing education are at the margins of their college or university (Curry, 2012). Levine (1980) found that institutions are deliberately structured to resist change, but Ellis (2012) suggested that transformational change, such as the innovation of adult degree completion programs at traditional higher education institutions can disrupt institutional uniformity. At traditional institutions, nontraditional programs for adults are placed within one of three administrative structures: centralized, distributed, and hybrid (Ellis, 2012). With centralized models, both traditional and nontraditional programs utilize central functions, having one registrar's office, one marketing and enrollment office, and one academic unit per discipline. A distributed model of adult education decentralizes these functions for nontraditional programs, having a separate registrar's office, separate academic unit, and a separate governance structure. Lastly, a hybrid model has a mix of both centralized and distributed functions to serve its adult education program functions (Ellis, 2012).

A centralized model tends to deemphasize the entrepreneurial nature of adult education, whereas a distributed or hybrid structure results in greater flexibility and autonomy.

How adult education programs are structured within a traditional university may affect their ability to enact change or creative innovations that are less incremental, developmental, evolutionary, programmable, or linear. While there are advantages for adult education in having a strong connection to the university, finding a balance that does not entangle the function in protocols that are not designed for change or new opportunities is a challenge.

Both the institutional structure and culture affect organizational or institutional effectiveness. With respect to the new program development lifecycle, an organizational structure that supports innovation and transformational change and is more autonomous and independent from an overseeing body or structure may help reduce the new program lifecycle.

The Influential Power of People

Knowledge Management: The Know What

As individuals contribute to institutional success, their knowledge and influence within a process are critical to examine. Opportunities for shortening the development lifecycle may be achieved through removal of barriers and increased procedural efficiencies, but the cohesiveness of individuals engaging in the processes must also be achieved. Deming believed that corporations should strive for better process efficiency, but it is people who drive processes, not the reverse. A process could be set up to have zero waste, as Deming encouraged for optimal efficiency, but a process is only as effective as the people who are engaged in each step (Braughton, 1999). As administrators navigate the unique political and structural environment of their universities, how they acquire and share knowledge is a vital consideration for leading or supporting strategic initiatives, procedures, or tasks that ensure efficient execution.

Acquiring a competitive advantage is a goal of any profit-seeking organization. The intellectual capital of an organization can certainly be a competitive advantage and should be viewed as an asset by organizational leaders. Knowledge management is the process of converting information into tangible references that have long-lasting significance (Kidwell et al., 2000). There are two theoretical perspectives that are prevalent in the literature about knowledge management. Rossett (1999) and Martensson (2000) focused on the knowledge of people and creating knowledge. Another perspective emphasizes emerging technological solutions or storing knowledge in databases. The two views support the notion that knowledge management helps organizations improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

While information is easily accessed with technology, how one absorbs, organizes, and applies knowledge to decision making is a complex human process not necessarily facilitated by technology. A popular framework (Kidwell et al., 2000) speaks to two types of knowledge, explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is documented and is exchanged to assist with action. It is easily accessible, communicable, and exchangeable (Kidwell et al., 2000). Tacit knowledge is the opposite, as it is experiential and dependent on the context of a situation. It is individual, informal, specific to a culture and context, and difficult to transfer (Kidwell et al., 2000). While both explicit and tacit knowledge are required for effective decision making, it is a challenge for individuals to access available explicit knowledge and interact with the appropriate people connected to the issue at hand at the most optimal time during the process.

HEIs have opportunities to strengthen their knowledge management practices. The application of knowledge management plays a vital role at research universities, especially in contributions to the research process. However, its application and benefits for program, curriculum, or course development is worth further investigation. Comprehensive utilization of

knowledge management procedures and technologies may lead to improved decision making, cost reduction, shortened product lifecycle time, and improved university services (Kidwell et al., 2000). An institutional approach to knowledge management would mean less reliance on individuals' unique institutional knowledge, which impedes organizational agility, adaptability, and responsiveness (Kidwell et al., 2000). Figure 2 describes the applicability of knowledge management practices to curriculum development in higher education.

Figure 2

Knowledge Management Practices to Curriculum Development

Table 2: **Application and Benefits of KM for the Curriculum Development Process**

Knowledge Management Application	Benefits
• Repository of curriculum revision efforts that includes research conducted, effectiveness measures, best practices, lessons learned, and so forth. • Repository of content modularized and arranged to facilitate interdisciplinary curriculum design and development. • Portal of information related to teaching and learning with technology, including faculty development opportunities, outcomes tracking, lessons learned, best practices, technology overviews, and so forth. • "Hubs" of information in each disciplinary area, including updated materials, recent publications, applicable research, and so forth. • Repository of pedagogy and assessment techniques, including best practices, outcomes tracking, faculty development opportunities, and research. • Repository of analyzed student evaluations updated each semester for lessons learned and best practices for all faculty. • Portal for new faculty with guides for developing curriculum, working with senior faculty, establishing effective teaching styles, advising do's and don'ts, supervising PhD students, and so forth. • Repository of corporate relationships to identify curriculum design advisory task forces, guest speakers, adjuncts, case study sites, and so forth.	• Enhanced quality of curriculum and programs by identifying and leveraging best practices and monitoring outcomes. • Improved speed of curriculum revision and updating. • Enhanced faculty development efforts, especially for new faculty. • Improved administrative services related to teaching and learning with technology. • Improved responsiveness by monitoring and incorporating lessons learned from the experiences of colleagues, student evaluations, and corporate or other constituent input. • Interdisciplinary curriculum design and development facilitated by navigating across departmental boundaries.

Note. Taken from Kidwell et al. (2000, p. 32).

Because of the decentralized organizational structure and clan culture at many higher education institutions, the knowledge gained by administrators is often more tacit than explicit. Institutional knowledge of unique individuals can restrict the flexibility and responsiveness of

any organization (Kidwell et al., 2000). Administrators often must rely on those who have previously completed the task to gain insight into how a process or task should be repeated. Kidwell et al. (2000) explain that this behavior is a result of an organizational culture that is historically individualistic. However, as the higher education culture shifts towards a more consumer-centric culture, less reliance on individuals and a greater reliance on explicit knowledge is key to greater efficiency and effectiveness. According to Deming's principles and Maguad's (2007) interpretation of how waste can appear in higher education, knowledge acquisition and management is a crucial aspect of individual performance within the university system.

Power and Influence: The Know Who

While literature explains that knowledge management can improve institutional knowledge sharing, individual interactions and connections with stakeholders are crucial to project execution. Furthermore, the tactics that a school, department, or administrator use within a process or procedure to improve organizational interests have political considerations.

The characteristics of 21st century students are more diverse than ever in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and disability (Sandoval-Lucero, 2014). The nontraditional student population is growing, yet most of American higher education focuses on the younger student population. Many institutions have developed adult degree completion programs and professional graduate programs, through their schools of continuing studies or extension schools, to meet the needs of this growing population who typically fall outside of its central mission. However, these continuing education or extension schools and the administrators who work within them are considered to be on the margins of the academy, similar to women's, ethnic, or gender studies departments. Adult degree program

administrators often navigate between historical traditions and the institution's core mission; they also face the fiscal concern of market pressures (Watkins & Tisdell, 2006). Power and influence, therefore, are vital considerations related to reduced product development cycle time.

There is abundant literature on power and influence. The most relevant for improving the product development lifecycle and eliminating waste from the viewpoint of continuing education within a large, complex institution is the literature that addresses how power relations are negotiated differently by those operating on the margins and those operating closer to the university's central functions. Program administrators are tasked with both budgetary considerations and departmental goals along with meeting overarching mission and vision objectives from central authorities. This is a challenging task when administrators work in the margins (Watkins & Tisdell, 2006). Given that continuing education schools or departments are often lucrative for their universities, more traditional university stakeholders question the quality and academic rigor of their programming. Furthermore, university administrators who oversee adult education are constantly negotiating power and interest in their degree programs, especially in programs delivered online, because distance education challenges the traditional face-to-face teaching method in higher education.

Power, in all its different types, is a complex interaction between individuals; domination is not necessarily the goal. Cervero and Wilson (1994) wrote of the relational negotiation of power and interest. As it relates to adult degree program administrators, power comes with collaboration. Power is relational, social, and political work (Watkins & Tisdell, 2006). Power is a process that is always being negotiated. To exert influence, individuals draw upon power sources, such as expert, legitimate, reward, or coercive (Raven, 2008). Expert power is how an individual manifests the power to get things done. Legitimate power is based on knowledge or

authority. Reward power is based on a person's control over resources and how that influences others' desires for those resources. Lastly, coercive power is the ability to impact resources and outcomes.

Cervero and Wilson's model, unlike many other models, recognizes that the politics of a context is not just noise. Successful negotiation of influence is essential to program planning. *Knowing what* and *knowing who* are two critical skillsets for administrators leading new program launches in higher education. The new program development cycle can be slowed down if knowledge of the process or individuals' responsibility within the process is not transparent. For example, navigating what information is required by each individual in the process, and knowing who is required for buy-in or approval is often a learned experience. These factors negatively influence both the timeline and the overall success of a new program lifecycle. With increased transparency and a formalized process that focuses on eliminating non-value-added activities, it is very likely that the process would become shorter.

