

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – LA CROSSE

Graduate Studies

LEADERSHIP EXPRESSION IN FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: AN  
EXPLORATION OF CHARACTERISTICS AND STRATEGIES OF ACADEMIC  
DEANS

A Chapter Style Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education

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DEANS

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We recommend acceptance of this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the candidate's requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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## ABSTRACT

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Higher education needs prepared leaders now more than ever. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore leadership characteristics and strategies of academic affairs deans at four-year public institutions. This study seeks to gain an understanding of how deans lead in the current environment of public higher education. Ten deans expressed leadership strategies and characteristics working in four-year institutions. Four themes emerged: the differences in leading academic staff; the progression from faculty to dean; a dedication to diversity; and the importance of experiential professional development. The results indicated four-year institutions must place more emphasis on the challenges leaders face and their progression into leadership positions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank throughout the journey toward my doctorate. First, I would like to thank the ten academic deans who took time out of their busy schedules to share their leadership experiences. I grew personally and professionally as a result of our interactions. I gained an appreciation for the emotional and grueling work of leaders throughout our discussions. These ten deans gave me hope that public higher education will persist given all the challenges it faces during this time.

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so much richness to this dissertation. Not only did you guide this dissertation process, but you helped me uncover confidence as a researcher. Thank you.

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I must conclude with a special shout out to faculty and staff in the Educational Opportunity Program at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay in 1993. These individuals took a chance on a low-income, first-generation college student. I was motivated to attend college but lacked confidence and study skills to succeed. Education is undoubtedly a transformational experience. A single admission decision can change a life because the man I was at 18, and the man I am now are remarkably different. That chance to attend college, the relationships I built, and the lessons I learned have drastically changed the direction of my life.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Picture a new academic dean, formerly a faculty member, with little to no leadership preparation. This dean was a wonderful professor but now must mediate conflict, manage a budget, appear on television to talk about enrollment, educate the community about the power of liberal arts, diversify the campus, and build public support for the institution. Feeling overwhelmed? For new leaders in higher education, this feeling can be the first sign of a problem. Higher education leaders, such as faculty and academic staff, often accept leadership positions unprepared for the challenges ahead (Gonaim &, 2016; Morris & Laipple, 2015). The changing face of public higher education exposes leaders to potentially precarious situations. Furthermore, factors such as corporatization, changing student demographics, lack of public support, and the attack on liberal arts education impact new leaders (Evans & Chun, 2012). These factors demand leaders prepare to leverage academic governance, manage decreasing state appropriations, grow enrollment with shrinking numbers of high school graduates, minimize equity gaps, and lower the cost to earning a degree (Evans & Chun, 2012; Porterfield & Whitt, 2016). Leaders must also learn the communication and people skills needed for leadership. Success leaves clues, and by uncovering leadership strategies from experienced deans in four-year public higher education institutions it is possible to

gain insight to help prepare leaders in higher education and impact the future of higher education.

I plan to explore leadership strategies and experiences of academic affairs deans in four-year public institutions. This chapter begins with background and context regarding challenges facing higher education. Next, I introduce the purpose and research questions for the study followed by an outline of my qualitative research design. I will then briefly describe the theoretical framework that supports the research in this study and articulate the reasons I decided to concentrate on four-year public institutions and the significance the study has on higher education. My positionality and assumptions about the study follow. The final component of the chapter covers the definitions of terms used throughout this dissertation. This introduction will lay the groundwork for the literature review, methodology, and conclusions that follow. Understanding the threats that surround leaders is the first step of exploring the experiences of academic deans.

### **Background of Problem**

Administrators must be prepared to deal with precarious situations (Morris & Laipple, 2015). For this study, the term “leader” refers to academic affairs deans in upper-level administrative roles tasked with executing an institution’s mission and vision. These individuals also must be responsible for some level of human and financial resources. From managing limited budgets to mediating conflict, these experiences can determine the success or failure of an administrator (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017; Morris & Laipple, 2015). In this section, I will outline competition, cost of degree, performance-based funding, lack of public confidence, shifting student demographics, corporatization of higher education, and threats to tenure and liberal arts education as only a small set of

shifting environmental factors to how leaders express their leadership within these environmental contexts. This phenomenon, the expression of leadership, refers to the strategies and characteristics of deans as they navigate these environmental factors. Furthermore, the phenomenon highlights the critical nature of leadership preparation.

Many organizations such as The American Council on Education (ACE) ([www.acenet.edu](http://www.acenet.edu)) and The Harvard Institutes for Higher Education Programs (HIHE) ([www.gse.harvard.edu/harvard-institutes-higher-education-programs](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/harvard-institutes-higher-education-programs)) currently offer robust leadership development programs for administrators, such as deans, presidents, and chancellors. These programs offer support for leaders to improve management, supervision, and leadership ability. These programs are robust; however, I argue higher education has entered into a historic shift due to recent political, economic, and societal factors. Furthermore, these changes are happening quickly, and leadership programs must adapt to the dramatic and rapid shifts impacting public four-year institutions. Administrators in these institutions must pilot public higher education through these challenging times. The problems below present an opportunity to examine effective leadership strategies during a challenging time and prepare higher education administrators for the future.

### **Contemporary Higher Education Environmental Factors**

Increased competition for students places pressure on upper-level administrators (Hossler, Bontrager, & Associates, 2014). Resource dependency theory (RDT) serves as a useful theoretical framework for understanding that pressure. To understand the impact competition has on institutional resources, grasping the theory itself is essential. Fowles (2014) contended resource dependency, “theorizes that the behaviors of organizations are

shaped by the availability of external resources upon which the organization relies for survival” (as cited in Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003, p. 273). Hossler, Bontrager, and Associates (2014) provided a similar description when they argued RDT-oriented institutions, “respond to changes in the external environment by shifting time, energy, and resources to protect or acquire scarce resources that are central to the health and vitality of the organization” (p. 9). RDT posits for an institution to survive, it must be keenly aware of both its current internal resources and the potentiality to acquire external resources (Fowles, 2014). Internal resources include tuition from recruitment and retention, state appropriations, philanthropic gifts, and academic program-community collaboration dollars (Fowles, 2014). External resources include the high-school graduate pipeline which consists of online, transfer, on-campus, veteran, and high school students in the institution’s geographic area (Fowles, 2014). Therefore, the balance between institutional revenue and expenditure is pivotal (Fowles, 2014; Hossler, et al., 2014). Due to decreases in state-appropriations, competition for internal and external resources has become fierce and exploring the academic dean experience and strategy may help new administrators develop approaches to succeed in this environment.

Another factor faced by administrators is the need to reduce the cost of a higher education degree. More and more, students are graduating with increased debt from college going pursuits (College Board, 2017). According to the College Board (2017), students in 1987-1988 paid 3,190 dollars to attend one year of college whereas tuition in 2017-2018 increased to 9,970 dollars. The trend of student loan debt is equally as troubling. According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (2014), the average student debt for four-year public education was \$25,500 dollars with 20%

compromising private loans. Even more disconcerting, Pell grant recipients (those with family incomes below \$40,000 dollars) were more likely to borrow at higher rates (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NPSAS], 2014). Administrators in higher education need to grapple with the pressure legislators and parents place on institutions to reduce debt. To minimize student debt, many institutions offset tuition and increase academic support via tuition increases (Hossler et al., 2014). Without state support, administrators must prepare institutions to carry more of the tuition cost. Uncovering the academic dean leadership experience and strategies may offer lessons for how to manage institutions through increased cost to a degree.

Legislators are increasingly linking performance-based funding to state appropriations. Performance-based funding, also called outcomes-based funding, provides institutions money for meeting a set of standards such as decreased time to graduation, increased graduation rates, job placement, and improved retention and persistence (Nisar, 2015). Currently, 30 states are in the process of either creating or implementing performance-based funding (Lumina Foundation, 2018; Snyder & Boelscher, 2018). Performance-based funding burdens administrators in a couple of ways. First, performance-based funding forces administrators to use recruitment and retention data in ways that diminish the student experience (Nisar, 2015). *Institutional isomorphism*, the need to copy the recruitment and retention efforts at similar institutions for competition purposes, can drive the decision to emphasize quantitative over qualitative student outcomes (Hossler et al., 2014). In other words, a lack of financial resources causes administrators to focus on acquiring resources by examining only the statistics that lead to funding versus increasing the overall quality of education in their

institutions (Nisar, 2015). Second, administrators find themselves walking a thin line between open access, academic preparation, and data-driven support for funding. For example, institutions that believe in open access raise their admissions standards to increase the likelihood for additional funding. Lastly, some researchers worry performance-based funding will lead to institutions reducing academic rigor to meet requirements (Fain, 2017). Therefore, students will enter the workforce less educated and prepared for success. Learning the strategies deans use within the world of performance-based funding may reveal leadership preparation strengths or weaknesses.

Higher education has also come under considerable pressure from the public to increase degree attainment (Lumina Foundation, 2018). The lack of speed to do so has eroded public confidence in higher education. A recent Gallop poll summarized by Jones (2018) underscored the shrinking public confidence in higher education. According to Jones (2018), 48% of adults in the United States expressed confidence in higher education. This statistic is down from 57% in 2015. The level has fallen 17 percentage points for Republicans and a 6 percentage points for Democrats. Jones (2018) contended, “Higher education is not in as strong a position in terms of public trust as it has been in the past” (para. 6). Republicans believe much of the decline in trust is because higher education is defending the “liberal political agenda” (Jones, 2018, para. 7). The argument ties directly into the problem of the attack on liberal arts education later in this chapter. Academic dean strategies and experiences may leave clues on how to build political support for higher education.

Higher education administrators must also prepare to educate and support a diverse student body. Institutions are becoming increasingly diverse (U.S Department of

Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). The idea of institutions comprised of traditional-aged, residential students is one of the past. To underscore the dramatic shift of increasing diversity, the Lumina Foundation (2015) found Hispanic enrollment has tripled since the mid-1990's and Black enrollment grew by 72% in the same timeframe. The Lumina Foundation (2015) expects the trends to continue through 2021 with Black enrollment projected to increase by 25 percent, Hispanic students by 42 percent with only a 4 percent increase in White students (Lumina Foundation, 2015). The diversification of higher education is essential, but the academic and social support for underrepresented, first-generation, post-traditional and others causes some challenges for campuses as well. Take, for example, the challenge of mental health on college campuses. Students have linked poor academic performance with individual psychological concerns, such as depression, and relational concerns such as the welfare of a loved one (Locke, Wallace, & Brunner, 2016). Exploring leadership strategies, and particularly, leader experiences can offer insight into ways to prepare new leaders for a changing and complex student demographic. As importantly, diverse deans may have experiences that provide preparation for building diverse teams and diversifying institutions.

The changing student demographic has also brought with it the importance of flexible course delivery (Renn & Reason, 2013). Institutions of higher education are offering courses online, in the evening, and on weekends to meet the needs of student work schedules and family obligations (Gray, 2013). No longer are institutions bound to geographic boundaries to recruit students and professors (Gray, 2013). Administrators must determine how to make their campuses more enticing to students utilizing

innovative delivery course modes. Online and distant education is eliminating the physical limits of campus and making it more likely to recruit out of state students with in-state measures (Amirault, 2012). Academic dean experiences and strategies may shed light on navigating campuses through this change.

Another factor facing higher education administrators centers on the connection of corporate strategies to higher education. As a result, institutions are seeing students moving from learner to customer (Clay, 2008). Hossler et al. (2014) described this movement toward corporatist approaches as *new managerialism*. Hossler et al. (2014) defined new managerialism as, “the adoption of organizational structures, technologies, management practices, and values that are more commonly associated with the private, for-profit business sector” (p. 10). With increasing frequency, institutions of higher education are seeing business leaders hired as chief executive officers, business strategy merging with academic governance, and decision-making is a result of corporate interests (Clay, 2008). Additionally, the view of the student as consumer is leading to the adoption of “corporate models” to cut cost and make money (Clay, 2008, para. 3). A good example of the corporatization of higher education is the University of Phoenix which, with its 200,000 plus students, is one of the largest private institutions in the United States (Clay, 2008). The corporatization of public higher education requires leaders that value the purpose and mission of education, more than just tuition dollars and job placement. Tuition revenue confines institutions and is often the starting point for the difficult decisions within the institution (Warner, 2018). Uncovering strategies in which academic deans lead may empower future higher education administrators to explore adopting business approaches.

