

A Learning Mindset Needed from Faculty in Online Program Management and University Partnership Business Model

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Abstract: Many universities are getting into online education, and the trend is expected to continue. These universities often have their faculty work with instructional designers (ID) in-house or, at times, from outsourced online course development through an Online Program Management (OPM) provider. The ID process involves course development where the faculty and instructional designer (ID) work together to build the online course. A gap exists in the literature around how faculty interact with such IDs provided by OPMs and what impact the ID process has on their teaching design and their pedagogical knowledge and development. This research uses a Case Study to analyze how the nature and dynamics of the ID process in a business partnership between a non-profit (research university) and a for-profit (OPM provider) influence faculty. This case study included a private R2 research university that had recently joined a partnership with an Online Program Management Provider (OPM) to develop and offer online Master's degree programs. The Activity Theory conceptual framework guided the inquiry and analysis of the collected data. Results show that the impact on faculty pedagogical knowledge and development is different for each faculty and is dependent on faculty assumptions, personality, attitudes, training in pedagogy and technology, and past online teaching experiences. A learning mindset from the faculty side is very important to get the best of this relationship. This research supports e-learning practice by guiding that faculty should not be participating just due to the pressure by their upper-level management but because they really want to teach online. Faculty should be ready to check their own assumptions and knowledge they have about pedagogy before getting into this process. This study is a novel approach to understanding the impact on faculty teaching design using the Activity Theory framework. It shows how Activity Theory could be a useful technique to solve problems in e-learning research and practice.

Keywords: Faculty development, OPM-University model, Activity Theory

1. Introduction

Teaching online requires a different approach in course design and facilitation compared to the traditional face-to-face classroom (Fetherston, 2001; Hardy and Bower, 2004; Oliver, 2002; Boling et al., 2012; Morris and Stommel, 2016). Instructors teaching online face new pedagogical challenges in relation to student engagement and retention (Boling et al., 2012). Online course design requires planning on their course curriculum using evidence-based practices and requires faculty training and development on effective facilitation techniques (Boling et al., 2012). College instructors need to think about new strategies on active learning, learning outcomes, student-student interactions, student-faculty interactions, and student-content interactions when designing and teaching their course online (Boling et al., 2012). Teaching online necessitates adaptations in research and evidence-based teaching and instructional design practices (Boling et al., 2012). Faculty or instructors experience a change in their beliefs, assumptions, and goals on their own teaching when they transition from teaching face-to-face to online (Phillips, 2008). Faculty integrate technology into their teaching as they start to teach online and move from teaching- to a learning- centered paradigm (Boling et al., 2012; Fink, 2013; 2013a). Faculty may be hesitant to teach online as they may be used to their traditional classroom methods where they are live with students, exchange eye contact, observe their body language, and convey an engaging personality for student interest and engagement (Crawley, Fewell, and Sugar, 2009). Online courses that are designed and developed without the application of research and evidence-based practices can negatively impact the quality of student learning experience and lower course retention and completion which in turn can impact institutional success (Vasser, 2010). A face-to-face course converted into an online version without appropriate application of evidence-based instructional design and delivery practices can affect the quality of student learning and its impact (Vasser, 2010). Online courses designed and built without an oversight or help of an instructional designer (ID), can lead to faculty just delivering content online in passive form (McQuiggan, 2007). Online courses built with proper planning and timing with the help of an ID can have a deeper impact on student learning and this process also benefits in faculty pedagogical development where they get to learn and practice integration of technology with their pedagogy and best practices in course facilitation. Working with an ID to design and build their course is an excellent opportunity for faculty development that can

motivate faculty to change their beliefs and mindset and implement good teaching not only in online teaching but also when they go back to teaching their traditional face-to-face classes.

The instructional design process can be integrated by a university using in-house resources or outsources to an external OPM or instructional design company. As higher education institutions consider offering online programs, they often consider outsourcing their development to third-party vendors known as 'Online Program Management' (OPM) providers (Springer, 2018; Powers, 2019; Farakish, Jaggars, and Fay, 2020). OPMs provide support in four core areas: market/lead generation, enrollment management, student services, and course development and delivery (Springer, 2018; Powers, 2019; Schmoyer, 2020). A partnership between a non-profit, such as a university, and a for-profit, such as an OPM, is a form of outsourcing in higher education and involves a business relationship (Springer, 2018). According to Springer (2018), *"The OPM provider recruits students to the online program, provides training and support to faculty and students, provides technological expertise, offers academic advising services to the students until graduation, and collaborates with the faculty from the university or college to convert on-campus courses to the online environment. The vendor may also develop marketing strategies to promote the growth of the online program and further the university's brand, and it may help secure regulatory approvals related to online education"* (pp. 1-2). One of the core functions of an OPM partnership is to provide instructional designers to help university faculty build their courses using evidence-based practices and at the same time help faculty grow their pedagogical knowledge and development for the effective design and delivery of their online courses. These instructional designers play an important role in changing faculty mindsets and approaches to their teaching design when they first move into modality from their traditional methods of teaching. Therefore the relationship between the faculty and instructional designers are critical for the success of effective online teaching and student impact.

The instructional design process involves course development where faculty and ID work together to build the online course from scratch or convert an existing face-to-face course to an online course. During this instructional design process faculty and ID spend many months together to design an online course. During this time, they meet regularly every week and exchange ideas and create, update or revise the course materials to have it prepared for online course delivery. During this process the faculty and ID need to work in coordination and trust each other but at times the interactions can be difficult and problematic and can create conflicts (InsideHigherEd.com, 2017; 2017a). For faculty, who have been teaching for a very long time, can sometimes face difficulty in working with an ID because they are not comfortable with the changes and structure needed to convert traditional course to an online modality (Halupa, 2019). For ID's, who have degrees and certificates in instructional design, very well know the principles involved in designing an online course, however the faculty may be very resistant in implementing the suggested changes and may not understand the needed time, critical thinking, and collaboration that needs to be involved (InsideHigherEd.com, 2017; 2017a).

Many colleges and universities are considering exploring online education and convert some of their programs into online formats or come up with brand new ones as solely online (Casey, 2008; Rovai & Downey, 2010; Essary, 2014). The pandemic has accelerated the need for online programs (Fain, 2020). There are many benefits to online education. Online degree program offerings allow universities and colleges to reach non-traditional students from different locations and also reach those who have family and employment constraints that hinder them to participate in in-class instruction (Fresen, 2018). Other benefits of teaching online include easy access, cost effectiveness, personalization of student learning experience, greater accountability, just-in-time learning, removal of time, place, and situation restrictions, learning outcomes achievement, and effective support for lifelong learning (Anderson and Elloumi, 2004). Online education allows for flexibility and supports adult learner lifestyle (Allen and Seaman, 2017; Ozcan and Yildirim, 2018). From 2013-2017, online education course enrollment for at least one course grew by 28.77% (1,493,490) (Bradford, 2019). In a survey taken on importance of online education, out of the 2800 Chief Academic Officers, 69.1% reported that online education was very important and useful to their organization's long-term planning and strategy (Allen and Seaman, 2013, p. 4). Many schools and universities continue to grow their online education programs although campus-based enrollments are declining (Allen and Seaman, 2016).

