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## Addressing the Lack of Digital Literacy Learning at a Kuwaiti Higher Education Institution

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## Abstract

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is an effort to address the lack of digital literacy learning at a Kuwaiti higher education institution. Digital literacy and, by extension, digital citizenship are critical skills to have in today's world. Global College of Kuwait (GCK, anonymized) is a relatively new college in the Gulf region that is struggling to retain students, particularly after the COVID pandemic highlighted the GCK's lack of experience with and preparedness to teach digital literacy. To tackle the problem, a reform committee was formed and tasked with finding a feasible solution to improve digital literacy learning in GCK's Foundations Program. A Foundations Program is a preparatory program typically found in most private colleges and universities in the Gulf. It focuses on language and math literacy skills for new students and is a Pass/Fail program that is mandatory prior to entering a degree program. The OIP analyzes the best ways to implement digital literacy learning as part of the Foundations Program, ensure that all students engage in digital literacy knowledge and practice and gain transferable academic skills of critical thinking for life. Using John Kotter's (1995) 8 Step Model of Change, the analysis finds that there are best practices for digital literacy learning tailored to a Foundations Program and suggests that GCK opts to implement the same. Following regional best practices, GCK should imbed digital literacy tasks as part of the English-language literacy portions of the Foundations Program.

*Key words:* digital literacy, higher education, digital citizenship, foundations program, language literacy, critical thinking, Kotter

## Executive Summary

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) hopes to address a key problem of practice (PoP) within the higher education institution known as Global College of Kuwait, or GCK (anonymized). The PoP is a lack of digital literacy learning at GCK, with a focus on remedying this within the Foundations Program. The OIP is composed of three chapters and each addresses a different element of the discussion. To begin, answering questions of what the issue is, why it is an issue, and what are the organizational or cultural contexts related to this issue, among other details are required. Then, the focus is largely on why I have chosen a particular leadership approach, or framework for change, and how these decisions impact or fulfill equity, diversity, and inclusion considerations. A key element in the second chapter is the selection of a potential solution to the PoP. The final section engages in a more detailed understanding of how that solution should unfold through the lens of three plans: a communications plan, a monitoring plan, and an evaluation plan. These should all work cohesively to ensure the long-term success of the implementation plan for the chosen solution.

A clear gap is highlighted between the current state and the desired state of GCK as an institution that adequately prepares students for digital realities. My position as a faculty member of the Foundations Program and as the reform committee lead informs my leadership approach to tackling the PoP. I believe that educational institutions have a moral obligation to prepare students for the challenges they will face in academia and beyond. Part of this obligation is to ensure there is equitable access to information. Regardless of past education, students should be on relatively equal footing upon graduation. GCK is a structural-functional institution in nature with a transactional leadership in place. However, I opt for more situational leadership styles

within the reform committee. The organizational context, epistemologies, cultural implications, and equity considerations of the PoP are discussed at length.

Leadership is discussed through many lenses, and I have opted to primarily use low-differentiation leader member exchange theory (LD-LMX) (Haynie et al. 2019). LD-LMX strikes a balance between power-based approaches and relational approaches to leadership. This leadership approach functions well with the framework chosen for leading the change process. Kotter's 8 Step Model of Change (1995) was an easy choice as GCK's structural-functional nature requires a linear, progressive framework for change. The steps, limitations, and considerations of Kotter's model are outlined within this chapter, including his work on accelerated change in the modern world. After establishing the leadership approach, and framework, the inhibitors and enablers for change are charted and show that GCK is ready for change. Finally, four potential solutions to the PoP are outlined and one is selected to move forward: the best practices solution is to adopt a successful regional model.

Finally, a detailed change implementation plan – the implementation of the best practices solution – is produced. The steps of the implementation plan are discussed through the lens of Kotter's (1995) 8 Step Model of Change. The short-, medium-, and long-term goals for the plan are outlined, with a discussion of what the return on investment (ROI) will look like. Thereafter, a communication plan is proposed that includes details of who needs to be informed and what information is shared, as well as how. Then, a monitoring and evaluation plan are discussed in two forms, both adapted from Markiewicz and Patrick (2016). The monitoring plan is focused on an impact assessment along the way to ensure accountability. The monitoring plan also serves as a means to track the change effort's progress and make amendments as required. Finally, the evaluation plan is the ultimate assessment of the success and sustainability of the change effort.

The OIP successfully addresses the most important questions and considerations related to the PoP. It effectively elaborates on the ways the lack of digital literacy is harmful to the main stakeholders of GCK, and how implementing digital literacy learning in the Foundations Program can be the start of more long-term success for the GCK in a very competitive education industry.

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## List of Acronyms

**EDI** – Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

**GCK** – Global College of Kuwait (Anonymized)

**GPA** – Grade Point Average

**ICT** – Information and Communication Technologies

**KMP** – Knowledge Mobilization Plan

**LD-LMX** – Low Differentiation Leader-Member Exchange theory

**LMX** – Leader-Member Exchange theory

**OIP** – Organizational Improvement Plan

**PEST** – Politics, Economics, Social, Technical analysis

**PDSA** – Plan-Do-Study-Act

**PoP** – Problem of Practice

**PUC** – Private University Council

**STEM** – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

## **Chapter 1: Problem Posing**

Chapter 1 provides information required to better understand the organizational context and structures of the Global College of Kuwait (GCK), an anonymized private higher education institution in the microstate of Kuwait. The discussion identifies a problem of practice (PoP) and my agency in addressing the stated problem. Further, the chapter offers insight into the initial phases of the change process. Four guiding questions emerge from the PoP and are considered for the Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP). The OIP process begins with the identification of the gap between the current and desired state of GCK as an institution that adequately prepares students for modern digital realities, which is explicitly articulated in this chapter.

### **Positionality and Lens Statement**

I currently hold the position of faculty member in the English Foundations Program. The Foundations Program is a three-semester literacy program aimed at improving new students' English and math literacy skills as preparation for their degree requirements (GCK, 2022). All Foundations Program students must take the English courses, but math is reserved for those entering specific degree programs. The main issue is that students do not enter GCK with a level of digital literacy that is required for success in a post-secondary institution. For example, many students are using email and basic software such as Microsoft Office for the first time in the Foundations Program. In fact, one lesson during orientation includes how to attach a document to an email. Due to my position, and my interest in pursuing this at the doctoral level, the Dean of Academic Affairs offered me the role of Committee Lead – Foundations Program Curriculum Reform. This role is charged with providing a report on how the Foundations Program can better incorporate digital literacy competencies. This places me in a favourable position, as my agency is directly tied to addressing the PoP. In particular, the role of committee lead allows me to

identify the gaps in digital literacy learning required by GCK and to provide tangible suggestions and solutions that work for the Foundations Program. I am able to identify these gaps as through my role as reform committee lead, I have access to assessment results, among other internal files that may be useful for the curriculum reform.

The committee exists because of external pressures that resulted from the COVID pandemic as well as increasing competition among higher education institutions in the Gulf region. Specifically, I have been tasked with creating and managing a committee that will provide the executive board with a detailed plan for Foundations Program curriculum reform. This reform plan needs to include evidence of how GCK and students will benefit from implementation of the reforms. For GCK, this can be both monetary and non-monetary. For students, benefits include improved skills, better opportunities during their studies and after graduation, and global citizenship. However, all is dependent on the reform's approval; therefore, details related to my potential role in implementation are speculative at this point.

### **Worldview and Considerations of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

My role as an educator is in line with my values and beliefs. I view the world through the critical theory epistemology lens, whereby social justice and equity are intrinsic parts of education (Capper, 2019; Nickerson, 2023). Life is an opportunity to explore and understand, and part of that is critically viewing the world in hopes of changing it for the better (Nickerson, 2023). Without adequate tools to achieve understanding, there would be little purpose or change in how one lives. As an educator, I strive to provide my students with the skills required for them to be global actors. Within the context of the Foundations Program, it is my personal goal that students exit with greater critical thinking skills and as digitally literate students of the world.



An educational institution has a moral responsibility to adequately prepare students for the realities and challenges they will face upon graduation (Buchmann, 1986). This moral obligation, among other responsibilities, has not been prioritized in Kuwait (Keller et al., 2012; Aly et al., 2020). I hold the firm belief that it is one role of the institution to prepare students for global digital realities in the 21st century. Oxfam, a major global charity, defines global citizenship as the ability to understand the world and one's place in it (Oxfam, n.d.). I argue that one cannot be a global citizen in the modern age without being digitally literate because digital tools connect the world, barring other boundaries. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) summarizes digital citizenship as using technology to improve one's community, understanding and engaging in politics and society, as well as the ability to discern credible information online (ISTE, n.d.). It is crucial that students receive the knowledge and tools required to be digital citizens participating in global affairs. This goal should be considered within an organization's equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) priorities, as it combines equity and diversity. Students are not on equal footing with their peers if they are not receiving the same quality of education. Diversity in ideas and experiences is also achieved through digital citizenship. In particular, digital citizenship, or the ways we engage in digital spaces and communities, is essential to building social cohesion and understanding among diverse groups (A. Harris & Johns, 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks informing my understanding of the PoP and my approach to leadership are systems theory and positivist theory. Systems theory, or systems management theory, is important because it views the organization as an interconnected machine requiring all parts to work in unison for a common goal (Lukes, 1986). Further, should one element of the

system be adversely affected, it may harm other elements or the rest of the institution (Sridharan, 2023). Arguably, a subpar Foundations Program would be this weak link in the machine that is the GCK organization. Unfortunately, systems theory does not address more human elements of the organization, such as social inequities (Gordon, 2022). One of its drawbacks is that this approach requires a responsive leadership, which is not always the case in organizations that are focused on the end-goal (Harappa, 2021). This is in line with the structural-functional reality of GCK. Therefore, it is useful to use this lens when understanding the workings of the GCK and how change efforts need to be inserted in order to maintain structural flow and not disrupt the existing functions of the machine. Another key to understanding GCK and its priorities would be to understand the epistemological stance under which GCK works.

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge addressing how we “acquire and justify our beliefs about reality” (Main, 2023). Understanding GCK’s epistemology is important to understanding how to engage the college in change efforts. Based primarily on observation, the college functions under a positivist epistemology. The positivist epistemological stance holds that only that which can be measured and confirmed is to be taken as true and is considered a scientific understanding of the social world (McLeod, 2023; Turner, 2006). The benefit of the positivist lens is that it is rooted in scientific data that allows for monitoring, evaluation, and re-evaluation, demonstrated through the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle in this OIP (Cecez-Kecmanovic & Kennan, 2018). While the positivist stance is rooted in the concrete, my preference for critical theory allows me to better understand the “concrete,” so to speak, and to improve it where possible. This lens allows the reform committee to take action that is supported by empirical fact in order to further the change effort’s credibility (Ryan, 2018).

## **Current Leadership Approaches**

There are a variety of leadership theories and approaches that I find applicable. While I do not have an assigned leadership role within the GCK structure, my role as an instructor and my position with the reform committee reflects an emergent leadership (Gerpott et al., 2019; Northouse, 2018). Unlike a formal hierarchical leadership, an emergent leadership is directly tied to merit and positive interpersonal interactions within the organization (Hanna et al., 2021). As I have been entrusted with the task of reform, I try to exemplify authentic leadership by being transparent, self-aware, and attempting to centre ethics in all decisions (Gardner et al., 2021). That being said, I am aware that too much positivity in leadership can hinder progress as there is pressure to avoid conflict (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Additionally, the depth of interplay between the leader and the team under authentic leadership is difficult to achieve in the existing GCK setting.

As GCK operates within the scope of transactional leadership, I find myself countering this where appropriate. Transactional leadership is a punishment-reward spectrum of leadership where the main focus is outcome, regardless of internal or human elements (Cherry, 2022). Naturally, this style fits well with GCK being a structural-functionalist organization. I prefer to employ less rigid theories of leadership where combined epistemologies allow a leader to single out best practices that are dependent on the needs and challenges of the organization. This is also known as situational leadership (Cherry, 2023). Situational leadership allows for flexibility and understanding between the leader and the members, resulting in improved motivation and greater commitment, by teachers in the education sector specifically (Sari et al., 2022). Positive attitude in leadership is directly tied to the participants' positive reactions and involvement to change, making it very important to find the right balance (Brenner & Holten, 2015).

Situational leadership allows a healthy balance between formal authority and human connection. Mele et al. (2010) find that when relationships are prioritized in an organization under the systems management approach, there is more harmony and “resonance...between entities” (p. 131). With a more balanced view, the leadership has the opportunity to work as they please. My first approach with the committee was based on the leader-member exchange theory.

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory “conceptualizes leadership as a process... that is the interactions between leaders and members” (Northouse, 2018, p. 230; see also Erdogan & Baur, 2015). Within LMX theory, there are both formal and informal relationships, whereby the informal or in-group relationships are more effective in creating results when the relationships between leaders and members are good. The reform committee itself is an in-group relationship that is a subset of the Foundations Program faculty. I try to use this to my advantage as we are currently a small group of people working with a similar end-goal in mind. It helps when there are disagreements to highlight the goal of my role as committee lead, as this goal is in line with the individual and professional interests of the group. However, my concern is that it is very close to the transactional approach that GCK takes, which is less empathetic and collaborative than I would like. I am also convinced that without these key elements, success will be delayed.

For the purpose of achieving approval and project success, it would be beneficial to stay within the LMX leadership approach and add more empathy and collaboration where possible. While the two styles of leadership are typically not in concert with each other, studies have indicated the possibility based on LMX differentiation.

I have been gradually lowering the differentiation to be able to encourage a more collaborative and empathic approach in the reform committee. My concern for the team is

critical in maintaining productivity and to keep our common goal in sight (Haynie et al., 2019). My role may be limited, but within the reform committee, I am able to navigate effortlessly between LMX theory and an authentic leadership style to achieve the vision of change. I believe I was already practising this to some degree, but it needed refining. Currently, it is much improved. In this way, I can be an ethical leader that recognizes the contextual and relational needs of my team while working toward equitable solutions to the problems at hand (Liu, 2017).

Authentic leadership addresses the human aspect whereby student success and equity are crucial, along with respect for educators (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). On the other hand, transactional approaches ensure that the focus does not shift and that GCK's ultimate goal of profit is pursued, also keeping traditional leadership roles intact. Social justice is at work on all levels of the process since the ultimate goal is to create more equitable access to digital literacy for all students. Additionally, with faculty engaged on all levels, I am seeing more engagement in the change process. While my positionality limits me to GCK, this is challenging both the internal and external forces that create barriers for students both entering and exiting the college. I am confident that the reform committee's level of productivity is directly related to how I have approached the leadership role. Faculty want to be understood and included, and with limited opportunities to do so, the reform committee has become a safer space for open conversations regarding reform. There is a tendency for people to more wholly support change if they are actively taking part in creating that change (Rowland & Higgs, 2008).

### **Organizational Context**

The GCK is a structural-functionalist post-secondary institution with a rigid transactional leadership style. Structural-functionalism as understood by the seminal work of Talcott Parsons places social cohesion and function at the core of all decisions (Dew, 2014; Parsons, 1975).

Essentially, the idea being that as long as the organization or society achieves its intended function, everyone should work together regardless of personal ideologies or differences.

Parsons's approach to work has been heightened in the wake of the COVID pandemic and its effects on education (Sarah, 2022). GCK embodies Parsons's approach with all decisions being top-down and no real effort being made to support or accommodate students' diverse needs; thus, GCK effectively maintains a historic, outdated system of oppression (Capper, 2018). This means even decisions such as switching offices with a colleague require the approval of the GCK executive board. There are no department heads under the existing model due to GCK's size and the small student numbers. Decision making is entirely centralized with the executive board making all decisions and communicating them to faculty and staff, typically via email. Naturally, this type of environment lends itself to slowing down the change processes. GCK further hinders students by failing to address students' needs post-graduation; essentially, the college is not preparing students with the tangible soft and hard skills required by the modern workforce. Particularly after COVID, both private and public education sectors in Kuwait have faced severe backlash for outdated practices and tools and for the high numbers of students being inadequately prepared upon graduation (Othman, 2023). One example that Othman (2023) highlights is the lack of consistency in curriculum content and grading across educational institutions. Most students are entering from public high schools. Public education has consistently been underfunded, and the Gulf countries have seen privatization as the answer to spiking numbers in their populations (Coffman, 2003).

### **Role of Privatization in the Problem**

In the past, privatization skyrocketed and was long praised as a means of ensuring "quality of instruction" (Coffman, 2003, p. 18) despite no checks or oversights from the local

government. In more recent years, there have been attempts to improve private higher education, but ensuring that the quality remains high has been a difficult task (Oxford Business Group, 2019). A private higher education system, with most of its applicants coming from underfunded public schools, already creates a huge disconnection between college-level expectations and students' ability levels. This gap widens for public school students as they have less exposure to information and communications technology (ICT) in schools. It is expected that these gaps will be filled, and the major role of the Foundations Program is to fill the literacy elements of that gap – with the future role including digital literacy.