Legislators questioning the value of unionization, liberal arts education, and tenure is another factor challenging higher education administrators. Currently, 27% of all faculty in the United States have union representation (Austin & Jones, 2016). Some legislators have scrutinized unions, along with tenure, as a barrier for holding faculty accountable for ineffective teaching (Austin & Jones, 2016). Furthermore, questions about the tenure process and how it protects underperforming faculty in the governance process has also raised eyebrows (Austin & Jones, 2016). Backgrounding both of these issues is the perceived decreased value of a liberal arts education. Some contend the goal of a higher education degree should focus exclusively to prepare students for the workforce and to become economic drivers for society (National Association of Colleges and Employers Staff [NACE], 2016). One of the biggest fears of legislators is students not earning enough through liberal arts majors to live comfortably (NACE, 2016). This fear centers on the job market but neglects the value critical thinking and communication skills have outside of the workforce. Many of the academic deans I will interview have degrees within higher education. Their experiences and strategies will guide leadership preparation for championing the higher education agenda.

The problems, taken together, are a few of several factors that signal a historical shift within higher education. These factors and shifts in higher education provide an open door to examine the public higher education dean. This shift is complex and exacerbated by political, social and economic factors. The responses of the academic deans in four-year public institutions is critical to empower future leaders. I maintain the solutions to the problems may lie in the strategies and experiences of those deans. To academic deans in public higher education, facing these problems at one time may feel

like the core principles of education are under attack. The problems described above set the stage to shed light on deans, their leadership strategies, and the preparation of future administrators.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the leadership strategies of academic affairs deans at four-year public institutions. This study seeks to gain an understanding of how deans develop strategies from their experiences in the current environment of public higher education.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What leadership strategies do academic deans utilize at four-year public institutions?
2. How have the experiences of deans contributed to their leadership strategies?
3. How can institutions improve the preparation and development of administrators?

### **Research Design Overview**

I will take a qualitative, phenomenological approach to this study. I describe the specifics methods in more detail throughout chapter 3. The sections below will provide an overview of my methods and methodology. My purpose and research questions support the comprehensive overview of my research design. They will also guide each step meticulously throughout the entirety of my dissertation.

### **Research Site**

Public and private institutions alike are feeling the effects of the problems facing higher education. I contend public institutions are pivotal to educating the populous in

the current political environment given their dependency on state appropriations. As a result, this study will concentrate on public four-year institutions. The debate between those who believe earning a degree is a privilege and, others, a right is what turned my attention to public higher education. For legislators who believe higher education is a privilege, a shift toward for-profit and privatization of higher education emerges. For legislators who think public higher education is a right, a shift toward policies advocating for free college and taxpayer support takes precedent. In either case, learning more about dean strategies on public four-year campuses will provide a good first step to understanding these viewpoints.

### **Participant Sample and Recruitment**

My participants are upper-level administrators defined as academic deans. These individuals have some responsibility for human and financial resources. I will use a purposeful and snowball sampling method to recruit a diverse group of deans who hold various social identities (e.g. racial, ethnic, age, gender, sexual orientation). *Purposeful sampling*, selecting participants to help me understand my research questions, was used to help to ensure a diverse group of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For recruitment, I will identify potential academic deans by talking with colleagues, or gatekeepers, from various institutions across the United States. Over my many years working in higher education, I have developed meaningful relationships with these higher education professionals nationwide. I will call on them for an initial list of participants to begin my study. Next, I will send a detailed and concise email to those deans, described the research, the purpose of the study, and asked for their participation. The email, reviewed by my dissertation chair and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the

University of Wisconsin – La Crosse (UWL), will entice them to contribute to the study. In essence, I will use the idea of leadership preparation as the way for them to “give back” to their profession. Identifying and recruiting academic deans will be vital component to the success of the research and I explain the process thoroughly in Chapter 3.

### **Delimitations**

I plan for a few delimitations within this study. First, I will focus exclusively on academic deans. Leaders are everywhere on our campuses. To limit the scope and scale of the study, I will center on academic deans from the outset. Second, I plan to concentrate on dean experiences and not necessarily their successes. Measuring the “effectiveness” of a leader is a difficult proposition and outside the range of this study. Third, I will keep my study focused on leadership within higher education and excluded military and business approaches. Lastly, I will focus on four-year public institutions. Private and for-profit institutions are suffering from the same issues as public institutions. Given my background and experience in a public institution, I chose to limit my research to public four-year institutions. I will describe my delimitations more thoroughly in Chapter 3, but this section underscores how I planned to narrow the scope of my study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Adaptive leadership theory by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) serves as the theoretical framework for my study. The two main components of the theory that support my research are the concepts *technical problems* and *adaptive challenges*. *Technical problems* have known solutions (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Operating on the human body would be a technical problem. A surgeon can fix a torn muscle. Solutions

to technical problems come from authority, expertise, and processes (Heifetz et al., 2009). *Adaptive challenges* are sets of problems where the individual's priorities, beliefs, and interpretations tie into the solution (Heifetz et al., 2009). The ability of an administrator to distinguish between technical problems and adaptive challenges can be complicated. The ability to work through complicated technical problems and adaptive challenges underscore the work of leaders in higher education. I posit administrators navigate technical problems and adaptive challenges each day. I further maintain technical problems and adaptive challenges provide a useful framework for leader decision-making. Take, for example, course availability. The problem of predicting course seats is a process with a clear solution. An administrator must crunch the numbers of students to course seats. Any associate dean can quickly make educated assumptions on the number of seats for courses. From this aspect, course availability is a technical problem. The planning of the financial part, however, could be an adaptive challenge. If the associate dean does not want to pay adjunct professors but instead force tenured professors to teach additional load, the dean must try and entice faculty to do so. Moreover, the dean needs to work with faculty governance and institutional administration to implement a policy on modifying teaching load. From this perspective, course availability could be an adaptive challenge. Adaptive Theory, technical problems, and adaptive challenges provide the underpinning for the leader experiences.

### **Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study originates from my experience navigating budget reductions in 2014. I found myself watching administrators lead their departments through these reductions. I recall attending relentless budget meetings and responding to

incessant emails. The interactions had me feeling helpless but heightened my interest to pay attention to the decisions and interactions around me. As the pressure mounted, I began to wonder how some administrators handled the adversity. For some, the act of reducing the budget and eliminating programs was easier to manage professionally and personally. To these administrators, reducing the budget was like a puzzle. And the employees were pieces of the puzzle. They disconnected from the personal aspects and moved pieces around as needed. For other administrators, people became the lifeboat for getting through the challenges. They turned their attention to transparency and depended on the relationships between governance groups and their direct reports. My dissertation was born from the fear of budget reductions, my interest in leadership, and my observations throughout that difficult time.

I maintain throughout this introduction the future of higher education, now more than ever, needs prepared leaders. Our ability to develop our leadership on campus is the key to making public higher education a powerhouse. Effective administrators in four-year public institutions can balance the needs of the institution with those of the broader community. They can unite students, faculty, staff, legislators and business leaders. These administrators can use the historical underpinnings of higher education to transpose a vision for a brighter, more prosperous future. The inability for public institutions to either find or develop these administrators, jeopardizes all of the above. Instead of higher education adopting corporate strategies, higher education leadership has strengths of its own. The experiences and lessons that test administrators in higher education can be as effective as those in the business world. The complexity of governance in the academy make progressing an agenda even more difficult. I contend

higher education administrators have the advantage. Moreover, I insist our ability to develop a student's perspectives on issues, debate viewpoints peacefully, respect and cherish diverse backgrounds, and create innovative solutions in areas depends upon our success defending higher education and the preparation of our administrators in higher education.

### **Positionality Statement**

As a White, cis-gender man I benefit from privilege as a researcher. With privilege comes the responsibility to recognize how my overt and covert advantage impacts my research. From the dissertation proposal to the findings, I need to critically self-reflect on my thoughts, feelings, and actions as the researcher. Furthermore, to be competent, I must encourage authentic and genuine participant responses by minimizing the power dynamics during interviews. As a White man, I have a responsibility to champion diversity, inclusivity, and social justice. As a scholar, I have a responsibility to protect my participants and allow findings to occur naturally throughout the research.

My parents taught me few lessons, directly, about leadership as a child. Neither held a leadership position professionally and I do not recall them teaching me any personal philosophies. As a result, I struggled learning how to lead. I did learn from them, indirectly, how to relate to others, the power of humor, and, above all else, a sense of right and wrong. Their lessons often came from my mistakes and successes. I argue the opportunity to make mistakes may have been the greatest lessons my parents gave to me. By allowing me to muddle through, they set the stage for my interest in leadership and journey into higher education.

As an undergraduate, I started to develop an interest in studying leadership. The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB) exposed me to the practice of leadership and required me to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills. Likewise, I had mentors who often told me I had leadership potential. I was likable, understood the influence of teams, built a sense of community, and used constructive criticism as a means to improve my ability as a leader. Without those teachers, supervisors, and friends, I would have never realized my potential and discovered my interest in exploring another leader's potential.

My journey into community counseling and current role as director of academic advising present both benefits and challenges to the research. Experiencing trials and tribulations as a mid-level manager challenges me with leadership situations every day. I know the leadership skills that serve me well and those needing improvement. The leadership strengths and weaknesses help me to understand the connection between supervision, management, and leadership. These insights will benefit me as a researcher but might seem foreign when exposed to a leadership skill outside of my own. As a result, I must approach the research with an open mind. My work as an employee assistance, in-home, outpatient counselor taught me effective communication skills such as listening and reflecting. These communication skills will pay dividends during a qualitative, phenomenological approach to research. Above all else, my journey as a first-generation, low-income student from an undergraduate to present day carries with it a perspective on life. On the one hand, I know what it feels like to come from a low socio-economic status and the lack of confidence as a first-generation student. On the other hand, I also know my White, man privilege opened doors that oppressed individuals

had to break through to advance. I carry, reflect, and monitor, all these experiences as a researcher to protect my participants and my research.

### **Researcher's Assumptions**

I have some assumptions regarding leadership characteristics and development of higher education administrators. My first assumption is institutions already train leaders but do so from supervisory and management perspectives. I want to explore broader leadership strategies. For example, mediating conflict between two department chairs is essential, but is the leader taught how to understand the reason the department chairs are at odds? Is there any training on the understanding of the problems I describe in this introduction? Second, business leadership strategies are permeating the environment of higher education. Shrinking resources are leading to the elimination of majors. Majors, such as the humanities, that focus on critical thinking and communication skills are coming under the auspices of business leaders focused on return on investment. This transition from higher education to business leadership places precedent upon enrollment numbers versus education standards. Third, leaders are finding themselves struggling to support the value of the liberal arts degree. More and more, politicians are emphasizing technical job skills in the workforce. I assume the defense of liberal arts education floods the national stage for policy makers and administrators alike. Lastly, I assume the backgrounds of leaders will be a vital component underscoring the leadership experience. For example, research has attempted to link women leaders, more than men, to more relational approaches (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017). Administrators with different racial and ethnic backgrounds will have differing experiences if they work at a predominantly White institution (PWI), for example, navigating campus culture and hiring practices

(Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). I hope to find it rewarding to explore the intersection of leadership experiences and personal background.

### **Definition of Terms**

Defining leadership terms is a critical component for the understanding of this study. Without mutual understanding, the leadership concepts outlined throughout this study become a labyrinth. Leadership terminology connects like a spider web. Some terms interconnect or share partial meaning. Take the terms supervision, management and leadership for example. Even more problematic is the individual interpretation of the words. Because the nature of leadership is subjective, defining the leadership terminology is a crucial piece of the puzzle. The terms: leader, leadership, supervision, management, characteristic, and strategy appear throughout the following chapters. These terms, defined below, provide a mutual understanding for this study.

There is no shortage of definitions of leadership. Dugan (2017) claimed there is no one definition of leadership that explains the various perspectives of the leader. Northouse (2010) defined leadership as, “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Both authors viewed leadership as a process and action that impacts groups as well as individuals (Dugan, 2017; Northouse, 2010). Preskill and Brookfield (2009) defined leadership as, “a relational and collective process in which collaboration and shared understanding are deemed axiomatic to getting things done” (p. 3). For this study, the definition of leadership incorporates the perspectives outlined by all these authors. I define *leadership* as an action-oriented, relational, and collective process in which an influential individual helps other individuals achieve common goals.

For this study, the term *leader* refers to administrators in upper-level administrative roles such as such as chancellors, provosts, deans, and directors tasked with executing an institution's mission and vision and responsible for some level of human and financial resources.