Gap in Literature

A prolonged process or decision making timeline impedes responsiveness to consumer needs. The program approval process plays a critically important role in the operation of an institution, but there is a lack of scholarly research on how to accelerate the approval process cycle. Lake's (2003) study on reducing course or program approval time while retaining quality at Edinboro University resulted in 14 recommendations to the university president and its executive team. However, Lake (2003) mentioned a lack of comparative cycle time data or benchmark data from other higher education institutions. The literature since then has not added clarity about how many other higher education institutions have measured program approval cycle time, even though it is an important measurement.

Another gap in scholarly literature is a comparison of institutional procedures. Because there is a lack of comprehensive data on the similarities and differences among institutional approval processes, there is a lack of literature or discussion about the factors that constrain and contribute to approval cycle time.

The purpose of this study is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences in procedural requirements for launching new degree programs at R1 or R2 public or private 4-year institutions nationwide. Furthermore, it will bring cycle time data to the forefront by examining and exploring how continuing education administrators may eliminate waste within their institution's approval processes. This qualitative study will gather information related to continuing education leaders' organizational structures, approval processes, cycle time, obstacles, and pain points. This study intends to formalize best practice frameworks around high-performing cultures, efficient approval processes, and a reduced launch cycle time. For today's career-oriented educational offerings, speed and efficiency to market are critical factors to ensure high-quality, relevant adult education in an overall competitive higher education landscape.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The new degree program approval process plays a critical role in the operation of an institution, yet, there is limited scholarly research about the institutional factors that constrain and contribute to the approval cycle time. If the lived experience of university administrators within the process was better understood, would opportunities to eliminate waste from the various procedures unveil themselves? The purpose of this phenomenological study was to foreground the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that CE administrators have regarding their university's new degree program approval cycle time. The CE administrators' journey through the new degree program or product lifecycle is defined as their experiences with the organizational, cultural, and process factors that they encounter as they lead or take part in the process. This chapter introduces the research methodology for this phenomenological study. A phenomenological approach provides a way to highlight the factors that constrict and contribute to an approval cycle process time. The other primary components of this chapter are the applicability of a phenomenological approach, the research plan, research participants, procedures, analysis method, and ethical concerns.

Research Questions

This study developed a deeper understanding of CE administrators' experiences with their university's new degree program approval cycle through the following questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of continuing education administrators with their university's new degree program approval cycle?

RQ2: What organizational, cultural, or process factors have influenced or affected continuing education administrators' experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time?

RQ3: How do continuing education administrators who lead or take part in the degree program approval lifecycle feel and think about their university's process and its cycle time?

Methodology Selected

Qualitative research is interpretive research that focuses on words and narratives detailed through participant interactions. In contrast to a quantitative methodological approach that seeks to explain phenomena by using statistical analysis, qualitative research design looks at the more significant, broader picture to understand meaning over a long period. Questions that ask 'what,' 'how' and 'why' are hallmark to qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research questions that focus on amount, intensity, or frequency (Yilmaz, 2013). The data come from participant interview responses and their unique narrative of their personal experience, which may include quotations from open-ended questions; detailed descriptions of the situation; and interview responses about experiences, attitudes, and beliefs (Patton, 2012).

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed the defining features of five qualitative approaches to inquiry: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study research. Each methodology stems from an associated philosophical belief about the nature of reality, how it is known, and how individuals' values are honored or expressed. The philosophical beliefs, or interpretive frameworks, include postpositivism, social constructivism, transformativism/postmodernism, and pragmatism (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research paradigms and frameworks are not meant to present rigid boundaries (Sipe & Constable, 1996). The two interpretive frameworks that most closely align with this research study are social constructivism and pragmatism. Social constructivism recognizes that participants' experiences and environment shape their situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which

was a critical consideration for the study because it was unlikely that each participant's situation would be the same. While the study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences, the researcher also aspired that the findings would positively impact the field of CE. A pragmatic approach is concerned with the application of what is useful and what works, with the intent of practical application (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Figure 3

Four Contemporary Research Paradigms

	POSITIVIST	*Interpretivist*	**Critical Theory**	Deconstructivist
If this research paradigm were a color, it would be:	**blue** (cool, "scientific," objective)	**green** (natural, symbolic of organic growth	**red** (dynamic, action-oriented)	**black** (absence or denial of color)

Note. Adapted from Sipe and Constable (1996, p. 156-157).

As shown in Figure 3, Sipe and Constable (1996) used colors to describe the research paradigms of positivist (blue—cool or objective), interpretivist (green—natural or organic growth), critical theory (red—dynamic or action-oriented), and deconstructivist (black—the absence of color). This study lies between green and red. There is a deep desire to learn from the participants what, how, and why continuing education should take action. The findings could strengthen the efforts of CE and university effectiveness through improving a vital university process: the new degree program approval cycle time.

My decision tree for choosing the type of qualitative design for this study began with an analysis of the purpose statement and the research questions. While I considered a case study

approach, which identifies a specific case to be described and analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018), it did not fully satisfy my desire to focus on the lived experiences of university administrators at multiple institutions. Phenomenological research aims to understand the essence of the lived experience of a group of people surrounding a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). The goal of a phenomenological study is to understand what a group of people experience and how they experience it (Moustakas, 1994). As individuals describe their involvement or participation in a shared experience, their individual beliefs and attitudes about the phenomenon emerge. These are shaped by consciousness, language, and cognitive and noncognitive sensibilities (van Manen & Adams, 2010).

There are various ways to understand a lived experience. Edmund Husserl introduced the method of reduction and constitution of meaning by eliminating the influence of any external factors (Husserl, 1931/1967). The aforementioned method is also referred to as epistemological or transcendental phenomenology. Husserl introduced two procedures, bracketing and epoche, used to achieve a state of unbiased understanding (van Manen & Adams, 2010). *Bracketing* is the researcher removing their beliefs from the study, and *epoche* requires the researcher to simply reflect on the lived experience, not on the meaning of the phenomenon being studied. Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, did not believe a researcher could suspend preconceived notions about a phenomenon. Heidegger focused on existence, and how the being of things shows itself to us, which is known as an existential case study approach (van Manen & Adams, 2010).

Amedeo Giorgi and Clark Moustakas led the emergence of modern phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Giorgi believed it was necessary to be reflective and clear about methodological approaches. Moustakas sought to identify the processes and qualities that help

researchers holistically explore, collect, and interpret data (Kenny, 2012). Moustakas felt the research question would deeply touch the researcher, having an emotional effect that could not be ignored in the research process. Moustakas's heuristic method highlights that inquiry follow a procedure of profound understanding and focus on describing the participants' experiences (Kenny, 2012). Max van Manen approached phenomenological research as oriented on lived experiences and focused on the interplay or interpretive process where the researcher may make different meanings from the described experiences.

The phenomenological approach in this study was transcendental (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental approach includes identifying a phenomenon to study, removing bias through bracketing and epoche, and collecting data from several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) outlined three core processes that facilitate knowledge derivation in transcendental phenomenology: epoche, reduction, and imaginative variation. *Epoche* is the researcher's process of setting aside preconceived notions, judgment, conception, or bias about the phenomenon being studied. *Reduction* involves describing participants' experiences through not only what the researcher observes, but via an experiential context through textual qualities, such as hot and cold, high and low, or angry and calm. Imaginative variation seeks to draw possible meaning through imagination, or different frames or factors that may account for an individual's experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) took a more structured approach to data analysis than van Manen (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas's approach requires bracketing, horizontalization (treating every statement as equal), and analyzing the data for noteworthy phrases, meanings, and theme clustering. van Manen's less structured approach is used when

research questions are ambiguous and the researcher seeks a more in-depth understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research seeks to interpret meaning from the data related to the overarching or central question posed in the research study. A phenomenological study, through Moustakas's phenomenological approach, centers on two questions: (a) what have individuals experienced in terms of the phenomenon? and (b) what situations have influenced or affected their experience in the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018)? The qualitative methodology selected for this study is phenomenology, which allows for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of university administrators as they lead or take part in their university's new degree program or product lifecycle.