As higher educational institutions grow their distance education programs, they struggle to motivate faculty to adopt to this new model of online teaching. These institutions either must build an infrastructure internally or they can outsource or partner with OPMs, that are Online Program Management (OPM) Providers. These OPMs offer some or all the needed services with ID staff, technology, marketing, admissions, and faculty support to build, implement, and maintain online programs. They offer these services as revenue-sharing model or on an ala-carte basis where they have a fee for these services. This research paper analyzes a case study to study the impact on faculty approaches to their teaching and pedagogical development when they work with the IDs in a

university (non-profit) and OPM (for-profit) business partnership model. In this business partnership, IDs participate from one instructional design firm that is outsourced by the OPM. This case study exposes the factors that influence and do not influence on faculty to implement change when they work with instructional designers in this OPM-University partnership model. It exposes the impact on faculty to change their teaching design practices as they work to develop their courses with the instructional designers in the OPM-University partnership. This paper is derived from a dissertation research project that presents a case study on this kind of a non-profit and for-profit business partnership model (Ramani, 2020). There is a literature gap, and no studies have been done that analyze the impact on faculty pedagogy in such online course development process. No studies have shown how the instructional designers provided by these OPMs work with faculty to motivate for a change in their teaching behavior. This study can help faculty and instructional designers on best practices and preparation in the context of faculty development before getting into this kind of a partnership to build new online programs.

Engeström's (1999) Activity Theory (AT) framework was used to analyze the data and direct inquiry. This theatrical framework is a descriptive meta-theory rather than a predictive theory (Engeström, 2000). According to AT an activity can and should only be understood and analyzed by looking at who is involved and engaged in the activity, what their goals are, rules, restrictions, the results, and the larger community of this activity. The unit of analysis in a system is 'activity' (Jonassen and Murphy, 1999). For this paper the activity analyzed is the faculty-ID relationships and outcomes in the online course development process where faculty work with IDs to build their courses and also expect to get knowledge and development in effective pedagogy by these IDs as they build their courses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Background on the Relationship Between Faculty and Instructional Designers

In an online course development process, faculty often have to work with Instructional Designers (IDs). IDs in higher education are professionals who work with faculty to build and revise their online courses or help them convert their face-to-face courses into online courses. They provide support through training and consultation (You, 2010; Chittur, 2010). They play an important role in motivating faculty to implement a change and can have a lasting impact on student learning experience and, hence, eventually student completion, retention, and graduation. Instructional Design, which is often also called Learning Design, is *"a collection of theories and models helping to understand and apply instructional methods that favor learning. Instructional Design as a method or a process helps produce plans and models describing the organization of learning and teaching activities, resources and actors' involvement that compose an Instructional System or a Learning Environment"* (Paquette, 2014, p. 661).

However, instructional design is something faculty often misunderstand. Faculty often mistake IDs as technology experts and reach out to them for questions related to technical support within a university environment, but in fact these IDs are experts in Learning Design and can help faculty integrate technology into their teaching for best impact on student learning and can provide training for their use and adoption (You, 2010; Chittur, 2018). Typically, when starting an online degree program, IDs often start working with the faculty through multiple 1:1 meetings (mostly virtually) at least six months prior to the start of their teaching semester. The instructional design process involves the implementation of instructional design project management methodologies such as ADDIE (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, & Evaluate). ADDIE model is very linear, and the majority of times, the IDs work using agile methodologies such as the SAM (Successive Approximation Model) process or the Design Thinking approach that involves more collaborative and iterative work for designing and developing courses (Peterson, 2003; Campbell, 2014).

IDs follow evidence-based instructional design practices and work with faculty to segment their course into modules, build lesson plans for synchronous and asynchronous sessions, and advise on strategies for student engagement using educational technologies. IDs make sure to build quality online courses using Universal Design for Learning and Accessibility principles and consider essential review standards such as Quality Matters to design and build quality courses with their faculty (Quality Matters, 2023). Online education has some clear quality indicators that are focused on being student-centered (Li and Irby, 2008; Chittur, 2018). Chaney et al.'s (2009) research reveals student-centered principles of instructional support for both faculty and students (see Table 1) (Ramani, 2020).

Table 1: Common Quality Indicators of Distance Education Identified in the Literature

Student-teacher interaction	Active learning techniques
Prompt Feedback	Respect diverse ways of learning
Student support services	Faculty support services
Program evaluation and assessment	Strong rationale for distance education that correlates to the mission of the institution
Clear analysis of audience	Appropriate tools and media
Documented technology plan to ensure quality	Reliability of technology
Institutional support and institutional resources	Implementation of guidelines for course development and review of instructional materials
Course structure guidelines	

Source: Chaney et al. (2009)

As faculty members work with these IDs, they rethink their roles as teachers and start to focus on student-centered principles and revamp their courses to help students master learning outcomes (Chittur, 2018). IDs must work with other academic staff, technologists, and administrative staff at their institution to complete the course development procedures. Skilled and Experienced IDs have strong interpersonal and motivational skills to bring a change among faculty and have them implement good teaching design. They should be comfortable in motivating the faculty and bringing a change to help faculty rethink their knowledge of pedagogy and teaching practice when the interactions between them are going well (Pan et al., 2003). IDs need to have very good communication skills and avoid any kind of misunderstandings with faculty and do not micromanage them or interfere with their subject matter or content expertise (Pan et al., 2003; Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, and Feldman, 2010; Chittur, 2018). Successful IDs collaborate with their faculty, create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, and implement effective project management and time management practices (Armstrong and Sherman, 1988; Lin and Jacobs, 2008; Chittur, 2018). IDs have strong social and people skills and build a rapport with faculty by respecting their teaching style and limiting the number of suggestions based on their reactions and responses. Faculty often prefer and like when their IDs also have subject matter expertise or background; however, principles of learning are applicable to all disciplines (Chittur, 2018). Faculty are likely to be motivated to make changes in their pedagogy when they see the impact on their students' achievement of learning outcomes (Chittur, 2018). New faculty members who just start to teach online often get anxious and nervous as they feel they will lose their identity as experts (McQuiggan, 2007). During an instructional design process, IDs can assist faculty through personal and professional transformation, and these faculty often think of changing their teaching design and practices in their other online courses as well as in their traditional face-to-face courses (Campbell, Schwier, and Kenny, 2005; Campbell, 2014; Chittur, 2018).