The term supervision refers to the process of monitoring the best performance from an individual or group of people. I define *supervision* as the process of providing oversight to an individual or group of people for the purpose of identifying weaknesses and improving performance.

Leadership and management are distinctive concepts (Northouse, 2010). Rost (1993) best outlined the separateness between leadership and management and contended leadership is a multi-directional, relational process while management is a unidirectional, hierarchical process (Rost, 1993). In addition, he claimed management centered on task-oriented processes whereas leadership was vision-oriented (Rost, 1993). For this study, the term management aligns with Rost's definition. I define *management* as a process by which a leader coordinates and influences others to get their work done.

It is difficult to find a definition for *characteristic* in the leadership literature. Research uses the term characteristic in a way that aligns with the literature. Individuals and groups can possess characteristics. These characteristics can encompass the leader strengths, weaknesses, and, most important to this study, the strategies the use. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I define *characteristic* as a distinguishing feature or quality of a leader.

Leaders learn strategies through various personal and professional experiences. Strategies can originate from childhood, adolescence, and adult failures and successes.

More importantly, leaders can learn strategies from the experiences and from other leaders. As such, I define a *strategy* as a plan of action created to accomplish an objective.

This introduction is the beginning of the journey to understand the experiences of academic deans in four-year public institutions of higher education. Throughout this introduction I have presented: the various problems upper-level administrators face; the purpose and research questions guiding my study; my research design and delimitations; theoretical framework of adaptive leadership; rationale and assumptions; positionality; assumptions; and the definition of terms. This introduction provides a comprehensive backdrop for an exploration into leadership. Before attempting to understand the dean experience and their leadership strategies in the public institution, I provide an examination of the broader literature on leadership specific to higher education

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent political, social, cultural, and environmental shifts in higher education are testing new leaders (Kuk, Banning, & Cherrey, 2015). The shifts in higher education are unrelenting and they await faculty and staff pursuing opportunities to progress into leadership positions. Porterfield and Whitt (2016) described the recent shifts as a steady drumbeat:

The content of the drumbeat has been just as consistent: increasing costs and declining funding, inadequate responses to shifting student and national demographics, new competitive economic demands, complex technological advancements, globalization, and increasing public skepticism that colleges and universities provide a quality return on investment. (p. 11)

Moreover, the drumbeat is an alert for institutions of higher education to prepare its leaders to serve as leadership visionaries. In the case of four-year public college and universities, leaders must be prepared to guide students, faculty, and staff through a variety of concerns facing their institutions.

For staff and faculty of four-year public institutions, the drumbeat signifies minimal pay increases, fewer resources, and the need to defend the “value and validity of higher education” (Canney, 2012, p. 1). At the heart of shift in higher education is the debate over whether a four-year bachelor’s degree is a right or privilege. For those believing an opportunity to earn a degree is a privilege, intense competition and rising

costs of higher education are becoming commonplace. On the opposite side are those who feel a college degree is right, and advocate for higher education to be open access. The debate is causing the federal government to advocate for decreasing the time it takes to earn a degree, increasing transferability with between various college types, implementing accountability measures, and developing opportunities for college credit in high school (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGB], 2011).

For students, concerns run rampant in the changing face of higher education as well. First, more and more students are struggling with mental health issues (Canney, 2012). Campuses must prepare themselves for the increased demands of issues such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Locke et al., 2016). Students also face economic pressure including the cost of college impacting time in the classroom (Canney, 2012). Long work hours needed to offset the high cost of college place an additional strain on students and force institutions to offer courses outside of normal hours (AGB, 2011). Second, student concern is the competitive job market upon graduation and the accountability of higher education on job placement (Brown, 2018). Societal pressures force students to earn a degree as quickly and efficiently as possible. As a result, four-year public institutions are under scrutiny from politicians to create a clear path to a degree and shorten the time it takes to graduate. These institutions, in turn, place high expectations on faculty and staff educating students.

Most concerning is the number of higher education leaders who openly acknowledge their unpreparedness to lead institutions (Gonaim, 2016; Morris and Laipple, 2015). For the purposes of this literature review, the term “leader” refers to

administrators in upper level administrative roles such as such as chancellors, provosts, deans, and mid-level managers tasked with executing an institution's mission and vision. If leaders within higher education are unprepared, then four-year public institutions are at the mercy of the above concerns. More significantly, without prepared leaders in higher education, legislators will not understand the challenges of the academy and the importance of funding public education. Regardless of the concern, the changing face of higher education and the impacts on students, faculty, and staff raise some questions about the future of higher education leadership. Do effective higher education leaders need a distinct set of qualities to help them navigate higher education and student affairs issues? Are there common themes throughout the literature showcasing effective approaches to higher education leadership? Examining key themes in the literature on effective higher education leadership can provide insights on how to develop and prepare leaders for the challenges they will face working in public education.

Narrowing the focus of this literature review was a challenging proposition given the voluminous amount of research on leadership. The current research in this study on leadership in higher education concentrates exclusively on the shifting, changing landscape on colleges campuses. To learn about leader qualities on college campuses, research must begin to focus exclusively within higher education environments. This review includes studies outlining characteristics contributing to leader success in the college setting. Furthermore, identifying how those characteristics and skills differ from other fields would provide vital for insights regarding the specific characteristics and skills new leaders need to learn as they become upper level administrators. For instance, a current trend is the adoption of a business and corporatist leadership mentality geared

toward governance and management (Blaschke, Frost, & Hattke, 2014). Business and higher education leadership is a study in itself. Therefore, this review excludes business leadership approaches. This study also excluded data-driven decision-making leadership strategies. Without a doubt, data-driven decisions, particularly those sources focused on accountability, are exceedingly important (AGB, 2011). For the purposes of this study, however, data-driven decision making is a skill or tool used by leaders and not a leadership characteristic. In essence, data-driven decisions are a product of the leader utilizing the six characteristics of leadership described next.

The literature review begins with an explanation of common leadership principles based on my review of the literature. The review then moves to the description of six leadership characteristics categorized by the common themes found in the literature. The term “theme” denotes a set of qualities, traits, or approaches found in effective higher education leaders. The six leadership characteristics with their corresponding themes are: (a) the relationship-driven leader, focusing on building nurturing relationships; (b) the communicative leader, using listening, speaking, questioning and learning to solve problems; (c) the diverse-minded leader, balancing self-reflection with the power of difference; (d) the change-oriented leader, thriving within the changing face of higher education; (e) the politically savvy leader, motivating, inspiring, and deconstructing institutional barriers to change; and (f) the virtuous leader, guiding thoughts and actions through ethical principles. Next is a theoretical review of adaptive leadership followed by a practical approach connecting leadership style to adaptive theory. The review concludes with gaps in the research and a summary of major insights.

### **Leadership Principles**

To fully grasp the leadership characteristics and their corresponding themes, recognizing some of the elementary principles found throughout my review of the literature is imperative. The first principle is leader characteristics and skills are not necessarily discrete attributes, but rather, tend to overlap and blend together. For example, a communicative leader might be highly relational, diverse, and change-oriented. Second, leaders learn behaviors; they not born with them (Dugan, 2017). Leaders can develop leadership strengths based upon personal experience, mistake making, and mentoring (Bogenschneider, 2016; Dugan, 2017). Third, as history has proven, leaders can have good and bad intentions (Burns, 2017; Dugan, 2017). The leadership themes and their leader characteristics have positive and negative leadership ramifications for students, staff, and leaders. Burns (2017) conducted a quantitative study on three harmful leadership styles (abusive, bullying, and toxic). Burns found some inherent aspects of harmful leadership, based upon experience and learning, can be difficult to change. Leadership characteristics, once developed, can have troubling implications (Burns, 2017). Fourth, leadership is, in its essence, a problem-solving decision-making process (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Making decisive, educated, and well-informed decisions was a product of each of the leadership characteristics. Lastly is the distinction between leading, managing, and supervising. For the purposes of this literature review, *leading* is a long-term, vision building task; *managing* is a short-term, task completion process; and *supervising* is getting the most out of those you lead through professional orientation and interaction. These principles serve as the foundation of the leadership themes in the literature that follow.

### **The Six Leadership Characteristics**

Six themes involving leadership characteristics emerged through a four-step literature review process. The first step consisted of a thorough review of the literature synthesizing both qualitative and quantitative studies. The second step involved organizing each literature source by common themes such as relationships, people, communication, diversity, team, and morality. The third step involved categorizing the common themes and creating leadership characteristics that encompassed the entirety of the research reviewed for this study. The final step encompassed a final, detailed search of the literature, focusing on saturation, to ensure the themes were representative of a comprehensive landscape of the literature. Discussion of each leadership type, with a description of the characteristics, follows in the next session.

### **The Relationship-Driven Leader**

The first theme highlighted the ways higher education leaders built caring, empathetic relationships with students, staff, and faculty in meetings, classrooms, and in the community. The relational characteristic, emphasizing relationship building in leadership work, highlighted the importance of prioritizing interpersonal connections. The research underscored various approaches leaders used to bring themselves closer to individuals and groups.

**Connecting to individuals.** A leader's ability to build trusting and caring relationships was the strongest theme within the literature. Higher education leaders effective at building relationships had open, transparent, and constructive connections to students, faculty, and staff (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; McMurray, 2010; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Relationship-driven leaders could, however, have difficult discussions as easily as pleasant ones. White (2011) described these difficult exchanges

as “fierce conversations” where the leader discusses issues honestly, sharing their real thoughts and ideas (p. 93). Relationship-driven leaders were growth-oriented, whether it was the institution they worked for, students and staff they supervised, or critics they challenged (Cullen & Nickerson, 2017; McMurray, 2010; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Relationship-driven higher education leaders functioned in a continual state of questioning and learning (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). These leaders absorbed every encounter and relational misstep and learned how to use those experiences to gain trust with followers.

Bathurst and van Gelderen (2014) conducted a narrative study to examine the life of a new scholar and her progression into leadership. They found six areas of leadership that coincides with relational leader characteristics:

1. Handling specific issues in higher education. Leaders must take advantage of the opportunities to build relationships whenever confronted with a challenge. Bathurst and van Gelderen (2014) referred to these challenges as “moments” (p. 396).
2. Managing reputation. Managing reputation referred to the new scholar struggling to maintain a sense of self outside of the institutional mission and vision.
3. Completing tasks and improving leadership skills. Bathurst and van Gelderen (2014) noted that organizations often have plans outside the scope of the leader responsibilities. When these plans and responsibilities conflict, the leader experiences additional stress (Bathurst & van Gelderen, 2014).

4. Creating an environment outside of the vision of institutional leaders. The vision of the institution sometimes conflicts with those of the leader in a specific department (Bathurst & van Gelderen, 2014).
5. Managing silence. The new scholar felt the need to express opinions but found the institution working to silence her views if they did not correlate with the direction of the institution.
6. Seeking confrontation. The ability to maintain a polite and courteous demeanor during confrontive situations brought administrators closer to the scholar (Bathurst & van Gelderen, 2014). The scholar welcomed confrontive situations as an opportunity to practice staying calm and being polite.

These six areas uncovered in the study demonstrated some of the relational characteristics found throughout the literature. Even though the Bathhurst and van Gelderen (2014) study only had one participant, it highlighted some of the factors relational leaders encounter. Relationship-driven leaders need to transpose the work with individuals to groups as well.

**Connecting to Groups.** Relationship-driven leaders united groups and inspired them toward a common cause (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Kezar & Lester, 2011). These leaders cherished opportunities to build relationships within the classroom, meeting rooms, and in the community. McMurray (2010), in his dissertation on relational leadership and college presidents, found relationship driven leaders to be authentic, trustworthy, and people-focused in their approaches to problems. McMurray (2010) contended relational leaders have high social intelligence which makes connecting to groups easier:

It is evident that social intelligence has important implications for leadership because effective leaders must display both a cognitive capacity to analyze situations with a level of perceptiveness to acquire and interpret social information, as well as the social skills and initiative to take action on that information and influence people within the organization. (p. 38)

In combination with social intelligence, relationship-driven leaders radiated care to groups of individuals (McMurray, 2010). They maneuvered through challenging initiatives effectively because of the "moral accountability" communicated to the larger group (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014, p. 20). Moral accountability refers to the way in which leaders thought introspectively about how their actions impacted relationships (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014, p. 20). Regardless of the challenge or problem, individuals and groups felt a closeness to the relationship-driven leader.