Researcher Role

As an experienced professional in higher education with the ability to influence strategy and decision making within my school of professional studies, I naturally draw upon my background and experience as a cautious risk taker who seeks betterment for all stakeholders. Most of my professional experience in higher education relates to continuous improvement: how to improve instructor effectiveness; how to drive academic quality improvement efforts; and how to discover, design, and launch academic programs. To be successful in continuous improvement endeavors, one must collaborate with team members or partners who have an equal drive to improve the higher education ecosystem. Organizational cultures that strive for excellence, push boundaries, and take risks can meet the changing needs of students. My bias, as an experienced professional in higher education, is that administrators generally accept the procedural boundaries or processes that are present in the higher education ecosystem. As HEI administrators increasingly view students as consumers of the education they create and offer,

administrators and existing processes or procedures frequently need to adapt, pivot, and become less rigid so they can swiftly adjust to a changing external landscape. The ultimate goal of this research study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

Because I have my own lived experience with the study topic, epoche had to always be at the top of my mind, and I had to make a constant effort to reduce judgment or bias. I bracketed my knowledge and experience with new degree program approval processes to help minimize my influence on the research process. I critically reflected upon my assumptions and beliefs about the study's phenomena. Writing down my perspectives in advance of data collection helped me become more attentive to subtle prejudices (Cohen et al., 2000). I also kept a journal during the study, an exercise of continuous reflection, that contains additional thoughts on issues uncovered during bracketing (Cohen et al., 2000). I reread my observations throughout the study's phases to ensure rigorous inquiry in the study. Implementing these techniques to reduce bias helped me ensure that the study's findings reflect its participants and their lived experiences.

Study Participants

The study's participants were primarily, but not exclusively, CE leaders at universities that are members of the UPCEA. UPCEA, founded in 1915, serves its members—leading public and private colleges—with conferences, professional networking, publications, and benchmarking information (UPCEA, n.d.). Participants came from a mix of R1 or R2 public or private institutions nationwide, and all participants had first-hand experience with their institution's new degree program approval process. R1 and R2 institutions were the selected Carnegie categories as CE administrators were more likely to have a shared experience in serving industry and the adult student population while navigating a university's traditional culture and organizational structure.

Sampling, Criteria, and Sample Size

Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting a small group from a larger population that can best inform the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a phenomenological study, participants must have experienced the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, criterion sampling was an appropriate strategy for this study. Criterion sampling narrows the broader population by requiring a basic threshold for participants to meet (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although the ages, gender, and work experience of the participants were wide-ranging, the two required criteria were that the participants were currently working in CE at their institutions and that launching new degree academic programs was central to their job responsibilities.

As a member of UPCEA, I accessed a list of potential participants through UPCEA's member portal. I identified a short list of 20 possible participants through personal and professional knowledge of their job responsibilities. The participants were verified via a web conferencing platform, Zoom, by Jim Fong, UPCEA's chief research officer and director of its Center for Research and Strategy. By the nature of Mr. Fong's job responsibilities at UPCEA, he was uniquely positioned and willing to review or add to the short list of potential participants with me to ensure that the criterion sampling strategy was credible. The list was narrowed down to 15 participants, because the study's sample size was determined to be between eight and 15 participants. It was anticipated that data saturation would occur as the number of participants engaged neared 15 people.

The study's participants were primarily drawn from CE leaders that are members of UPCEA, but UPCEA membership was not a criterion for study participation. I allowed for snowball sampling as a recruitment technique in the interview protocol. In snowball sampling, the researcher asks research participants to identify additional research participants (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). In the case of study participant referrals, prospective participants were not always a member of UPCEA.

Procedures

Before beginning data collection, I sought and obtained study design approval from the National Louis University (NLU) Institutional Research Review Board (IRB). An IRB ensures that a research study's design follows the appropriate guidelines for conducting ethical research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The review process involved a narrative that detailed the purpose of the study, the role of the study participants, and the processes and procedures for data collection (NLU, n.d.). Participant risk and the details on how participants would be solicited to participate in the study were described. Lastly, the procedures for obtaining participant informed consent were explained in the application for IRB review. Once the application was reviewed and approved by IRB, data collection began.

After receiving IRB approval, and utilizing the verified participants and contact information agreed upon with Mr. Fong, participant solicitation occurred through email. The invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A) asked participants to volunteer in support of my doctoral degree. The invitation to participate in the study detailed the study's focus and significance. It also stated the date of IRB approval. Upon reply, participants received and were prompted to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B), which acknowledged their agreement to participate in the study. The informed consent form articulated the purpose of the study and what participation in the study would include. It also detailed that participant participation was voluntary and that the data collected would be anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

Data Collection

The study used an interviewing method, where both the interviewer and the interview questions are the instrumentation used (Appendix C). The interviews were conducted via Zoom and were both audio and video recorded. The participant interviews took place in a single session for approximately 1 hour, and the transcriptions were processed through an online audio-to-text automatic transcription service.

The interviews began with open-ended questions about the participant's journey into the field of CE and personal reflections on their recent experiences with the new degree program approval process. The questions followed focused on experiences with organizational, cultural, or process factors that may have affected their navigation through the process. Concluding questions were centered on the degree program approval process cycle time, its efficacy, and possible continuous improvement opportunities. Field notes were used to capture my spontaneous reflections during and after the interviews. Field notes included thoughts and concerns related to the study, reflections on the interview process, and initial ideas on emerging themes. I suggested that interviews take place outside the participant's workplace to ensure a relaxed environment where participants could express their viewpoints free from distraction (Turner, 2010).

Researchers not only have an ethical obligation to be accurate, unbiased, and transparent with participants and study findings, but they must also protect the confidentiality and anonymity of each participant's contributions. Participant identity needs protection at all stages of the research, from participant selection through data collection, analysis, and publishing (Crewell & Poth, 2018). In data analysis, the process of coding minimizes harm to the participants, as does the use of pseudonyms, which I employed for both participant and university protection. A

pseudonym (a false name) is commonly used in qualitative research to conceal a participant's identity. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names in this study so that participants and universities were less identifiable to readers.

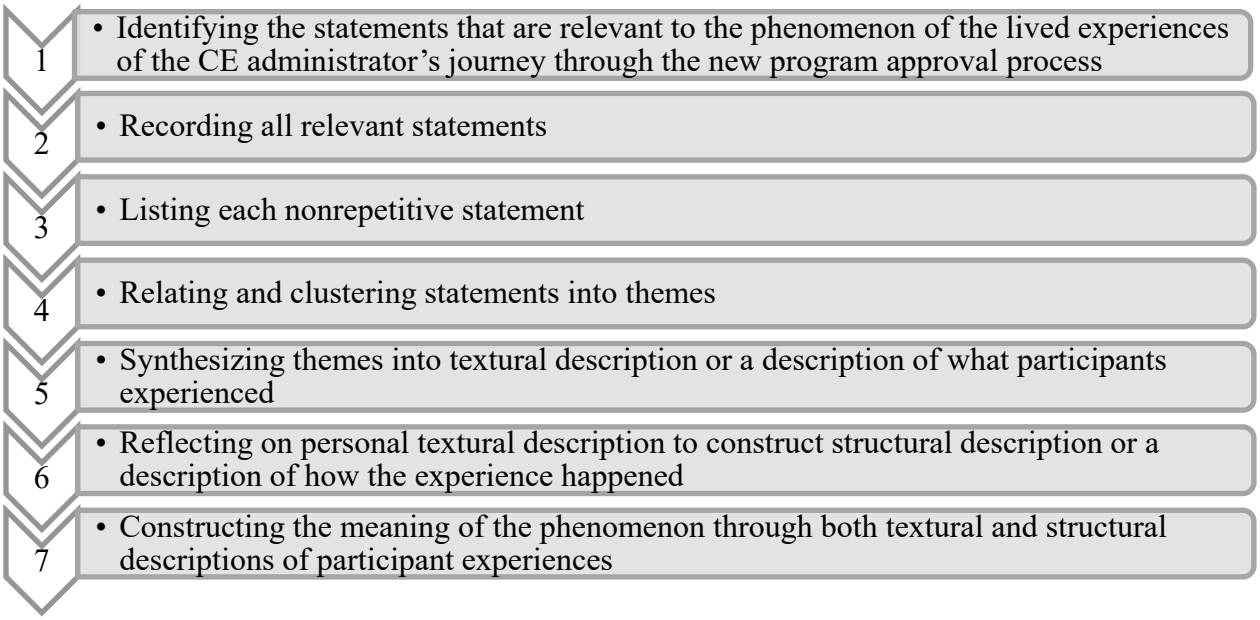
Participant anonymity and confidentiality are critical ethical principles in any research study, and care in how participant data is protected during a study is of equal consideration. Only I had access to participant data, and it was stored on a secure laptop. The data collected (recordings, transcripts, field notes) will be held for 3 years, after which it will be destroyed to ensure the confidentiality of the research participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of organizing the data for analysis, reducing the data into themes, and representing the data through visuals or discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I analyzed transcripts and field notes multiple times to internalize the new ideas collected. Patterns such as similarities, differences, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation were considered and identified through my analysis (Saldaña, 2013). Building on the data collected from the interview questions, a modification of the Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen (SCK) analysis technique was used to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas's approach requires bracketing; horizontalization (treating every statement as equal); and analyzing the data for noteworthy phrases, meanings, and theme clustering. The SCK method (Figure 4) includes a seven-step process.

Figure 4

Modification of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) Method



Note. Adapted from Moustakas (1994, p. 121-122).