### **Wider Contextual Considerations**

To begin this discussion, it is worth noting that Kuwait is a microstate in the Gulf Cooperation Council (a regional, intergovernmental, political, and economic union comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates),, but maintains its unique culture and traditions. A significant part of being a microstate is the desire to preserve the Kuwaiti experience, which lends itself to slow institutional change (Alfelaj, 2016). This is particularly true for the older generation, despite the millennial and generation Z population being more open to adaptation. Unfortunately, these people are not the current decision makers or policy makers. Maintaining the status quo even in outdated educational practices has been a constant in Kuwait. While literature dating back to the 1990s from Kuwaiti scholars (Safar, 1997) highlights where and how digital literacy and education curriculum can be improved, it was not appropriately applied until very recently.

Kuwait's current reality is improving significantly, despite delays. There are now non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with schools to teach children as young as six basic coding along with other modern ICT skills. This OIP, therefore, is expressly referring to

students who graduated before these changes occurred. Major reform only happened in 2020, which means there is a large population of students who are of concern (“Kuwait Eager to Implement,” 2020). These students did not get to experience any of the new digital literacy tools or curriculum that the Ministry of Education began incorporating in 2020. Therefore, they entered college and university with a distinct disadvantage, and later entered the labour force unprepared and less employable.

### **The Catalyst**

The COVID pandemic was a major breakthrough for digital literacy advocates as most schools in the region suffered with the transition to online learning. GCK suffered far worse than most of its competitors, which led to a very large loss in student numbers. To rectify this issue, the GCK executive board has requested a report analyzing digital literacy implementation and profitability. Therefore, the pandemic can be seen as the catalyst for the change effort, as well as having laid bare the issues of equity.

### **Equity Considerations**

Improving digital literacy skills at GCK is also an issue of equity and social justice. GCK, being one of 14 colleges and universities in the microstate, has a local reputation as the place labour workers’ children attend, along with locals who could not pass the 3.0 grade point average (GPA) or literacy requirements at more established colleges. This reputation can be seen as a negative attribute as it may implicate students with lower academic levels. However, GCK maintains the position that wherever students start, it can adequately prepare them to be able to complete their bachelor’s degrees at these established universities (GCK, 2022).

However, this means that faculty are teaching students at a lower academic level. Most are entering the institution from underfunded public high schools where some essential academic



practices were not the norm. These students come to GCK in hopes of improving their soft and hard skills to either continue their education at an established institution or to confidently enter the workforce. It is an issue of both equity and morality that arises for an educational institution when this is not the case. Students have time and money (their family's or the country's) being invested in GCK with a promise of a return that they will be skilled and employable. If only a subset of students achieve this, and that subset happens to be those entering from private institutions, then GCK is actively participating in an unjust education system ("Lower Returns," 2022; Murad & Alawadhi, 2018).

### **Leadership Approach and Cultural Implications**

Unfortunately, GCK's actions are misaligned with its stated mission of preparing students for the realities of the workforce (GCK, 2020). GCK is a satellite campus of a very reputable North American college. Therefore, there is a public image of an international, respectable college, but the reality is a college that is both local and traditionally managed. On some level, this is deceitful as students are pulled in with a particular expectation that is not realized. Contemporary leadership theory reframes leadership in a manner that allows leadership to be "dynamic and reciprocal" (Komives & Dugan, 2010, p. 113) as members work toward a common goal. While my vision for change and that of GCK are not directly aligned, we can find common ground. Where mine focuses on student success, the college prioritizes profit. It will be challenging to balance these two visions for a mutually beneficial solution to be successful, and the link between student success and student enrollment will be explored to help bind these two ideas. Accomplishing the vision for change will require both parties to work cohesively together in a clear and communicative manner. Without this clear, agreed-upon vision, transformation efforts will likely fail (Kotter, 1995).

Kuwait's educational and political climate was rocked during the onset of the COVID pandemic and the resulting migration to online education. The sheer number of problems that schools across the region faced forced discussions on every level. The result in the post-secondary institutions was pressure to better equip students with digital literacy skills, which is a hopeful note for curriculum reform.

The existing leadership practices employed by GCK are best described by power theory. Power theory falls under the structural-functionalist epistemology where power is seen as "all or nothing" and authority is required for all decisions (Capper, 2018; Gangwar, 2021). This clashes directly with my preferred approach, which would embody more relationship theory; that is, the idea that individuals working with mutual respect can lead to more effective solutions and collaboration (Alajmi, 2022; Capper, 2018). All things considered, the structural-functionalist nature of GCK, along with the gaps in the college's stated mission and practised mission, have combined to shape an organization that lacks passion. GCK has the tools needed to empower educators and students. However, rigid leadership and outdated hierarchy limit the faculty's role and ability to thrive in their profession. This directly affected my motivation prior to COVID, but with the assigned task of curriculum lead, my motivation has been restored.

This role is new and born of a need for adaptation at GCK. GCK's Western affiliate is well established and respected in North America. However, in Kuwait, GCK only has rights to use the college name and the course materials; it is not required to use the same ideas or management styles of its affiliate. GCK has operated as a family-run business with no changes to the executive board, however the turnover rate of the faculty has been shocking. Since the establishment of GCK, the majority of original faculty members have resigned or been

dismissed. This, along with a need to adapt to the changing needs of students and the workforce, leads to the bulk of this discussion: the leadership PoP.

### **Leadership Problem of Practice**

The PoP is a lack of digital literacy learning within the Foundations Program curriculum at the GCK. The Foundations Program is a three-semester system for preparing students in the literacy skills they will require for their degree program. As the committee lead for the Foundations Program curriculum changes, there is a unique opportunity to present and implement improvements within the realm of digital literacy. Decision making at GCK has strictly been the responsibility of the executive board; however, the executive board has requested a report highlighting the connection between potential digital literacy changes with student retention and profitability for the college.

The lack of technological incorporation in Kuwaiti schools has become a concern for academics as it signifies a much broader, long-term issue for the microstate (Alfelaij, 2016). The fear is that Kuwaiti students will be at a disadvantage in academia and the workforce, and these concerns have proven valid (Al Hashlamoun, 2020). In line with this concern, Kuwait suffers from outdated teacher-centric methods that are entrenched in the culture as the norm, and for-profit institutions uphold these as they benefit from the hierarchical model of their institutions (Alfelaij, 2016). Specifically, the top-down approach is one that leaves no room for discussion, allowing for-profit institutions to focus on profit without answering to any authority regarding gaps in content offered within the institution. It is important to note that GCK is fully equipped with the proper ICT tools, and educators are qualified to use these but choose not to due to the students' skills gap. It is not the main focus of this OIP, but there remains hope that when students gain more digital literacy and become accustomed to ICT use after the Foundations

Program that the faculty will be more likely and able to incorporate technology into the classroom.

### **Digital Literacy Defined**

Digital literacy can be defined in many ways. Beetham et al. (2019) define it through its qualities: access to technology, use of ICT skills, and the practice of engaging with information and others online. Coldwell-Neilson et al. (2019) argue that definitions of digital literacy are outdated and have not kept up with the changes in digital technology, therefore focusing on the capabilities is more important. Tinmaz et al. (2022) provide a thorough review on digital literacy that also finds a variety of definitions and approaches to digital literacy. Spante et al. (2018) review the concept of digital literacy in higher education research. They conclude that multiple definitions are in use, and some cross over into the domain of digital competence, particularly more recent definitions. For the purposes of this OIP, it should be assumed that digital literacy refers to the three elements outlined in Beetham and Sharpe's (2011) work. Their definition was chosen as it provides a simpler base to work with for a new digital literacy curriculum, and it also flows very well into Ahmed and Roche's (2021) work with digital literacy and information literacy. Both works will be important to discuss when framing the PoP.

### **Long-Term Implications**

Students in the Gulf countries are at a significant disadvantage in the workforce, and this is especially highlighted when they are among peers from Western institutions (Al Hashlamoun, 2020). To better understand the problem, the symptoms must be discussed. Students are currently treated as customers, and their individual needs are not addressed. Once tuition is paid, they are guided through a system that is like checking boxes and, as long as they show up and pay their fees, that box will be checked. Rewarding the bare minimum effort simply to keep student

numbers increasing is causing a crisis of student underachievement (Johnson et al., 2022). Many of these students are government-funded, which means if they enter with a 3.0 GPA and maintain a 2.6 GPA thereafter, they are a significant income stream for the institution (Kuwait Cultural Office, 2020). Students do not need to worry about the financial burden of school as it is covered by the state.

Keeping students happy is important as they always have the option to transfer their credits to another institution and take their business along with them. While this is an effective corporate model, it is not the best fit for an academic institution. After COVID responses and online learning proved to be a great challenge, the clear skills gap between GCK students and other college's students was made even more apparent (Aly et al., 2020). While not a single higher education institution in Kuwait is offering a comprehensive digital literacy curriculum, some have made better efforts than others. Kuwait is a very family-oriented society, and it is not uncommon to have parents get involved in their adult children's lives, which is exactly what happened when GCK students' parents began to complain to the executive board about their concerns. With no indications of change at the time, students left in droves to institutions that would better prepare them for education in a technological world. Faculty observed student numbers were down and that transfer request forms were being filled out daily (GCK Registrar, 2021).

### **Bridging the Gap**

The current GCK Foundations Program curriculum follows a forward design model where the syllabus is designed, and then assessment methods and learning outcomes are addressed afterwards (Richards, 2013). While this model seems logical in the sense that a framework is set before details are addressed, there are studies suggesting it is not the best

approach to language instruction. Namely, an empirical study conducted by Hodaeian and Biria (2015) found that a backwards curriculum design is far more effective in English second language learning. A backwards curriculum design begins with the learning outcomes, and then based on those, the syllabus, methodology, and assessments are created (Richards, 2013). This approach would allow for a focus on the outcome as opposed to the process, and for language learners, the outcome is the driving purpose of their enrollment.

Richards (2013) discusses the central model of curriculum design where classroom processes and methodology are the key focus, and the formulation of learning outcomes and assessments are created organically based on the observations in the classroom processes. I would like to see GCK move from a forward curriculum design in the Foundations Program to a more fluid design between backwards and central. The three curriculum designs are further detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Curriculum Design Types*

	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Assessment Methods</b>	<b>Syllabus</b>
<b>Forward</b>	Transmissive Teacher-directed Practice and control Explicit rules	Based on expected norms Summative tasks, particularly end of semester Cumulative	Sequential Linear progression Key elements Determined before course
<b>Central</b>	Learner-centred Experiential Interactive Meaning > accuracy	Formative Self-assessments Develop capacity for self-reflection Not as tangible	Activity based Content created with learner input Evolves to reflect learning process Sequence may vary
<b>Backward</b>	Teacher-student interactions Practice part skill, part real life Accuracy emphasized Practice for real life use	Performance based Improvement oriented Cumulative Criterion-referenced	Needs/competency based Determined before course Works on skills in small chunks as opposed to whole Linear progression

*Note.* Adapted from Richards (2013).

Based on my experience teaching, sticking to learning outcomes without addressing your students' current levels is not always the most effective approach, as the learning outcomes are created generically and students are entering with varied levels of language knowledge. It would be ideal for faculty to have general learning outcomes, with a focus on how to approach instruction methodology and meeting students where they are, within reason. Schouten (2017) recommends collecting data on student levels to be more realistic with where students are and where they can be. GCK has assessment data, and this approach can help improve the student experience while increasing their digital literacy capacity.

The desired state for the GCK Foundations Program would be a curriculum that allows for students to have realistic goals, incorporating digital literacy and language tools in the classroom that go beyond traditional or outdated curriculum and instruction. Appendix A displays an excerpt of the current semester plan and offers an alternative approach that demonstrates the ease of including digital literacy tasks in the existing syllabus model by using a more fluid curriculum design.

### **Framing the Problem of Practice**

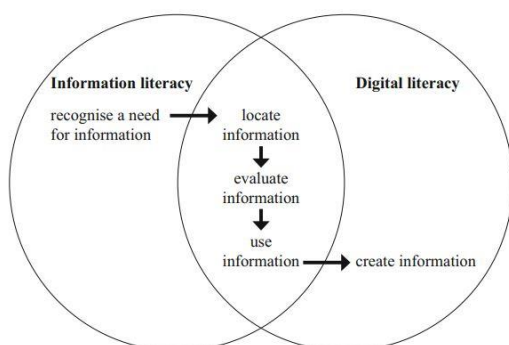
This PoP addresses the lack of digital literacy learning in the GCK Foundations Program. Post-pandemic realities have altered both work and education, and there is a responsibility on universities to make changes to address a more digitally inclined education and workforce (Bergan et al., 2021; Zhao & Watterston, 2021). The need to change is pressing, for ethical and business reasons: the ethical reason being to prepare students, and the commercial reason being for GCK to be competitive in the higher education industry. This section will provide a historical overview and why including more digital and information literacy into the curriculum is optimal for GCK.

## Historical Overview

The PoP assumes that digital literacy must be addressed in the Foundations Program, and it is important to understand why that is. The Foundations Program was created to address any learning literacy gaps students may have before entering their degree requirements (GCK, 2022). Currently, there is an English Foundations Program and a Math Foundations Program. The reform committee is for the English Foundations Program as math is in a different department. The assumption that digital literacy should be taught in the Foundations Program is not uncommon as most technology is run on English platforms; therefore, there is a clear intersection between learning the English language and achieving adequate digital literacy skills (K. Harris, n.d.). In fact, maintaining this connection is essential for students to be able to succeed and study independently outside of the classroom (Silver-Pacuilla, 2008). However, this connection alone is not enough to guide what students should be learning.

Higher education institutions should not function based on the assumption that students enter their studies equipped with the necessary skills for success, but rather provide those requisite digital skills in order to ensure success in academics and in the “digitally-mediated workplace of the twenty-first century” (Ahmed & Roche, 2021, p. 4617). Figure 1 highlights the intersection of information and digital literacy, and there is a need to include these themes in the change process for the Foundations Program.



**Figure 1***Information and Digital Literacy Venn Diagram*

*Note.* Sourced from Ahmed & Roche (2021).

Figure 1 highlights the intersection of information and digital literacy with a focus on locating, evaluating, and using information. This PoP summarizes these ideas as research literacy using digital tools, and they are included because the change is to reflect workplace needs, which are all elements of the fast changing, digital workplace. The GCK Foundation Program should focus its digital literacy education on research literacy, media literacy, and basic software. The first of these is heavily influenced and supported by literature in the field. The second two are additions based on an observable need at GCK. Media literacy refers to the ability to interpret media and to understand how students engage with and emotionally invest in the media they consume (Macedo & Steinberg, 2007). This refers both to popular media and social media where official news and figures share articles, images, and so on. GCK needs change but it cannot be random, the change proposition has an important role: the why is to better equip students and the how is through these methods.

### **Social Justice Considerations**

Social justice refers to the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities (San Diego Foundation, 2022). Digital literacy is a skill that goes beyond education and work; it allows learners to engage with online communities and expand

their knowledge while being more active members of society – both online and in person. Even more importantly, in a very homogenous culture, the ability to challenge one’s perspectives can be limited, and being proficient and able to navigate the online world would be the main way to seek new perspectives (C. Collins, 2021). The GCK student population would benefit from the ability to critically engage with new and old ideas from other cultures and experiences. The most accessible approach would be to use the internet when pursuing such information. This is especially important in a society where 60% of the total population is Arab, and the majority of the entire population, including non-Arabs, practise the same religion (World Population Review, 2023). While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with living in a society where the majority of people look, sound, and think like you, it would be a disservice to students to allow them to navigate the world as though these were the only ways to be and think. In a globalized world, they need the tools to understand and involve themselves in various realities, which would encourage their digital citizenship (Cornali & Tirocchi, 2012).

There is a direct link between digital literacy and equity as a whole. Bigger (2022) identifies digital literacy as key in addressing a multitude of issues, and particularly requires an assessment of how this works within geographic locations. Within the Gulf region, digital illiteracy is further encouraging foreign privatization and a lack of investment in local professional development efforts, but there is hope for change (Aly et al., 2020). This hope exists because, like GCK, the post-COVID era has forced a re-evaluation of education and technology in the region (Aly et al., 2020). Agada (2022) furthers this idea by highlighting the need for equitable access to information for the aggregate good. He even claims that digital literacy reflects “cultural, racial, class, and economic divides in society” (p. 8). Kuwaiti’s higher education institutions should strive to provide students with the digital literacy required to gain

equitable access to information, to one day be leaders in their region, and to encourage knowledge on all levels.

One concept to consider to meet social justice goals is the ethic of care. The ethic of care is a great concept to consider these social justice goals as this ethic holds themes of loyalty and trust whereby long-term aggregate good is the goal (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). This ethic is based deeply on moral decision making. Providing students with an arsenal of skills that allow them to navigate life, school, and work, while being critical thinkers would undoubtedly be a goal for the aggregate good of society. Ahmed and Roche (2020) very clearly demonstrate the overlap between information literacy and digital literacy and how they work together to create more open-minded, critical thinkers. This overlap is demonstrated in Figure 1.