### **The Communicative Leader**

The second theme discovered in the topical literature centers on the value of openly speaking, listening, and questioning. As notably, learning from students, staff, faculty, and the broader campus community embodies the communicative leader. Transparency in helping individuals to feel as though they are "in the know" permeated the literature. These skills, particularly when practiced routinely, encompass the communicative leader.

**Speaking and listening.** Trusting relationships are at the center of successful leadership. Transparency, honesty, clarity, listening, and managing conflict were essential elements of effective leadership communication (Cooper & Boice-Pardee, 2011; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Being upfront and honest set leaders apart from those

that avoided confrontation and, as a result, the honesty created opportunities for personal and professional growth (Bathurst & van Gelderen, 2014; Burns, 2017). Communicative leaders developed safe places to talk about sensitive subjects (Cooper & Boice-Pardee, 2011; White, 2011). They inspired and motivated others in classrooms, meetings, and campus events through sincerity of message and inspirational speech (Cooper & Boice-Pardee, 2011). Furthermore, they spoke out when they saw injustice in the workplace (Harrison, 2011). Communicative leaders used active listening and influential speaking to help others see their authenticity and realness.

**Questioning and learning.** Communicative leaders asked lots questions and listened intently for the opportunity to progress a situation or change its course (Lipman-Blumen, 1996; Robinson, 2016). Communicative leaders remained in a state of continual movement between listening, questioning, and learning (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Questioning to learn was a common denominator of effective leadership. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) found:

Questions help people identify mistakes made and successes enjoyed. As such, they are the engine of knowledge creation. They keep people on the cutting edge, primed for the next new idea and ready for the next creative frontier. The more we question each other constructively and discerningly, the more likely we are to keep our horizons broad and our opinions open. (p. 130)

With unwavering confidence, communicative leaders discovered innovative ideas by learning, and they had the courage to follow those ideas even if they contradicted the initial direction of the leader (Bolman & Gallos, 2011). Communicative leaders evolved by diving into a situation, talking with individuals, and using mistakes in communication

as inspiration for growth (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Effective communicative leaders asked questions as means to understand a situation knowing full well they would act, change course, and move ahead.

A mixed methods study by Hart, Plemmons, Stulz, and Vroman, (2017) highlighted the skills of the communicative leader within higher education. The researchers divided a regional university into three divisions: the president's division, budgetary and administrative division, and the academic affairs division. Within each of these divisions, Hart, et al. (2017) uncovered common communication themes. The first theme highlighted the effectiveness of face-to-face communication as compared to email correspondence. The second theme centered on the importance of accurate information and the elimination of rumor. Rumors are taxing emotionally for campus students, staff, and faculty (Hart, Plemmons, Stulz, & Vroman, 2017). The need for transparency, particularly about the financial health of the institution, was the third theme found in the study. Many of the participants worried about the cost of living, raises, and progressions. Lastly, many of the participants demanded clear communication inside and outside of their departments (Hart et al., 2017). Participants wanted to be in the know and not taken by surprise by a change or decision.

### **The Diverse-Minded Leader**

The third theme found in the literature concentrated on leaders that championed diverse, inclusive, and socially just teams and work environments in which they work. These leaders not only valued diversity, they also questioned the system that benefited those with privileged backgrounds. These leaders worked not to isolate individuals, but to open their eyes to the social injustice around them.

**Examining self.** Diverse-minded leaders practiced continual self-reflection (Roper, 2011). These leaders improved their leadership skills by reflecting on their own personal and professional experiences as fuel to educate students, faculty, and staff about diversity and inclusivity (Roper, 2011). Patterson (2013) described the importance of critical self-reflection when balancing personal and professional lives:

It is important for individuals to become self-aware, as their own identities intermingle with their professional selves. Discerning how these two forms of consciousness intersect helps educators come to terms with conflicts that may arise between their principles and the values they are expected to uphold within their organizations. (p. 12)

Preskill and Brookfield (2009) described strong leaders as ones who participated in routine “critical reflection” while comprehending their space in the systemic structure (p. 41). As a result, self-reflective leaders were more likely to advocate for equal and equitable systems and minimize superiority by playing by the same rules as their followers, thus breaking the hierarchical structure set by the establishment (Bordas, 2016). Self-reflection with the intent of improving leader behaviors and deconstructing barriers to supervision permeated leadership literature.

**Valuing difference.** Diverse-minded leaders quickly assessed the landscape of the institutional environment and advocated for increased diversity, inclusive campus spaces, and differentiated teams (Heifetz et al., 2009; Kuk et al., 2015; Roper, 2011). These leaders built diverse teams focused on collective action and alliance (Bordas, 2016; Roper, 2011). To demonstrate the importance of diverse teams, Leon and Williams (2017) set out to determine how higher education diversity committees help institutions

accomplish diversity goals. They conducted a qualitative study focused on 10 diversity committees from predominantly White research institutions (PWI). They found the strongest committees consisted of people from different areas and various levels of the institution (directors, faculty, staff, students, etc.). Leon and Williams (2017) argued diversity committees in and of themselves can serve as a source of institutional leadership because they: promote proactive thinking about diversity; build “political capital” to champion diversity issues; and break down silos by collaborating across divisions and departments on diversity efforts (p. 405). Diverse-minded leaders understood the power of a group lies not only within the various genders, races, ethnicities, and personal experiences of each member but also through the ways these individuals change institutional culture.

The research literature consistently identified leaders who learned from individuals from other backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities (Bordas, 2016; Northouse, 2010; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Diverse-minded leaders valued new cultural perspectives and approaches to problems (Dugan, 2017; Northouse, 2010). Leaders who cherished difference believed building a team of individuals with diverse social identities influenced power centers through grassroots perspectives (Bordas, 2016; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). In a study that showcased the thinking of the diverse-minded leader, Diem and Carpenter (2012) conducted a qualitative overview of leadership through a social justice lens. The researchers reviewed the most frequently read journals in the years 2006 through 2011 by educational leadership professors. Diem and Carpenter (2012) studied race within educational leadership and leadership preparation. They found five themes important to leadership and diversity: refuting colorblind leadership by

engaging in difficult conversation; countering misconceptions of race; recognizing student achievement is not always merit based; engaging is self-examination; and advocating for individuals in society without a voice (Diem & Carpenter, 2012). The themes underscore the knowledge diverse-minded leaders use and form the basis for additional content for leadership development programs.

Arnold and Kowalski-Braun (2012) conducted a qualitative case study with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) demonstrating the importance of valuing difference in higher education. They followed institutional leadership as they created a chief diversity officer (CDO) position on campus. The purpose of the study was to examine how an institution could institutionalize the value of diversity and inclusion. Arnold and Kowalski-Braun discovered the ways institutions of higher education are advocating for diverse-minded leaders. First, GVSU decided to structurally implement diversity and inclusion on their campus by creating the Division of Inclusion and Equity with a chief diversity officer to lead the division. Second, GSVU aligned the CDO position to report directly to the president of GSVU. They wanted an organizational structure where the CDO could make decisions quickly with the support of upper level management. Third, the position supported all students including students of color and LGBTQ+. The CDO position was not exclusive to any group of students. Lastly, GSVU mandated assessing and improving institutional diversity, including the physical environment of campus, which administration wrote into the responsibilities of the CDO position. GVSU used four principles to guide their work: connecting cultural and political strategies to vision; aligning change with institutional and individual identity; being comfortable with a disorderly process; and understanding the way individuals handle change varies between

each level of the organization (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012; Kezar, 2001). Diverse-minded leaders self-reflect and value difference. Institutions of higher education are taking note of the value of this leadership characteristic.

### **The Change-Oriented Leader**

The fourth leadership theme underscores the higher education leader's ability to thrive in an environment of continual change. Decreased state appropriations, accountability measures, the acknowledgment of corporatization and the changing demographics of college students challenge leaders in higher education (Evans & Chun, 2012). The studies that follow showcase the need for leaders in higher education to thrive in an environment of change.

**Acknowledging the change environment.** Accepting a leadership position today in the ever-changing world of higher education is risky (Gonaim, 2016; Morris & Laipple, 2015). Like a boat on the ocean, change-oriented leaders in higher education acknowledged the rough seas. Research outlining declining state allocations, staff turnover, faculty and staff grievances, the elimination of academic programs, skepticism for the liberal arts degree, and decreasing faculty/staff retention often left leaders feeling unprepared (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Evans & Chun, 2012; Kuk et al., 2015; Porterfield & Whitt, 2016).

Morris and Laipple surveyed 1515 academic leaders (deans, associate deans, chairs, and directors) to measure their level of preparedness moving into a leadership role. They found higher education leaders struggled to resolve conflict, reported low levels of job satisfaction and high burnout, and struggled to balance the stress of work and home (Morris & Laipple, 2015). To further demonstrate the significance of change

and leadership, Buller (2015) argued higher education exists in a change environment and leaders struggle to manage it effectively. To be effective, change-oriented leaders let go of the structure of the university rooted in the past. These leaders get their motivation from future opportunity grounded in the excitement of being in a current state of change. Change-oriented leaders relish the challenge of navigating through change.

**Adapting to change.** Change-oriented leaders understood they must adapt and become comfortable with change (Porterfield & Whitt, 2016). To a change-oriented leader, change was like the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Change-oriented leaders use change, big or small, as an opportunity to act. They use any chance for change as the starting point to move a department or institution toward its mission and vision (Kotter, 2012). These leaders helped followers cope with the loss accompanied by change, developed strengths in a time of weakness, and moved others toward goals seemingly unattainable (Buller, 2015; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Kotter, 2012; Robinson, 2017). Becoming comfortable with a “visionary view of change” was a theme in and of itself (Buller, 2015, p. 38). Buller (2015) contended, “Rather than suggesting that change is something a person passively endures or occasionally co-opts, it describes change as a process that people should seek out, embrace, and cultivate” (p. 38). Change-oriented leaders see change as a necessity for improvement.

Higher education leaders must also thrive within the local, regional, and national challenges of the higher education landscape. To thrive leaders must jettison a narrow problem orientation, so they can offer innovative alternatives (Watkins et al., 2017). Lamm, Sapp, and Lamm (2018) argued, “The need for individuals capable of leading change has become pronounced based on the changes occurring within the higher

education system” (p. 121). Lamm, et al., (2018) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the effectiveness of a leadership development program created to support leaders entering higher education. They found effective leaders are “change agents” within an institution (Lamm, et al., 2018, p. 122). These change agents understood their position within the change process, had the self-awareness to know when change is occurring or had stagnated, understood how and why people adapt and cope with change and the importance of leadership development to higher education. The study by Lamm, et al. (2018) showcased the effectiveness of change-oriented leaders in higher education.

### **The Politically Savvy Leader**

The fifth theme found in the literature connects leadership to power dynamics. Politically savvy leaders understand the importance of moving initiatives ahead and the value of playing within, or circumventing, academic governance. These skills include identifying influential political allies, motivating groups of grassroots individuals to action, and building leadership capacity into individuals or groups who lack formal power.

**Navigating power.** Politically savvy leaders understood power exists within the political, social, cultural and environmental arenas (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Kuk et al., 2015). To better understand utilizing power, Harrison (2011) suggested three methods for supporting institutional leaders traversing power dynamics. The first method was infusing business and political literature into leadership development to make leaders more influential with policymakers. The second method was developing mentors to teach new leaders the implications of power. Improving the public image of higher education by teaching leaders how to deliver a powerful message or speech was the final method. These three methods combined with organizational rank, allow leaders to

balance the power outside and inside the institution. Utilizing those methods, politically savvy leaders navigated the dynamics of power through political, social, cultural, and environmental measures (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Harrison, 2011; Kuk et al., 2015). They recognized their influence with other leaders and groups, and worked with all factions to support student success, create innovative academic programs, or champion a just cause for a student organization. Bolman and Gallos (2011) discussed various aspects of power:

If you want something to happen but can't do it, you lack power. It is important to understand that power takes many forms. Authority, or position power, is a basic tool for administrators, but it needs to be supplemented with other forms-the power rests in having information, expertise, control of the resources, personal skills, relationships, allies, the capacity to reward, and many others. (p. 74)

Politically savvy leaders are those leaders that work closely with people, groups, and governance to get things done. These leaders use all the institutional tools to their advantage and have a keen understanding of how to move individuals to action. People are their greatest resource, and the various hierarchical combinations of title and governance are like a puzzle waiting for a solution.