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

A researcher's ability to demonstrate quality and rigor is essential for the validity of the findings. Maxwell (2013) argued that there are two validity threats to qualitative research: bias and reactivity. While eliminating both is unrealistic in qualitative research, their potential influence should be recognized and understood. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that qualitative researchers use at least two of nine validation strategies to ensure trustworthiness. I used member checking as the primary validation strategy. After participant interviews, I emailed the interview transcript with a request to review for accuracy. I also asked participants to member check, by soliciting their views on the credibility of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and the themes of the study. After I completed data analysis and drew initial interpretations of

the data, I emailed the preliminary findings for comment, clarity, or request for further theme development. Returning study findings to participants to ensure correctness and resonance further assured the quality of this qualitative study.

I also used thick description, an interview protocol, coding/recoding, and reflexivity as other methods to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Appendix D). Anfara et al. (2002) underscored the importance of an audit trail to strengthen the dependability and reliability of research. I analyzed data from the interview questions that directly related to the research question (see Appendix E).

Possible Delimiters

The participants' views on the research question may not be fully representative of all program administrators in the field of continuing education, which is a hallmark of phenomenological research. Additionally, the participants' views may not be fully representative of non-R1 and R2 CE administrators. Furthermore, the data collected for the research study were limited to an interview, with no field observation. Field observation of the participants and the process in action was desired, but it was unachievable due to university constraints and the short-term nature of this research study. Lastly, while the data gathered were insightful to me, the findings may not be broadly transferable without additional data collection. This study intended to raise attention and highlight the importance of the topic to the academic community, with the hope of unveiling findings that can inform CE administrators. It is undetermined whether findings will indeed be actionable.

Chapter Summary

Both continuous improvement of existing programs and new program initiatives are vital elements of quality assurance in higher education operations. Yet, there is limited scholarly

research on the effectiveness of the institutional degree approval processes that administrators use as they strive to improve their institutional programming. The purpose of this study was to foreground the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that CE administrators have regarding their university's new degree program approval cycle time. The qualitative methodology selected for this study was phenomenology, which allows for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of university administrators as they lead or take part in their university's new degree program or product lifecycle. Data were collected from participants who were working in CE at their institutions, for whom a central job responsibility was launching new degree academic programs. Participant interviews were the primary means of data collection. The data were analyzed and coded in a way that protected the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of continuing education administrators with their university's new degree program approval cycle?

RQ2: What organizational, cultural, or process factors have influenced or affected continuing education administrators' experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time?

RQ3: How do continuing education administrators who lead or take part in the degree program approval lifecycle feel and think about their university's process and its cycle time?

Key findings were drawn from patterns within the data collected. My hope was that if the lived experience of university administrators within the degree approval process were understood at a deeper level, opportunities to eliminate waste within the various processes would unveil themselves, leading to improved institutional effectiveness.

Chapter 4: Findings

This qualitative study explored continuing education administrators' lived experience with their university's new degree program approval process. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to foreground the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of CE administrators regarding their university's new degree program approval process and its cycle time. During data collection, the researcher gathered information related to university and CE organizational structures, the general steps for new degree program approval, an estimated approval process cycle time, and the obstacles CE administrators encounter as they lead or participate in the process.

Deming's theoretical framework grounded this study, and the literature review examined the institutional factors that influence a prolonged new degree program or product lifecycle. This study's findings lead to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence or affect CE administrators' lived experience with their university's new program approval cycle, which addresses a gap in scholarly research about institutional factors contributing to and constraining the approval cycle time.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the study participants, followed by a presentation of the research findings, organized by themes and subthemes and supported by participant interviews. It concludes with a restatement of the research questions and summarizes each research question's findings, drawn from the themes and subthemes. The study's findings give insight into how CE administrators use multiple strategies and techniques to effectively shepherd new degree programs through required approval steps as quickly as the established process plausibly allowed.

Study Participants

As a member of the University Professional and Continuing Education Association, I accessed a list of potential study participants through UPCEA's member portal. Although UPCEA's institutional membership includes over 300 institutions, a significant majority of member institutions are classified as R1 or R2 (UPCEA, n.d.). I identified a shortlist of possible study participants at 20 R1 and R2 private and public institutions through personal and professional knowledge of their job responsibilities. The participant shortlist was verified by Jim Fong, UPCEA's chief research officer and director of its Center for Research and Strategy, to ensure that the criterion sampling strategy was credible. I invited 15 verified individuals to participate in the study, and 12 accepted my invitation. The study's findings are representative of 12 participants and 10 R1 or R2 institutions.

The participants in this study were CE administrators from R1 or R2 public or private institutions nationwide. All 12 participants had first-hand experience with their institution's new degree program approval process, and launching new academic programs was central to their job responsibilities. Pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter to conceal participant identity and protect their anonymity. Tables 1 and 2 provide a breakdown of the participant and institutional profiles in this study.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Participant total	Participant demographics	Prior professional experience in new program or product development	Participant pseudonym
12	10 female 2 male	10 had prior experience 2 had no prior experience	Participant 1: Kelsey Participant 2: Robin Participant 3: Samantha Participant 4: Kathy Participant 5: Isabella Participant 6: Cindy Participant 7: Karen Participant 8: Glenn Participant 9: Margaret Participant 10: Sandra Participant 11: Angela Participant 12: Richard

Table 2

Institutional Profile

Institution total	Carnegie Classification breakdown	Institutional type breakdown	CE structure within institution as described by participants
10	9 R1 1 R2	5 private 5 public	6 hybrid 4 centralized

Findings

I examined transcripts of 12 CE administrators' experiences and perceptions of their university's new degree program approval process and cycle time. The modified SCK method of data analysis, as described in Chapter 3, was used to obtain the overarching participant sentiment about the phenomenon. Three themes with various subthemes were derived from the collected data. These are found in Table 3, along with the number of participants who made statements

related to each theme and subtheme. In this section, each theme's description begins with a brief summary and is supported by direct participant quotes.

Table 3

Themes, Subthemes, and Participant Count

Themes and subthemes	Participant count
Theme 1: Cycle time varies	12
Subtheme: Systems management matters	6
Theme 2: Many steps with many voices	12
Subtheme: Relationships matter	12
Subtheme: Leadership matters	12
Subtheme: Faculty decision maker behavior matters	9
Theme 3: Finance and resources matter	10

Cycle Time Varies

The approval cycle time varied among the institutions from 6 months to 3 years. CE administrators experiencing a short cycle time felt the length was appropriate, unlike those who experienced longer cycle times. Isabella said:

> [The cycle time takes] 6 to 9 months. I think the timeline is…reasonable. I think because we've learned how to move through it efficiently. I think if we had to move quicker, we would, but that would be artificial…[it] would just be to move quicker.

Margaret shared her satisfaction with the estimated 1-year timeline at her institution, stating:

> It takes a year…. I honestly think the process works fairly well. I think a year is excellent. I think that's a respectable amount of time to bring a new idea forward…[and] if you

> asked our colleagues across the university, I think there are very few of them that would take only a year.

Administrators experiencing a longer approval cycle time highlighted lost time because of the academic calendar, a focus on workarounds, and a frustrating working environment. Samantha shared:

> There's the long process that takes about a year and a half…. One of the pain points is that we are on a 12-month schedule and most of the academic units are on a 9- or 10-month schedule…. It doesn't allow for a very regular kind of pattern through the year because you always have that big summer break where things…come to a grinding halt.

Kelsey said:

> The process takes up to 2 years, which is difficult, at best. One way that we work with the system is we offer many individual flexible access online courses…. And it opens the door…. That's the only way we can get around it, but it does take 2 years. And, oftentimes, they miss the mark.

Karen said:

> It can be a 2-year process…. I learned to really celebrate myself in those little moments to find that gratification because there is no instant gratification. There is little gratification, and the job…is so incremental and so slow.

As participants described their cycle time, they noted process evolution and improvement as encouraging and moving in a positive direction. Angela shared how two noticeable changes in the approval process cut the timeline in half. Angela said:

> Luckily, it has become much less complicated than it used to be. It used to be that [we had to wait for] our board of trustees…to sign off on every single degree approval before

> we could actually launch it. It was painful. Now they…do…an electronic sort of package approval…. It's much more informal than it used to be. Also, council used to require two reads…and we changed that…. So that cuts that time in half.

This theme emphasizes that the cycle time varied at each institution from 6 months to 2 years or more. Administrators experiencing a short cycle time feel the length is appropriate, in contrast to those experiencing longer cycle times. As the process became longer, CE administrators noted more consequences, such as missed market opportunities, efforts with programmatic workarounds, and a frustrating work environment.

Systems Management Matters

The approval process tracking systems, or lack thereof at some universities, make it difficult to track the approval process or keep it transparent. This impacts the cycle time. Kelsey noted:

> There is no tracking process…. There isn't a system that goes, X person just signed off and sent it to Y, Y signs off and sends it to her department head who sends it to the associate dean…. It's like, where is it right now?