### **PEST Context**

Some broad concerns for the organization include political, economic, socio-cultural, and technological policy considerations. Changes in public K-12 education policy introduced by the Ministry of Education are in full swing and the question of how digital literacy changes will continue to be relevant once those graduates filter through the system is important. The digital literacy reform must address people on a range of levels to ensure that future students will benefit from the program as well. Economically, inflation has impacted every industry, including private education. The Ministry of Finance has announced an increase in rents and land prices that will definitely affect the GCK's budget (Ministry of Finance, Government of Kuwait, 2021).

In terms of cultural and policy considerations, encouraging digital citizenship opens the door for introducing ideas that go outside the box of traditional, religious, and cultural norms for the microstate. While Kuwait's constitution protects most forms of speech, similar to other

countries, there are a few restrictions on free speech (Human Rights Watch, 2018) and there is a potential for liability should educators be too open in their use of teaching media literacy. This would have to be gauged as a department, and content used within the classroom would need to adhere to the country's expectations of what is discussed openly. A detailed PEST analysis is required to better understand the multiple layers of considerations at play in this change effort.

### PEST Analysis

GCK administration maintains profit as the prime objective of the private institution. However, improving digital literacy is mutually beneficial as the college cannot disappoint students and expect to improve enrollment numbers, let alone retain existing student numbers. The profit-over-student-progress mentality is a social justice issue, as an educational institution has a moral imperative to educate disadvantaged students (A. Harris & Jones, 2018). Table 2 illustrates a PEST analysis covering the major themes to better understand the issue at hand.

**Table 2**

#### *PEST Analysis*

<b>Politics</b>	<b>Economics</b>	<b>Socio-Cultural</b>	<b>Technological</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Education reforms</li> <li>• Frequent ministerial changes</li> <li>• Government dissolved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inflation</li> <li>• Unsuitable investment environment</li> <li>• High-risk competitive environment</li> <li>• Loss of student numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance to change</li> <li>• Formal education system</li> <li>• Segregated schooling systems</li> <li>• Focus on particular sectors</li> <li>• Tradition and cultural divides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of ICT tools in early education</li> <li>• Limited experience with ICT tools outside of education</li> </ul>

On the political front, Kuwait has seen a positive change with the Ministry of Education reforming its K-12 curriculum, including digital literacy ( "Kuwait Eager to Implement," 2020). However, there is instability with frequent ministerial changes and the government being

dissolved multiple times a year. The country has had internal disputes that have led to ministries often slowing down their work as they wait for the new ministers to delegate according to their visions. Should this recur, it can add to the problems, but these do not directly impact the existing students at GCK. The college is approved under two government entities: the Ministry of Higher Education and the Private University Council. Both entities do not involve themselves in auditing or day-to-day concerns. If the college is functioning and profitable, and if students are receiving an accredited degree, it is business as usual.

Economically speaking, inflation is hitting even the wealthiest of private institutions and there is a great deal of pressure for GCK to focus on finances over costly curriculum changes. Due to the sheer level of competition, GCK is not the ideal investment opportunity and getting new or more investors does not seem likely for the college. GCK has already lost students post-COVID, and private education remains a highly competitive market in Kuwait.

From the socio-cultural standpoint, there are deep divisions that exist because of the segregated school systems: gender-based schools, and public versus private schools for the more affluent families who are able to afford better schooling for their children. All public schools are segregated by gender, which means many of GCK's students will be sitting in a class for the first time with individuals of the opposite sex. This has proven to be a challenge for first-year students when encouraging them to engage with content and their peers. Some students feel they cannot engage freely in a mixed class, but over time, they can adapt (AlMatrouk, 2016; Tfaily & Samarah, 2018). Alfelaj (2016) also highlights the resistance to change embedded in the culture, with a tendency to value traditional schooling. This also means a stronger focus on sectors like medicine and engineering, which translates to some universities having very limited degree programs. Students who are unable to travel for school, therefore, are pressured into a degree

program based on availability and parental preferences for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs.

Finally, technologically, there is a clear lack of ICT tools in K-12 learning and, although there is change taking place, it will take time before its impact can be appreciated. Students have very limited experience with ICT tools outside of education, other than phones and game consoles for the most part. Being introduced to software and search engines that are beyond the basics is a shock to many students. Not only do they need to learn the technology, they also need to learn the technological language involved. This can be very intimidating since students also need to learn English as public schools' language of instruction is switching from Arabic to English.

### **Guiding Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice**

Every problem has a subset of questions that need to be addressed in order to effectively address the different elements of the problem, also referred to as root cause analysis (Percarpio et al., 2008; Waters, 2022). The PoP addressed has many assumptions and expectations. Therefore, it is crucial to guide the change process through realistic understanding of the problem's breakdown. To begin, the first and major assumption is that digital literacy is to be taught as part of the Foundations Program.

#### **1. Should digital literacy be part of the Foundations Program?**

The assumption that digital literacy finds its place in the Foundations Program is not a random action. This decision was made because the majority of ICT tools and software are primarily coded and run in the English language (McCulloch, 2019). In fact, English is used by a quarter of all internet users and the most common language used on the internet is English (Optimational, n.d.). Therefore, English-language skills are required to effectively navigate

digital tools and the online world (Srinivas, 2019). To separate the two would result in a slower learning process and perhaps create more difficulty for students.

## **2. What are the key components of digital literacy that students need to learn?**

Students need to be able to interpret all media forms and use their research literacy to confirm the validity of anything they see or hear. These two skills work cohesively to create a digital citizen who can productively engage in the online world and the real world. Basic software refers to the proficient knowledge of software such as Microsoft Office, Outlook, Student Learning Management Systems, and other core digital competencies required for daily use in academia and the workplace. My proposal is to begin the first semester of the Foundations Program with basic software, the second with research literacy, and the third with media literacy. If done correctly, this progression would mean that as the students' English improves, so too does their digital literacy.

## **3. How will digital literacy rates be measured and maintained?**

While there are theories for effective measurement and maintenance of change efforts, a benchmarking strategy that highlights the best practices of successful higher education institutions in the region is required. This will allow me to identify region-specific data for Arabic speakers in English-medium schools for a better chance at a successful model for GCK. Specifically, what tools are being used to measure digital literacy, and how is progress maintained in learning? Under review are colleges and universities in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, a selection that is based on preliminary search efforts. These considerations have narrowed the choice to Khalifa University in the United Arab Emirates. This focus will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

#### **4. Will GCK see a return on investment through the implementation of digital literacy reform – monetary or otherwise?**

Finally, and similarly, the speculations of a return on investment are present, but a clear path has yet to materialize. This requires a calculation of costs associated with the change effort and the potential returns. Much of this response will be speculative, pending concrete data and re-evaluation.

#### **Leadership Focused Vision for Change**

The discussion thus far has adequately explained the reasons change is required. Prime among them is the changed reality of education and a moral responsibility to prepare students for the workforce. This next section will address what, specifically, requires change in order to move from the current reality to the desired, improved state as an organization.

#### **Vision for Change**

GCK has great potential as an educational institution. Reforming GCK's Foundations Program curriculum in order to upskill students' digital literacy is the central focus of this change vision. Current external pressures include reduced student numbers and online education era launched during the pandemic which has highlighted the need for digital literacy in the Gulf region. Al Hashlamoun (2020) points to the struggle that learners in the region face when placed in Western institutions, and this cannot be understated, especially in a highly privatized country in which many companies are Western satellite offices. The lack of digital literacy skills not only hinders students' education but also their future career prospects.

My vision for change, then, is to alter the Foundations Program curriculum to centre digital literacy as the means through which students learn digital language literacy.



## **Change Agent**

The character of a change agent is vague, as it is the leader's role to decide how and in which direction to navigate the change effort (McKinsey & Company, 2017). A valid concern in this decision is whether or not the direction is correct, based on data. The Carnegie Foundation outlines a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle in which "observed outcomes are compared to predictions" (Carnegie Foundation, n.d., para. 1). The idea being any discrepancy is a source of knowledge and the problem can be tackled with more data the second time around. Schwartz (2018) demonstrates the importance of the study cycle as intrinsic to a project's success. As a project's success is the ultimate objective, there is a need to be realistic about the leadership approach to achieve this vision of digital literacy for GCK students. As an agent in my role as reform committee lead, it is within my agency to use all the tools available to me to help create the vision of a digital literacy program in the Foundations Program. The PDSA cycle is one useful measure for assessing progress and revising the change effort as necessary.

## **Closing the Gap between Reality and Vision**

The existing Foundations Program at GCK is a three-semester literacy course where students are expected to pass English-language requirements before entering diploma courses (GCK, 2022). The envisioned Foundations Program at GCK would incorporate digital literacy skills as key elements of the curriculum. This would work in collaboration with the language literacy goals of the program as digital tools and software used by GCK are all run in English. Ahmed et al. (2018) identify a direct correlation between a motivated teacher and the improved motivation of students, as well as good results.

Motivating educators can manifest in a variety of ways, for example weekly check-ins, knowledge sharing, and involving them in the setting of goals and the overall work process

(Sonmez Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020). The change vision is multilayered and contextualizes both the educators' and students' needs in the classroom. An ideal vision would be a program where digital literacy is taught, students are motivated to engage with the content, and both educators and students leave satisfied with the results. This vision cannot be completed without executive board approval and a benefit to the board. Therefore, this vision adds a clause whereby the ideal result would include monetary and non-monetary returns for GCK, that is, a return on investment for GCK.

### **Potential Organizational Benefits**

Potential organizational benefits include student retention and/or enrollment, improved reputation, and more academically skilled students (du Plessis, 2015). These benefits require rigorous benchmarking and regional comparisons to prove or disprove their quantitative potential, but they remain logically connected to the change vision. Students who see their institution as investing in their learning and long-term success are more likely to remain loyal to that institution (Latif et al., 2021). Kuwait is geographically very small, which means there are a few major corporations where graduates end up applying for work. If GCK has a good standing with these actors, GCK's graduates are at an advantage in the hiring process as the companies are already aware of the work-related digital skills GCK students acquire during their learning.

### **Potential Social Benefits**

The heightening competition within the education industry is another reason reforming the curriculum could lead to social benefits. Improving academic quality can increase the social standing of GCK, which is an indirect organizational benefit. This would translate to better opportunities for students as well as potential collaborations for GCK. This would be a benefit because GCK and major industry actors like banks and other organizations can work together to

build opportunities for students. For example, co-op placements as part of degree requirements can be considered. This would help students apply their knowledge and digital skills outside the classroom. While a great deal of this is organizational benefit, it is important to highlight how these organizational benefits work in favour of Foundations Program students. As a large number of students in need of digital literacy skills are from more disadvantaged socio-economic families, increasing their skills and the reputation of their educational accomplishments works to their benefit in the long run.

### **Equity Diversity and Inclusion Considerations**

Changes in the Foundation Program would benefit GCK by challenging inequities. GCK's student population is largely made up of public secondary school graduates. Public secondary schools in Kuwait follow Arabic-medium instruction. Therefore, the majority of students are at a significant disadvantage with regards to language and information access. Leadership is directly tied to social responsibility (Komives & Dugan, 2010) and one theory that accurately addresses this would be the ethic of care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Under the ethic of care, the valuing of compassion and relationships is an important element of decision making (D'Olimpio, 2019). Academia, especially in the post-COVID era, must focus on compassion and rebuilding the bonds between educator and student. The ethic of care would allow a reassessment of the socio-psychological elements of learning and of the academic environment (Corbera et al., 2020). In these ways, the ethic of care ensures there is human consideration given to the change efforts, particularly to those who are more vulnerable (Hepler, 2022). The ethic of care ensures that the responsiveness in relationships is contextual (Gilligan, 2011). Using the ethic of care to understand GCK-student relationships would mean framing the college as a community whereby the students are the vulnerable party requiring

attention and compassion. Thus, GCK has a moral responsibility to foster an environment whereby students are equipped with all the skills required to be better citizens – in addition to being good students.

### **Leadership Considerations**

Leadership considerations are divided into three subparts: the macro level is framed as the organizational leaders, the meso level is the department heads, and the micro level is the instructors.

#### ***Macro***

On the macro level, GCK's reputation is directly linked to the students' future career prospects as Kuwait is a small country where an individual's successes and failures are often openly shared and known within their community. Therefore, where an individual completes their studies and what they achieve within society are directly linked; thus, it is of interest to GCK to have its graduates contribute positively to their respective workplaces and industries.

On this level, the leadership that needs to be considered is at the level of the executive board, as the board's buy-in moves the change process forward. The board would also be considering reputation and social standing. GCK is struggling to find its place among its competitors. Including a digital literacy program can be a means to solidify GCK's societal and industry reputation. Its leadership is very hierarchical, and the challenges associated with traditional forms of leadership must be considered here. For example, is collaboration with competition possible under these conditions?

#### ***Meso***

On the meso level, department heads struggle to rally their faculty as the existing digital illiteracy has frustrated and limited them to traditional from-the-book methods of teaching and

learning. Department heads have an important role in the change effort as they can set goals and strategies that encourage and incentivize their faculty team.

### ***Micro***

On the micro level, leading the reform committee through the low-differentiation LMX approach is a carefully calculated decision. It is an attempt to balance the best of two extremely conflicting practices for the aggregate good. One element to consider would be how this might impact future faculty–administration interactions when addressing change within GCK. As for individuals, the focus is primarily teaching staff. As they are the leaders within their classrooms, they need to be convinced and eager to lead the digital literacy change.

### **Change Priorities**

There are three main priorities connected to the change vision: curriculum reform, profitability for GCK, and student engagement. Curriculum reform is intentionally vaguely labelled as it can cover a wide range of ideas, including how to incorporate digital literacy within the language literacy requirements. For example, how and where it would connect to information literacy, among other technical ideas and details, including type of curriculum (Richards, 2013).

Profitability is the second priority as the reform effort has been approved on the basis that incorporating digital literacy will benefit GCK. Ideally, this benefit should be monetary, although this OIP opts to explore additional forms of returns for GCK.

Finally, student engagement is the third priority. The success of the change effort is dependent on student engagement and results. The program can hypothetically be a perfect educational model but without student involvement to prove its worth, it would simply be theory. These priorities are directly tied to the belief that sustainable change efforts related to digital literacy need to occur at all levels, including at the student level (Pettersson, 2021). The close

interplay of how the change will benefit GCK, improve education, and engage students is critical as it will impact how GCK as an organization approaches digital literacy and change efforts well beyond implementation (Zhang, 2010).

### **Power and Leadership**

Power dynamics tend to hinder organizational change (Boonstra & Gravenhorst, 2010) which is why getting the executive board's approval and removing the members from the day-to-day discussion is important to the relationships that need to be created within the reform committee. The situational leadership approach requires this flexibility, which will also be helpful as participants adapt to the change process (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The faculty and student participants will be more likely to engage with the change efforts if they understand why the change is happening.

The "why" must be personal for each participant (Holt et al., 2007), and for faculty it may be about competitiveness in business, and for students it may be in their self interest. As societal values evolve slowly (Beatty, 2015), it will be important to communicate the why from this personal perspective to garner active engagement. An empathic leadership approach that seeks the aggregate good in a transactional environment will likely be met with hesitation, and it has been thus far. However, through leveraging the right parties, and approaching them with the support of formal authority within the institution, I can help encourage trust and change in a typically change-resistant environment (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017).

It is important that GCK, while behind its competitors, is not at a complete loss. Many qualities of the envisioned state exist in the current state, which means the change effort is feasible and within reach. K. Harris (n.d.) is among many who have discussed the link between digital literacy and academic success in language learning. GCK effectively teaches English-

language skills, and with the right training, it could combine the existing knowledge, best practices, and innovations to make a seamless transition into digital literacy learning. The details of the possible ways to do this are discussed in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 1 Summary**

Chapter 1 examined my leadership style and approaches and where they fit within my agency as Committee Lead. Thereafter, it discussed the organizational context, and a clear PoP was defined. A PEST analysis was conducted to better understand elements influencing the PoP and considerations for the desired state of the organization. A clear vision for change was expressed within the discussion. In the next chapter, I will outline the change framework best suited to GCK's organizational culture and examine the organization's readiness for change. Finally, I will begin to explore potential solutions for the predicament of digital illiteracy in GCK.

## **Chapter 2: Planning and Development**

Chapter 1 effectively covered the requisite discussion in order to begin planning and developing a change effort. This chapter will delve into details of how change efforts can proceed, where there is room for improvement, and why. The why is the central focus of this chapter in order to understand and select an informed change path that is equitable and considerate of all the organization-specific factors. To enter this discussion, the first step is to understand my leadership approach to change. This is important as my perspective of leadership deeply informs the chosen leadership approach necessary to address the PoP. With this, the discussion can develop to include the framework for leading the change process, as well as assessing the organization's readiness for change. Finally, a thorough analysis of potential strategies and solutions to address the PoP are explored. The solution with the best fit will be selected to help move the change process forward.

### **Leadership Approach to Change**

This section delves deeper into understanding my perspective on leadership and how to balance my personal views, and the objective need for a firm leadership approach. Among the elements discussed is the justification for the use of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory in the GCK context, which is supported by relevant literature. Thereafter a speculative discussion ensues regarding how this leadership style may propel the desired change within GCK. The limitations and opportunities of my leadership approach are further explored before moving into the next section that discusses the framework for change.

