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# Draft PhD



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# Dissertation Proposal

ADS840: Doctoral Seminar

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**01**



**Proposed Title**



Introducing the Topic



# Retention and Success: A Phenomenological Study of Middle-Level Managers in Publicly Funded Ontario Colleges

**Proposed Title**

# 02 ✨ Literature Review ✨

Current State of Knowledge



## Importance of the MLM Role

- Critical organizational threat – lack of intelligent and skilled leadership (Bennis, 2007).
- MLMs fill the most critical roles within academic organizations (Spence-Ariemma, 2014).
- MLMs can impact productivity and effectiveness of a university (Brinkley-Etz Korn & Lane, 2019).
- Volume of MLM responsibilities and related pressures illustrate the importance of the academic chair's role to individual institutions (Brinkley-Etz Korn & Lane, 2019).

## MLM Responsibilities

- Responsibility for academic programs and connecting senior college leaders with faculty, staff, and students (Kruse, 2022).
- Pressure from above and below (Campbell & Bray, 2018; Hartley, 2010; Honu, 2018)
- Estimated that they make 80% of all institutional academic decisions (Parker et al., 2022).
- Expected to run academic programs successfully and complete initiatives to support student success (Kruse, 2022).
- Significant decision-making responsibilities in the areas of curriculum, research, and accreditation (Boyd, 2021).



## **Lack of MLM Preparedness**

- Many MLMs have had little to no formal training in preparation for the role (Sirkis, 2014) and must train themselves to be effective leaders, managers, and administrators (Boyd, 2021).
- Fewer than 10% of MLMs had leadership and management training before fulfilling the role (Gillen et al., 2024).

## **MLM Competencies and Supports Needed**

- Both management and leadership skills are critical for success (Brinkley-Etz Korn & Lane, 2019).
- Require an understanding of how the institution functions, decisions are made, and how to develop relationships (Spence-Ariemma, 2014).
- Context is important when determining competencies and supports – size and mission of institution (Sirkis, 2014), culture, demographics, and physical environments must be considered (McArthur, 2002).

## **Results from Lack of Competencies and Supports**

- Concerns regarding retention, recognizing a high turnover rate (Fraser & Ryan, 2012).
- Burnout and stress are considered occupational hazards (Lima, 2016).
- Position can be lonely and with a feeling of isolation from others (Kruse, 2022).



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# 03 Research Questions

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Including Objectives





# Research Questions

1

What do middle-level managers (MLMs) perceive as the barriers to success in their role within publicly funded Ontario colleges?

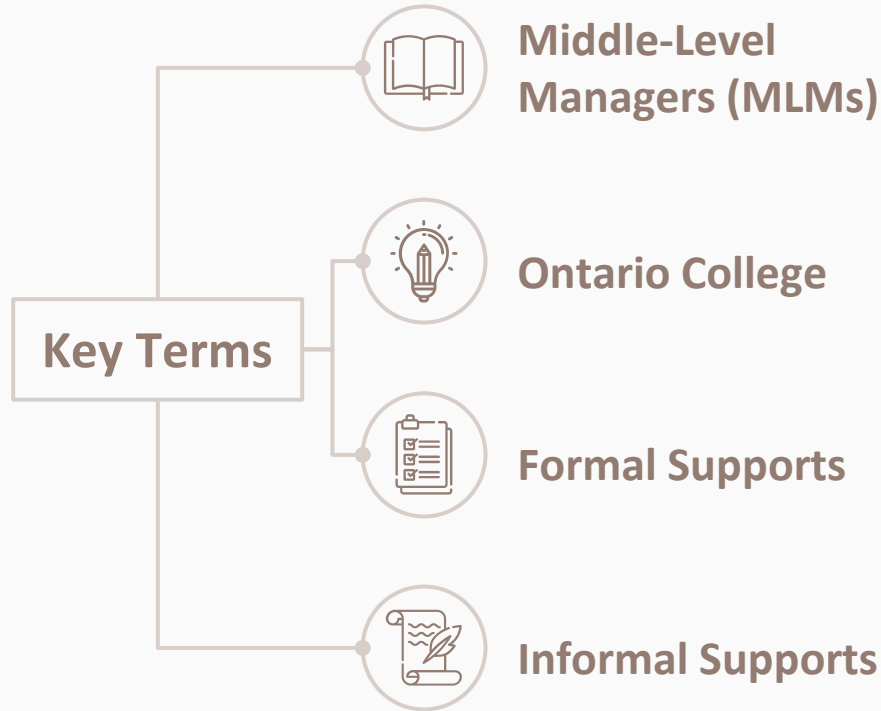
2

How do these perceived barriers impact MLM success and retention?