Angela's university had an approval process tracking system in place, but she said it was antiquated and inadequate for contemporary needs. This slowed down the approval cycle time or, more tragically, dissuaded the submission of new degree program proposals. She said:

> We have to submit everything into an actual program management system, and it's not ideal. The problem is that it was allegedly custom made so many years ago that it isn't commensurate with our current processes…and we…have to do a lot of fitting square pegs in round holes in terms of the templated questions to make sure that we're actually getting all the information in there that we require that the university requires. It also

> doesn't do a great job with tracking, It's not user-friendly…and it does not report out. So once you put information in there, it just goes into the ether.

On the contrary, an up-to-date, modern management system can improve a CE leader's experience with the new program approval process by adding transparency. Samantha remarked:

> We have a new system…and there's actually 26 steps to a new program. You could kind of see which step it's at and…where things get stuck. Anyone can log in and see where it's at, see the comments that have been made. It's a relatively new system…and it's very clear what step you're at. It's a little more linear, in some ways, which…slows things down, but it also makes things a little clearer.

This subtheme raises awareness about the approval process tracking systems. Their absence at some universities made it difficult to track the approval process or keep it transparent. A re-evaluation of the adaptability, currency, and useability of the centralized system that houses, tracks, and reports on new programs' approval steps may decrease frustration and reduce the cycle time.

Many Steps With Many Voices

While the number of approval layers described by participants at their institutions differed, public institutions had more approval steps than private institutions. Generally, CE administrators from private institutions noted fewer than 10 approval steps, while participants from public institutions noted more than 20. All participants indicated that new degree program proposals go through various review levels by university stakeholders, who raise considerations and critiques. Samantha spoke about the complexity and long duration of the approval process:

> There's so many steps along the way.… It's a four-page flow chart. It's crazy. It's…long and there are many different stakeholders and approval steps along the way. Some of the

> steps are approval steps and some of the steps are information items where people get to give feedback. We're constantly having to navigate…. We've got this feedback, but is that something we need to respond to? Or, is that something we want to respond to?

CE leaders also emphasized that significant effort goes into building strong market-informed proposals to prove viability and demonstrating due diligence to proactively address various stakeholder questions. Angela described how she pre-empts anticipated critiques:

> I always want to make sure that our proposals are fully buttoned up. It's always my goal to never be sent away because people from council has concerns or questions. That's one of the things that…I work really closely on…just making sure that our proposals are really thorough and robust and complete…. I do think…that we excel at that compared to some of the other units.

Nonetheless, CE leaders found the approval process frustrating because of the lengthy duration attributed to multiple steps and often resistant voices. Reflecting on his time as a CE administrator, Richard shared how the process can negatively affect team morale:

> Because we've run into so many problems with the approval process and the time, I think [about] the team morale…. When I look at the effort that went into the latest proposal and how much time the team spent on it and doing all of the research and getting all of the faculty letters, and then seeing their shoulders slump when we get that answer [no] or we get questions that kind of demonstrate, did they really even read the proposal? That's extremely difficult.

Relationships Matter

CE leaders noted the myriad steps and voices in the new degree program approval process. As described by CE administrators, successfully navigating the process depends on

individual champions who socialize and politic a new degree program idea through existing or new relationships to ensure common ground and reach a satisfying outcome. CE administrators emphasized the need for faculty champions who are motivated and passionate about helping drive a program successfully through the process. Karen noted:

> You've got to have a [faculty] champion. If you don't have a champion, it will never happen. And it needs a champion who is, I don't want to say altruistic, but has different motivation than…making money or launching a program for programmatic sake. Usually, they see an industry need or a student need and they really want to meet that.

The willingness and ability of senior leader champions to build and manage relationships across the university helps gain trust and buy-in as CE leaders seek new program approval. Cindy described her school's commitment to relationship building by sharing:

> Our dean is the person who started this, but I think all of us…have done a lot to establish relationships across the university. So that's really important to all of us and I think that's critical to us being able to move [new programs] forward.

Kathy shared an anecdote about how her school's senior leaders' commitment to relationship management built tremendous campus support for a new degree, which positively impacted her experience with the approval cycle: "We set up a whole series of conversations with different departments. There were multiple meetings…. The dean and other staff of the college met with every single department, so they really scheduled something like 50 or 55 meetings."

This subtheme emphasizes that positive and productive university relationships are crucial to a CE administrator's journey through the new degree program approval process. CE leaders leverage champions to build trust, respect, and collaborative engagement. Furthermore,

CE leaders recognize the continual importance of informing, educating, and often re-educating university relationships about CE's primary mission. Frequent touch points are equally crucial for addressing any perceptions or misconceptions about the field of continuing and professional studies.

Leadership Matters

The level of support and engagement from the senior administrative leadership in the approval process cycle affected the CE administrators' lived experience with leading the process. Kelsey, Kathy, and Cindy spoke about senior leaders who recognized that the landscape of higher education is shifting and that visionary action is critical to realizing change. Kelsey said:

> It's all about good leadership, great leadership, and providing the opportunity for visionary leaders to be able to use their skills and work towards finding those solutions that could be…. That's one of the uniqueness of our chancellor and our new strategic plan is they're realizing, nothing is same old, same old…. The vice provost is exceptionally good at what he does.

Kathy said:

> We have a very entrepreneurial dean, which is a very unusual situation to be in. I mean we're lucky…. We [also] had a dean who understood how to…manage up and how to work with the provost and the president…. The provost was so on board with this, he was giving speeches about what a great proposal it was.

Cindy said:

> I think the hard part is we know how lucky we are and that it is due to this great confluence of factors with an amazing dean, an amazing president, and amazing provost and CFO. And it's hard to advise whoever on how to re-create that.

CE administrators sought out other great leaders who had a similar determination and drive to keep motivated. Robin shared, "I think I'm just very driven, and I want to get things done. And I seek out people who are similarly motivated…. We just like to get things moving along…that desire to do it…and [similarly] inspired to do it."

If there is a lack of great leadership, Karen noted, the result is a missing sense of urgency and priority. This had affected her experience with driving new degree program approvals:

> There's not necessarily a shared sense of urgency or a shared sense of desire…. I wish everybody else was as invested as I was…[and] have the same drive and determination to get these things done. There doesn't feel like there's a shared urgency from any of the players.

This subtheme punctuates that great leadership and engagement from administrative leaders during the approval process cycle can positively or negatively affect administrators' lived experience leading the process. CE administrators want their senior leaders to help create a sense of shared urgency and shared goals with the stakeholders involved in the process, including acknowledging the changes affecting higher education and a greater understanding of CE's role in achieving university missions. Senior leaders can help set the stage for the goals to be achieved. CE administrators shared that deans, provosts, or chancellors who strongly support the CE mission and market-oriented programming help create a culture of entrepreneurialism and market orientation.

Faculty Decision Maker Behavior Matters

The powerful role of decision-making faculty and their behavior within the governance structure impacted the administrators' lived experience and the cycle-time duration. Karen respectfully shared her frustrations with faculty who overcontribute to a program review, stating:

> Each one of them is like, well, I have to say something, I have to have input on this, when really that's not their role. Their role is to see if there's any major impacts that we missed, but instead, we get all this feedback that we have to respond to that can take months.

Glenn also politely spoke about faculty role and responsibility confusion, noting that a wider scope outside of program review can delay the cycle time:

> I may get invited to faculty governance meeting. It's kind of like going to the woodshed, and I may be asked a bunch of questions, half of which relate to the program we're going to try to get approved, the other half or maybe other issues they have with us [continuing education]…. There's a lot of that baggage that tends to impede or slow down the process.

Not only has a widening of faculty roles and responsibilities been observed by CE administrators, but they also noted that faculty decision making can skew away from being data driven, making it an unpredictable variable. Kathy shared an observation, saying:

> We run into problems just because we may have faculty who have developed their whole careers on their careful use and analysis of evidence suddenly are much enamored of anecdotal evidence that is therefore suggesting that billions of students are going to come pouring in through the gates for their very niche-y idea for a masters program, you know?

Another CE leader, Kelsey, said:

> There can be times when it goes slightly more reasonably quickly because everybody knows and understands the subject area, and the professor or the department head who is really trying to move this through. There aren't great debates, but I know of programs

> that they go back and they are picky, and they are owny about the content because I really don't like that professor and I don't really think he knows what he's doing.

Last, a few faculty decision makers' influential power on the process was noted as troublesome for the equitable and timely evaluation of a new degree program. Richard put it this way:

> We received faculty support, and faculty letters, and dean and provost support, and [we] went before the graduate council. The chair of the graduate council did not allow it to go before the floor for a vote. He actually had the power to do that…so that program never even made it to a vote. I didn't know that the chair had that power.

This challenging subtheme spotlights the powerful role of decision-making faculty and how their behavior within the governance structure impacted administrators' lived experiences and cycle time duration. Decision makers who are focused on the task at hand and take a student-centered approach positively impact their lived experiences and reduce the cycle time. It would behoove CE leaders to remain focused, if they are not already, on data-driven and market-centered discussions, keeping students front and center in the process. CE leaders may be best served by anticipating and predicting questions ahead of approval steps or votes. Furthermore, a reset of roles, expectations, and guiding principles for the approval council or committee members may help refocus efforts around the duties at hand and prevent scope creep.