There will be times when faculty and ID interactions do not go well. This usually happens when faculty are very resistant to change or when IDs are too pushy, are unable to provide logical evidence, and do not know when to stop persuading their faculty. This can also happen when the faculty is very focused on handling their class flow through personality and on-the-spot decision-making (Russell, 2015). During such difficult and challenging interactions, IDs may have to drop their ego and try to build a positive relationship with their faculty (Pan et al., 2003).

3. Method

A qualitative case study approach was used to understand the social and cultural contexts of the faculty-ID relationship and impact on faculty pedagogy and their mindset in this business partnership model. According to Myers (2013), human decisions and actions are grounded in and can only be understood in context. Understanding the context can help researchers understand why they made decisions and acted in a certain way (Myers, 2013).

3.1 Sources of Data

A private research university termed as RU or R University in this article had recently joined a partnership with an OPM provider to offer online Master's degree programs. An Instructional Design Firm termed as IDF was outsourced by this OPM to provide instructional design services. The original names of the organizations and individuals have been removed for anonymity reasons. RU Faculty who were scheduled to teach in the Fall worked with the IDs from IDF and a media production firm that was also outsourced by OPM to design and build

their online courses. They received training from Faculty Support Services in-house on technology from the OPM side. The technical and administrative staff at R University worked with OPM to integrate student and learning management systems.

3.2 Activity Theory (AT) Framework For Analysis

Engeström's (1999) AT was used as a theoretical framework to understand the impact on faculty approaches to teaching design in this business model. The work/activity system involved the RU faculty, RU Community, and OPM. AT theory and research originates from Soviet psychologists Lev Vygotsky, Alexei Leont'ev, and Sergei Rubinstein (Cole and Engeström, 1993). This theory is often used in qualitative research such as ethnography or case studies in understanding a phenomenon and finding patterns and making inferences. It offers an external perspective (Arnseth, 2008). According to AT, an activity can only be understood by getting deeper into the activity context (Jonassen and Murphy, 1999). This means that analyzing a human activity should involve the kinds of activities they engage in, who is engaging, what their goals and intentions are, what products result from it, the rules and restrictions, and the larger community surrounding the activity. All these have an influence on human decisions and actions. These are all parts of the activity system (Jonassen and Murphy, 1999). AT will be very useful in this case study as it helps understand the work/activity system of faculty participating in the instructional design process from different contexts such as students, RU contract and policies, RU community, academic staff and administrations, OPM staff, and IDF staff (Jonassen and Murphy, 1999). It will help understand why the faculty acted in a certain way in the instructional process and what influenced the action and what the outcome was. Section 1 shows the components of an activity system. Section 2 shows the application of AT to the business partnership model used for this case study and all its elements/components that influence the subject.

Section 1: Components of Activity system

Figure 1 shows the Activity System that involves the following components that are also the elements (Jonassen and Murphy, 1999):

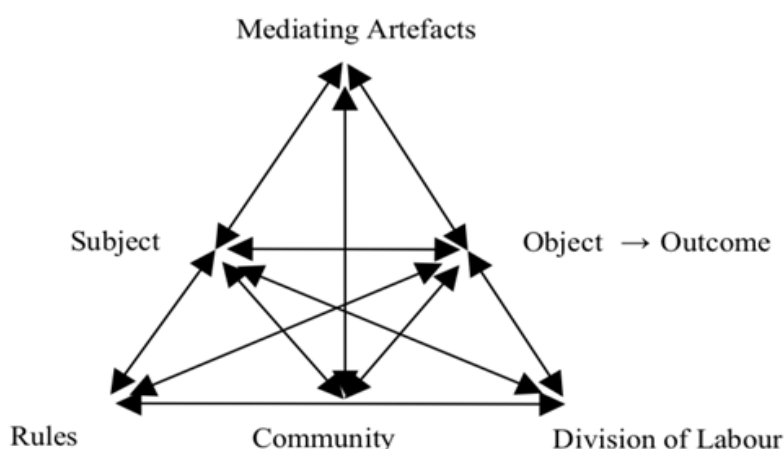


Figure 1: Engeström's (1999) model of an activity system

The Subject: The main actor or the person or group engaged in an activity

The Object: The intention or goal or the physical or mental product that is created

Mediating Artifacts: The tools, symbols, or technologies in the process that can transform or alter the activity.

Community: The broader social-cultural and surrounding contexts that can influence the subject and the activity

Rules: The guidelines, norms, and conventions that govern the activity and influence the actions of the subject and hence the activity

Division of Labor: the distribution of tasks and responsibilities in the system as roles that can also involve role(s) of the subject

Outcome: the intended or unintended result of the activity that can be positive or negative or neutral

This activity system has the above components of the activity system (as shown as vertices in figure 1) moving in a clockwise rotation from mid-left (Bradford et al., 2011).

Section 2: Application of Activity Theory to the OPM and RU Business Model

AT can be used as a framework for a university to self-evaluate its online learning practices (Bradford et al., 2011). "The purpose of such a framework is to permit organizations a method by which they may examine their support for sustained innovation" (Bradford et al., 2011, p. 163). Thus, the AT theoretical model can be adjusted as shown in Figure 2 to fit the OPM University Business Model. See description of components below:

- The Subject: the RU faculty engaged in the online instructional design process provided by OPM & IDF.
- The Object: Teaching. Teaching here involves everything related to the practice of teaching that faculty act on. It will be the new skills learned by the faculty members. Examples- intro discussion, active learning strategies, problem-based learning, multimedia instruction, scaffolding, modular segmenting, discussion forums, achievement of learning outcomes, rubrics, etc.
- Mediating Artifacts: technologies such as ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), LMS (Learning Management System), synchronous technologies, data management technologies, email communications, and other integrated software that are used from all R University, OPM, IDF, and Video Making firm to support online teaching can influence faculty.
- Community: the fellow faculty at R University, Technical and Administrative staff at R University, OPM Provider, and the students at R University are involved as community in this activity system.
- Rules: the policies, contracts, goals, quotas, deadlines, milestones, reviews, and evaluations from all R University, OPM, IDF, and Video Making Firm for this business partnership.
- Division of Labor (Roles): Faculty roles in teaching or research, marketing and admissions from OPM and R University, Senior administrative officers and Senior staff of R University, OPM staff, Senior and Junior staff from IDF, Instructional Designers from IDF, and the Video Making Firm staff. All these roles can influence the faculty who is the subject who takes actions and targeted behavior in this instructional design process (Bradford et al., 2011).
- Outcome: the intended or unintended result of the activity that arises from subject interactions and decisions influenced by other components.