3

What formal and informal supports are necessary for MLMs to be prepared for, succeed, and retained in their roles?

# Key Terms



Individuals filling leadership roles within Ontario colleges with direct reports and who are at least two levels below the college president. Position titles typically include chair, associate dean, and director.

One of 24 publicly funded post-secondary institutions in Ontario, Canada, specializing in applied and technical training.

Typically structured and goal-oriented and include activities such as conferences, courses, professional development training, organized conversation circles, and webinars.

Typically unstructured and without set goals and include activities such as online communities and resources, discussions, and conversations.

# 04 ✨ Conceptual Framework ✨

Guiding the Research



# Conceptual Framework

## Ontario Colleges

- Ontario college system created in 1965 as an alternative to the existing university system.
- Options to individuals unable to attend university due to social and socioeconomic barriers (Colyar et al., 2022).
- Offers various credentials in program areas needed by local labour markets (Colyar et al., 2022).
- Ontario colleges are complex institutions supporting partnerships, vocational training, literacy and basic skills, apprenticeship, and applied research (Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2021).
- *Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002.*
- Structures vary but most have an academic VP responsible for multiple deans, with deans responsible for multiple chairs, associate deans, or directors (Lima, 2016).

## Professional Development

- Based on literature on PD training programs for academic leaders, Albashiry et al. (2015) identified four design principles:
  - 1) Context, organizational structure and culture must be considered.
  - 2) Senior leaders must be involved in program development.
  - 3) PD should be ongoing with reflection and discussion included instead of isolated training sessions.
  - 4) Multiple modalities of delivery must be provided.
- Current research will focus on the first and fourth principles.


# 05

# Method & Ethics


Data Collection & Analysis



# Method

- Aiming to understand people and their contexts, i.e., academic MLMs.
- Lived experiences – understood by conducting in-depth interviews of multiple individuals experiencing the phenomenon of interest.
- Quantitative research may lack richness of responses needed to understand barriers to success and retention.
- Therefore, a qualitative research study will be conducted.



## Ontology

Interpretivist Approach



## Epistemology

Phenomenological  
Qualitative Study



# Method

## Data Collection & Sampling

- Semi-structured interviews – standard and probing questions.
- Sample size – minimum of five participants but aiming for theoretical sufficiency.
- Purposeful sampling – participants elicited through existing networks for academic leaders.
- Virtual Interviews via Zoom to reduce geographic barriers in obtaining diversity of participants.
- Interviews will be transcribed using Zoom transcription function and recordings will be reviewed to correct errors in the auto-transcription process.

## Data Analysis & Coding Considerations

- Initial thoughts will be developed based on themes across transcripts.
- Descriptive and In Vivo coding will be used to group common ideas and themes.
- Recognize potential researcher bias in interpretivist phenomenological studies.



# Ethical Considerations

- Study approval will be obtain through Niagara University's Institutional Research Board (IRB).
- Participant consent forms will be distributed and collected before engaging in the interview process.
  - Will clearly state the study's purpose.
  - Ethical considerations will be provided to participants.
- Researcher actions will aim to be caring, fair, and respectful.
- Summarize how participant data will be used, outline how identities will be protected, and follow all interview protocols.
- During the data analysis phase, it is important to include all relevant participant contributions, even if they do not align with the study objectives.
- Plans in place for reporting, sharing, and storing the data, as well as articulating who owns the data.
- Any potential conflicts of interest will be identified in advance.





**06**



**Significance**



Impact of Research on Practices



# Significance

## Fills Research Gap

Current research focuses on universities within the United States and involves faculty moving into academic chair positions. Ontario-related research focuses on leadership.

## Employee Engagement

There is a positive correlation between education and human well-being, leading to higher employee engagement and increased organizational performance.

## Decreased Turnover

There is also a positive correlation between increased employee engagement / supportive work environment and decreased employee turnover.




# Thanks!



## Questions?

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