### **Understanding Leadership**

Leadership, simply put, is the act of guiding a person or a group of people to a goal or to ensuring consistent progress (Prentice, 2004). Barney and Pratt (n.d.) echo this definition but



add that leadership goes beyond simply guiding others to influencing them. A good leader, then, makes those around them want to do or be better. World renowned consultancy McKinsey & Company (2022) breaks leadership down even further into the behaviours a leader encompasses. Kruse (2013) argues that leadership stems from social influence, not necessarily positions of authority. A leader does not always have all the resources or tools that would simplify this task, but a good leader will use what they have to get the results they need. This is my outlook on leadership. Further, I view leadership both when I am leading and when I am being led as an act of empowerment. The term leader implies a relationship between two or more individuals with one at the helm. Relationships are key to success (van Breukelen et al., 2006), especially in difficult workplaces and, without empowering your team, success becomes increasingly difficult to achieve.

### **Chosen Leadership Approach**

Choosing a leadership approach was a calculated decision. While my position reflects emergent leadership (Gerpott, 2019), I was unaware how that might fit in an environment predicated on transactional, hierarchical leadership as GCK is very traditional in dealing with power and authority (Cherry, 2022). Meanwhile, my personal approach is more closely linked to authentic leadership whereby openness and understanding in leadership are more central (Gardner et al., 2021).

After careful consideration of the ways multiple leadership approaches may work within GCK, I narrowed my decision to use LD-LMX theory as the focal leadership approach for the change efforts. LD-LMX theory strikes a balance between power-based approaches and relationship approaches to leadership by maintaining titles and delegated tasks with a clear chain of command and reporting structure (Haynie et al., 2019). However, the low differentiation

portion of this approach encourages bonding and positive relationships between the leader and the members within a team. Balancing work with respect for colleagues has been shown to improve working conditions as well as better motivate members to work and achieve tasks set out by their leader (Porath, 2015).

### ***Relationship between LD-LMX and the GCK Context***

The LD-LMX leadership approach was prioritized over others for two main reasons. The first being the organizational culture within GCK. Based on my observations, GCK's rigid power structure trickles right down to instructor-student relationships. To completely step out of this norm would likely make it difficult to garner support for the change efforts outlined. It may also cause faculty to second-guess involvement if they feel the committee is stepping too far outside of GCK's norm. Therefore, aligning as closely as possible to the existing culture, at least on the surface, is required. The second reason is that it was one of the few leadership approaches that has a body of literature to support the efficacy of the approach when it is manipulated to accommodate more empathetic, collaborative leaders (Haynie et al., 2019). I am both empathetic and collaborative in my leadership efforts; characteristics that typically do not align with most power theories. LD-LMX, therefore, is chosen for both its flexibility and conformity where needed.

### **Literature Supporting LMX and LD-LMX**

LMX theory posits that the efficacy of leadership is dependent on the quality of the relationship between the leader and the members of the team (van Breukelen et al., 2006). However, the relationship within this theory has been framed through the lens of traditional power structures. Van Breukelen et al. (2006) hold that while LMX theory has garnered great results over the years, there remains room for improvement – specifically with regard to

developing a metric that adequately assesses the quality of the relationship and its impact on work outcomes. Similarly, Schyns and Day (2010) introduce the concept of “LMX excellence,” which refers to the ideal quality of a working relationship between a leader and department colleagues, as well as the group consensus and attitude toward the leader. The common critique of LMX theory circles back to quality and depth of relation. Here, Haynie et al. (2019) take these critiques a step further in introducing the concept of low and high differentiation LMX leadership. The idea being that dependent on the organizational environment, a leader can opt for more empathetic and friendly (low differentiation) leadership or a more formal, cordial (high differentiation) version.

While Haynie et al.’s (2019) understanding was selected for the purposes of this OIP, theirs is not the first discussion regarding differentiation. Liden et al. (2006) studied differentiation through the lens of task interdependence. A key finding of their work was that individual task performance improved in low differentiation settings. Ultimately, there is a strong body of literature that discusses and supports LMX as a leadership framework. The primary critique across years and authors is the need to centre the quality of the relationships at the core. I address this by choosing LD-LMX leadership. It is the hope of this work that LD-LMX will enable the committee, following Kotter’s (1995) linear change efforts, to see great progress in the Foundations Program and the reformed curriculum.

### **LD-LMX and Change Efforts**

LD-LMX maintains the structured nature of a hierarchical approach while adding empathy and respect to the equation. In terms of maintaining morale and collaboration, I look to the lower definition portion of the LD-LMX theory. However, in propelling change efforts, I lean more toward the LMX portion. This means I encourage committee members to be vocal,

and make sure their suggestions and concerns are heard. Then, when all is agreed upon, I turn back to dividing tasks and confirming deadlines. Delegation ensures that the tasks are completed as quickly as possible, with more active participants. A motivated group of people are more likely to not only complete tasks but also to do a great job in the process (Porath, 2015). The alternative would be to assign roles and tasks without any concern for their personal perspectives and emotions. This would be an unmotivated group that completes tasks without prioritizing quality.

### **Agency, Analysis, and Other Considerations**

My current role as reform committee lead allows me real agency to bring about change. This is because I set the goals and spearhead research efforts to (a) get approval for the change, (b) implement it, and (c) report results and future suggestions. This puts me in a position to not only make changes but also to alter the plan as required until the desired results are achieved, a key element for success (Banutu-Gomez & Banutu-Gomez, 2007). The main limitation of my role is that all actions undertaken by the committee require the executive board's approval. Essentially, regardless of whether I feel that a particular action is a necessity for the success of change efforts, the action will not occur without approval. I cannot guarantee that all my ideas will receive approval, and therefore, alternative ideas need to be constantly considered. Here, the active involvement and readiness for change from committee members plays a role in generating ideas and maintaining morale (Holt et al., 2007). This impacts my ability to focus on one idea and move forward with full force. Further, my primary motivation is student success, particularly improving digital literacy. The executive board's primary motivation is student retention and profitability. These two motivations need to meet at an intersection, one that I am trying to pinpoint and achieve.

LD-LMX theory allows me to diagnose and analyze needed change because I am able to both assign rigid roles and hear and consider how members respond to particular ideas throughout the process. In this collaborative environment, I am able to address blind spots I may have missed while also arriving at alternatives that may have not been considered if I were working alone or on one objective. Additionally, the PDSA cycle allows for reassessments as required (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.).

I have considered multiple paths for my leadership approach. The final assessment I arrived at was that the potential of leading in a manner that marginalizes others is very difficult to avoid if I want to align myself with the structural-functional nature of the GCK. However, I understood early in the OIP research process that this alignment needs to occur. I tried to find an approach that would focus on relationships and found LMX theory to be one of the few that highlights the role of the leader and the members of the group. Upon further research, I discovered Haynie et al.'s (2019) LD-LMX approach that effectively works as a loophole to avoid maintaining oppressive structures and to achieve goals while respecting all members involved in bringing the change efforts to reality. While the leadership approach is balanced, finding a framework that is equally flexible where needed is important.

### **Framework for Leading the Change Process**

Once a leadership approach is decided, the next step involves choosing a framework that aligns with this leadership approach and complements the GCK organizational culture. Naturally, structure is required to guide change efforts. This section delves into the chosen framework: Kotter's (1995) 8 Step Model of Change. The reasons and benefits of the approach are discussed in relation to its alignment with GCK as an institution. The first, second, and third order of change, along with their limitations, are also addressed.

## **Chosen Framework**

Kotter's (1995) 8 Step Model of Change was chosen for this OIP. The primary reason for this choice was the linear and structured nature of the framework. While this may be seen as an issue for other organizations, the predictable, gradual nature of the process works very well for structural-functional organizations (Visnjic et al., 2022). These aspects were placed as key indicators of approval as the executive board works in a predictable, gradual manner. The value of this choice is that it aligns with how the executive board members would create and implement change if it were their choice. This increases the reform committee's opportunities for success overall. Kotter's (1995) change process is comprised of eight steps: (1) create a sense of urgency, (2) create a guiding coalition, (3) create a vision for change, (4) communicate the vision, (5) remove obstacles, (6) planning for and creating short-term wins, (7) consolidate improvements, and (8) create the change.

These eight steps all work to build on one another until, ultimately, there is a living vision of change that can be altered and improved over time. In an increasingly changing society, and especially in the realm of digital literacy and technologies, adaptation is valuable. A change model that has this ability built in allows for change agents to build on past efforts, failures, and successes. For the purposes of this OIP, steps five and six are of particular importance to the change effort. Step five, removing obstacles and empowering others to act on the vision, is important because it insinuates that the other committee members will become invested in the change effort and will be able to continue this effort with or without me as their leader. It is my hope that my presence or lack thereof is not directly tied the change effort progress. My goal is to create a vision and change effort that surpasses me and my limited sphere of influence.

Step six, planning for and creating short-term wins, is a great motivator for everyone within and outside the committee. Seeing the fruits of one's labour, so to speak, is a great motivator to ensure the committee's motivations and discipline do not waiver as they work to create change within the organization.

### Importance of Framework

Kotter's (1995) model was chosen as it demonstrates a very gradual process of change where each small win can be celebrated and encourage more action. This model works well for the GCK environment as structural-functional organizations tend not to respond well to sudden change (Capper, 2018; Dew, 2014). The model would also complement the PDSA cycle as both allow the opportunity to re-evaluate and make changes as required based on data and results in the change process (Pietrzak & Paliszkiwicz, 2015). Currently, the change model is anticipated to follow Kotter's (1995) steps as demonstrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

#### *GCK Change Efforts Using Kotter's Model*

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8
<b>Sense of Urgency</b>	<b>Powerful Guiding Coalition</b>	<b>Create a Vision</b>	<b>Communicate the Vision</b>	<b>Empower Others to Act</b>	<b>Plan/Create Short-Term Wins</b>	<b>Consolidate Improvements, Continue Change</b>	<b>Institutionalize New Approach</b>
Created by COVID, online schooling disaster	Committee for FP Curriculum Reform	SM theory to create a curriculum that aids students and garners profit for GCK	Meet with GCK Board for approval of plans	Once approved, faculty interest should spike	An example here could be students successfully using basic software to complete coursework.	Gradually include change, and correct as we go, as opposed to waiting and launching a new curriculum without testing it.	Once smaller changes are seen as successful, implement the new curriculum and maintain a standardized approach to Digital Literacy education.

The sense of urgency was established during the COVID pandemic as it shed light on the lack of preparedness and ability of both students and educators to complete their tasks online. A Powerful Guiding Coalition has been approved (the reform committee) where I am currently

taking lead. There is a vision in mind of a curriculum that helps set students on the path of digital citizenship, and critical engagement with their surroundings and this (once properly formed) will be communicated to the GCK executive board for approval. Thereafter, the approval is slated to encourage more involvement from faculty and staff, which can translate to more engagement from students. Step six, the planning and celebration of short-term wins, will be ongoing and inclusive of approvals, student progress, and more. Steps seven and eight, which reflect the PDSA cycle, will be the role of the committee to analyze and assess progress and findings to continuously provide the best practices for teaching and advocating digital literacy.

Kotter's (1995) model is aligned with LMX theory as both have an element of vagueness that I opt to exploit for the aggregate good. For example, LMX's grey area allowed Haynie et al. (2019) to work in empathetic differentiations, which gives us LD-LMX. Kotter's model (1995) is linear and standard in terms of its change approach. However, each step is left to the individual's interpretation of how they would want to approach it within their respective institution. At GCK, I am choosing to work within these grey areas to ensure I have a model that does not further oppress or alienate any affected party. In line with this idea, the framework allows for greater support resulting in more equitable outcomes for both faculty and students.

### **Limitations and Considerations**

There have been multiple criticisms and limitations of Kotter's (1995) work, and these must be considered when using his model. I would preface these criticisms with the reality that no one change model can address every single element of change and be 100% accurate. The goal is to choose a framework that best fits the organization's reality and apply that reality onto the framework for a better chance at change effort success.



Warrilow (2019) outlines the lack of consideration for change readiness, explaining that the Kotter's model is too linear and ignores informal leadership when discussing change.

O'Keefe (2011) further addresses this first point, stating that change is hardly ever a one-off event that follows such a neat progression. In fact, she says, that the global uncertainties we now live with require continuous change efforts that will be interrupted, unfinished, that will fail and succeed, and that cannot be predicted in the ways Kotter outlines. Rajan and Ganasan (2017) take these criticisms a step further, but with a solution added. They claim the model should not be written off, but rather, adapted for modern realities and relevance. A major improvement they discuss is a metric for estimating the effectiveness of the change effort. This metric is something I have considered and plan to benchmark in order to accurately measure progress of digital literacy within GCK's Foundations Program. As this work is underway, there is a need to assess how prepared GCK is for the changes required to be competitive in digital literacy education.

Kotter's work has evolved quite a bit since the 1990s and the addition of accelerators should be considered. While his past work was more rigid and sequential, he has recognized that change is itself changing and rapidly so (Kotter, 2012). Where traditional hierarchy is relying on a core group of change agents, the accelerators pull in as many supporters as possible (Kotter, 2012). In fact, the model Kotter (2012) proposes is named XLR8, which has two systems functioning simultaneously whereby the traditional core group is able to maintain their authority and work on relevant projects while a second team is a network devoted to design and strategy. Traditional hierarchy in structural-functional organizations like GCK simply will not survive the rapid changes required if decision making is delayed for bureaucratic reasons. The XLR8 model, then, offers the organization flexibility and the ability to be constantly evolving and competing

within the education industry. It is very important that within this model, the hierarchy can remain and the network focused on change can grow or change annually.

The XLR8 model has proven successful in multiple case studies, even those applying it in rigidly structural-functional institutions such as the United States Department of Defence (Kaufman et al., 2020). This model has also been successful in complicated, multilayered industries such as the medical field (Odiaga et al., 2021). In both cases, the effects of the accelerator model provided a constant feedback loop where change was not only sustainable but also consistent with market needs (Odiaga et al., 2021). While multiple approaches to change may seem chaotic, it allows for a more open environment for change (Odiaga et al., 2021). GCK can begin with Kotter's older model and, as acceptance of change increases, introduce the XLR8 model for future consideration.

### **Articulating Change**

Steps four (communicate the vision) and five (empower others to act) of Kotter's (1995) model are particularly focused on communication. At GCK, communicating the vision would occur through the standard channels. The existing GCK structure, as Appendix B outlines, is as follows: The two owners and five other executive board members are the decision makers. Under the board are the president and the dean, and below them are the faculty. Chapter 3 will investigate how we can optimize the existing hierarchy to articulate messages without reinforcing a feeling of limited communication among faculty. These discussions are directly related to the type of change I am seeking to create at GCK.

### **Change Order**

Bartunek and Moch (1987) discuss change on three levels: first-order change refers to change that maintains the status quo; therefore, it is often very small change that is not impactful.

Second-order change is a conscious effort to redirect current organizational activities or beliefs; and third-order change is an effort to empower employees to be change agents as they see fit. It involves training employees to be more present of existing practices and empowering them to act when the existing practices are inadequate (Bartunek & Moch, 1987). Of these three, second-order change is the most aligned to my efforts at GCK. Altering the Foundations Program to focus on digital literacy learning and student success is a structural change that directly relates to activities and beliefs but does not alter the overall structural-functional nature of GCK. Nor does it push organizational members to seek changes, as this would be counterproductive to the reform committee's efforts. Similar to the change order, the framework chosen was selected to fit into the existing organizational culture.

### **Organizational Change Readiness**

At this stage in the discussion, the change framework and leadership approach that have been established are complementary. The next step is to address whether or not the organization is ready for the changes it needs. It is important to recognize that while individuals may be ready for change, there are organizational factors that may push against change efforts (Blackman et al., 2014). This section discusses change readiness using Blackman et al.'s (2014) diagnostic tool. Further, it delves into a better understanding of the role and responsibilities of GCK stakeholders in the change process. Finally, using the same diagnostic tool for change readiness, a discussion regarding both internal and external forces that shape change follows.

### **Diagnosing Change Readiness**

Change readiness is a multilayered discussion as there are enabling and inhibiting factors to consider for any organization (Blackman et al., 2014). The basic understanding of this model aligns itself very well with Deszca et al.'s (2012) model of a forcefield whereby both inhibitor

and enabler factors are pushing against each other to cross the border between them. The only way to move from the current state to the desired state would be to gain more enabling factors or to strengthen them so that they are able to push against the downward force of inhibitors. Table 3 uses this concept to provide an understanding of GCK's inhibitors and enablers at the organizational and individual levels.

**Table 3**

*GCK Change Readiness Assessment*

	<b>Inhibitors</b>	<b>Enablers</b>
<b>Organizational (GCK)</b>	Resistance to Change (Oreg, 2003) *Seek routine, standardization *Short-term mindset  Other *Centralized decision making *Structural-functionalist leadership *Cost *No guarantee for ROI (yet)	*Competitive industry *Post COVID realities *Potential ROI * Executive board interest in change *Student interest in change
<b>Individual Students in GCK Foundations Program</b>	Resistance to Change (Oreg, 2003) *Seek routine *Emotional reactions *Short-term mindset	Readiness for Change (Holt et al., 2007) *New to higher ed, easier to adapt to organizational shifts *Committed to their studies, therefore obliged to follow through *Admin knows best thinking leads to support for change  Other *Counterproductive to their own interests to fight change

*Note.* Adapted from Blackman et al. (2014).