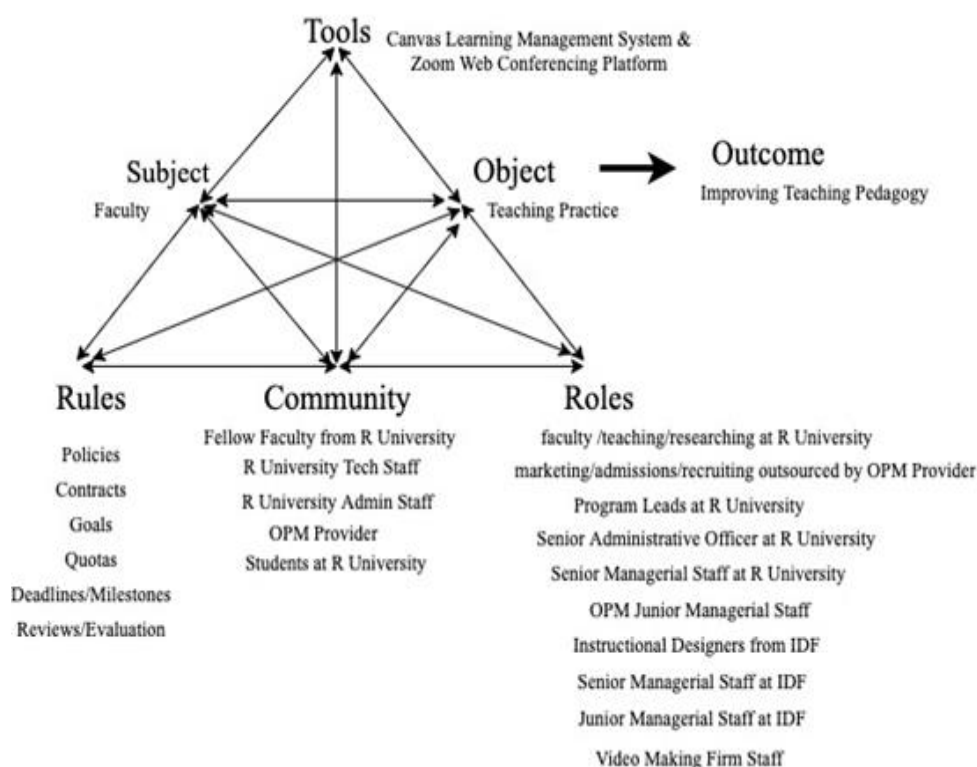


Figure 2: Activity system context for the RU and OPM business partnership (Ramani, 2020)

3.3 Research Design

The main organizations and people involved were RU Faculty, RU staff, OPM staff, and IDs from IDF. The researcher and author knew the Program Lead for one of the online programs at RU professionally and contacted this person. This Program Lead acted as gatekeeper and contacted the RU upper-level staff and OPM managers to request authorizations and proceed with this study. The authorization was granted as the upper level felt this was an important study. The Program Lead sent an email to all faculty who participated in this OPM model. The researcher interviewed fifteen RU faculty and one OPM senior manager and two OPM junior managers who oversee the instructional design process. The IDF Junior ID Manager and four IDs from IDF were also interviewed.

3.3.1 Data collection procedures

The researcher used interviews, participant observation, and documents as primary sources of data collection. The researcher also observed the faculty and ID course development meetings. Documents such as Canvas Course Blueprints, university-OPM agreements, and university webpages were used for verification and to understand the bigger picture. The RU Institutional Review Board marked this study as "Exempt".

3.3.2 Data analysis

A rigorous interpretative data analysis was done that was guided by the Activity Theory Model. The first step involved organizing and becoming familiar with the data and transcribing the recorded interviews. As data was analyzed, the researcher also took more interviews as needed. After reviewing the interview data several times, patterns were identified. Follow-up interviews were taken for additional needed data. The Strauss and Corbin's (1994) method was used during initial coding. Prominent themes were identified using the patterns of interview data and how faculty were influenced by each 'role', 'rule', 'technical tool', and everyone in the 'community' of the Activity Theory model of this business partnership. Looking on each vertex of this model, the researcher identified themes that impacted and influenced faculty to take actions and decisions to improve or change their teaching design practices or other pedagogical decisions during the instructional design process. Activity Theory helped explain the social and collaborative dynamics. Data Triangulation was done using a combination of interviews, participant observation, and documents to analyze the instructional design process for verification and credibility.

4. Results

Four themes emerged from this study after interviewing faculty and observing the instructional design process. These four themes are represented below, with each having its own Activity System Context Diagrams. On these diagrams, for each of the themes, arrow 1 represents that faculty are bound by a contract between RU and OPM and work with IDF (outsourced by OPM) ID staff. They have a contract as 'Rules' within the activity, which specifies that these faculty members receive stipends to participate in this partnership and develop online courses. The ID staff from IDF are also bound by the same contract in this partnership and are represented by an arrow (via different arrow numbers for different diagrams below). Any conflicts that arise between faculty and OPM/IDF staff are represented by other uni- and bi-directional arrows.

Tensions in Activity System Context

Each of the Themes below provides an Activity Theory mediational triangle. Each triangle has nodes that represent relationships between sources and have an influence on the subject, object, and outcome within an activity system. For these themes, sometimes the relationships are in harmony ("equilibrium"), and sometimes they are not in harmony. When relationships are not in harmony or equilibrium, the issues could be that the roles are not defined, rules are missing, or there is an opposing community and it can be said that the relationship is in tension, and such tensions can only be fixed when some correction is made (Engstrom, 1987). These tensions in the activity system can be uni- or one- directional where the problem is from the subject or actor who is not knowledgeable about rules, roles, community, mediating tools influences or these one-directional tension could come from the other side when rules cause restrictions, roles are not accommodating, or a concern from the community (Engstrom, 1987). The tensions can be bi-directional when conflicts arise both ways (Engstrom, 1987). The following are the themes that arise out of this case study that show the impact on faculty approaches to teaching design. These themes apply to some or most of the faculty and not all faculty involved in the partnership.

4.1 Theme 1: Faculty are Motivated to Participate in Online Teaching and Consider This Initiative to be Beneficial for Their University

Faculty who had worked at RU for a long time and who had permanent positions were very happy about the university going into this online teaching initiative. They considered this opportunity to be very beneficial to help the university generate revenue. They also considered this initiative to be very necessary and critical to meet student demands and the competition in the growing online market.

Figure 3 shows that the faculty, who is the subject in the activity system context, cares about teaching online, which is the object. The circular line around the Activity System shows that the faculty care and find it beneficial for their school. The circular line represents motivation from the faculty side. In the Activity System context of this theme, everything is in equilibrium, and there is no tension. Faculty are motivated to participate and implement new technical innovations through online learning and make this a success for their school.