A qualitative study conducted by Enke (2014) explored the concept of power from the perspective of senior women administrators in liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. Enke (2014) wanted to learn more about how women viewed power and how those ideas aligned with the underrepresentation of women's leadership. Enke's (2014) findings aligned with the aspects of the politically savvy leader. First, power and influence go hand in hand. Moving individuals and groups forward is often about

influencing the members in ways that prompt them to act (Enke, 2014). Second, women as well as men, appeared to struggle with conceptualizing the notion of power as being forceful (Enke, 2014). Leaders tended to shy away from direct questions about power, but their power was evident in the ways their staff followed them, people respected them, and others noticed them when they entered the room. Lastly, power was “mediated by multiple identities” (Enke, 2014, p. 215). Gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual-orientation all had positionality ramifications in higher education (Enke, 2014). The methods for speaking in meetings and physical appearance had implications for how the women enacted power and leadership. The factors uncovered in the study by Enke (2014) show the many variables politically savvy leaders understand and utilize to accomplish goals.

**Motivating and inspiring.** Much like the communicative leader, a politically savvy leader understood power is influence (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Kuk et al., 2015). Politically savvy leaders came from entry level areas as well as administrative positions (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). A critical strength of politically savvy leaders was their ability to use interpersonal and intrapersonal approaches to motivate change (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). These leaders found positivity in the most negative of situations by motivating others to pursue opportunity. In addition, they transferred their power to others in ways that motivated and inspired them (Heifetz et al., 2009; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009).

As an example of how leaders inspire others, DeRue, Barnes, and Morgeson (2015) conducted a quantitative study of 400 upper-level undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between team leader behaviors and team performance. It is important to note that DeRue

et al. (2015) focused on the leadership characteristic of charisma and motivation through coaching and direct leadership approaches. In the coaching form of leadership, leaders teach teams to effectively manage obstacles on their own (DeRue, Barnes, & Morgeson, 2010). In contrast, direct forms of leadership require leaders to set expectations, provide instructions, and monitor goals of team members (DeRue et al., 2010). They found that charismatic leaders, overall, have a positive impact on teams grappling with change. Charisma had a larger impact on teams that responded to coaching approaches more than direct approaches to team leadership (DeRue et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the researchers found charismatic leaders to be inspirational and powerful (DeRue et al., 2010). Though the participants were undergraduates, the DeRue et al, (2010) study represents the powerful connection of charisma, motivation, and leadership that exists in any level of higher education.

### **The Virtuous Leader**

The final leadership theme centers upon ethical choices and decision-making in higher education. Virtuous leaders make decisions based upon values such as honor, dignity, and goodness. These leaders balance ethical decision-making by combining authenticity with educated decisions. Virtuous leaders see leadership as inherently good; they want to better the institution, department, and student through responsible and accountable choices.

**Balancing right and wrong.** Moral and ethical leaders used virtues when interacting with students, staff, and faculty to build relationships and uphold academic policy (White, 2011). White (2011) defined ethics as, “upholding university values, norms, standards, and policies” (p. 86). Watkins et al. (2017) described three types of

ethics: aretaic – outlining virtues such as courage and fairness; deontology – highlighting moral obligation; and teleological – making correct choices. Connecting the work of Watkins (2017) and White (2011) demonstrates the importance of genuine and authentic leadership with traits such as courage, fairness, and decision-making. These two studies, in context, provide a map for ethical leadership. Myers, Jr. (2015) conducted a quantitative study with first-year and last-year MBA students focusing on learning ethical decision-making. The underlying premise in the study was that leadership essentially boils down to decision-making which is “good and bad, right and wrong” (Myers, Jr., 2015, p. 147). Furthermore, ethical leaders continually ask themselves if they can defend their decisions based upon fairness and consistency. Myers, Jr. (2015) found students can learn ethical decision-making in the classroom, while leaders learn experientially from co-workers and supervisors.

In addition to courage, fairness, and decision-making, ethical leadership must encompass relational, political, and legal guidelines (Liu, 2017). Liu (2017) argued that ethical leadership should, “be understood as occurring in the space between people, embedded in the context and exercised via a collective political project toward the goals of equality, justice, and emancipation” (p. 359). Ethical behavior accompanied by fair, consistent, and moral decision-making rounded out a major theme connected to the virtuous leader. If the six characteristics of leadership provide a lens in which to view leader behaviors, then adaptive theory is a vehicle to enact those behaviors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Adaptive leadership theory provides a foundation for higher education leaders to understand the complexity of institutional organization and human behavior. By grasping

institutional organization, leaders develop methods to solve broad campus challenges. Higher education leaders also support institutions by helping employees' behavioral issues such as uncertainty and loss. Equally significant, adaptive leadership provides higher education leaders multiple perspectives to recognize a problem with a quick fix and one that requires a complex solution.

### **Adaptive Leadership Theory**

Developed by Heifetz, et al. (2009), adaptive leadership theory is a practical and applicable way to view the quickly changing world of higher education. Three pillars form the basis of adaptive leadership theory. Leadership as an active process forms the first pillar of adaptive leadership theory. Adaptive leaders help individuals manage change by actively participating in the day to day processes (Heifetz et al., 2009). Research focused on leadership as an action-oriented process appeared throughout the literature (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Dugan, 2017; Enke, 2014; Heifetz et al., 2009). For example, adaptive leaders mobilize others to find answers on their own. The primary goal of adaptive leadership is to help others adapt to change (Heifetz et al., 2009). The expectation that leaders arrive in organizations and solve all problems like a messiah is a myth (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). One of the common mistakes made within organizations is the belief leaders possess all the answers (Heifetz et al., 2009). This belief often leads to leadership failure (Heifetz et al., 2009). Conversely, the adaptive leader guides others to answers by actively managing them through the complexity of change (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leaders are always moving, collaborating, and leading.

Technical problems and adaptive challenges form the second pillar of adaptive leadership. Technical problems have apparent solutions (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leaders

solve technical problems by creating processes, managing the work, and supervising the players (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). Technical problems are areas in which organizational leaders often expect heroism from leaders (Heifetz et al., 2009). An example of a technical problem in four-year public institutions is replacing vacant positions. Data such as student-to-staff ratios help leaders make decisions on staffing levels. When an individual resigns, leaders see the vacancy and advocate to fill the position. The technical problem, a vacancy, is clear and the solution is hiring someone into the position.

Adaptive challenges are more complicated. Adaptive challenges are problems with no easy solutions and often involve the complexity of multiple individual perspectives, lack of resources to solve the problem, and conflicting direction from upper administration (Heifetz et al., 2009). Crises within organizations are often adaptive challenges because they fester or occur outside of an organization's ability to see the change (Heifetz et al., 2009). State budget reductions are a good example of an adaptive challenge. Reductions signal the need to find efficiencies, do more with less staff, and discover solutions to problems caused by external factors. Another example of an adaptive challenge is the reorganization of staff within an institution. When chancellors reorganize academic programs between colleges, the work it takes to inform and acclimate faculty to the new reporting lines, coordinate the physical relocation, and mediate any political infighting between constituencies takes increased time and multiple perspectives to reconcile.

The last pillar of adaptive theory consists of six "adaptive leadership behaviors" for navigating adaptive challenges. The adaptive leadership behaviors align with the six

leadership characteristics. The first is "getting on the balcony" (Heifetz et al., 2009). When leaders are on the balcony, they are stepping out of a situation to gain a broader perspective of what is happening (Heifetz et al., 2009). For example, a mid-level manager who is given the responsibility of reorganizing staff in an office by making decisions based upon what is best for the institution is an example of getting on the balcony. The mid-level manager needs to step outside of the situation and gain perspective. The second leader behavior is "identifying adaptive challenges." Identifying adaptive challenges is the process of analyzing and diagnose those challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2016). Once the mid-level manager has identified those challenges, the manager can begin the work of problem resolution. The third approach of adaptive theory is "regulating distress." Regulating distress is when a leader either soothes or turns up the heat on a situation (Heifetz et al., 2009). After reassigning the staff, the mid-level manager now begins to field questions and concerns from staff and faculty about how the reassignment will impact them. The mid-level manager must listen, reflect, and advocate the reorganization is worthwhile. Fourth, is "maintaining disciplined attention." Maintaining disciplined attention requires an adaptive leader to keep the objective front and center (Heifetz et al., 2009). The mid-level manager's next task is institutionalizing the reassignment by keeping staff and campus constituencies focused on the positive ramifications of change. The mid-level manager must remain focused on the outcomes while balancing the various groups as they work toward solutions. The fifth behavior is "giving work back to the people." Giving work back encompasses the elimination of micromanagement and enactment of delegation (Heifetz et al., 2009). The mid-level manager delegates the work of the reorganization to allow others to feel the immediacy of

the change. Lastly is "protecting voices from below." Protecting voices is when a leader allows everyone to have a voice and is willing to listen to the negative or critical viewpoints (Heifetz et al., 2009). Once the reassignment is complete, the mid-level manager champions the individuals who worked hard to implement the change.

Adaptive leadership remains a practical approach to leadership development, the theory has a number of weaknesses. One of the biggest critiques of the theory is the lack of empirical evidence supporting the theory (Dugan, 2017; Northouse, 2019). A search for scholarly articles found little to no quantitative or qualitative research on adaptive leadership theory. Another weakness is the challenge to understand the values of followers and how those values participating in adaptive leadership impact outcomes (Northouse, 2019). For example, each of the adaptive leadership behaviors can be interpreted differently by individuals based upon their values and insights (Dugan, 2017; Northouse, 2019). Getting on the balcony, identifying adaptive challenges, and regulating distress can have different meaning to individuals. Leaders must infer what Heifetz describes in the adaptive leadership approaches and concepts. The behaviors and decisions of leaders practicing adaptive leadership are products of interpretation of the theory (Northouse, 2019).

The impact of leader thought and value on the theory without explicit direction leads to the next critique; adaptive leadership theory is a broad and wide-ranging (Dugan, 2017; Northouse, 2019). The theory presents a prescriptive approach to leadership, but the concepts within the theory force leaders to prescribe approaches based upon their view of the situations. The theory describes the outcomes of leaders working through

technical problems and adaptive challenges but does not provide a clear outline of measurement or practice (Northouse, 2019).

One of the largest critiques of adaptive leadership lies within the inability of the theory to expressively address social location and identity (Dugan, 2107; Northouse, 2019). Adaptive leadership struggles to address, specifically, those individuals entwined in the adaptive leadership process from underrepresented populations. Furthermore, the argument can be made that without some empirical research in these areas, adaptive leadership will continue to be challenged from a critical theory perspective. The lack of mention of social identity and location gives the impression that the concepts and approaches within the theory are generalizable, thus missing the mark on the importance of diversity and inclusivity (Dugan, 2017; Northouse, 2019).

Even with consideration of the critiques, adaptive leadership remains an intriguing theory for conceptualizing the work of higher education leaders. The three pillars: leading as action; technical problems and adaptive challenges; and adaptive leadership behaviors provide leaders with a comprehensive set of approaches to manage problems and issues in higher education. Adaptive leadership theory also equips leaders with the tools to tactically guide individuals and groups, both behaviorally and strategically, through change. Whether a problem has an easy or complicated solution, adaptive leadership is a valuable theory for traversing the challenges and issues within higher education.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Gaps exist in the literature. First, few studies explored the principle of leadership presence. One singular definition of leadership presence was difficult to find.

Leadership presence tied into Northouse's (2010) belief that leaders possess power when they influence others. Northouse (2010) contended, "People have power when they have the ability to affect others' beliefs, attitudes, and courses of action" (p. 7). Consequently, leadership presence underscores the ability for a leader to portray power to others, verbal and non-verbally. Second, much of the research highlighted conceptual approaches to leadership. Few examples conveyed the specific techniques leaders used to advocate for a position, unify a group, or manage conflict. Are there specific methods to commanding a room, giving a motivational speech or comfortably talking with an angry supervisee? Do motivational leaders use their voice like a musical instrument with pauses, tone, and pitch? How does that communication sound? The search for examples of leadership in action was lacking. Lastly, little research incorporated the impact of anxiety on leadership thought and action. Hampton (2013) conducted a qualitative study to learn about leadership fears. She interviewed director level leaders to learn more about their fears in the workplace. The leaders included individuals in the business, health, and education fields. Though not focused exclusively on higher education, Hampton (2013) uncovered fears encompassing four categories: fear of not being good enough; fear of rejection and loneliness; fear of the unknown; and fear of failure. Hampton's dissertation provides some clues into the anxiety faced by leaders but does not specifically examine those in higher education. Leaders, new to higher education, must communicate with chancellors, provosts, and deans in powerful positions. Do leaders know how to lead but fail because of anxiety reactions in strenuous situations? Gaps in the literature warrant further research.