The figure outlines the enablers and inhibitors impacting individual students in the Foundations Program and GCK as an organization. Put differently, enablers here could be referred to as drivers of change through Deszca et al.'s (2020) force field analysis. The number and weight of the overall drivers for change push the organization toward change, indicating that GCK is ready for change.

To begin with the organization, there is a strong resistance to change with a preference for maintaining the status quo, without thinking long term about how stagnation might impact profit in the future (van Rooijen, 2016). The costs associated with change are also potential barriers, as well as the fact that major changes tend to be tied to a shift in power structure (Boonstra & Gravenhorst, 2010). This is not desirable for an organization that is committed to a structured, centralized decision-making approach. However, on the enabler side, we see there are external forces pushing the college toward addressing change efforts. Notable among these is the executive board's interest for change and the potential ROI for change. As a business, the GCK needs to address stakeholder needs and profitability – monetary or otherwise.

On the individual level, Foundation Program students' ability is a factor influencing the likelihood of successful change. Notably, this generation has been raised with entertainment technology, which makes them more open to the introduction and adoption of technological tools in education (Hartman Team, 2023). While it is in their best interest to gain the skills required to succeed in the modern digital age, students are young and emotional in their reactions. They may see the changes as more work, more difficult, and therefore only think of the present moment when resisting change. This is where faculty involvement in change ideas and efforts plays a deciding role (Holt et al., 2007). Overall, the forces for change on the individual level are pushing for the desired change. On the organizational level, there is a neutral stance to change. Faculty are invested in the change effort as it improves the classroom experience from both sides. This leads to a key consideration: the role of stakeholders when discussing change efforts.

### **Stakeholders**

Stakeholders, in this OIP, refer to any group or individuals that have an interest in the success of the Foundations Program. The main stakeholders are the students, as they require the

program to be successful and beneficial for them to learn and apply their knowledge in their degrees and subsequent careers. The faculty and staff are directly linked to this success or failure, making them stakeholders as well. Parents, notably as many students are still minors when entering the Foundations Program, are another important group of stakeholders. They are especially noteworthy as they have the influence to change their children's school should they see fit. Finally, the executive board has a business interest in a successful Foundations Program.

Each stakeholder has a role to play, and if done correctly, this would lead to a credible, just, and useful change effort (Davidson, 2014). Faculty need to effectively communicate the changes to students and apply the new material appropriately. Under this umbrella of faculty, the reform committee needs to work with the director and executive board to ensure progress is tracked and amendments are approved along the way. Finally, the reform committee needs to work with parents to encourage their engagement and understanding of the reform.

### **Internal and External Forces**

Internal forces that may shape the change effort include the executive board's preferences, as well as any constraints at the departmental level. The main concern here is that profit will be prioritized at the expense of the changes required for successful digital literacy reform. Additionally, if the reform committee's change propositions are seen as too grand, there may be a decline in interest for reform committee members. This would significantly hinder progress as a strong guiding coalition is at the heart of the change effort (Kotter, 2012). External forces that may shape the change effort include the competition's practices, the Private University Council's (PUC) approval for student numbers, and how equity ties into change.

To elaborate on external forces: if the competition is innovating and reaching out to high school students, they will be able to cast a wider net for new students with an attractive, digitally

relevant curriculum. GCK would have nothing to offer and therefore lose any competitive edge. As detailed in Chapter 1, the PUC is the main financial actor in that it covers 100% of tuition costs for the majority of GCK students. Therefore, it is important to the change effort that PUC view this reform positively. PUC's standards must be met as this is a crucial external force. Finally, the moral standard of equitable education is a less tangible external force, but it maintains a role in the discussion.

This OIP hopes to ensure that equity efforts are a key consideration in the formation and implementation of the change effort. Equity is central in the journey to find a solution for the PoP. All things considered, GCK faculty and the executive board are aware that the change is necessary, as the future of the college is heavily dependent on change in the industry for the reasons outlined above. There is both a need and a want to improve digital literacy and the college's competitiveness in the market. Therefore, GCK is ready for gradual change, leading to a greater organizational change effort in the future.

### **Strategies and Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice**

Any problem can be analyzed and addressed through multiple lenses, and individual worldviews inevitably impact one's understanding of a problem (Pronin, 2007). Chapter 1 addressed the assumption, based on my worldview and positionality, of where the changes and solutions should occur. However, alternatives must be discussed before choosing one solution as there may be better options available that might be even more beneficial for both GCK and the students. The potential solutions will be discussed alongside an array of considerations, including EDI. Additionally, as the ethic of care is a central tenet of my worldview and leadership approach, each potential solution will be held to the standard of how it does or does not work in

favour of the aggregate good. Finally, a single solution will be selected after a thorough discussion and comparison of each potential solution has been outlined.

### **Potential Solution #1 – Best Practices**

The first solution would be incorporating digital literacy education into the Foundations Program using regional best practices data. This solution would require a detailed investigation into regional best practices and the returns associated with their framework. This investigation would either have to occur in-house or be outsourced to a professional consultancy in order to ensure the data supports the change effort.

### ***Considerations***

The first consideration of this solution would be how it impacts the course as it is currently set. Working with the example of digital literacy inclusions set in Appendix A, the primary change would be creating additional learning objectives for the Foundations Program classes. The priorities remain literacy, but the definition thereof is expanded to include digital literacy. Practices will shift slightly, but overall, the changes are relatively small and gradual, which would not shift the culture of the organization.

In terms of resources required, GCK is equipped with qualified staff and modern laboratories. There is no direct upfront cost required for hardware or other digital tools. However, it would be ideal for faculty to be trained in a digital literacy teaching and learning course. There are plenty of such courses available from credible institutions, for example, those sponsored by the Digital Teachers Academy (n.d.). This way, faculty are not forced to figure it out on their own, but instead can subscribe to a standardized approach to teaching the content and incorporating digital tools into their classrooms. As a non-tangible resource, the time required to narrow down best practices and train faculty must be considered. Also, a potential



variable cost would include paying for faculty professional development courses, such as those offered by the Digital Teachers Academy.

In terms of EDI, this solution sets all students on the same playing field and ensures that regardless of previous schooling or access at home, students will have the tools they need. This would work to assure that students are receiving the same access and opportunity as their peers. Additionally, the public-school graduates would catch up with their private school peers. The ethic of care then is fulfilled as the change effort ensures the aggregate good is addressed. This solution improves education at GCK and prioritizes students' learning, which will lead to a more educated and informed population.

Finally, the primary internal change driver is the Foundations Program director, as she has pushed this matter to the executive board. The secondary internal change driver would be the executive board. The role of its members is to approve the change and sign off on potential expenses such as the teacher training. With regard to external change drivers, the COVID pandemic has put immense pressure on educational institutions to address their need for online and alternative approaches to education. Community change drivers are speculative at this stage, including potential future partnerships with the education industry. If the solution opens the door to improved education and wider networks, this can translate to community involvement within GCK.

### **Potential Solution #2 – Student Responsibility**

The second solution is to keep the curriculum as is and put the onus on the students by simply assigning tasks that involve the need for digital literacy skills. Here, there is no digital literacy instruction within the classroom, but students are required to have digital literacy skills and the use of digital tools to complete their assigned work. This would require students to seek

their own answers, educate themselves through tutorials online, asking peers, and so on. Under this approach, some students, notably those with more privileged schooling backgrounds, will thrive.

### *Considerations*

This change would not impact the course as it currently is formed, but there is an assumption that overall grades would slip as most students need direct instruction to be successful. Additionally, there would need to be discussion to better understand whether learning objectives need to shift or remain the same. If they were to remain the same, this basically translates to a Foundations Program that utilizes digital tools but does not assess student use or their knowledge of digital literacy.

This solution does not require many additional human or capital resources. However, similarly to the best practices solution, time to redesign assignments with a digital component is a resource to be considered. However, it does pose significant EDI challenges that must be addressed. For instance, students without access or support at home are left to their own devices and may fall further behind their peers. In this scenario, the systemic oppression of disadvantaged students is upheld in an environment where their needs are entirely dismissed. This would exclude such students from future opportunities and limit the pool of future graduate students and workers to those from already advantaged backgrounds.

This built-in exclusivity scores this solution very low on the ethic of care scale as the aggregate good is not prioritized. Specifically, the good of the elite, as it were, remains the focus. In this case, the elite would refer to students from private schools or students who have had access to tutors and other support networks based on income. In such a society, the division of socio-economic classes is deeply felt as opportunities continue to open up for members of the

upper class, while members of the middle and lower classes do not receive the same benefits. This reality translates from the school to the workplace. The Foundations Program is the beginning of one's higher education journey, the success or failure of this phase can set the tone for the entirety of one's academic path. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has countered this approach to education for the last 10 years with the stance that equity and quality of education can go hand-in-hand (Levin, 2012). Here, this solution falls extremely short.

The internal change driver of this solution is the director of the Foundations Program, as she would be the one to push for any changes to the status quo. The executive board members are already aware and have already approved the existing Foundations Program curriculum, which means they do not need to be informed further unless drastic changes occur. However, the inclusion of tasks requiring digital literacy would be reviewed and approved by the program director. Her role would be to ensure that the inclusion of these tasks does not delay or hinder the primary learning objectives related to language literacy. This would reflect the idea of putting the onus on the students to educate themselves regarding digital literacy. In terms of community change drivers, there is no indication that this solution would involve industry networks. However, one external change driver that could come into play would be the role of each student's family. If grades decline drastically, as is expected in such a model, there is bound to be recourse and complaint that would need to be addressed. Here, there is potential for the executive board to get involved and assess whether this is the optimal solution for addressing digital literacy. Another external driver for making some changes, even if they are minimal, is the competition within the industry. If other colleges and universities in the microstate are

innovating and improving their educational models, incorporating digital literacy, there is less incentive for students to choose GCK for their studies.

### **Potential Solution #3 – Additional Semester**

The third solution goes in the exact opposite direction of solution #2 and opts to create a fourth semester of the Foundations Program dedicated solely to digital literacy learning. This solution gives digital literacy the importance and weight it deserves considering the digital realities of the 21st century. However, it comes with much deeper organizational considerations and financial costs.

#### ***Considerations***

To begin, the fourth semester would require a curriculum made from scratch and whether this would be made in-house or outsourced is another discussion to be had. The inclusion would require new practices and policies specific to digital literacy with a clear set of learning objectives that differentiate this semester from the previous three language literacy semesters.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this solution would be the sheer number of resources required to achieve it. For example, it would require class space, educators, technology (maybe a lab) set aside solely for fourth semester students. While an entire semester to learn, practise, and implement digital literacy skills sounds ideal – the cost would include adding time to students' Foundations Program journey and these credits would not count towards the students' degree requirements. This means students would be forced to delay their graded studies by an extra four months (or seven if we include the summer). Further, a new course would require hiring more teachers and booking or building more classrooms, which would be costly. Further, it may disturb the existing organizational culture if an entire department is brought in by

external hiring. This would be concerning for a structural-functionalist organization such as GCK.

In terms of EDI, this solution is wonderful as it ensures all students receive the exact same attention and care, which means disadvantaged students will enter the degree program on a more equal footing with their peers. It also works to break down inequities in learning by giving ample time for students to practise their knowledge in an equipped classroom among professional educators, hired specifically for their expertise in digital literacy. For this reason, the solution also scores very highly on the ethic of care standard. The aggregate good is prioritized despite financial costs, ensuring a more balanced start to students' academic journeys.

The main change driver for this solution would be the increasing speed of digitization across industries. This requires students to be prepared to enter a workforce defined by Industry 4.0 – the workforce that is defined by smart and sustainable technology (Milward et al., 2019). There would also be industry and professional drivers as hiring would ideally be from industry experts. In fact, Leahy et al. (2016) argue that these smart partnerships can enhance the quality of education through the use of digital technology. If the college establishes itself as highly professional digital experts, this may attract partnerships and garner interest for student numbers. Finally, the PUC would need to be considered and its approval would be just as important as that of the executive board, as the PUC is the main financial provider for student scholarships. The PUC covers the cost of the majority of students' Foundations Program and degree journeys. Should the PUC reasonably decide that it is not willing to pay for an extra semester for each student, the solution would likely not hold weight as the GCK has no reason to expect students to pay out of pocket for an extra semester of work that does not go toward their degree or their GPA.

#### **Potential Solution #4 – Degree Course**

The fourth solution is a variation of the third. It would be to remove the digital literacy education from the Foundations Program and create a degree course solely dedicated to digital literacy. Instead of an entire semester, this would be a single course, credited and counted toward the students' GPA scores. The cost would go down for such a solution as compared to solution #3 while still prioritizing digital literacy learning.

#### ***Considerations***

As this solution resembles the third, some of the considerations are the same. Primarily, the cost of creating a new curriculum. The inclusion of new practices, policies, and learning objectives would still all apply here as well. The main change would be that it applies only to a single course as opposed to an entire semester/program. It would have to be decided which department this course falls under as there must be oversight and guidance. If all students, regardless of degree program, must enroll, there needs to be a gauge on student numbers and effective education. For example, if the goal of this course is to ensure that detailed digital literacy learning takes place, then large classroom numbers are not acceptable. There would need to be multiple sections, which means the discussion regarding hiring is introduced. This would include a variety of costs such as hiring, benefits, and office space. There is the option to use existing professors and add to their workload, but cost for overtime would still have to be included.

This course could replace an elective and therefore maintain the exact amount of time required for graduation but simply include a necessary life skill course. One key disadvantage, however, is that students require digital literacy to complete tasks for all their courses and under this model, even if taken in the first course of the semester, students would be required to take a

full course load. Therefore, they would be learning digital literacy skills simultaneously as opposed to before entering their graded degree programs. If and how this would impact grades should be considered. Would students be more successful if they acquired the necessary digital skills before having to apply them to degree-specific tasks? Or does it make no difference? This would need to be investigated as the answer could completely disprove the validity of this option.

The EDI considerations are mixed as the solution ensures all students are included, regardless of background or degree. However, the diversity of needs is not addressed, and while the educational approach is equal, it is not equitable as some students will enter this graded class on much better footing than their disadvantaged peers. There are options to make it more equitable, for example maintaining its credit worth but keeping it as a pass or fail course so as to avoid affecting the GPA. There is also the option to have the class be only mandatory for students who score low on the digital assessment tool. However, I hold the position that all students, regardless of prior knowledge, could benefit from such a course.

The executive board is the main change driver of this solution as it requires a thorough investigation regarding cost and organizational changes. Students would be considered change drivers here as well, seeing as they will be more likely to voice their concerns or opinions about a course that is graded and that impacts their GPA. As one of GCK's main goals is student numbers and retention, student satisfaction with such a solution would need to be considered.

### **Comparing Solutions**

Table 4 below is a visual representation of the solutions and their respective considerations followed by a more detailed discussion and comparison of the options available.

**Table 4***Table of Solutions*

	<b>Ethic of Care</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>EDI</b>	<b>External Support</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
<b>Solution #1</b>	Medium	Low	Covered	Yes	Low	Feasible
<b>Solution #2</b>	Low	Low	Not covered	Speculative	Low	Feasible
<b>Solution #3</b>	High	High	Covered	Speculative	High	Not feasible
<b>Solution #4</b>	High	Medium	Covered	Yes	Medium	Not feasible

Table 4 outlines five key considerations for each solution: first is the ethic of care, which covers anything that can fall under cost from materials required to staffing. The second, EDI, addresses the cost of the change effort, and the third addresses if students are treated equitably and if their diverse needs are being addressed in the solution. External support refers to external drivers of change such as parent complaints, or competition behaviours. For example, solutions #1 and #4 are not expected to cause any issues with students or parents and are in line with other regional colleges' best practices. However, solution #2 can pose problems as it is not in line with the digital shifts occurring outside of GCK. Also, solution #3 could pose a problem and lose community support as it delays students' degree studies. The first consideration is essential in my leadership approach: does the solution address the aggregate good and, therefore, fulfill the ethic of care? I have opted to put this on a spectrum as solutions #3 and #4 address the ethic of care and aggregate good more deeply than both solutions #1 and #2. Finally, feasibility is included as a solution can only truly be considered if there is a reasonable expectation that GCK will implement it.

In an attempt to focus in on the best possible solution, the first standard that must be fulfilled is the ethic of care. Since solution #2 does not effectively address the aggregate good, it should be eliminated from consideration. The only argument that would be for keeping it is cost-effectiveness. However, that is not the priority when looking to solve the PoP. As for solution #3,



there is a major concern of cost. The executive board is looking for ways to bring in more profit and student numbers. Solution #3 involves high costs and potentially losing students to other universities that maintain the three-semester standard for foundations learning. Logically, and logistically, the endeavour of taking on solution #3 is not only massive but is also far outside of my scope.