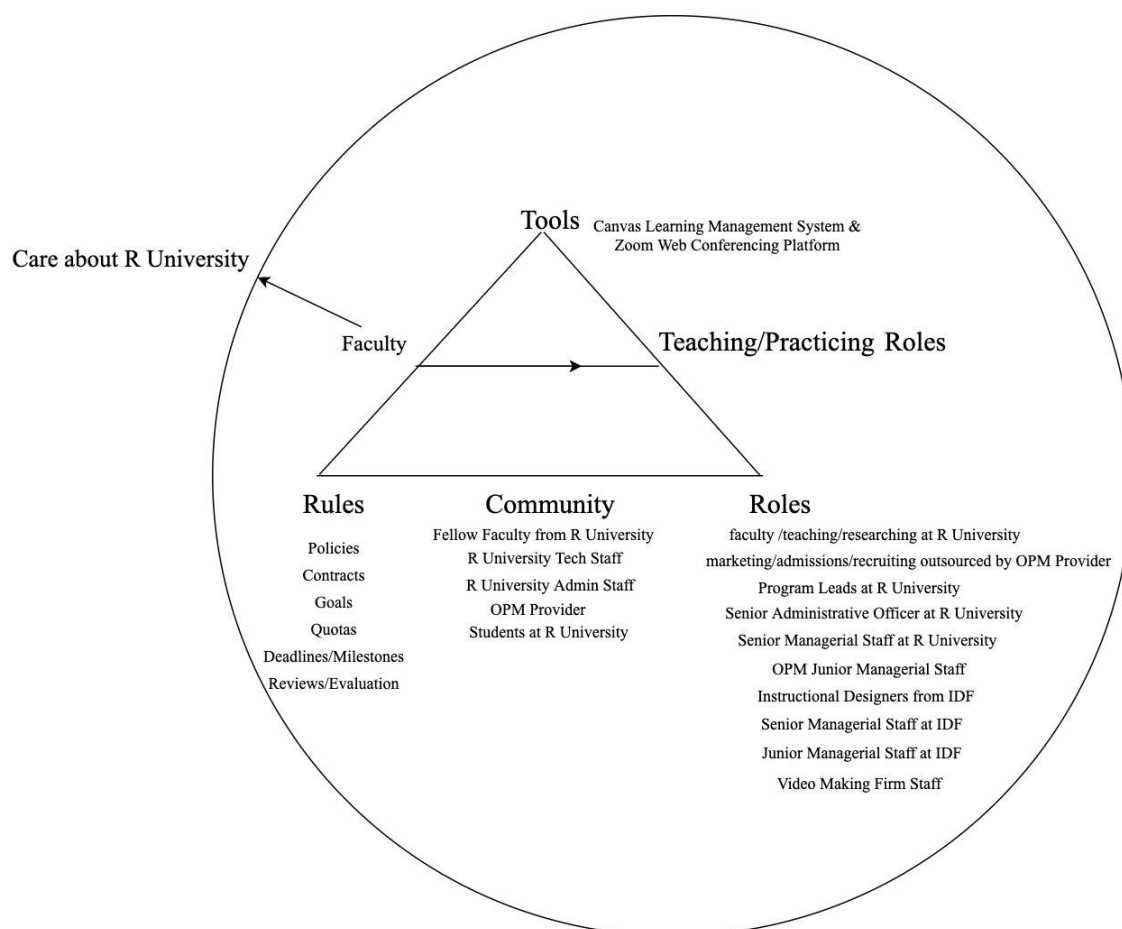


Figure 3: Activity System Context for Theme 1 (Ramani, 2020)

For one of the faculty, it is about the 21st-century online market and meeting the future of academia:

First of all, it's attractive for me because this is the, we're in the 21st century and this is the future of our students are going to be. ... So, I think this is the future of academia.

For many of the faculty, it was about dealing with student and market demand, access to online format, generating revenue, and competing with other universities. Below are some quotes from faculty:

Yeah. There is definitely there is a demand

One of the reasons was the high demand if this degree program is in an online format. ... We had a lot of students coming saying, you know is there any way we participate in your training in an online format.

It is adjusting ourselves to market changes and offering programs that students would like to consume today that people work remotely.

I think this is a really good opportunity for the university and help grow our enrollment.

I think it is probably necessary because there is you know so much that ... so much of higher ed is heading in that direction.

I think what I am most excited about is because I think it could help RU. Working on bringing up enrollment. I think this is a really good opportunity for the university and help grow our enrollment.

4.2 Theme 2: Faculty Face a Difference of Opinion on the Pedagogical Guidance Provided From the ID Staff and Were not Willing to Change

Some Faculty faced a difference of opinion at times on the pedagogical ideas provided from the IDs. For Faculty members who had differences of opinion with IDs, some adjusted to change their pedagogy, but some did not adjust to make changes. Many faculty members considered the ideas as too undergraduate level and not a good fit for graduate level master's programs. Tensions also arose due to a lack of subject matter background and knowledge (this is on faculty subject matter) from the instructional designers they worked with. Figure 4 below is the activity system context for this theme. It shows that the tension is bi-directional (between faculty and ID staff). The ID staff (OPM+IDF→Roles) were unable to motivate the faculty (subject or actor) to use evidence-based pedagogy (Pearce and Husbands, 2012), which caused differences of opinion and mutual conflict and tension. This is shown as Arrow 2 (bi-directional). The ID staff from IDF is bounded by the contract in the business

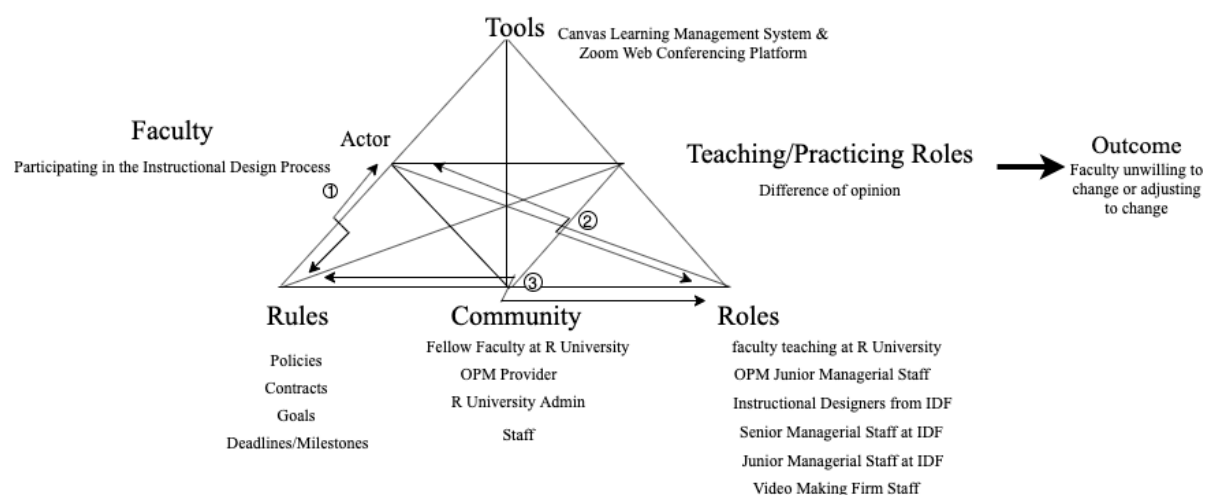


Figure 4: Activity System Context for Theme 2 (Ramani, 2020)

For example, in designing a course, one of the faculty was not impressed with their IDs instructional design and pedagogy ideas and had a difference of opinion with their ID.