### **Insights and Conclusion**

Major insights emerged from categorizing the leadership characteristics using the themes from the topical literature. The first insight is the need for a thorough review of leadership development programs offered to higher education leaders. Gigliotti and Ruben (2017) conducted a case study analysis to determine some of the complexity between higher education and leadership development. They found a set of distinct insights in offering a leadership development program in higher education which included:

1. An interconnectedness of faculty and staff issues for leaders.
2. No single correct approach exists for leadership development in higher education.
3. Institutions must improve the assessment processes for leadership development.
4. Leadership development happens over a long period of time and not in a two-day workshop format
5. Institutions provide an effective training ground for leadership development.
6. Business leadership development could be adaptable for higher education.
7. Collaboration between all parties on campus is imperative to successful leadership development programs.

These factors provide clues on ways to enhance and improve leadership development in higher education.

As higher education gravitates toward a corporatist and managerial center, leadership development programs must emphasize improvisation, integrity, relationships, and flexibility within quickly shifting environments (Watkins et al., 2017). Research indicated greater emphasis on participation levels in leadership development programs as well (Buller, 2015; Morris & Laipple, 2015; Watkins et al., 2017). Stone and Major

(2014) conducted a quantitative study examining the value of leadership development programs for new administrators. Stone and Major surveyed 217 administrators throughout the United States and administered a Value Creation Survey. The researchers found institutions must: clearly articulate the goals of leadership development programs on college campuses; prioritize participation; increase offerings throughout the year; value leadership development programs; and communicate the importance of leadership development programs (Stone & Major, 2014).

Another insight was the association between leadership, management, and supervision. Leadership focuses on guiding others from a higher level of vision whereas management centers on the day to day processes of completing tasks (Dugan, 2017; Kotter, 2012). Higher education leaders must possess both leadership and management skills. The notion of leading and managing increases the complexity of the merging of business practices into higher education leadership. Broader research must dissect the levels of leading and managing specifically for higher education leaders. The distinction between leading and managing foregrounded the leadership styles and themes found in this literature review.

Gender and culture comprise the final insight. Though one of the leadership styles centered upon diversity, the amount of research on the topic of diversity, inclusivity, and social justice was scarce, pointing to the need for additional study. The bedrock of each of the leadership characteristics presented in this review had cultural underpinnings. A good example of the underpinnings were gender leadership differences. Some literature referenced woman leaders as nurturing while the idea of men aligned with strength (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017; Northouse, 2010). Further analysis

on leadership, gender, sexual orientation, and culture will help guide institutions of higher education into the age of a globalized world.

To examine the influence of gender on leadership, DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, and Wheatly (2016) examined, via a mixed-methods approach, leadership development from the perspective of women leaders at a research university. The researchers administered a focus group questionnaire to participants in a Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI). The purpose of the WLI was to educate women about leadership skills. DeFrank-Cole et al., (2016) argued:

Women need to see themselves in other women who take on positions of leadership. If not, the domain of senior level leaders will remain an essentially male-dominated club, a result which limits the perspectives of the leaders and the followers themselves. (p. 26)

DeFrank-Cole et al., (2016) found leadership development programs assist women in learning the skills of other women in senior level positions. More specifically, they outlined the skills of strategic thinking, influencing others, speaking up, and developing professional networks as vital areas for women leadership development. These leadership skills benefit women leaders given the recent examination of gender and leadership in the college setting (DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016).

The literature review set out to identify common themes found throughout the literature of leadership in higher education. Six leadership characteristics emerged based on recent literature. The leadership characteristics highlighted the categories of relationships, change, political savviness, diversity, and ethics as the core of higher

education leadership. The themes interconnect, blend together, and contribute to both good and bad leadership behaviors. Adaptive leadership theory provided a conceptual framework to view the changing world of higher education. Furthermore, the theory allows higher education leaders to utilize the themes in this literature review to solve technical problems and adaptive challenges. The review moved to the identification of gaps of leadership presence, specificity of approaches, and leadership anxiety. It concluded with insights for increased examination of higher education leadership development programs, variants between higher education leadership and management, and gender, culture, and leadership. Equipping higher education leaders with the skills and abilities to succeed is imperative for higher education as it moves through the 21st century.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the leadership strategies of academic affairs deans at four-year public institutions. This study seeks to gain an understanding of how deans develop strategies from their experiences in the current environment of public higher education. Three research questions guide my study:

1. What leadership strategies do academic deans utilize at four-year public institutions?
2. How have the experiences of deans contributed to their leadership strategies?
3. How can institutions improve the preparation and development of administrators?

Multiple steps set the stage for a thorough research practice in this methods chapter. First, I will introduce qualitative and phenomenological research methods and provide the reasons I selected them. Second, I will illustrate my role as the researcher and learner. Third, I will describe my research sites and explain the reason I selected small, medium, and large four-year public institutions for my study of leadership. Fourth, I will convey the importance of confidentiality and protecting my participants. Fifth, I will outline the data collection and analysis processes as the means to gather information from participants. In addition, I will discuss the finer details of research methods including my approach to sampling, interviewing, and coding. Sixth, I will explain how to establish trustworthy and authentic research and the delimitations of

within my research. Finally, I will review ethical considerations and the impacts on my research. The goal of each section is to describe, in detail, the methods I will use and demonstrate a comprehensive, appropriate, and well-constructed research study.

### **Methodological Approach**

I used a qualitative, phenomenological methodology for my study on leadership. Moustakas (1994) defined phenomenology as, “a scientific study of the appearance of things.” (p. 49). Creswell (2018) concluded phenomenology originated from the fields of philosophy and psychology and argued the phenomenological researcher, “describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 13). Within any phenomenological study lies the phenomenon itself (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) described the purpose of a *phenomenon* as, “the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge” (p. 26). He believed phenomena were the foundation of research, the human experience and knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon in my study were the ways deans express their leadership as they face issues such as increased competition, lagging public confidence in public education, reduced access and opportunity for underrepresented students, and decreased state appropriations. As a result, this study intended to use these issues as the backdrop to explore how deans describe their experiences and strategies in four-year public institutions. Put simply, I intended to use the issues facing four-year public institutions to uncover leadership experiences of deans. At the heart of this process stood the qualitative and phenomenological methodology that undergirds my research.

One of the most common phenomenological approaches is *transcendental phenomenology* (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology is “a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness” (p. 49). Moustakas (1994) chronicled the process of transcendental phenomenology as the following:

1. Discovering a topic and question rooted in meaning, values, as well as involving social meanings and significance;
2. Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature;
3. Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers;
4. Providing co-researchers with the instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research;
5. Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process;
6. Conducting a recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question;
7. Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions. (p. 104)

It is important to note, Moustakas (1994) used the terms *co-researchers* and *participants* interchangeably in transcendental phenomenology. The transcendental phenomenological approaches described above will undergird the methods and form the foundation of my research.

I decided to use phenomenology as my primary method for a few reasons. First, the core of phenomenology, deep and meaningful interviews, will provide a wealth of qualitative information on dean leadership strategies within four-year public institutions. Interviews encompass the words, feelings, verbal and non-verbal cues of participants. Second, much of the research in the literature review focused on the human experience. In-depth participant responses will support or refute the six characteristics of leadership found in the literature review. Third, the interviews may open doors to improve leadership development programs by incorporating the strategies necessary for leadership in public higher education. Last, phenomenological research moves past self-reported participant outcomes found in quantitative studies and allows for interpretation and clarification from the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is crucial within phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher serves as the central figure for gathering participant experience, feelings, values, positionality, and beliefs (Moustakas, 1994). Even more, the researcher serves to help participants feel safe and secure throughout the research process (Moustakas, 1994). Likewise, the advantage to a phenomenological researcher is the ability to absorb a wealth of information verbally and non-verbally (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). My professional background will help guide my role as the phenomenological researcher. I possess over fifteen years of experience in higher education from a medium master's comprehensive university in the Midwest. In addition, I currently serve as a director and have participated in leadership development programs that concentrated primarily on management and supervision

skills. I have tackled the issues facing public higher education. My professional background also includes experience as a clinical, mental health counselor. Experience in the mental health field will help in the areas of confidentiality, listening, and reflecting skills required for effective qualitative, phenomenological interviewing. My professional experience may provide a window into participant responses and leadership strategies. I must, however, be careful to ensure my experience exists outside of the research itself; a process Moustakas (1994) calls “bracketing” (p. 97).

My other role as a researcher includes being a learner. I am a student at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse in the Doctor of Education Program. The program offers support throughout the research process and presents me with additional avenues for learning during the research phase. Furthermore, I anticipate opportunities to learn strategies and approaches from the deans I will be interviewing. One of the greatest rewards of being a researcher will be integrating the lessons I am learning while conducting the research. These lessons will help me become a better director, father, and community member. As I conduct the research, I can simultaneously be learning new ways to lead my staff. In essence, I will be practicing the lessons as I discover them.

### **Research Site and Participants**

I selected public, master’s college and universities with small, medium, and large profiles as categorized by The Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education ® (n.d.). I wanted to obtain a sufficient sample of deans. By broadening the size and scope of my research sites, I gained some understanding of the characteristics and strategies of leaders responsible for varying institution sizes. I also included public institutions nationwide versus statewide for a couple of reasons. First, by including four-

year public institutions throughout the United States, I can examine the experiences of higher education deans across states and develop common themes and strategies. Including multiple campuses in various geographic areas allowed me to study leadership experiences in various states where the issues within public higher education vary. Second, including institutions across the United States provided me with the access to a more extensive and inclusive participant list. Lastly, concentrating on small, medium, and large four-year public institutions in the United States provided various types of leadership strategies based upon the resources, or lack thereof, at the hands of the deans.

The research sites consisted of four-year public universities from the East to the West Coast of the United States. Seven institutions were urban institutions, 2 rural, and 1 suburban. Seven of the institutions were located in the Midwest, two West, and one from the East. Enrollments for the institutions ranged from a large public institution of 50,000 to a smaller institution of nearly 8000 students. The institutions all had some level of residential living, multiple academic colleges, and served a variety of populations, such as first-year, transfer, veteran, and underrepresented students. All participants for this study served in a leadership role on these institutions.

The participants consisted of ten academic deans, five men and five women. Two of the participants were deans of color. A third dean identified as White but self-disclosed as a candidate of international origin. The deans led academic units ranging from liberal arts to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and were responsible for human and financial resources. The experiences ranged from 4 years to 15. They oversaw departments and divisions ranging from 4 to 24 and supervisees from 56 to 500. They oversaw budgets from 4 million for 40 million dollars (See Appendix

D). Their backgrounds all began in academia though one dean possessed business experience from the private sector, and the other had military experience. The ten participants and corresponding demographic information are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.0 Academic Dean Overview**

Gender (Age)	Ethnicity	Leadership Experience (Years)	Institution Size	Carnegie Classification	Departments/ Supervisees	Budget Oversight (Millions)	College
Man (50)	Hispanic	15	18,000	Doctoral, Non-Residential	24/500	40	Arts and Sciences
Woman (55)	White	17	11,000	Doctoral, Residential	6/200	21.5	Education, Health, Human Sciences
Man (53)	White	4	50,000	Doctoral, Non-Residential	31/148	13	Liberal Arts
Woman (62)	White	14	8,000	Master's Residential	4/64	4	Communication, Media, and Arts
Woman (57)	White	7	14,000	Master's, Residential	7/100	7.3	Business
Woman (55)	White	7	12,000	Master's, Residential	9/140	3.8	Education and Human Services
Man (54)	White	14	27,000	Doctoral, Non-Residential	8/230	8	Humanities and Social Sciences
Man (58)	White	10	20,000	Doctoral, Non-Residential	6/130	32	Engineering
Woman (56)	White	11	20,300	Doctoral, Non-Residential	11/56	6.5	University College
Man (60)	Asian	10	24,000	Doctoral, Non-Residential	4/100	9.6	Education

## **Data Collection Procedures**

I used a purposeful and snowball sampling strategy in the leadership study. Purposeful sampling requires I select participants that will help me understand the problem I wish to shed light upon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A sublayer of purposeful sampling, snowball sampling allowed me to recruit more participants in my study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Snowball sampling is the experience when one participant leads me to another potential participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used gatekeepers at the research sites and within my institution as leads for additional interviews. For all intents and purposes, I relied on colleagues in various institutions to serve as the connection between potential participants and myself. Utilizing gatekeepers to identify participants allowed me to establish a sense of trust with them. My participants were upper-level leaders. For the purposes of this study, the term “leader” refers to academic affairs deans in upper-level administrative roles tasked with executing an institution’s mission and vision.