This leaves solutions #1 and #4 to consider. While solution #1 is within my scope and is easiest to attain, solution #4 prioritizes student learning and enhances the depth of knowledge in a digital literacy course. Both address the ethic of care, focusing on the aggregate good, equitable education, and equipping students with the tools they need for their academic journey. While solution #4 is a great option, it is out of my scope. Solution #1 is a better fit for this OIP. I would suggest solution #4 be brought forth as an option to the executive board if solution 1 is implemented and evidence upholds the need for more digital literacy education within GCK.

### **Chosen Solution**

Solution #1: incorporating digital literacy education into the Foundations Program using regional best practices data. To achieve and adequately implement this solution, the next section will discuss best practices in digital literacy learning – frequently referred to under the umbrella of transferrable academic skills within the region. A clear benchmark and goal should be outlined, and the change effort should align with the GKC culture and leadership. Therefore, it should be gradual with minor successes reported along the way to garner further approval for changes and adaptations. This solution also adequately aligns with my LD-LMX leadership approach in that I can direct change efforts through delegation while also prioritizing the needs of students and the reform committee as we work together for an improved curriculum. Finally,

it aligns very well with my change framework as it is minimally disruptive to the GCK culture as a whole, but garners tangible results for students and the greater community.

### **Chapter 2 Summary**

This chapter effectively addressed the approaches to change. Further, the change process was addressed through Kotter (1995) while assessing organizational change readiness using Blackman et al.'s (2014) diagnostic tool. Literature supporting the proposed change effort and its impact on GCK are provided and discussed. Then, a variety of solutions were analyzed through multiple lenses, ensuring the ethic of care and EDI are major determinants of the chosen solution. Next steps will include dissecting the chosen solution to ensure it is feasible, what its implementation might look like, and how it can be improved. Chapter 3 will discuss the details of the transition and change, including a detailed framework for monitoring and evaluating the change process.

### **Chapter 3: Implementation, Communication, and Evaluation**

Chapter 2 concluded with the selection of Solution #1 – Best Practices: incorporating digital literacy education into the Foundations Program curriculum. This chapter will elaborate on the intended changes through benchmarking and regional practices. More specifically, this chapter will align the plan to the organizational context, to understand how the changes would practically unfold at GCK. This would include task delegation, goal setting for gradual change progress, and the role of LD-LMX theory as the style of leadership for this change effort. Additionally, the interplay of change efforts and the involvement of key actors will be discussed.

To achieve a holistic view of the implementation, there will be a thorough discussion surrounding the communication plan and how change is to be communicated to various stakeholders. Also, there will be an assessment of how monitoring and evaluation could take place for optimal results in ensuring a successful change effort. Finally, there will be a short discussion regarding a potential inquiry cycle to ensure the change is accountable and transparent.

#### **Change Implementation Plan**

Kotter's (1995) 8 Step Model of Change clearly identifies a framework for planning change. However, implementing these steps is specific to each organization. At GCK, the linear change plan aligns very well with the existing power structure of the college. Selecting Kotter's approach was intentional. Implementation, however, will require frequent check-ins with the executive board. Regarding the selection of personnel, half the battle is won with the creation of the reform committee. The reform committee, of which I am the lead, is primarily comprised of faculty and a few staff. The faculty on the committee are instructors in the Foundations Program, which means they are the most invested in seeing a smooth implementation as it will directly

impact their classrooms and work. Bryk et al. (2010) define network improvement communities (NICs) as the arrangement of people and tools working together to “get better at getting better” (p. 131).

The reform committee is situated with this definition in mind – for the change implementation to be successful, the instructors at the head of the class need to be on board, engaged, and feel they are heard as their work is most impacted by the proposed change plan. Bryk et al. (2010) outline key structuring agents that make NICs successful. Among them, and key to the discussion in this chapter: common goals that are both ambitious and measurable. There is an understanding within the NICs that they will use whatever knowledge they have to attain small goals on the way to the larger end-goal. In GCK, this may mean small additions of digital coursework on the way to complete digital literacy for students. The measurability of the process requires further dissection. The establishment of the NICs is a great start as implementation can begin from the first meetings and setting of the agenda, and the same members will go into their classrooms to try new methods to bring that data back to the committee for evaluation. This raw data and observations, along with secondary research to identify resources on best regional practices, would combine to continuously move the goalpost toward more progress and innovation in the Foundations Program. With these details in mind, Table 5 provides an estimated breakdown of the time, tasks, and progression required for a successful implementation.

**Table 5***Change Implementation Plan*

<b>Phase Framed by Kotter's 8 Steps</b>	<b>Timeline (Weeks)</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Actions Required</b>
Stage 1 Establish a sense of urgency	1	External forces: e.g., public opinion FP director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight concerns with current model gaps.</li> <li>• Highlight areas of potential improvement.</li> </ul>
Stage 2 Create a guiding coalition	2–5	FP director reform committee lead (me)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the approval of the executive board and the appointment from the FP director, I have selected faculty and admin who are invested in the change effort to help collect data and guide the change as required.</li> </ul>
Stage 3 Develop a vision and strategy	6–8	Reform committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepen understanding of what DL means for the FP and for students during/after the program.</li> <li>• Benchmark a model to adopt or to be inspired by.</li> <li>• Break down next steps and potential monitoring options.</li> </ul>
Stage 4 Communicate the vision	9–14	FP director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop communication strategy.</li> <li>• Present DL implementation plan phase one to FP faculty.</li> </ul>
Stage 5 Remove barriers to enable action	15–17	FP director Reform committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline clear KPIs.</li> <li>• Outline potential forms of ROI, current and future.</li> <li>• Present vision and goals, including KPIs and ROI to GCK executive board for approval.</li> <li>• Must prove potential monetary and non-monetary returns are in progress.</li> </ul>
Stage 6 Create short-term wins	18–20	Reform committee FP faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DL assessment results to monitor implementation plan progress.</li> <li>• Collect data from instructors regarding DL tasks in classwork.</li> <li>• FP faculty survey regarding observations of student progress and overall sentiment regarding DL implementation.</li> </ul>
Stage 7 Consolidate improvements	21–23	FP director Reform committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review assessment data, results, and survey statistics.</li> <li>• Compare the three DL assessments for average student progress.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track KPIs to identify progress in two areas: the PoP and the executive board's requested ROIs.</li> </ul>
Stage 8 Create change	24–32	FP director Reform committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize curriculum changes, including amendments from monitoring checkpoints.</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a long-term evaluation model/plan.</li> <li>• Incorporate DL in FP promotional material.</li> </ul>
Potential next steps	TBD	TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look into expanding the scope of DL learning in FP.</li> <li>• Engage in industry competition/conferences.</li> <li>• Offer options such as co-op placements to encourage GCK students to exercise DL knowledge in the workforce.</li> <li>• Brainstorm ways to improve.</li> </ul>

*Note:* DL = digital literacy; FP = Foundations Program.

### ***Establishing Urgency and Creating a Guiding Coalition***

The catalyst for the sense of urgency was the COVID global pandemic. During this time, GCK, like most institutions, switched to e-learning. However, GCK struggled significantly with this transition as no e-learning or digital literacy learning took place prior to the pandemic. Students and faculty alike were ill-prepared for the challenge. As a result, GCK saw a drop in student numbers as students migrated to colleges and universities better equipped to teach online and to teach students how to use digital tools and resources. This loss of students, and profit, triggered the need for change. Once there was a clear problem to address – the lack of digital literacy and digital learning in the GCK Foundations Program – the director approached me with the offer to lead a reform committee.

The reform committee has been tasked with identifying the existing gaps, providing potential solutions, and tracking the outcomes of the reform effort. This guiding coalition has taken approximately three months to get a decent number of participants and to encourage faculty to engage in the change effort to come. Part of the challenge associated with getting committee members has been the traditional organizational culture within GCK. It took a lot of effort, and soft skills – namely, a focus on collaboration – to get members on board with my

idea. The reform committee then began working on a vision and a clear strategy to attain that vision.

### ***Developing a Vision and Strategy***

The reform committee opted to assess regional best practices, hoping to benchmark a model to adopt. Kuwait is situated in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Based on QS World University Rankings (2023), and after reviewing all available data on the respective university websites, Khalifa University's (KU) foundation program was identified as being the most similar to GCK as a two-semester program with a focus on math and language literacy. KU goes one step further in clearly identifying non-academic skills as part of the learning outcomes, highlighting "critical thinking, digital literacy [and] autonomous learning" (Khalifa University, n.d.). For this reason, the benchmark has been established to KU's model, and the next step required was to communicate the vision.

### ***Communicating the Vision***

Communicating this vision requires delicacy as the change should be gradual to ease both instructors and students into the new system. It will also be beneficial as, following Kotter (1995), there is a need to evaluate the plan and make changes as required. It is easier to make small alterations to gradual shifts than it is to make grand changes and altering them shortly after implementation. Additionally, doing so could reflect poor planning and perhaps impact the committee's credibility among stakeholders. Therefore, it is essential to manage stakeholder trust in the change process (Pirson & Malhotra, 2008). It is my intent to begin slow, regardless of this risk, and if the returns are slow to follow, adjust the plan accordingly to avoid losing approval.

The vision should be communicated by tackling three core arguments: (1) acknowledging the gap and why it is a problem, (2) what other institutions (i.e., Khalifa University) have done to

address this issue, and (3) what gains can faculty, students, and GCK as a whole hope to see as a result of the change effort. Framing the communication in this light would allow for a greater understanding of why change needs to happen. This also reflects an empowering trait of relational leadership as members are encouraged to tackle the challenge as opposed to following instructions blindly. Additionally, framing the faculty as one of the stakeholders benefiting from the change is a means to encourage their participation in the change process.

The communication plan must be presented by the reform committee as we are in charge of organizing and framing this information. Further, by controlling the dialogue at this stage, I can opt to employ LD-LMX in a manner that does not demand they get on board but rather encourages faculty to engage with the change effort for the aggregate good. Due to the traditional power structures within GCK, there remain obstacles to address before tangible implementation.

### ***Removing Barriers to Enable Action***

The primary obstacle in the change effort is a conflict between the GCK executive board's priority and the Foundation Program reform committee's priority. The reform committee's priority, which is also the PoP, is purely academic. The priority is to improve digital literacy rates in students at GCK. The executive board requires a return on its investment to make the change effort worthwhile. To better understand this dilemma, the ROIs and non-monetary ROI goals are outlined in Table 6.

**Table 6**

#### *Potential ROI Goals*

<b>Monetary ROI</b>	<b>Non-Monetary ROI</b>
Student retention	College reputation
Justified increase of tuition fees	Competitive within industry
New students	Increased digital literacy rates

*Note.* These goals are speculative and can only be confirmed or adjusted once the change is implemented and evaluated.



The monetary ROI goals include maintaining student numbers, despite previous losses. As it stands, there is little that is stopping students from seeking other colleges that do address their gaps in knowledge. Therefore, the changes GCK make must be attractive to students, beyond educational outcomes. For example, incorporating digital art to create a fun and engaging means of interacting with digital software. This type of program design links to creating skills that go beyond the classroom, otherwise known as transferrable academic skills (Atlay & Harris, 2010). With an improved approach to the education process, the college can justify increasing tuition fees to cover losses and potentially garner profit. An improved education program, targeting the needs of students in today's digital age is marketable and can attract new students. The main goal of digital literacy education is to foster a better understanding and acceptance of ideas. By also highlighting the profit angle, a more ethical evaluation of these ideas can be achieved (Leviton & Melichar, 2016). To maintain the ethical trait of relational leadership, though, the increase in tuition should be suggested as relative to the needs of the program and not more. As the region witnesses a shift to more technology-focused learning, it is a matter of institutional survival to adapt with the industry (Jeffery, 2022). It is crucial to consider profit and digital literacy learning as equally important goals to achieve gradual success in the process of change.

### ***Create Short-Term Wins***

Creating short-term wins is essential for all parties involved in order to maintain the change effort and to encourage participation. These wins are best when measured numerically. Quantifying the increase in digital literacy rates of GCK students would be the confirmation required for educators to know their hard labour is bearing fruit. There are reputable organizations that have assessments for digital literacy. One such example would be NorthStar

Digital Literacy Assessment (Literacy Minnesota, n.d.). This program creates a detailed assessment of a person's existing digital literacy skills that can be tested again to track progress. Of course, the college would require a thorough assessment of all such options before partnering with one assessment tool to create assessments for GCK students. This would fall under the investment required from the college to see a return. Once a tool is selected, the results of the assessment and the frequency of measurement can be used to track progress for short-term wins.

Another means of tracking short-term wins would be periodic impact assessments. I suggest four impact assessments: one that could be done after a trial run of the program, and as Kirkpatrick (1996) discusses, this is ideally done with a control group. A second could be done after the change is implemented program wide, shortly after midterms, to identify if students are achieving outlined digital literacy goals through classwork/exams. A third impact assessment could take place at the end of the first semester whereby all relevant data, digital literacy assessment results, and student numbers are reviewed. Based on this impact assessment, amendments should be made for the following semester. The fourth and final impact assessment could occur at the end of the second semester once all three digital literacy assessments have been collected to analyze overall average of growth. At this stage, a faculty survey, using a Likert scale to keep it quantifiable, would be beneficial. Each of these impact assessments are an opportunity to celebrate short-term wins, amend the approach to create more, and keep the change effort on track. Additionally, allowing faculty a greater say in the process is reflective of inclusive relational leadership. This is important to a successful change effort.

### ***Consolidate Improvements and Create Change***

Once all four impact assessments are considered, the final (for now) change plan can be identified and implemented for the following semester. The impact assessment breakdown within

Kotter's steps is loosely inspired by Kirkpatrick (1996). Kirkpatrick outlines four levels for evaluating training programs and encourages the use of a control group if feasible. The four levels are reaction, learning, behaviour, and results. While three of these are already part of Kotter's approach, behaviour is not. The behaviour element is interpreted in the context of how the instructor's facilitation of digital literacy learning impacts student learning. As Hall (2013) highlights, this relationship is a major factor in student scores. Finally, the results are measured through KPIs and allow a better understanding as to whether the Foundations Program should continue the chosen path or re-evaluate the options for addressing digital literacy. The results also give credibility to the change effort and help improve the program (Kirkpatrick, 1996).

Once the change is finalized, the program benefits can be pitched to the marketing department to include in promotional material for GCK. The successful implementation would also open the door for many potential engagements in the future. This includes involvement in conferences, competitions, and industry placements. These potential next steps are part of the process-oriented relational leadership style where each meeting and each step is taken to "collaboratively achieve mission-driven goals" (Komives et al., 1998).

### **Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Goals**

The change process, though following Kotter's steps, can be further divided into short-, medium-, and long-term goals. As outlined in Table 5 above, Stage 5, remove barriers to enable action, would be a short-term goal. The goal here is to incorporate an assessment of ROIs for greater stakeholder buy-in on the change effort. Stage 6, create short-term wins, would be a medium-term goal. As per the implementation plan, this would be achieved through periodically quantifying the increase in digital literacy rates through the digital literacy assessment tool. This way progress can be seen and celebrated, maintaining the participants' motivation. Stages 7 and

8, consolidate improvements and establish change, would be the long-term goals. Removing barriers is the next step in the change process and must occur before any short-term wins can be recorded. The most important short-term win would be getting the executive board to agree to the change plan. Other short-term wins require the change effort to be in place, and therefore can only be medium-term goals. Finally, the long-term goals are to see a solidified change and improvement within the institution. Ideally, in the future, digital literacy learning will be so commonplace that it will no longer require an assessment.

### **Key Actors and Considerations**

The key actors in the change discussion are students, faculty, the executive board, and society. All four can benefit from the successful implementation of this change effort: students gain skills and a better education; faculty also learn and improve their work; the executive board gains profit if student numbers positively correlate with the change; and Kuwaiti society as a whole gains digital citizens who are able to more critically engage with their environments, access information, and use their knowledge to benefit their community.

Mento et al. (2002) highlight the importance of balancing theory and practice, noting that while Kotter's (1995) 8 Step Model for Change is among the best-known change processes, that even this model may require adjustments when implemented. One great addition to the process is encouraging the change agents to model the desired state with the organizational culture in mind (Mento et al., 2002). Of course, if the organizational culture is problematic or if the change is regarding the organization's culture, this addition can complicate change efforts. However, at GCK, incorporating digital literacy in the Foundations Program is not expected to cause any disruptions that require a discussion regarding cultural fit. Additionally, employing a more

relational theory of leadership within the reform committee itself will allow me to navigate these challenges in a way that does not challenge GCK management.

The change plan, working within the means and structure of the organization, aims to improve education for students, increase profit for stakeholders, and facilitate the teaching process for degree faculty. Through the ethic of care, this change effort – if successful – can achieve the aggregate good (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016): (1) the businesspeople are satisfied with their returns, (2) the students are genuinely learning and improving their skillsets required for school, work, and general life, (3) faculty are less stressed and creating meaningful experiences in the classroom, and (4) disadvantaged students are given the skills required to engage with their peers on and offline, making them more competitive in the workforce upon graduation. Setting goals is essential to reaching these deliverables. For this to succeed, the committee members need to be involved, respected, and engaged. Hence, the decision to opt for an empathetic leadership approach.