Finances and Resourcing Matter

A university's established financial structure and existing resource allocation can contribute to a competitive environment among schools or academic departments and may result in academic discipline territorialism. Financing and lack of resources are underlying factors with a new degree program that can prompt concerns with content duplication, overlap, or general

boundary concerns. A consequence can be a resistance to collaboration or new program approval. Margaret described how the financial structure negatively impacted collaborative efforts and caused conflict in the new program approval process:

> The university's budget model, which is kind of an every-tub-on-its-own-bottom type of model, can make collaboration among or between colleges challenging because everyone's chasing that revenue piece for being the college of instruction. It's created a bit of a competition environment, maybe a bit of territorialism to where colleges feel like they "own" a particular discipline or courses that cover a particular content area.

Glenn described how financial and resource considerations can trip up a degree program approval:

> I know what the academic approval process for a program is supposed to look like. I know how it's supposed to behave. I know what it is and isn't supposed to include. Where we're challenged is when things are included that aren't related to the academic quality, rigor, and fit of a program within an institution. It's when we get into the resource issue…more of the finance..... It muddies the process and they don't care what the program looks like.

Last, Richard described how his institution's budget model created a minimal financial incentive to offer new degree programs:

> We pay our tax, centrally, but the problem with that is we still rely on a lot of academic capital being pulled from other schools. We need those faculty members, at least to take some lead and champion position for us, if we're going to get these programs through and to teach them. But, unless those programs actually get money, then it makes sense for them to participate. If all they're doing is loaning us a faculty member that we just pay

> for and they get nothing else out of it and the rest of the money goes centrally. You don't have the financial incentive for the departments really to do this. It's something that we'll have to change, I think, if we're going to make any sort of headway.

This theme stresses that a university's internal competitive environment among schools or academic departments can be partly driven by resource constraints and the established financial structure. Discipline territorialism and concerns with duplication, overlap, and school or departmental boundaries may result in resistance to collaboration or new program approval, which can challenge a CE administrator's pursuit of new degree program approval. Budget and revenue discussions are necessary at the start of a new degree program proposal to help ease it through the approval process.

Restatement of Research Questions

The findings address the three research questions that guided this study:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of continuing education administrators with their university's new degree program approval cycle?

RQ2: What organizational, cultural, or process factors have influenced or affected continuing education administrators' experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time?

RQ3: How do continuing education administrators who lead or take part in the degree program approval lifecycle feel and think about their university's process and its cycle time?

Findings Summary for Research Question 1

The first research question asked about the lived experiences of continuing education administrators with their university's new degree program approval cycle. I asked participants to

think about recent experiences with their university's new degree program approval cycle and share what happened. Generally, participants used a specific example and described both the official and explicit steps and the unofficial and implicit steps that they encountered as they journeyed through the process. I asked additional probing questions about their feelings related to any steps in the process that were more time consuming or difficult than others and their feelings about how and why they were able to navigate the process successfully.

The themes and subthemes derived from the data revealed that CE administrators perceived the approval process as complex, time consuming, incremental, and sometimes nonsensical. Generally, their lived experience with their university's new degree program approval cycle was frustrating, difficult, and iterative; it required persistence, preparation, teamwork, collaboration, and organization. CE administrators spent significant time up front in building guiding templates, thorough proposals, and project management plans to shepherd a new program through the approval process. CE administrators helped ease their burden by setting up internal, collaborative committees that looked at a new degree program from various lenses, such as marketing, enrollment, academics, finance, registration, to ensure a proposal was sound from all angles.

Findings Summary for Research Question 2

The second research question asked about the organizational, cultural, or process factors that have influenced or affected the CE administrators' experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time. I asked probing questions about their institutional culture and their feelings about their organizational structure.

The themes and subthemes derived from the data revealed that CE administrators encountered many organizational, cultural, and process factors as they led or took part in the new

degree program approval process. Governance structures, decision-making faculty behavior, and database systems can positively or negatively contribute to cycle time duration. Although approval processes have evolved and incrementally improved at many institutions, CE administrators continued to feel a lack of influence and control, to varying degrees, because of organizational, cultural, and process factors that led to slowness and a sense of ineffectiveness.

Findings Summary for Research Question 3

The third research question asked the participants who led or took part in their university's program approval lifecycle how they felt and thought about their university's process and cycle time. I asked participants to give a cycle-time estimate and to provide an opinion regarding whether they thought the timeline was acceptable and reasonable based on their experience. Additional probing questions were related to what aspects of the process worked well, what aspects were more challenging, and where they would begin if they could change the process.

The themes and subthemes derived from the data reveal that CE administrators respected the university requirements of due diligence and program review to ensure a healthy and viable new degree. Still, their perception was that the approval process was built for more negative feedback than positive, and time to market was not considered in the process. It was perceived to be painful and excessive. Whenever possible, CE leaders should seek to drive the aspects of the process that they can control, such as relationship building, strong proposals, and templates.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an overview of the study and its participants. It then included the findings from interviews, highlighting salient themes from participant statements. Last, it summarized insights relating to each research question that guided the study. The findings that

emerged provide an understanding of how CE administrators used multiple strategies and techniques to effectively shepherd new degree programs through required approvals as timely as the established process plausibly allowed. Furthermore, the findings provide awareness of the taxing impact that a university's new program approval processes and cycle time have on CE administrators and how they actively leverage steps in the process that they can control while striving to diminish any foreseeable obstacles.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings, Recommendations, and Future Research

Higher education sits within a dynamic and rapidly changing external environment and faces growing pressure to demonstrate institutional effectiveness, increase its financial strength, and sustain competitive advantage. Yet higher education institutions' internal structures and procedures lack flexibility and agility, which impacts their ability to keep pace or accelerate. The general problem examined in this phenomenological qualitative research study was the speed and efficiency of the new degree program approval lifecycle in higher education.

This study's design was shaped by my desire to develop a deeper understanding of continuing education administrators' experiences with their university's new degree program approval cycle. Continuing or professional education schools at traditional research institutions serve the growing nontraditional student population by offering educational programs that are flexible, relevant, and industry driven. Speed and efficiency to market are critical factors in ensuring high-quality, relevant, career-oriented education. A challenge for CE schools and leaders is that their university's decision making can be process laden and time consuming.

The purpose of the study was to foreground the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that CE administrators have about their university's degree program approval process and cycle time. This study sought to understand process roadblocks that affect CE leaders so strategies and tactics may be instituted to gain efficiencies and reduce the approval cycle time.

The three research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of continuing education administrators with their university's new degree program approval cycle?

RQ2: What organizational, cultural, or process factors have influenced or affected continuing education administrators' experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time?

RQ3: How do continuing education administrators who lead or take part in the program approval lifecycle feel and think about their university's process and its cycle time?

This study was grounded in Deming's 14-point management theory, which articulates how to improve an organization to improve business success. A lean-thinking organization focuses on constraining factors, such as bottlenecks (or hindrances) in operations or the organizational structure, to improve information flow. Lean concepts imply a long-term elimination of waste and continuous improvement that involves all stakeholders (Cristina & Felicia, 2012). The application of lean concepts to the new program approval process may increase procedural efficiencies and lead to an improved academic program approval process in higher education. A shortened product development and approval lifecycle is especially critical for a CE unit's continued success within its university.

The study's findings indicate that CE leaders' experiences are multidimensional as they navigate their institution's often convoluted process. The themes and subthemes derived from the data reveal that CE administrators encountered many organizational, cultural, and process factors at their institutions as they led or took part in their university's new degree program approval process. Although the number of institutions and participants limits this research, this study contributes to a gap in scholarly literature on how to improve or accelerate the approval process and its cycle time. This chapter discusses the study's findings and presents recommendations for professional practice and ideas for future research.

Discussion of Findings

There are many hurdles CE administrators must overcome as they proceed through the new degree program process. The numerous steps and voices generate CE leader discontent with their lack of influence and control and a strong belief that its inefficiencies present a barrier to timely execution of their unit's mission. The three findings of this study are: (a) new degree program approval processes generally perform suboptimally, (b) the new degree program approval cycle is foremost a people-centered process, and (c) governance and organizational autonomy influences cycle time.

New Degree Program Approval Processes Generally Perform Suboptimally

A university's new degree approval process is complex, time consuming, incremental, and sometimes nonsensical. CE administrators find their university's new degree program approval cycle frustrating, difficult, and iterative; it requires persistence, preparation, teamwork, collaboration, and organization. CE administrators face many predictable and unpredictable challenges as they lead or participate in their university's new degree program approval process.

The literature has not clarified how many higher education institutions have measured or evaluated program approval cycle time. Still, it stresses a growing need for HEIs to create capacity and act swiftly by creating new, restructuring existing, and sunsetting irrelevant programs without being obstructed by obstacles and bureaucratic restrictions (Salmi, 2001). Lake's (2003) study on reducing course or program approval time while retaining quality at Edinboro University resulted in 14 improvement recommendations to the university president and its executive team. This first finding highlights that process improvement is needed to improve higher education. Lake (2003) proved that a focus on reducing course or program approval time while retaining quality will result in process advancement.