This is a graduate level course. It's not simple readings.

The ID who worked with this faculty stated that this faculty's personality is rigid and is unwilling to change.

This Faculty has a very conservative point of view when it comes to how (he or she) would teach and while (he or she) was open and listened to what we had to say aboutI would be surprised if I saw that would change his or her teaching considerably.

In designing for a course, another Faculty also faced a difference of opinion, however this faculty adjusted to the suggestions provided by their ID.

So they want to make sure that if I say a reading, the reading has been provided properly. If there is something due, they want to make sure that instructions and everything are clear. Now again, as I said, I feel like that's a little bit for more undergraduate students, little bit more hand holding. But I still thought that it wasn't a bad idea.

This faculty also had a difference of opinion regarding assessment topics surrounding rubrics and exam solutions.

I am not a big Rubrics person. But they wanted to have a Rubric for everything. That was created. They created it. I had some for my projects and assignments, so they used those. The other thing that is still pending and the faculty who is teaching this course and I do not like is that they want solutions for midterm and final exams and you know in a graduate class specially not all questions are multiple choice and there are subjective questions. I don't want to create solutions. But they are asking me too.

The ID working with this faculty responded for this faculty as:

It's really how this faculty understands that you know we weren't just doing this just to make work. There really were some sound pedagogies behind making some choices that we had to make in the class.

Another Faculty was not supportive of an idea of an assignment provided by the ID they were working with.

First tangible example is ID had talked about a quiz every week and to make sure before the students came into the live session they could pass a quiz on the readings and I pushed for having them answer discussion questions amongst themselves you know on this listserv model that we have and have the TA moderate the discussion.

Another example that this faculty also mentioned is:

The ID also pushed us to you know to develop what I would see as a detailed point system for all activities and so forth and you know that's not the way most of us teach graduate level education and sort of the view was that online students are not going to do readings and do work if you don't have points attached to each thing and so far I am finding that to be not very helpful.

The ID responded to working with this faculty as:

In some cases, this faculty was open to trying new things. At other times, this Faculty wanted to stick with what (he or she) knew worked well from past experience.

The ID staff was too pushy on faculty to have them implement multimedia videos in their courses. But the majority of these faculty members did not want to create videos because they did not see the value and considered it an undergraduate level teaching style. They were not impressed to use it for their graduate level courses. One of the Faculty considered the video samples to be very basic, and of undergraduate level. This faculty adds:

For example, how do cellular phones work. You know I had slides but if that would have been video that would be helpful. Some of those were done, but at the end of the day what IDF was telling me and many others, I felt like they did not truly understand graduate school education.

One faculty shared that videos did not align with their teaching style. They shared that they do not really teach with multimedia videos. Another faculty shared that they were looking for some innovative pedagogical ideas to implement rather than multimedia videos that seemed too undergraduate way of teaching. They wanted to innovate their course activities by having students do and perform learning activities via active engagement with course content rather than just presenting course content via videos. Faculty shared that their complex material cannot be understood via video watching.

One of the faculty members assumed that students in graduate level courses can understand course content easily without the need of multimedia and via all the instructional materials provided. This faculty said:

The multimedia stuff. Our students don't need that. They get it. We have good clear description of what they need to do. They are graduate students.

Another faculty member shared that videos have their own place but had a difference of opinion and conflict with the ID regarding the location in the course they were asking to place and use the videos.

So, you know there is a place for videos. But we had a constant fight of struggling with saying, you know the point of [having] videos for their own sake [is not] any more than to have PowerPoint [slides] for their own sake.

Some faculty were frustrated and demotivated to work with their IDs who did not have any background in their academic discipline/subject-matter they were designing and teaching their course in. They shared that they would have found it more efficient and productive if their ID also had background and knowledge of the subject they were teaching. In other words, they preferred their matching ID to be specialized or have a background in their academic discipline. These faculty members often had to explain their IDs, their course content, and the background of the subject matter. The faculty found this lack in ID subject matter background to be time-consuming which caused delays in completing their course development process. For one faculty, this was a main problem for late completion.

You know, the ID had essentially zero understanding of the content of the course, you know, which I can appreciate. Because, it's course [ABC] so it's not, you know, you have to have some background. If we

talk about course ABC topics [X,Y,Z], if you don't understand what that is, how are you going to develop a course.... they're not going to happen. And that was the main problem.

For two faculty members of one of the programs, the same ID who they worked with, also knew their subject matter. Their ID studied the same major. One of these members shared that everything worked well with their ID because their ID had a background in their subject matter. They also mentioned that some fellow faculty they knew did not have a smooth experience of the course development process due to the lack of their matching ID's subject matter background and knowledge.

We had a designer that was very good who knew the subject matter and not just how to do instructional design. The ID was a major [A] student and knew about our major and overall [what] our experience was. You know, exceptional; and we really had a good experience. But in talking with other faculty, they had, you know, different experiences. And I come away realizing that, you know, that most things are in the chemistry between the designer and faculty shared knowledge base. You know that really made a difference.

4.3 Theme 3: Faculty Think About Their Students and Take Into Consideration Only Those Pedagogical Ideas That Benefit Their Students During the ID Process

During the instructional design process, faculty carefully consider the ideas provided by their IDs that could benefit their students. They consider what idea could be the most useful and effective for their student learning. Hence, faculty (subject or actor) is influenced by Students of R University (Community) as shown via arrow 3. Figure 5 provided the Activity Context for this theme and shows tension is uni- or one- directional via arrows 4 and 5. The ID staff was also able to influence the faculty under this theme, as shown in arrow 4, as they provided ideas to faculty that they thought were effective for their student learning experience. The impact on faculty teaching design and pedagogical knowledge is via using ID suggestions and analyzing and then implementing only the ideas most needed and effective for their students (arrow 5) that leads to the outcome that ID staff collaborate and respect faculty and do what faculty prefer to do for their students.