### **Leadership and the Inquiry Cycle**

The LD-LMX theory is a critical choice for change at GCK. LD-LMX has been shown to create a positive atmosphere where those involved in the work are more willing to contribute a greater effort to their work (Porath, 2015). This is proven to be the case with the “volunteer army” that Kotter (2012) references in his XLR8 model. The GCK organizational culture is an authoritative one where staff and faculty do not usually have as much autonomy as they may prefer. Using the reform committee to provide this autonomy, as well as voice and connection with others through relationship theory, will help motivate reform members engage and act in the interest of the proposed changes. Prakash (2011) holds that committees offer more than just

autonomy as excellence in academia is not achievable without the collaboration that occurs in these environments. This strengthening of the committee will also facilitate the inquiry cycle.

Pedaste et al. (2015), through the assessment of various inquiry cycles, highlight the general phases of any inquiry process. The phases draw on Kotter's model (1995) among others, so naturally, the phases share certain elements. Pedaste et al. (2015) break down the inquiry cycle as outlined in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Foundations Program Inquiry Cycle*

<b>Orientation</b>	Problem statement to create awareness of desired change
<b>Conceptualization</b>	Hypothesis period
<b>Investigation</b>	Collect and analyze data
<b>Conclusion</b>	Compare data to hypotheses
<b>Discussion</b>	Communicate results and begin engaging in reflective activities

*Note.* Adapted from Pedaste et al. (2015).

The phases mentioned in Table 7 4 are all effectively covered in Kotter's (1995) model, but it helps to solidify the process as Pedaste et al. (2015) reflect on multiple inquiry cycles finding common grounds. Under Kotter (1995), the change efforts include sustaining change efforts through evaluation and adaptation. Further, Kotter's (2012) more recent work emphasizes the need for ongoing strategic thinking, assessment, and re-evaluation of existing methods. This is otherwise known as an inquiry cycle – and it must be cyclical for ongoing improvement as required ( Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020). Therefore, the inquiry process is already embedded in the change implementation process. While these two are intricately connected, the need to communicate the plan is a separate discussion with its own set of intricacies, such as stakeholder concerns, and means of reaching audiences need to be considered.

### **Plan to Communicate the Need for Change and the Change Process**

This section will delve deeper into the process of building awareness surrounding the need for change. In line with this, there will be a discussion regarding framing issues for different audiences, as well as anticipated questions and responses. A knowledge mobilization plan (KMP) is included to address how information will be disseminated and to whom. Finally, the communication surrounding progress, milestones, and wins will also be discussed in connection with the KMP. The first step to change is communicating the need for change and building awareness to solve the problem.

#### **Building Awareness**

The term “equity” will be an important guiding element to this change effort, particularly during all communications. The change effort is primarily concerned with increasing digital literacy skills in GCK’s Foundation Program. Putting aside all other secondary goals, increasing digital literacy skills is a means to create an equitable learning experience where all are on the same footing regardless of whether they attended private or public schools. Further, all students should be at a level of digital literacy that makes them employable in the long term. To reach this end goal, the plan must first be widely accepted and adopted in each classroom.

The way to encourage department-wide acceptance is to communicate the importance of the plan. Once communicated as a potentially successful change effort, Pietrzak and Paliszkievicz (2015) suggest that faculty will appreciate the value of being a part of such change and be more motivated to actively participate in the process. Focusing on the outcome of the change effort will build awareness of the existing gap. The awareness of this gap will affect each actor differently. For students, it may encourage them to work harder to be competitive in their respective fields. For educators, it may encourage them to engage more with digital literacy

learning as a means to improve the organization as a whole and to help close the gap through their direct efforts. Drawing on relational leadership, the reform committee will build awareness in a way that encourages faculty to take ownership for their part in the change process. This will primarily be done through meetings and incentives that can later be agreed upon. One idea would be to reward faculty that engage in the early phases with hours toward their mandatory professional development portfolios. This way they can engage in the change process, support the committee, and be involved in the research and training, all of which will help build their career profiles. Therefore, their efforts should be actively recognized and celebrated along the way. The focus will remain narrowly on the students and their digital literacy skill building, this allows the end result to constantly be the centre of the change effort discussion. To ensure this remains true, the issue must be framed differently for different audiences.

### **Framing the Issue and Addressing Potential Questions**

Framing the issue will require a tactful balance of sharing necessary information and addressing relevant concerns. For parents and students, it must be framed in light of how these skills are required in the workforce and how GCK is providing the opportunity to learn said skills in a unique and competitive manner. The competitive edge must be emphasized as parents are oft the decision makers for their underaged children and could switch their enrollment to another institution. From this category I anticipate questions from both students and parents. From students, there will be questions surrounding why the program has changed, especially if they have friends or siblings a year ahead of them, which is often the case. I also predict complaints regarding the level of difficulty after incorporating more technology and digital literacy into the curriculum. Without providing quantitative data, which may not be of interest to them, I would provide an FAQ sheet for students and parents alike that outlines how these changes are in the



best interest of the student. The focus would be regarding their potential future careers and the needs of the market. For parents, I anticipate a focus on their children's grades. There may be concerns regarding a difficult curriculum that could affect their overall GPA. Here, I would remind them that the Foundations Program is a strictly pass/fail program so it could not affect their GPA even if they failed. The worst-case scenario would be having to repeat the course.

For educators and reform committee members, the information should be shared through an academic lens of research and precedent. These actors are critical in delivering the content and ensuring the implementation in their classrooms. Therefore, they need to be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that this is a positive change that will lend itself to improving not only the GCK but also their classrooms and the skills of their students. I anticipate faculty will ask for freedom and creativity in how they approach digital literacy learning. I would be open to this, but suggest there remain some level of standard approach, for example, the same tools as other classes to ensure all Foundations Program students are receiving equitable digital literacy education.

Finally, for executive board members, the issue should be framed through a profit lens, as previously discussed. The framing needs to include how digital literacy, equity, and an improved Foundations Program can lend itself to an improved college reputation and an increase in student numbers. I anticipate pressure from the executive board members to provide proof of progress throughout the change effort. This will be provided to them through the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation plan. Along the way, as monitoring milestones are met, important messages can be shared through the knowledge mobilization plan.

## Knowledge Mobilization Plan

The KMP can be understood through multiple theories, but this OIP will focus on Lavis et al. (2003) and Eaton (n.d.). Eaton (n.d.) is discussed at length through the KMP infographic provided in Appendix C. Lavis et al. (2003) ask five key questions regarding knowledge transmission. Table 8 provides a quick overview of the questions and the answers, and a fuller discussion of each follows.

**Table 8**

### *KMP Questions and Answers*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Short Answer</b>
1. What should be transferred to decision makers?	Data, progress, milestones, etc.
2. Who should be receiving this research knowledge?	Follow the hierarchy. Reform committee → Foundations Program director → executive board
3. Who should the messenger be?	Depends on recipient, but should follow the hierarchy. The Foundations Program director is the executive board's messenger.
4. How should the knowledge be transferred?	Formally, digital trail.
5. To what effect should the knowledge be transferred?	Inform, update, and receive feedback as required.

#### 1. What should be transferred to decision makers?

The quantifiable data of progress, milestones, or obstacles need to be shared with the reform committee's direct supervisor: the Foundations Program director. Additionally, amendments, improvements, and concerns along the way need to be communicated to avoid major miscommunications. This also helps to clarify the change path if need be.

2. Who should be receiving this research knowledge?

The reform committee should gather the data and provide it to the Foundations Program director who would then serve as a filter, selecting the information that needs to reach the executive board, and managing the rest herself.

3. Who should the messenger be?

It is very important that the messenger follows the GCK vertical hierarchical model of reporting. While a more horizontal communication process occurs in the committee, external communications need to align with GCK culture. That means that, as the reform committee lead, I will take any committee results to the Foundations Program director. I would never go to the executive board directly, as this would disrupt the existing hierarchy and potentially discredit the change effort (Bartels et al., 2010). The messenger to the executive board should be the director, as this will maintain the respect for the rank and approach instilled by the board. The messenger is an important consideration in order to give the message greater credibility (Shonkoff, 2000).

4. How should the knowledge be transferred?

All knowledge should be transferred formally with a digital trail, as hard copies may be lost or mismanaged. Anything that needs to be shared should be sent as a document attached to a work email with a meeting request for a discussion once all parties have read the document.

5. To what effect should the knowledge be transferred?

The goal of the knowledge transfer should be to inform, update, and receive feedback where applicable. In this way, stakeholder input is constant, and the change effort is more credible in the eyes of all of those participating.

In brief, these five questions and their responses offer insight and a knowledge transfer strategy for actionable messages. I am now aware, at least roughly, how and why I am transferring certain knowledge and what effect I am hoping for in this process. The next step is to visualize and categorize the KMP.

### **KMP Infographic**

Appendix C illustrates a KMP that is inspired by Eaton's (n.d.) infographic breakdown of knowledge mobilization. Eaton's version breaks knowledge into multiple categories, but for the OIP, three categories are most relevant to the GCK experience. The first knowledge category is professional and refers primarily to faculty; the second category includes community members, would-be students, and parents; and the third category includes social media, as its reach can go beyond the college and the homes of students. Communicating the path of change will look different to each of these categories, but remains a key component of a successful change initiative (Beatty, 2015). Additionally, communicating change efforts with all parties is a means of encouraging Kotter's (1995) third step of creating a shared vision. The first party in this process would be the faculty and professionals working within GCK. Communicating small wins and maintaining support for the change effort are in line with Kotter's model for change.

### ***Professional***

For the professionals, the reform committee plans to open all meetings for faculty attendance, including non-members hoping to be updated on the status of the reform changes. Department-wide emails will be sent when appropriate, such as celebrating project milestones. Part of communicating the change to faculty will involve preparing them on how to forward

communications to others. Faculty workshops and teacher training in digital literacy education will be critical inclusions.

An important part of the GCK professional community will be the executive board. Communication with the board should be formal and streamlined through the Foundations Program director. The most important results and milestones will be shared while ensuring board approval is maintained throughout the steps taken. This approach will respect the existing organizational culture, while within the reform committee and its participants, a more relational leadership and collaborative environment can thrive.

### ***Parents and Students***

Multiple channels are available for the student body and their families. Parents are included as many students are under 18, therefore, their guardians may be more involved. Emails will be an important communication channel for parents and students when appropriate, and only when it is in the best interest of the change effort. Orientation week can include a small presentation regarding how GCK prepares students for a digital future and why they need such skills. Parents that opt to be on a mailing list can receive similar information and be updated on the program's achievements.

### ***General Community***

For the wider social community, GCK can use search engine optimization (SEO) terms to boost its reach by posting on social media about digital citizenship and promoting forward thinking in education. It has been proven that SEO can improve a college's visibility online, and digital literacy content would potentially attract both students and other academics for GCK (Costa, 2023; McCoy, 2011). For the wider academic community, engaging in conferences and

sharing findings related to the implementation effort can be a more long-term communication strategy. This would solidify GCK's role as a digital literacy leader in the Gulf region.

### **A New Platform**

Part of the communication plan will be a focus on two-way communication, which is not a common feature in GCK. The implementation plan outlined faculty surveys, and student surveys, both of which will allow the reform committee to hear the perspectives that are most impacted by curriculum changes. These two groups have traditionally been instructed on what to do without having a deeper discussion on how this may help or hinder their experience. Using anonymous surveys will offer them a voice and ideally elevate the digital literacy curriculum. Hearing from students will also help identify ways the digital literacy elements of the Foundations Program can be improved to support students with learning disabilities. These students, often overlooked in curriculum planning, can be part of the discussion and influence the decisions made about their learning through these anonymous surveys. The surveys are one of a few tools that will help monitor and evaluate the change process. Table 9 outlines the key tools used throughout the implementation plan and will be further discussed in the communication plan.

**Table 9**

*Communication Tools in the Implementation Plan*

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Uses</b>	<b>Stage of Implementation Plan</b>
<b>Meetings</b>	Update, inform, get feedback	Ongoing
<b>Emails</b>	To maintain record of meetings, key information, and digital trail of change effort	At key intervals, notably Stages 2, 4, and 6
<b>FAQ Sheet</b>	To clarify what the change is and why it is needed, targeting mainly parent and student audiences	Stage 4

<b>Surveys</b>	To gather anonymous observations of change effort progress from faculty and student participants	Periodic but essential in Stage 6
<b>Reports</b>	To provide director and executive board members relevant, quantifiable data related to the change effort	Stages 6, 7, and 8

These tools will help the reform committee discuss the change effort in a clear, academic, and open communication style. Before elaborating on the communication tools, however, a better understanding of the monitoring and evaluation practices need to be considered.

### **Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation**

Arguably the most important element once implementation begins is to monitor and evaluate the changes in order to eventually consolidate changes, as per Kotter's model (1995). I have opted to do this in three ways: periodic impact assessments, surveys, and final quantitative data analysis. The periodic impact assessments will occur after the summer trial group, and again after each digital literacy assessment result. This will allow the committee to quantify how each student's digital literacy is progressing in a standardized manner. Based on these results, there may be amendments before the next assessments. Surveys for faculty responsiveness will be helpful in the implementation and success of the digital literacy program. Surveys for student responsiveness will help improve the tasks and curriculum details to ensure student engagement. Finally, a quantitative data analysis report will include statistics on progress in digital literacy, faculty and student satisfaction percentages, and an assessment of student retention or addition of new students after the implementation.

These three approaches will analyze the effectiveness of the implementation effort. It will be important that the periodic impact assessments be consistently obtained through surveys during the PDSA cycle before the final report is prepared. These assessments will allow the

reform committee to address any potential issues before the report reaches the executive board, as major issues may halt or negatively impact executive board support.

Adapted from Markiewicz and Patrick (2016), both monitoring and evaluation plans follow the same line of inquiry. The plans opt to ask five key questions related to appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. These core questions will allow for an understanding of how the change action is working in accordance to the vision, how well it is going, and if there is a metric that can measure progress. Further, it allows for discussion surrounding the broader outcomes of the change effort, and how likely the change is to survive and adapt.

### **Avoiding Additional Barriers and Inequities**

While there is no guarantee that new barriers will not arise, the reform committee is doing its best to ensure there are multiple opportunities for various stakeholder input along the way to avoid inequities and new barriers. Throughout the entire process, including the monitoring and evaluation stages, I plan to rely heavily on the collaborative trait of relational leadership to decrease the chances of a barrier being overlooked. Additionally, this inclusive form of leadership will help eliminate inequities as all participants of the change effort will have input at some point.

Before going into the detailed plans, it is important to recognize that change is a process and not a one-off event (Hall, 2013). It involves an assessment of the personal concerns surrounding change, an assessment of how change is being applied, and if there are operational changes that need to take place (Hall, 2013). For example, faculty may wonder how this change will impact them: Will they be given proper training or will they have to figure it out on their own, thus increasing their workload? Will all faculty apply the curriculum changes as proposed



or will some take short cuts in their classroom? Finally, is there something that GCK can do to facilitate the implementation? These are valid concerns to a faculty member, and it is crucial that such concerns be addressed in the communication stage as outlined in order to have a confident faculty entering the change effort.

Each member of the change effort has their concerns, and through the monitoring, the reform committee can discuss their concerns and how to address them to instill confidence in their role for the change effort (Loucks-Horsley, 1996). In this way, the reform committee can ensure the change effort is lasting, as individuals are at the heart of the discussion. Tables 10 and 11 outline the monitoring and evaluation plans in more detail.

**Table 10***Monitoring Plan*

<b>Monitoring Questions</b>	<b>Focus of Monitoring</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Monitoring Data Sources</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<b>Appropriateness: Has the plan improved digital literacy results in students?</b>	Students	Digital literacy assessment tool results, periodically taken to track progress.	Standardized tool with specific levels and ranges. Quantifiable when charting changes/progress between takes.	Faculty to proctor assessments, reform committee to analyze data across all Foundations Program classes.	Digital literacy results at the start of semester, end of semester one, and end of semester two.
<b>Effectiveness: Has the change effort improved equity in education for students?</b>	Students Faculty	Public and private school graduates are submitting work on a comparable level, able to keep up with lessons and engage with digital literacy in the classroom.	Faculty and student surveys with directed questions regarding sense of equity.	Reform committee to gather Foundations Program-wide results and analyze data. Specific questions will be considered to reflect the indicators required.	Surveys should be sent after midterms, and before finals, both semesters.
<b>Efficiency: Are students improving in classroom digital literacy tasks?</b>	Faculty	Submission of quality work that involves the use of ICT and critical thinking.	Student classwork and tasks.	Faculty to grade assignments/indicate if students are improving.	Midterms during both semesters would be ideal here, as it offers an opportunity to reassess and correct.
<b>Impact: Is there any improvement (retention/increase) in student numbers?</b>	Data provided by registrar.	Student numbers are increasing, re-enrollment is high.	Registration files, fees paid, etc.	Registrar to provide the data, reform committee to review and confirm data in relation to implementation.	After first semester, and again before the new cohort starts the following academic year.
<b>Sustainability: Is there potential to maintain/grow the digital literacy components of the Foundations Program?</b>	Reform committee, students, faculty.	Successful adoption of KU model, and progress in student digital literacy skill application.	Surveys (student and faculty) should indicate a positive correlation between digital literacy implementation and improved student skills.	Reform committee to collect data, analyze, and summarize into one report.	Periodic review of how curriculum changes are going, two to three times a semester.