I selected deans as my participants for a few reasons. First, it was necessary the leaders had a standardized level of leadership responsibility. Deans who shared similar responsibility provided a baseline for research. The responsibility also made it more likely the participants had established some strategies used to lead on their campuses. Second, academic affairs deans have taken varying paths to leadership positions. Those paths, whether through teaching, research, or service, made it more likely they have individualized personal and professional experiences to share. For example, various racial, ethnic, and gender differences may undergird these leader paths. Lastly, most deans participated in some form of leadership development. Their participation in

leadership development made it more likely they will understand the differences between leadership, management, and supervision. In addition, it increased the opportunity to learn more about how their experiences contributed to improving leadership development programs in higher education. All of these reasons helped provide me a more in-depth, meaningful interview throughout the study.

The recruitment and interview processes were as deliberate as the sampling and selection processes. Creswell (2018) highlights the importance of keeping the participant list low for a phenomenological study. Fewer participants means longer and more meaningful interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, I sent a concise email to those academic deans, described the research, outlined the purpose, and asked for their participation. I wanted the email to entice them to participate. To that end, I included some of the problems facing public higher education as a way to persuade participants to “give back” through participation. Second, upon agreeing to participate, I talked with participants about confidentiality, informed consent (see Appendix E for example consent form) and reassured them by referencing IRB approval. Third, I sent them a demographic survey in Qualtrics (see Appendix B for demographic survey) outlining some background information from participants. I collected data on years of experience in higher education, such as ethnicity and gender. I also asked them about the number of employees, departments, and budgets they oversee. Conducting a survey prior to the interviews allowed for more time with each participant and my interview questions. Fourth, I reviewed each participant institutional website to learn more about their institutional missions and recent news stories. I believed this review provided some context behind the interviews. Last, I called to schedule each dean for the audio and

video recorded interview. Longer interviews form the foundation for phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994). I offered video interviews using a secure web meeting platform called Zoom, so I can study both verbal and non-verbal cues of the participants. I ensured Zoom was a confidential and research appropriate site with IRB before use. Phone interviews limited my ability to gather the most information as possible. For example, a participant could be answering emails while talking with me via phone. A video interview kept the attention of the participant.

I made the interview process as detailed as possible. I interviewed each participant for up to 60 minutes. The average interview lasted between 45-60 minutes. None of the interviews ran over the 60-minute time allotment. Interviews began with a brief overview of my dissertation topic. I also informed the participants of the total number of questions and time allotted for the interviews. The reason I primed participants using the total number of questions was to ensure I could get through all the questions in the time I allotted for the interviews. The interview questions centered on leadership expression as it pertained to leading faculty and staff. In essence, the nine questions prompted the deans to think about leadership from the standpoint of development and strategies such as communication and mentoring. Additionally, two questions served as the backdrop for leadership expression by requiring the deans to examine the challenging landscape of higher education and importance of diversity and equity as elements of how they lead (see Appendix C for interview questions). The overarching goal of the interview questions was to get the deans talking about how they lead, the feelings associated with leading, the specific strategies or characteristics they utilize, and how those elements form their leadership expression.

I recorded the interviews through Zoom and through a digital recorder and transcribed them verbatim with transcription software provided by NVIVO. The transcription allowed for the observation of both verbal and non-verbal cues of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It also allowed me to pay close attention to the expressions hidden within silences of the interview. For example, long pauses and deep breathes indicated the careful thought or frustration of a participant. The ultimate goal of the interview was to gather both contextual and perceptual information from the participants. The contextual information highlighted some of the issues and challenges within their institutions. The perceptual information included the deans' thoughts and feelings about leading in a four-year public institution. The interviews were my primary data gathering technique, so I garnered the maximum amount of data as possible.

### **Confidentiality**

Protecting participants during research was vital to the success of this study. Deans often find themselves in precarious positions. Confidentiality is of utmost importance given the standards of practice required for informative qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stage & Manning, 2016). I took the following steps to ensure confidentiality for participants. First, I required participants to complete informed consent forms. The consent forms will describe the purpose of the study, risks, benefits, and the importance of confidentiality. More importantly, informed consent allowed participants, at any moment, to opt out of the study. Second, I educated participants about the research on leadership before the interview. Participants went into the interview with a basic understanding of the topic itself. Informing them of the topic

also minimized any uncomfortable feelings associated with the interview and gave participants time to consider whether to participate. Confidentiality is imperative within phenomenological research to get deep, rich, and honest answers from participants (Moustakas, 1994). As a result, I used pseudonyms for participants and did not identify institutions by name. Regarding, audio recording and transcripts, I kept them on secure drives and locations to protect participants. More than anything, I want to be sure participants understand anonymity within research is critical given their positions as deans within institutions.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The work of analyzing data can be one of the most complex processes in qualitative research because of the relationship between data collection and investigator (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). I followed a strict process to analyze the data. As I conducted interviews, I transcribed and coded them as soon as possible after each session. Saldana (2016) defines a code as, “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data” (p. 4). The first round of coding consisted of a review of transcribed interviews line by line via the research software NVIVO. I received approval from IRB to use NVIVO prior to commencing the interviews.

I took an inductive process for analyzing the data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined the researcher’s goal through the inductive process as, “gathering detailed information from participants and then forms this information into categories or themes” (p.63). The coding for the study consisted of four rounds. In my first round of coding, I looked for keywords or phrases, ultimately ending with 187 codes. The first codes

contained thoughts about participant word choice or meaning of a phrase or word within the interview. First coding allowed for a thorough examination of interpretation or analytical coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldana, 2016). I took a close look at the first codes and wrote out descriptions for each of them. The approach helped me to see commonalities between codes for grouping. My second round of coding consisted of comparing the first codes with their definitions, this process dwindled the initial 187 codes down to 133. Most notably, I began to see broad categories emerge from the data. I moved any common codes into NVIVO using broad categories with similar codes.

My third round of coding, categorization, came easier because of the process of describing and defining each initial code from the first two rounds. I began with 98 initial categories. Again, as I categorized, I kept aligning and combining them. Biweekly, I reviewed codes and categories with my dissertation chair to ensure our interpretation of categories aligned. I began to move from broad categories to rich, descriptive ones. Some categories had very few codes within them. Moreover, some categories were addressed by only one dean versus across all ten of them. These categories were important but did not rise to the level of significance. Some of these categories form the basis for additional research in the future. Once categories were established, my final round of coding consisted of looking across them for themes. Themes emerged quickly based upon the number of first codes and categories. Ultimately, the goal from the first to last round of coding was to see saturation between the codes and categories. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted *saturation* occur when, “continued data collection produces no new information or insights into the phenomenon

you are studying” (p. 199). Data collection and analysis led to findings and conclusions in latter parts of the dissertation.

### **Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness and Authentic Research**

Trustworthiness of the findings is critical. I have developed some strategies for increased trustworthiness. The first method for improving the trustworthiness of data is triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation occurs when researchers examine evidence, such as interviews and observations, to justify themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Following this principle, I carefully examined responses from interviews, observations, and document analysis to validate the themes found throughout the coding and establish validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The second step of trustworthiness was to create an “audit trail” of how I analyzed data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 163). I kept a memorandum of steps I took throughout the research process and thoughts about the interviews. These thoughts included potential findings, additional questions from the interviews, and questions for my dissertation chair or IRB. In addition, I met with my dissertation chair biweekly throughout the data collection analysis to review codes, discuss categorization, and align themes. Third, I conducted member checking to make sure I have clear responses for any vague information. Referring back to participants on clarification of responses provided additional depth to the data. Fourth, I used, as what Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe as, “rich, thick descriptions” to report out findings (p. 200). Clear descriptions left little room for interpretation. Developing specific themes was essential to the research. Fifth, my experience in higher education allowed me to understand the challenges faced within public four-year institutions. This experience brought increased validity to the study and

helped build rapport with deans during the interviews. Lastly, I used my theoretical framework of adaptive leadership as an avenue to better understand themes found throughout the interviews. The theoretical framework, essentially, provided an additional perspective to use during the research.

### **Delimitations**

In designing my study, I decided to underscore a few limitations. First, I decided early on that I wanted this leadership study focused on administrators. I eliminated the idea of concentrating on all leaders within higher education. I excluded entry-level leaders and those below mid-level management positions such as coordinators or those individuals with leadership ability but no title. Though their roles on campuses are essential, I wanted this study to center on administrators in upper-level positions, such as academic deans, with the ability to create change through decision-making. Second, I dispelled the notion of trying to find “effective” leaders. The efficacy of a leader is in the eye of the beholder. One person may see a leader as effective and another as ineffective. Third, my research interest aligned with four-year public institutions, which present unique contexts and problems for deans as compared to two-year and private institutions. Thus, four-year public institutions comprised my primary research sites. Fourth, I concentrated my research in the area of higher education and excluded the areas of business and military leadership. The corporatization of higher education and increasing competition between campuses has introduced business leadership to higher education. I wanted this study, however, on higher education to keep the research manageable and place a spotlight on higher education. Lastly, I decided to eliminate interview questions regarding decision-making. Decision-making within leadership is imperative.

Nonetheless, I viewed decision-making as a “tool” within the repertoire of the dean. Leaders, good and bad, make decisions. The decisions are often the result of the various leadership thought processes. Nevertheless, I anticipated hearing about decision-making throughout the interviews.

### **Anticipated Ethical Issues**

Anticipating ethical issues is critical to conducting a successful research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Given, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I wanted to prevent any ethical issues from occurring throughout the study. Before conducting the study, I sought IRB approval. IRB approval confirmed this study meets ethical guidelines and I referred to them throughout the process. At the beginning of the study, I outlined the purpose to participants clearly, safeguarded to not pressure participation, and kept my positionality at the forefront of my research. While collecting data, I asked my questions consistently to each participant, did not share my personal opinion on responses, and acknowledged the power differences in the interviews. During the analysis of data, I kept all information as informative and did not place personal bias unintentionally into responses. If I was unclear on a response, I clarified it with the dean or reviewed with my dissertation chair before coding it. I also ensured complete confidentiality of all information. To reiterate, I protected the anonymity of deans throughout the study. Finally, during the reporting and sharing portion of the study, I shared my findings while protecting participants and abiding by all the ethical standards for authorship.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed and comprehensive approach to my study on leadership strategies in higher education. One could argue the methods chapter of a dissertation is the most important in research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consequently, I conveyed the methods I will use to gather my research. First, I outlined the purpose and research questions that formed the foundation of my study on leadership. Second, I presented the qualitative, phenomenological approach I will take toward the research. Third, I described the role of the researcher followed by the importance of researching four-year public institutions. Fourth, I outlined how I will make confidentiality a priority. Fifth, I described my data collection and analysis procedures. Sixth, I outlined how I will ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of my research. Seventh, I described the delimitations of my study on leadership. Lastly, I highlighted the anticipated ethical considerations while I conduct my research. All of these steps, taken together and scrupulously detailed, strengthen my research on leadership strategies within four-year public institutions.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the leadership strategies of academic affairs deans at four-year public institutions. My research questions have explored the important elements of leadership expression, strategy, and development. The research questions below guide this study:

1. What leadership strategies do academic deans utilize at four-year public institutions?
2. How have the experiences of deans contributed to their leadership strategies?
3. How can institutions improve the preparation and development of administrators?

This chapter outlines findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis. An analytical analysis follows using adaptive leadership and the three pillars that guide the theory as a theoretical framework to undergird the findings. Four themes emerged from this study and the corresponding titles were taken directly from participant responses: (a) We have a caste system in higher education, (b) You are friends with them one day and boss the next, (c) I worry sometimes my associate deans look too much like me, (d) Experiential strategies versus straight book learning. The first theme, “We have a caste system in higher education,” showcases some of the differences in leadership approaches deans experienced leading faculty and staff in their institutions. Some examples included managing workload, navigating governance structures, and supervising staff and tenured faculty. The second theme, “You are friends with them one day and boss the next”

centers upon the changes deans experienced as they progressed into leadership. This theme outlines dean experiences moving from academia to administration. The third theme is “I worry sometimes my associate deans look too much like me.” This theme illustrates experiences using faculty and staff strengths to bolster the institution and community. The final theme, “Experiential strategies versus straight book learning,” emphasizes learning how to lead by actively participating in leadership work. Providing new leaders opportunities to grow, role-play, and manage emotional conflict encompassed some of the findings in this theme.