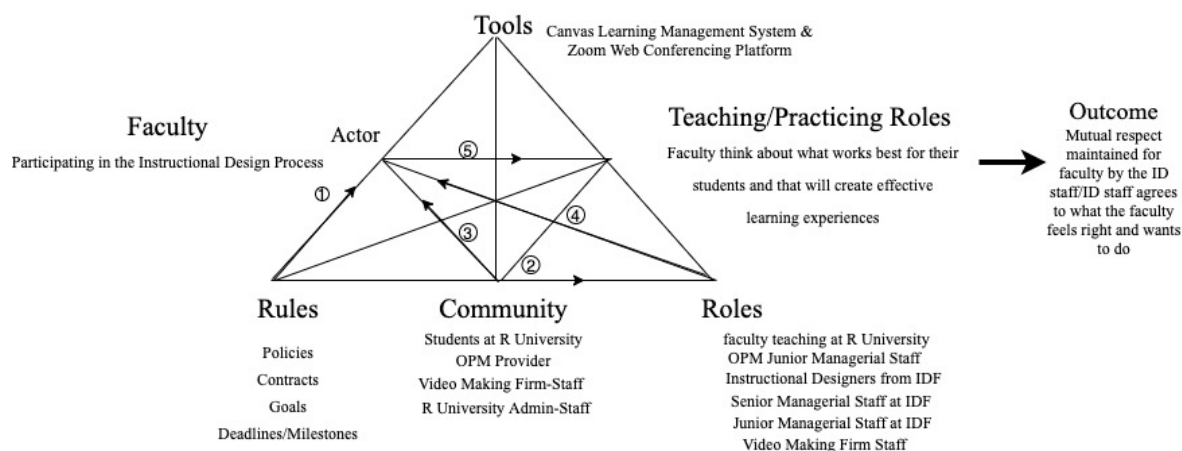


Figure 5: Activity System Context for Theme 3 (Ramani, 2020)

For example, one of the faculty considered the idea of having knowledge checks instead of multimedia videos:

I think we were thinking about what the students are more capable of doing. Sometimes, they say no it's fine. The multimedia stuff. Our students don't need that. They get it. We have good clear description of what they need to do. That was a conflict of interest. Second was knowledge checks. At first I thought do they really need that. But then I realized it can help me structure the live sessions.

Another faculty liked the idea of including a discussion instead of a quiz every week:

A tangible example is this ID had talked about a quiz every week and to make sure before the students came into the live session they could pass a quiz on the readings and [what] I pushed for them to do is answer discussion questions amongst themselves you know on this listserv model that we have and have the TA moderate the discussion. And that's a clear example of us going in that direction.

One faculty did not like and did not consider the suggestion of gamification techniques from their ID as they considered inappropriate for this level of teaching and their ID respected their decision:

You know and one of the things that I think this ID did not push, which I kind of appreciate it, but [what] this ID certainly made available were some of the aspects of gamification. Right, like how to make it like a game, and you know that's just I have personal preference where I don't think that's really appropriate for this [level]. And I told this ID that pretty much straightforward upfront and this ID was pretty much okay with that.

4.4 Theme 4: Faculty are Fascinated to Teach Online Using Technical Tools

Faculty in this business partnership were excited to test and start using the technical tools and also experience how they replicate their face-to-face teaching in an online format. ID staff provided their suggestions on the integration of technology that made the faculty excited about these tools. Faculty were fascinated to learn to use the Zoom tool for their live sessions. They were also motivated to integrate technology into their online teaching to benefit student learning. Figure 6 represents the Activity System context for this theme. There are six uni- or one- directional tensions in this activity system that influence faculty to see how technical tools could be integrated and applied and could help them implement teaching ideas from their face-to-face classroom. Arrow 4 shows the ID staff's influence on faculty on the suggestions to integrate pedagogy. Technical tools acting as Mediating artifacts influence faculty to replicate the technical tool in an online format via arrow 5. Arrow 3 shows that students influence the faculty to think and imagine using these tools and plan for such activities. Arrow 6 shows faculty motivation to use technical tools to benefit student learning in online teaching format.

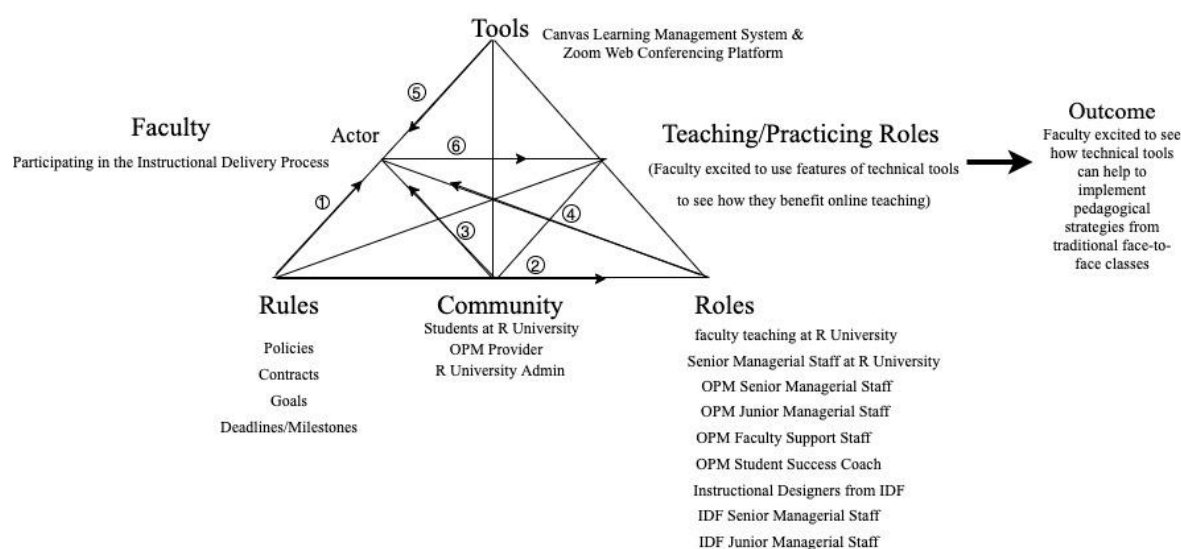


Figure 6: Activity System Context for Theme 4 (Ramani, 2020)

One faculty found several features of the Canvas LMS to be beneficial and how it made assignment submissions more effective and easier to organize without the use of papers. This faculty also was impressed how technology provides evidence of assignment submissions and was excited to use the whiteboard feature of the Zoom technical tool. This faculty was also concerned about how to use these tools but was excited about learning them.

I really like, in general, I like in Canvas that submissions are clear and there is a day you know. You don't have to deal with lots of papers. You know people sometimes tell you that they have submitted but cannot find it as evidence as it is. That's probably going to be general for all electronic tools. But Zoom, I kind of like the grouping feature in it. I was excited about the whiteboard feature. But I haven't been able to use it as a real whiteboard. It's very hard. I even thought to try [a] tablet to try to write on it, but it's been a challenge to you know to write on my ... that was one tool I was excited about...it's probably a user thing ..I probably need to get used to it...It has been really...