*Note.* Adapted from Markiewicz and Patrick (2016, p. 127).

The monitoring plan in Table 9, adapted from Markiewicz and Patrick (2016), offers a clear breakdown of how monitoring will take place, indicators to look out for, and who will be responsible. The five monitoring questions will guide the implementation. Appropriateness will allow the committee to understand if the plan is rightfully aligned with the intended outcomes. Effectiveness will address the ethical concern as to whether the plan is working to close gaps of inequity, as opposed to reinforcing them. Efficiency will monitor whether the plan is working in the environment and if all actors are playing their part in the implementation. It is important to note that the curriculum changes will be embedded into the syllabus and curriculum, therefore it will be mandatory for all Foundations Program faculty to implement the changes in their classrooms. These changes are to be made during step three of Kotter's model for change, ideally during a summer semester to provide ample time for research, discussion, and a trial run if applicable.

The fourth question monitors impact, which is perhaps the question of most concern to the GCK administration. It refers to the monetary return on the investment made in the program. Finally, sustainability will help to maintain and improve the change effort. Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) rightfully highlight that evaluation is most often a deeper understanding of monitoring results, along with more data as required. The evaluation, then, is a process of logical deduction based on observable results and trends. The evaluation plan will follow the same five questions at the end of the change effort.

Evaluation as a concept is a tool used to understand how events impact an organization, in this case the change effort's impact on the GCK (Butler et al., 2003). While Hall (2013) addresses the individual concerns, there is a need to look at the effort through the organization's cultural lens. GCK's culture is not particularly attuned to the individual, and therefore CBAM

does work for the monitoring stages along the way but not for the final evaluation. A Linear Newtonian approach to evaluation is more suited to GCK. This approach focuses on quantifiable data that highlight how the group is functioning as a unit for the best interest of the organization as a whole (Butler et al., 2003). It is for this reason that the evaluation plan also follows Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) as it is malleable to this need for a linear, gradual, and logical approach to addressing change. The evaluation plan follows the same five categories of questions as the monitoring plan: appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Where the monitoring plan will involve more qualitative data collection, the evaluation plan will be heavily quantitative as it fulfills the Newtonian approach to evaluation.

Goals of the Newtonian evaluation process include the following: (1) indications of obeying the change effort, (2) indications of predictability or control, and (3) indications that the goal has been or will be attained (Butler et al., 2003). As Table 11 illustrates, the answers to the appropriateness and efficiency questions could fulfill indications of obeying the change effort. The answer to the question of effectiveness could indicate an ability for prediction and control. Finally, the answers to impact and sustainability should be able to answer if the overall goal was achieved or if it is achievable. There is no singular method for evaluating change, and it is also a difficult task as change is a summary of multiple efforts from multiple individuals at different times. The broad questions in this model allow for an assessment at least on the overall progress and feasibility of the change effort

**Table 11***Evaluation Plan*

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Summary of Monitoring</b>	<b>Evaluation Method</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>
<b>Appropriateness: Did the plan improve digital skills in Foundations Program students?</b>	Summary of digital literacy assessment tool results three times a semester.	Quantitative.	End of project implementation (i.e., one full academic year running).	Reform committee to review results.
<b>Effectiveness: Was there a correlated improvement in equity for students with little ICT background?</b>	Student and faculty surveys.	Quantitative.	End of academic year.	Reform committee to review results.
<b>Efficiency: Are students at an acceptable level of digital literacy when they enter degree programs?</b>	Summary of classwork grades, submissions, etc., via faculty surveys, actual number of students per class that succeed standardized test	Quantitative.	End of academic year.	Reform committee to review results, final review with Foundations Program director.
<b>Impact: Has GCK retained more students after implementation? Has GCK attracted more/new students through the program?</b>	Data provided by registrar to be determined.	Quantitative, notably if question is included in registration forms regarding if digital literacy is a priority for the student.	End of registration the following academic year.	Registrar to provide data, reform committee to analyze.
<b>Sustainability: Is there room for improvement and growth in the digital literacy portion of the curriculum?</b>	Summary of feedback from all participants: faculty, students, reform committee, and others.	Qualitative, for reform committee's analysis and review.	End of academic year.	Reform committee to review results, make suggestions. Foundations Program director makes final call.

*Note.* Adapted from Markiewicz & Patrick (2016, p. 127).

The evaluation plan follows a stakeholder approach (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016) whereby the roles of each participant are a central focus in the end result. Through this approach, the main concern in the PoP can be addressed: student digital illiteracy while also tackling issues of inequity, faculty responsiveness, and the executive board's goal for monetary/non-monetary returns on the investments made in the digital literacy curriculum changes. This approach also fits very well into the ethic of care as more work surrounding individual concerns is possible in the monitoring leading up to the evaluation. Further, it adequately responds to the goals outlined in the Linear Newtonian epistemology of evaluation (Butler et al., 2003).

### **Responding to Monitoring and Evaluation Findings**

It is beneficial to the change effort that Kotter's (1995) approach is general in that it can be applied and woven into other plans very seamlessly. As changes are consolidated and amendments are made, the same steps will recur. There will be a need to create a sense of urgency surrounding the change implementation plan, and how to address it. This will also require tact as a relational leader, as stakeholders and participants alike may find amendments frustrating. Some may even see them as an indicator of failed change. Therefore, the delivery of such changes must be communicated in a collaborative manner.

As the reform committee lead, I plan to make minor amendments to ensure the following impact assessment is successful. The major response will be to the final evaluation plan should it require greater change than the monitoring of milestones. At this stage, that response is only speculative. However, I would think a major change might include changing the chosen digital literacy assessment tool or altering large components of the curriculum – with both changes continuing to support the main goal of improving digital literacy within the Foundations Program.

### **Next Steps, Future Considerations of the Organizational Improvement Plan**

The next steps of the change process will be training Foundations Program faculty in digital literacy teaching strategies and beginning the in-class implementation of the change effort based on the information gathered from the trial run. In line with this, the reform committee should establish a subset of the committee that can focus on promoting digital citizenship and literacy as a key selling point of the Foundations Program, which could include posting infographics and articles to social media, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and so on. The change effort will need to be multifaceted to be successful, with all stakeholders' voices being considered and heard and with ethical relational leadership being practiced. If done correctly, I am confident there will be a great future for digital literacy learning at GCK.

It is my hope that a successful implementation of the change effort would result in more funding and support for the faculty in the Foundations program. This funding could be used for more training as ICT tools and digital literacy are constantly evolving. It could also be put toward attending and presenting at conferences within Kuwait and abroad. With student success at the heart of the effort, the faculty need to be appropriately trained and prepared to teach students digital literacy and adequately prepare them for their academic and professional careers. As the opportunities and options expand, GCK should be looking into moving in the right direction. This does not always have to be through curriculum, but perhaps hiring and training could be refined to attract more talent and faculty with backgrounds suited to digital literacy teaching and learning.

A future consideration would be to revisit the proposed solutions and implement solution #4 – a degree course dedicated to digital literacy that is applicable to all majors. This would be a

great addition to GCK and put it ahead of its competition. Further, there should be college-wide implementation of digital literacy learning intertwined with curriculum, as all careers involve and require elements of digital literacy. It would truly differentiate the GCK if it were to incorporate ways of learning that are more accurately indicative of the workforce into which students will enter upon graduation.

Beyond careers, there is a need for every person to be digitally literate as social media and other ICT tools are being used by students and non-students alike. With a crisis of misinformation, the issue of digital illiteracy becomes one of media and information illiteracy, which can go as far as negatively affecting politics and the economy if digital literacy education is not prioritized (J. Collins, 2021). This is what fuels my interest in addressing the digital divide, namely in the Gulf region. There is significant work to be done in understanding the gaps, as well as adding to the literature, in order to improve higher education in this part of the world.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

This chapter effectively covered how implementation would work at GCK in order to address the PoP. It outlines the implementation plan details, following Kotter's (1995) model for change. Based on this plan and outlined goals, a communication plan is outlined that works for the reform committee, as well as the wider GCK organizational culture. Thereafter, the monitoring plan and evaluation plan are detailed to highlight the ways the change process will be held accountable and maintained to ensure the success of the change effort. Finally, potential future plans are outlined that can be implemented should the opportunity arise.



## Conclusion

This OIP has effectively explained the POP at GCK as a lack of digital literacy learning. The focus was on the Foundations Program as that is my scope of influence. The three chapters discussed the organizational context, challenges, and opportunities for solving the PoP. Chapter 2 culminates with the decision to go with solution #1: incorporating digital literacy education into the Foundations Program using regional best practices data. This would be the most feasible approach and the one that would most likely gain executive board approval. Chapter 3 delved into the details of implementing solution #1, along with discussing potential future actions that GCK could take in order to improve its digital literacy learning across the college as a whole. Briefly put, GCK will need to continuously make a conscious effort in keeping the curriculum relevant for modern workforce needs.

There was significant discussion surrounding the role and responsibility of the leaders in such a change process. In typically resistant environments such as GCK, department heads and those with formal power can play an important support role (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). As someone with informal authority, I leaned into their support as well as my own leadership style to execute change and influence attitudes toward change. My own leadership style blends relational leadership with transactional, and I focused on initiating and engaging in change, as opposed to the negative approach of simply executing instructions (Walk, 2023). This flexibility is what has allowed me, thus far, to create a great team working together toward an equitable goal for students' digital literacy skills (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). It has also opened the doors to high-quality, collaborative communication for faculty within an organization that prefers vertical communication. This communication dynamic has also proven to be especially useful in the progress, as change effort participants were more engaged due to the committee valuing their

involvement (Tanner & Otto, 2015). In this way, the change effort has subtly gone beyond simply reimagining digital literacy education at GCK to quietly indicating a better way to manage internal discussion for the aggregate good.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Semester Plan and Alternative Semester Plan*

An anonymized and summarized version of the semester plan is outlined as currently conducted within the Foundations Program. To the right of this is the desired and achievable version of what the semester plan would look like incorporating digital literacy. For the purposes of this discussion, much of the details in the semester plan have been removed to maintain the anonymity of the organization being discussed. The focus is semester one, where students are at a Pre-A2 Kaplan English standard or 4-5 IELTS standard for context (British Council, n.d.; Kaplan International Languages, n.d.).

Semester one is 14 weeks long and is divided by cycles, with cycle one being everything leading to the midterm and cycle two being everything after the midterm and before the final. For brevity's sake, Table A.1 only addresses cycle one. Additionally, it is summarized for simplicity.

**Table A. 1**

#### *Cycle One*

Week 1	Placement test, Grammar Book basics required for cycle one.
Week 2	Listening and Speaking Book (LSB) – gradual increase in difficulty by day.
Week 3	Writing Book – combining vocabulary learned in LSB and Grammar to practice written communication, focus on sentences and sentence structure.
Week 4	Reading Book – reading passages that combine all the above plus reading comprehension. Language difficulty of workbooks and passages increased on a daily basis.
Week 5	Grammar and Writing Books – practice + some new skills introduced, including editing and peer review.
Week 6	Primarily reserved for reviewing key concepts of all four skills.
Week 7	2 days reserved for Speaking midterms (individual, therefore the class should be split) and the remaining three days are Grammar, Listening, and Reading midterm exams.

*Note.* Adapted from GCK (2020).

While the plan above has proven to be effective in guiding students with language skills, there is room for inserting digital literacy content. It is important to note both the listening and reading texts are e-books, therefore some digital interaction is present in the current model. Tables A.2 and A.3 show minor changes to highlight digital learning in the existing practice, and how achievable that may be.

**Table A. 2**

*Revised Semester Plan – Digital Literacy*

Week 1	Placement test, Grammar Book basics required for cycle one. <i>Opt for online placement test as opposed to existing paper-based option.</i>
Week 2	Listening and Speaking Book (LSB) – gradual increase in difficulty by day. <i>Speaking task: Record a video of your speech and upload to a private YouTube to be played in class as a graded in-class activity.</i> <i>Listening task: Find a podcast on X topic covered in class and list key takeaways.</i>
Week 3	Writing Book – combining vocabulary learned in LSB and Grammar to practice written communication, focus on sentences and sentence structure. <i>Writing Task: send an email to your instructor with proper email format from your student email account.</i>
Week 4	Reading Book – reading passages that combine all the above plus reading comprehension. Language difficulty of workbooks and passages increased on a daily basis. <i>Reading Activity: Google to find a news article relating to X topic and read it. Share your findings with the class.</i>
Week 5	Grammar and Writing Books – practice + some new skills introduced, including editing and peer review. <i>Overlap activity: Create an Excel crib sheet for Grammar skills.</i>
Week 6	Primarily reserved for reviewing key concepts of all four skills. <i>Reserve one day for a digital literacy midterm where students have a task sheet that they need to fill, including useful skills such as uploading videos, finding credible sources, sending an email, creating an Excel sheet for their own reference, etc.</i>
Week 7	2 days reserved for Speaking midterms (individual, therefore the class should be split) and the remaining three days are Grammar, Listening, and Reading midterm exams.

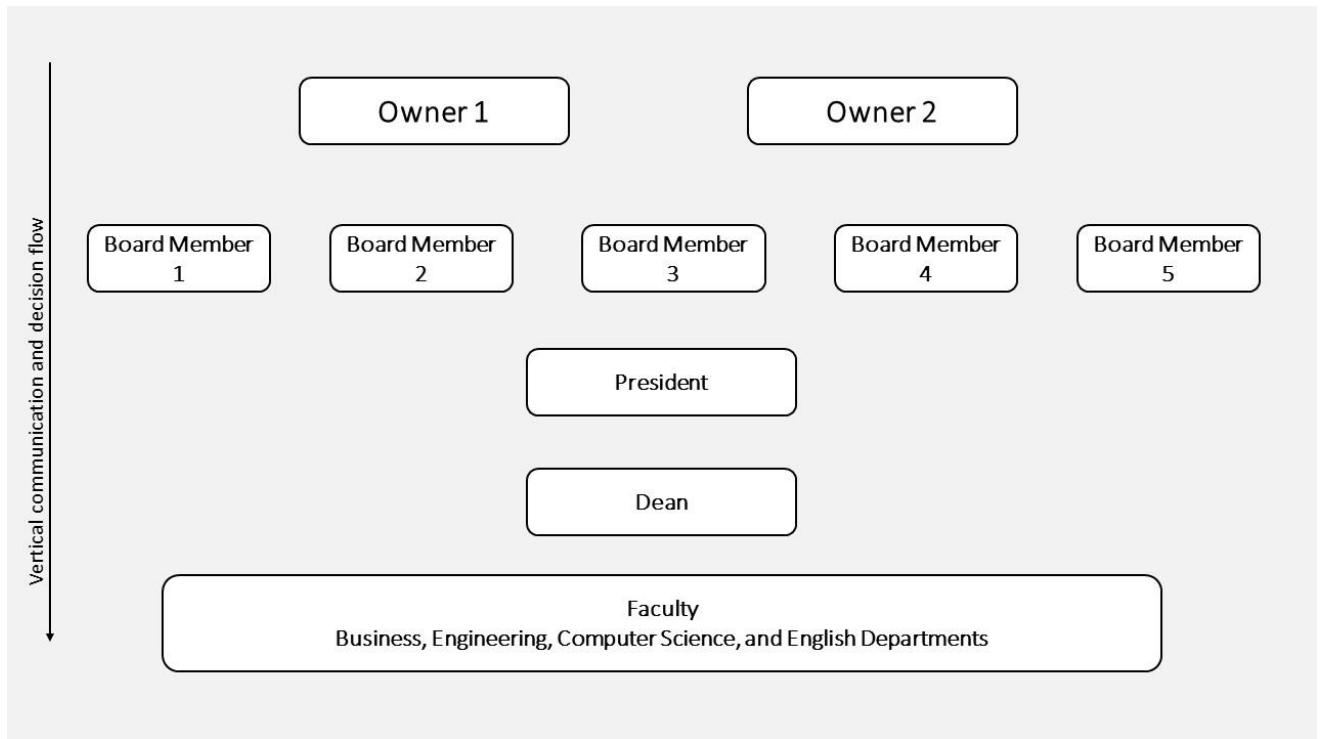
*Note.* Adapted from GCK (2020).

The revised plan highlights how easily attainable incorporating digital literacy in the classroom can be. Notably for semester one, where basic software would be the central focus. In grey, the tasks and minor alterations to existing practices allow for more dynamic, interesting lessons while also introducing new skills and software. This sample lesson plan introduces video

creation and sharing, podcasts, use of search engines, Outlook emails, Excel sheets, and an introduction to media literacy with the search for credible sources. There remains, however, some key questions to address for the PoP before jumping to potential solutions.

## Appendix B

### *GCK Structure*



## Appendix C

### *Knowledge Mobilization Plan*