Lean principles and practices underscore the need to eliminate waste. The new degree program approval process performs suboptimally in part because of motion waste in the approval steps. In manufacturing, *motion waste* means unproductive steps in a process that add labor costs (Maguad, 2007). The predictable and unpredictable approval steps and voices are countless and result in non-value-added motion, which should be analyzed and streamlined to improve process speed and efficiency.

The New Degree Program Approval Cycle Is Foremost a People-centered Process

At first blush, an institution's new program approval process appears lockstep, formulaic, and conventional. However, in practice, the process is dynamic, evolving, and arbitrary because of the significant human activity involved. A university's culture, and the human and social exchanges within it, plays a central role in the new degree program approval process, impacting its speed and efficiency. Senior leadership influence, administrator and faculty relationships, and individual decisionmaker behavior can positively or negatively impact the approval cycle. The multitude of collective and individual voices produces non-value-added activity. Furthermore, cycle time delays occur when decisionmakers infuse self-interests into the process.

Individuals contribute to and influence the new degree program approval cycle time. CE administrators, who operate on their universities' margins, gain speed, efficiency, power, and influence by collaborating with others outside CE at their universities. The literature emphasizes that institutional culture influences how organizational goals are achieved and that power is relational, social, and political (Watkins & Tisdell, 2006). This finding supports that an organization's culture and the power and influence of its people are vital considerations related to new product development cycle time.

Deming encouraged optimal efficiency, but a process is only as effective as the people who are engaged in each step (Braughton, 1999). Scrutiny at various points and levels during the new degree process is excessive and lacks teamwork and focus on the goal. Arguably, dissent and debate underpin an academic environment: through discourse and dialogue, ideas are challenged and growth occurs. However, this academic cultural norm must shift to yield efficiency in the program approval process, which is the gatekeeper to new product innovation. Deming (Figure 1) stated that people and departments must work as a team, not in silos, to foresee production problems. A consumer-centric culture places the customer at the focal point of all activities by providing a superior customer experience, which is the key to the success of today's most innovative companies (Morgan, 2017).

Governance and Organizational Autonomy Influences Cycle Time

Governance and organizational structure strongly influence the speed and efficiency of the new degree program lifecycle time. The more autonomy and independence a CE unit has with its operations and academic or governing body oversight, the more likely it can influence a shorter cycle time. In contrast, a centralized CE unit or one that is more deeply integrated with central university functions is more likely to face longer cycle times.

The literature said that how adult education programs are structured within a traditional university may affect creative innovations that are less incremental, developmental, evolutionary, programmable, or linear. At traditional institutions, nontraditional programs for adults are placed within one of three administrative structures: centralized, distributed, or hybrid (Ellis, 2012). This finding supports the literature in that centralized models tend to deemphasize adult education's entrepreneurial nature, whereas a distributed or hybrid structure results in greater flexibility and autonomy.

Deming's management philosophy (Figure 1) challenges senior leaders to drive out fear and break down departmental barriers. Institutional silos are being reinforced in the new degree program approval process because there is an internal competitive environment among schools and academic departments. This is partly driven by resource constraints, an established financial structure, disciplinary territorialism, concerns with duplication and overlap, and boundary issues. Current organizational and governance structures impede a CE unit's ability to meet its strategic goals; therefore, optimizing independence where possible can eliminate waste and shorten the approval cycle time.

Recommendations for Professional Practice

This study has formalized best practice frameworks around high-performing cultures, efficient approval processes, and a reduced launch cycle time. I offer two strategic institutional considerations and tactical recommendations to institutional leadership and CE leaders for reducing the cycle time for new degree program approval.

Institutional Considerations

Prioritize Process Improvement

Evaluating its new degree program approval process to achieve optimal efficiency must be an institutional strategic focus and a high priority. Senior leaders must challenge its effectiveness and assert a belief that speed to market is more than ever a critical consideration in an institution's ability to bring new educational solutions. Because meeting stakeholder needs is vital to institutional success (Suskie, 2014), institutions must effectively meet the needs of an abundance of stakeholders, including the growing segment of nontraditional students who are seeking relevant, career-oriented education.

Although R1 and R2 institutions are primarily focused on research missions, overall institutional effectiveness spans more than this primary mission. Senior leadership support at a department, school, and central level eases approval steps and results in quicker approval. Although this study's sample size was limited to 10 institutions and 12 participants—who may not fully represent all CE leaders' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs in higher education—participants perceived the process as taxing and that they lacked the influence and power to improve it. CE administrators reluctantly stay the course because of their underlying desire and drive to innovate, ameliorate, and capitalize on the educational gaps observed in the market and to improve their CE unit's mission, the student body, and their institution's long-term relevancy. Application of Deming's theory of total quality management to achieve continuous improvement in this process is appropriate. Lean concepts should be applied at an institutional level to drive comprehensive evaluation and fundamental change in the new degree approval process.

Cultural Realignment of Process Purpose and Payoff

An institution with a culture that embraces risk and change and places value on innovation is more likely to seek out continuous improvement for stakeholder betterment. Decisionmakers must be reeducated on the purpose of the process and their role within it, emphasizing a necessary culture and mindset shift that embraces openness, creativity, and flexibility. New product development is an iterative process requiring behavioral modifications. At many institutions, a cultural shift adopting and adapting to entrepreneurial practices must occur to realize change, which requires recognition and commitment from senior leaders that change is necessary. Decisionmaker boundaries should be established or reestablished and enforced to keep distractions aside. Simplification, time-bound decision making, predictable approval meetings, and a highly organized workflow must be reinforced at a central level.

Institutional culture influences how organizational goals are achieved. Deming's 14-point management theory challenges a company's top management to commit to continuously working on product and service improvements in order to be competitive, break down departmental barriers, and drive out fear so all employees can work effectively for the company (Figure 1). An institutional culture shift is necessary to realize Deming's core values, including process improvement and cycle-time optimization.

Although this study reflects a snapshot of CE leaders' perceptions at a particular moment, the participants said that cycle time could be fast tracked, derailed, or rejected by any of the countless voices and decisionmakers who are part of the process. CE lived experiences simulate, in some respects, war preparation. CE leaders gather their weapons and prepare their tactics to reach victory with minimal casualties. CE leaders spend significant energy gathering market research, building strong proposals, and socializing the new degree program idea with faculty, administrators, and leaders (who may be potential nay-sayers) to ensure their proposal package is bulletproof, all while mentally preparing for the next obstacle as they conquer one step after another until approved. Because this process is vital to long-term institutional viability, faculty and administrators should not find it exhausting and akin to a war effort. If it is, Deming's management philosophy is being poorly executed at institutions, and the long-term impact could be detrimental to HEIs' long-term competitiveness in delivering their primary product, education. Decisionmakers who are part of the process should be reinformed of its institutional purpose, payoff, role, and responsibility as necessary. A mindset shift to positivity rather than negativity that keeps the end customer, the student, front and center in decision making is also essential to achieving efficiency.

Recommendations for Institutional Leaders

The new program approval process could be more efficient and effective if institutions (a) optimize data system solutions, (b) reduce approval steps and decisionmakers, and (c) resolve resource constraints and financial structures.

Optimize Data Systems Solutions

The adaptability, currency, and useability of the centralized system that houses, tracks, and reports on new programs' approval steps must be reevaluated and upgraded for optimal use. The approval process tracking systems, or lack thereof at some universities, contribute to delays by making it difficult to track approval progress. A university data management system that is robust, functional, and user friendly will decrease frustration, increase transparency, and reduce cycle time.

Reduce Approval Steps and Decisionmakers

Fewer steps and fewer voices will result in increased speed and efficiency. Eliminating non-valued-added activities reduces cycle time. Senior leaders must ask why each prescribed step adds value and why the designated decisionmakers are central or essential to approval. Furthermore, decisionmaker critiques should be student centered and relevant to the approval.

Resolve Resource Constraints and Financial Structure

Budget structures and resource constraints drive discipline territorialism, which prolongs new degree program approval. How tuition revenues and expenses are structured can restrict new degree program innovation and cross-departmental collaboration. Resolving resource constraints and altering financial structures to promote innovation may reduce territorialism and increase collaboration.

Recommendations for CE Leaders

The new program approval process can be more efficient, effective, and rewarding if CE leaders perform four common practices: (a) prepare and manage projects, (b) nurture decisionmaker relationships, (c) leverage CE faculty and administrator champions, and (d) lead with data.

Prepare and Manage Projects

Preparation and effective project management are essential to the new degree program approval process. CE leaders must educate themselves about the approval steps, decisionmakers, and interdependencies so they can effectively manage an approval to its ideal launch time. Furthermore, CE leaders should create templates to streamline the information and evidence that must be presented throughout the process. The iterative process of adjusting templates informed by feedback will ease and strengthen future new degree program proposals. I recommend CE school committees create cross-functional teams that bring a well-rounded perspective to the new degree program proposal. A cross-functional team will view a new degree proposal and process from various angles, preempt gaps, and strengthen the final submission.