One of the faculty members was impressed with how the modules feature in Canvas worked so well. This faculty now finds these modules as an effective way to teach.

I think the Modules. It is something that I don't do in my physical classes. Because I prefer to keep it simple by going into files and creating folders. So I create slides for week 1, week 2. But I think if I create

modules for each session and provide all the materials in the modules that might be a better way to teach.

One of the faculty members was excited about the breakout grouping feature in Zoom and really wanted to check out how it was possible to put students into groups in an online format.

I think I'm really excited to see how that um, uh, how does a group feature in Zoom going to work out? And so the breakout room or breakout group or whatever they call it, Zoom. Um, so I'm quite curious about how, how well that is going to replicate what we can do on the ground.

5. Discussion

This case study used the Activity Theory Framework to understand how faculty were influenced via different social and cultural situations and factors (Salomon, 2003). As faculty came in contact with different elements (technical tools, RU Community, OPM Staff, IDF, and Video Making Firm-VDF staff) of the adjusted Activity Theory model of this business partnership, they reacted and took decisions and actions according to their past experiences and knowledge of their teaching (Salomon, 2003). Faculty got influenced via tools and social and cultural interactions from the staff of all four organizations (RU, OPM, IDF, VDF) during the course design and implementation procedures (Salomon, 2003). When the faculty of RU enters this process, they have their own past experiences, knowledge, and assumptions of their teaching (Salomon, 2003). They have their own experiences and assumptions of what effective teaching is and what an instructional designer does (Salomon, 2003). They come into this process with varied experiences with technical tools and interactions with RU, OPM, and IDF environments. Each faculty member comes with own understanding and intentions to participate in this process, their own attitudes, and different levels of learning mindsets (Salomon, 2003).

Based on the data analysis and results of this case study, the researcher could not find any set or fixed patterns across faculty behaviors and interactions during the course development process of the OPM-University business model. There is no one set consistent answer to what influenced and what did not influence the faculty members. Each RU faculty was different and reacted differently according to their past knowledge, experiences, and current assumptions (Salomon, 2003). RU Faculty had their reasons and mindset about their teaching design at the time of starting the instructional design process. It is very important for the IDs to know their faculty differences and understandings in reasons, assumptions, and beliefs about 'pedagogy' and 'effective pedagogy' before starting this instructional and course development process. Faculty were got into this process first. Faculty members who have been with R University for a long time want to grow enrollment and support the university initiatives. When they get into the ID process, they face many conflicts for many different scenarios. Most of the ideas provided by the ID staff are considered a better fit for undergraduate education and not graduate level. Many pedagogical suggestions were not taken by some faculty. Some faculty members took suggestions only that would benefit their students. Some faculty members adjusted to the ID staff's suggestions. Many faculty members who did not use technical tools often or who did not teach online before were excited to see how these tools work for teaching strategies online.

The faculty had their own set of assumptions on teaching. None of these assumptions were clarified at the start of the ID process. They assumed some strategies worked only for the undergraduate level and not graduate level. They also assumed only some pedagogical strategies will work for their students and some will not and only be implemented those that they thought would work for their students. They also assumed that their ID needed to have their subject matter background. ID is a professional who is an expert in learning design and must maintain a balance between being a content expert and a learning design expert so that the faculty does not feel micromanaged (Halupa, 2019). Based on the literature review, IDs are experts in how people learn and can influence faculty to integrate effective and innovative pedagogy for student completion and retention in the online course being developed (Chittur, 2018). ID's bring expertise on how people learn and work with the subject matter expert to design for the most effective learning experience. However, in this study, some faculty members were concerned with the content knowledge of the IDs they were working with. Their experiences seem to be frustrating and more time-consuming because they thought that their ID did not have their subject matter expertise. IDs are matched to a faculty member based on their background and interests. These assumptions by faculty created tension in the minds of faculty about the ID process, and they were frustrated that they had to spend more time because of the lack of their IDs' subject matter knowledge by their ID. With all this, it can be said that the most important of all the factors affecting faculty current pedagogy knowledge include: what they know about their own teaching; how it differs with best teaching practices; what they really know about their assumptions of teaching; how aware are they of their own teaching; what they consider as

good pedagogy or not so good pedagogy; and what their viewpoint is on how students learn and what is best for them (Ramani, 2020). IDs should consider understanding these factors and clarifying with faculty before proceeding with the instructional design procedures.

6. Conclusion

Thus, based on this case study, it can be said that the faculty's own thinking about their teaching is critical for the growth in pedagogical knowledge and development that can be achieved from the instructional design process of this business model. To get the best from the ID process, faculty members need to keep their assumptions aside and try to understand that the IDs suggest implementing strategies that are evidence-based and that have proven to work for effective cognition. Every strategy has a sound logical reasoning that the faculty needs to understand. Thus, a learning mindset is very important and necessary for the faculty to get the most out of this process as they participate in this business partnership.

It can be concluded that the Activity Theory framework was very useful to investigate and understand the social and cultural perspective of how faculty interact with different individuals and technical tools involved in an OPM partnership and how this impacts on their pedagogical knowledge and development.

6.1 Implications for Practice

Faculty can benefit by having a learning mindset when they join this instructional design process. Participating in such a course development process can play a very important role in faculty pedagogical knowledge and development and can be an excellent professional development opportunity. Especially for those faculty are very new to online teaching or are about to start. Faculty should be involved in teaching online and the online course development process not just due to the pressure by their upper-level management but also because they really want to teach online, reach more students, and see them achieve learning outcomes and succeed in online modality. Faculty members should also be ready to check their own assumptions and knowledge they have about their own pedagogy before joining and starting the instructional design process.

7. Limitations

One of the main limitations is that this study is based only on one case study in the United States. Another limitation is that the interview answers from the IDF staff could be biased due to not wanting to provide any negative information for the organization they work with. This study only involved the first two terms, so it also had time limitations and constraints.

8. Further Research

The faculty in this case study commented on the differences between graduate and undergraduate teaching and were not happy about the suggestions provided by their IDs. An opportunity for further research could be to study these aspects of faculty knowledge and assumptions on teaching and learning, especially regarding their understandings and assumptions about differences between undergraduate and graduate teaching. This case study was successfully analyzed using the Activity Theory Framework. The use of Activity Theory in e-learning practice and research could also be another area for further research.

Note: This is a revised version of the article, created to eliminate possible redundancies with the respective two further articles below:

Ramani, S., Bradford, G., Dias, S., & Olfman, L. (2022). Identifying a gap in the project management approach of the online program management and university partnership business model. *Online Learning*, 26(1), 302–324. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1340531>

Ramani, S. (2022). Background and skill set of instructional designers questioned in the OPM-university business model. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 34(1), 25–35. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1363713>

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