Nurture Decisionmaker Relationships

CE leaders must actively nurture decisionmaker relationships because the new degree program approval process is people centered. CE leaders may not frequently interact with the designated decisionmakers outside the new program approval process. However, building decisionmaker relationships must be a priority if CE leaders are to positively and productively influence decision making and reduce cycle time.

Leverage CE Faculty and Administrator Champions

Adult professional or continuing education operates on the fringe of university functions, and power comes from collaboration. Faculty or senior leader champions who are motivated, passionate, and can help drive a program through the process are assets to CE leaders in mainstreaming the CE mission at their institutions. CE leaders must identify their champions and lean on them to assist with new program socialization from the onset of a new degree program approval.

Lead With Data

New degree program proposals must be data driven and explain the prospective target market. Comprehensive market research not only grounds the opportunity proposed but also helps decrease questions arising from the approval process. Decisionmaker subjectivity will occur; CE leaders who remain grounded in data-driven explanations and keep the characteristics of the adult student front and center will have more success in keeping discussions in scope and productive.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study indicates realistic limits to how agile and entrepreneurial CE leaders can be within an established and long-standing university structure and culture. A limit of this study is its sample size, which totaled 10 institutions and 12 participants, with the data collected limited to one interview. Future research is needed to understand and demonstrate how higher education institutions measure program approval cycle time. It may also include lean application experiments at various institutions that compare cycle time before and after waste elimination.

Future studies may also focus on governance structures and how the adaptation or modernization of such structures could lead to quicker decision making for new degree program

approvals. Studies that gather information on the various financial and funding models would benefit this area of research. A deeper understanding of financial models that promote cross-school or department collaboration would be of particular interest to CE leaders. Identifying alternative methods, frameworks, and governance model structures that address both financial and resource constraints and the decisionmaker gridlock experienced by CE leaders in the new degree program approval process would be an excellent resource for CE leaders. While the data gathered in this study was insightful to me, the findings may be transferable to other university and CE leaders if additional qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed.

Conclusion

Through this study, higher education gained a deeper understanding of the roadblocks that affect CE leaders as they navigate their university's new degree program approval process. This process is vital for all university administrators to ensure contemporary education and long-term institutional effectiveness. In particular, the new degree program approval process's efficiency and speed are pivotal for schools of professional or continuing studies that offer adult, professional, career-oriented education; however, a university's approval process is process laden and time consuming. Although the number of institutions and participants limits this research, this study contributes to a gap in scholarly literature on improving or accelerating the approval process and its cycle time. This study's findings reveal that CE administrators encountered many organizational, cultural, and process factors at their institutions as they led or took part in their university's new degree program approval process. It concludes by offering specific strategic and tactical recommendations to both institutional and CE leaders to improve process productivity and agility at their institutions.

The field of higher education is ever evolving, and the external environment around it is rapidly changing. It must accelerate its pace to meet today's challenges, such as the growing industry demand for a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Universities view CE units and leaders as innovation centers that serve the growing nontraditional population on their campuses. The findings of this study support the positive stereotype that CE leaders continuously innovate, iterate, and challenge university policies and practices to functionally support their agendas, such as effectively and efficiently shepherding new degree programs through required approvals. CE leaders will continue to think and act contrary to traditional university practices because of CE units' role at their institutions. Pushing change from the margins is an everyday CE administrator behavior and should be accepted as mainstream rather than unorthodox in order to advance student, faculty, and institutional progress. Incremental process improvements are not sufficient. HEIs require faster decision making because of the rapidly changing external environment. Transformative improvement in education requires ongoing development and adjustment of policies and practices. The new degree program approval process must not be overlooked or neglected, but instead spotlighted as an essential catalyst for long-term institutional sustainability.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear _____,

My name is Erica Bova, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University. I received your contact information through UPCEA, as I am also professionally a member. I am conducting interviews for my dissertation, and you have been identified as having experience that would provide valuable insight into my research topic. My dissertation focuses on experiences with organizational, cultural, and process factors that continuing education (CE) administrators encounter as they lead or take part in the process of approving new degree programs. The significance of this study is to learn about the factors that constrict and contribute to the approval cycle process time for new degree programs, as experienced by CE administrators. This research study has gone through the Institutional Review Board review process at National Louis University and was approved on September 23, 2020.

I would like to schedule a time to interview you via Zoom about your experience. Please let me know if you are willing to participate and when would be a good time frame for scheduling a meeting. In my email follow-up, I will also request you lend your informed consent to participate in this research study through your signature on an IRB approved informed consent form, which I will provide.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,
Erica Bova
ebova@my.nl.edu
224.628.4063

Appendix B

Informed Consent Observation Interview

My name is Erica Bova, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, "Institutional Factors that Prolong the New Degree Program Approval Lifecycle," from September 2020 to June 2021. The purpose of the study is to foreground the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that continuing education (CE) administrators have regarding their university's degree program approval cycle time. This form outlines the purpose of the study and describes your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Erica Bova, doctoral student, at National Louis University, Chicago.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to foreground the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that CE administrators have regarding their university's new degree program approval cycle time. Participation in this study will include:

- One individual interview scheduled at your convenience via a web conferencing platform, Zoom, in the fall or winter of the 2020-21 academic year. The interview will last up to1 hour. I will ask approximately 10-20 questions to learn about the factors that constrict and contribute to the approval cycle process time for new degree programs, as experienced by CE administrators.
- Interviews will be both audio and video recorded, and participants will be asked to have final approval on the content of interview transcripts.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences. Your identity will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality, I will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes on a secure laptop. Only Erica Bova will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits greater than those encountered in daily life. The information gained from this study could be useful to higher education and other schools that are looking to improve institutional effectiveness.

Upon request, you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email me, Erica Bova, at ebova@my.nl.edu to request results from this study.

If you have questions or require additional information, please contact me, Erica Bova, ebova@my.nl.edu, (224) 628-4063.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that has not been addressed by me, you may contact my faculty adviser, Bettyjo Bouchey, bbouchey@nl.edu, (312) 261-3505, or the chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth,

Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu, (312) 261-3526 or Dr. Kathleen Cornett, kcornett@nl.edu, (844) 380-5001. The chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL., 60603.

Thank you for your consideration.

Consent: I understand that by signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study (Institutional Factors that Prolong the New Degree Program Approval Lifecycle). My participation will consist of the activity below in the fall or winter of 2020-21 academic year: One interview lasting approximately 1 hour.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to this interview and for your time today. I am a doctoral student from National Louis University seeking to learn about the factors that constrict and contribute to the approval cycle process time for new degree programs as experienced by continuing education administrators. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to foreground the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that continuing education administrators have regarding their university's degree program approval cycle time. I will ask you reflective questions related to your personal experiences with your university's approval lifecycle and gather your feelings and thoughts on the process and the efficiency efficacy of its cycle time. There are no right or wrong answers, and I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you feel. Please note that everything you say in this interview will remain confidential. I will spend 1 hour in conversation with you today asking you a series of open-ended questions. I will be recording this session, which will be transcribed and available to you for further clarification or correction. Before we get started with the interview, do you have any questions? Let's begin.

1. What is your name and your role at your institution?
2. How long have you served in your current role?
3. Tell me how you came to be into the field of continuing education?
4. Outside of your current position, do you have previous professional experience in new program or product development?
5. Would you describe how your CE school is structured within the university.

I would like to ask you about your lived experiences with your university's new degree program approval cycle (RQ1).

6. Think back to when you most recently experienced your university's new degree program approval cycle and tell me about what happened.

I would like to transition and ask you about the organizational, cultural, or process factors that have influenced or affected your experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time (RQ2)?

7. Can you tell me what you do to navigate the degree program approval process successfully?

I would like to transition and ask you about how you feel and think about your university's process and its cycle time (RQ3)?

8. What is your perception of your university's new degree program approval process and its cycle?

9. Can you describe how your experience would change if the process were different?

10. Is there anything I forgot to ask you about your experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time?

11. Do you know of other CE leaders who have had professional experiences and who may be interested in study participation?

This concludes our interview. Thank you for your time!

Appendix D

Research Quality and Rigor

Research quality issue	Research quality technique
Credibility	Interview Field notes Observation Member checking ● Participants review interview transcripts for accuracy ● Participants are supportive of the study's key finding themes
Transferability	Provide a thick description ● Field observations and journaling
Dependability	Interview protocol Audio/visual recording Code/recode strategy ● First and second iterations
Confirmability	Practice reflexivity ● Revision of interview questions to reduce bias

Appendix E

Research Questions Audit Trail

Research questions	Interview questions
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of continuing education administrators with their university's new degree program approval cycle?	Q# 6
	Q# 7
RQ2: What organizational, cultural, or process factors have influenced or affected continuing education administrators' experience with the degree program approval process and cycle time?	Q# 8, 9, 10
RQ3: How do continuing education administrators who lead or take part in the degree program approval lifecycle feel and think about their university's process and its cycle time?	