Along with these themes, some strategies quickly emerged from dean stories and reflections. I will present those strategies after each of the themes. Consistent with the literature review, these strategies are applicable across themes. The concept of mentoring a new leader might exist within the expression of diversity as a means to promote strengths theme, as well as, the empowering leaders through experiential situations theme. For the purposes of this study, I detail those strategies after the themes in which the deans expressed them most frequently. For instance, the strategy of adaptation and change occurred most during discussions of leadership development. Deans expressed other strategies throughout the interviews, but they did not elevate to the level of relevance by frequency. A diagram of the four leadership themes are found in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Diagram of Four Leadership Themes Found in Participant Responses

I will talk about a few of those themes that held personal importance to me in the next chapter. A comprehensive overview begins the investigation of dean experiences leading faculty and staff.

### **Theme 1: We Have a Caste System in Higher Education**

Deans reported a multitude of distinctions that centered upon a long-established hierarchy in higher education, which places staff at a lower status than faculty. This hierarchy is apparent through the varying work schedules, methods of communication, and ways of interacting with them to accomplish tasks. Eight of the ten deans noted some aspects of these differences. The responses exposed some of the problematic situations these deans encountered. Furthermore, the deans found ways to move initiatives forward by understanding these differences. I will undergird this theme by first highlighting dean experiences leading faculty, switch to the difference in staff leadership, and conclude outlining the strategies to reduce the differences between both these groups.

Hugh is the dean of an education college for an urban, public university in the Midwest. He offered an overview on the hierarchical nature of faculty positioning within public higher education. This comment provided a nice summation of this overarching theme:

To a certain degree, you could call it maybe a little harsh, but we have somewhat of a caste system. You have full professors valued more in some way versus assistant professors. And I'm not a big fan of that to be honest with you, but, you know, it's part of the system that we grow up and try to break that down. But, you

know, you're trying to butt up against a system that's been in place for literally hundreds of years. It can be difficult.

I asked Hugh to elaborate on this caste system and his experience leading faculty, he quickly turned to faculty and staff governance as an example of the differences in leading faculty and staff:

What I've learned is that while it's a shared governance perspective, it is predominantly faculty governance. And the staff don't have as much say in things. And so, I found that to be kind of odd because they used the words "shared governance versus faculty governance." Shared governance implies it's about everyone, right? Staff and faculty as a whole.

Hugh was making the case that even within the governance system in higher education, the staff voice appeared minimized on his campus. If governance is a method to accomplish tasks, the structure is built in ways that advantage faculty.

Clara is a business dean at an urban, public university in the Midwest. She provided her experience in the challenges leading faculty:

You almost have to think of faculty as independent contractors. You know, they can walk away from you whenever they feel like it. And I am not necessarily meaning they can leave your organization whenever they feel like it. They can walk away from you in terms of engagement. In my college, they can make a lot of money doing anything out of service. I'm going to do the bare minimum that I need to do to, you know, stay within those expectations of post tenure review but I'm going to spend the rest of my time working with these companies and making money. The only thing that keeps them kind of engaged and tied to the institution

is their sense of personal responsibility. Which will quickly go away if they feel you don't respect them and you are going to treat them like a child or like any other employee that you can dictate what they're going to do and how they're going to do it. They will quickly lose the sense of commitment and responsibility to you and their sense of commitment to the students which they can fulfill without you necessarily.

I sensed some of the frustration as Clara spoke with me about the challenges leading faculty. At one point, she paused and tried to sum up her struggles overall with leading faculty, "The experience I would like to share is that, you know, people talk about how it is to lead faculty because they can't really.....there are no consequences." Clara was making it clear that faculty do not want to be told what to do from a supervisor or manager. Dwayne is a dean of engineering from an urban, public institution in the Midwest. His experience leading faculty aligned with Clara and Hugh, but he added the difference with leading staff:

You know what it is? The traditions of the academy. Staff are focused on other things. I can say things and ask staff to do things I can't ask faculty to do.

Faculty have certain expectations about how they can be treated or should be treated and sometimes those expectations are reasonable and sometimes they are not.

I wanted to learn more about the "traditions of the academy" as they related to his leadership experience. I asked him to elaborate on the power of the influence of the academy. He referenced the notion of power and research:

In the academy there's things that we tolerate that shouldn't be tolerated. We do it because it fits some other goals. So, the high-powered researchers, the folks who get external funding, they have the power and sometimes get away with inappropriate behavior. So power is based on publications and, you know, funding and all kinds of things I need to recognize.

The public higher education environment seemed to force leaders to work with faculty and staff differently. The experiences of these deans and their corresponding leadership expression focused on the frustrating and systemic view of leading faculty. Marshall, a dean of liberal arts from an urban, Midwest institution shared his experience getting faculty to create change or accomplish tasks:

So, I don't have the power to compel anybody or have them comply with anything, you know, the faculty. Therefore, you need to make sure that you seek the faculty, "yes." It's (leading) always kind of fighting back the faculty and taking your best authority really. The authority rests with fellow faculty members to be implemented. Faculty matters. Persuasion.

Marshall worried about his ability to move change along quickly given the slow process of participation. Elena, a communication dean from a rural, public institution in the East, supported Marshall's position on getting faculty to comply with projects and initiatives via her experience facilitating the search and screen process:

That's a challenge that is not easy to convince faculty members that this is for the greater good because with searches, in particular, especially if you have some folks who've been around for a while may have a certain way of doing things and it may block diverse faculty from progressing in the search process.

I felt that Elena implied that the power that exists on public campuses keeps that very system in place. The universality of the comments about the challenges leading faculty was strengthened by Helen, the dean of an online and adult college, from an urban university in the Midwest. Helen shared how her administration views the position of faculty:

I was talking with a chair the other day about this technical issue and he was saying how he went to a chair development conference. But what he went to learn about [leading tenured faculty] did not apply to our institution and so he found that a little distressing. You know, tenure is golden and at other universities tenure is a privilege. If you misbehave tenure will be taken away not so much at here. You have to really, really, really misbehave.

I detected Helen was referencing the lack of consequences for faculty because of the protection tenure provided them. She further clarified her position by referencing the perspective of the president at her institution:

My peer group is very different and when I talk about their behaviors and unprofessionalism in meetings. I'm actually also talking about my peers who tend to feel they have a right to, where they can, yell and question people in an unprofessional manner. All of the blackboard IT goes through my department and the president was concerned about what happened because faculty were concerned.

I acknowledged the frustration Helen was feeling and she further expressed her annoyance with the experience leading faculty, "It is very tricky that we have some very vocal faculty that are very, very disruptive." Shawn, a liberal arts dean from a urban,

commuter institution in the Midwest, shared Helen's experience when faculty disruption goes too far, "And when one faculty member, despite repeated instruction in annual evaluations continues to be a bully and they make people miserable, um, that person needs to be removed from the environment." The experiences of these deans expose ways in which leading faculty can be challenging.

Many comments also focused on how leading staff varies given their positionality in the institution. As the researcher, the comments in leading staff in the academy felt different than they did for faculty. The staff comments seemed to flow more easily as they were less guarded. I will discuss this difference more in the discussions chapter. From work hours to the management and supervision of staff, the experiences of the deans again shined the light on hierarchical differences. However, the leadership expression focused heavily on the idea of the need to follow direction as opposed to encouraging direction. Marshall provided a good overview of this difference:

There also has to be a sense of hierarchy so that they know you're the boss and if I say that, you should do that. But it is different, the staff are paying more attention to their boss. They don't have a choice.

Marshall's experience seemed to align faculty supervision with faculty governance and staff supervision with human resources. His approach to leading staff outlined that alignment:

I would say we have a human resources separate operation. They help you define these staff relationships. So, for staff, it's, again, part of what they expect from me and my vision. And that's really what I do. I articulate the goals for the

organization. That pretty much delegates implementation to my directors or those individuals down the line.

I encouraged Marshall to continue to talk about leading staff and the variance between staff being told what to do and encouraging faculty to do the same. He continued to focus on the differences between the autonomy of faculty and rules surrounding staff:

But it's different and the staff is paying more attention to their boss, but they don't have a choice to pay attention to you. I mean I think as a general there are, I mean even long-term employees at the end of the day there is a clear sense of paying attention to the boss. It's so much more about the employee relationship. I feel much more that I am the authority and you legitimately have a right to tell them what to work on. So, there is a clear sense that they perceive your powers as legitimate.

The comment on legitimacy of power when leading staff served as a stark difference from the comments surrounding faculty. Leon, a social science and humanities dean from a suburban residential public institution on the West Coast commented on the lack of autonomy for staff, but added an crucial element of providing professional and personal growth:

Staff members have less autonomy. So, we need to be thinking about ways to give them opportunities to grow and to go to workshops. Our university has a tuition remission program so a full-time staff member can take a course or two without tuition. I strongly encourage my staff to do that, so I have been a bit aggressive there perhaps.

I encouraged Leon to express a bit more about the lack of autonomy and the idea leaders should, as a result, offer more professional development opportunities. I wanted to explore his reasoning for more professional growth instead of breaking down the hierarchical system in place. He replied, “You know, we have a little less bit in common with staff. I am a faculty member. I have come through the ranks in a very traditional way.” The response supported evidence of the positionality of faculty and staff in the academy.

The notion of staff as needing to follow direction less upon persuasion and more upon this hierarchical approach to leadership began to reign throughout participant interviews. Elena echoed much of what was expressed by the other deans. Her comments supported my sense of leadership differences between both groups and the basis of the difference might be the structure of the academy itself, “They [staff] feel like they’re not appreciated much or valued as much or that they’re skill set is not as good as the Ph.D. And they are on the front lines frequently.” When asked about leading faculty and staff differently, Robin, a health dean from a public, rural institution on the West Coast, shed light on the inconsistency:

Their jobs are quite different in terms of what they do on a daily basis and the hours they keep. Faculty may work at two o’clock in the morning, staff don’t.

Faculty may not come in until 10 a.m. and staff are always here by 8 a.m. They have different kinds of hours and different kinds of demands.

This comment was one of the first I had heard that specifically addressed the faculty workday. Clara defended faculty workload juxtaposed to staff:

People do not understand how stressful the faculty role really is. We're used to thinking it as, "Oh, you get to be at the university, you get to wear jeans and a t-shirt if you want to go to class, and you don't have a regular schedule." You get to come and go as you please. Except for showing up for class meetings you have the summers off which, as you know, is total fiction. But even faculty don't understand how stressful their jobs are.

Hugh was not as approving about the faculty workday and felt faculty should feel lucky to have the flexibility:

So, you know, I have a kind of different perspective on life in that, as I tell people, most faculty members and people in higher ed don't really realize how lucky we are. In the sense that ninety nine percent of the world, when they go get a job in their respective fields, they usually have to work at least initially when they're starting out to get just two weeks of vacation out of the year. Just two weeks of vacation if they're lucky! And then, through seniority, they get the three and maybe four weeks. So, you know, that's a luxury whereas in higher ed we have winter break. We have spring break. You know we have a summer although you know technically you don't get paid. Yes, you don't get paid but that's a luxury that no one, literally no one has. You know who can take three months off. I mean, literally, if they wanted to be paid or unpaid that's a luxury.

These responses regarding the faculty and staff workday emphasized only some of the factors in varying leadership experiences and strategies. I began to see the differences, on a level of importance, between faculty and staff work.

A predominant set of comments about the differences of faculty and staff can be found in how deans expressed their leadership responsibility to their development. The comments about providing growth-oriented experiences for staff came up much more with staff than with faculty. For instance, Leon expressed a significant contribution to staff development:

I want all our staff members to be aspiring to get better jobs than the one they have. I want secretaries to aspire to be senior secretaries. They want senior secretaries to aspire to be program managers. And so that may mean moving around from one department to another within the college or elsewhere on campus. Nobody should feel stuck. And faculty members have a relatively high degree of autonomy in terms of developing new courses or writing a book or undertaking your research program.

I thought Leon's comment did not reference the ability for a staff member to progress to the faculty arena but kept the progression lines based upon the group they existed within.

Clara also expressed her dedication to staff professional development:

The thing I have found to be maybe the most important is no matter what role they're in that you're concerned and aware of their professional development needs. Even the person that's typing or answering the phone has aspirations to do something else. And we are in higher education. It should be our job to figure out ways to approach them and help them move along if they want.

Shawn equally voiced the importance of staff development. Moreover, he added the notion of work and life balance in the workday, "I am a little like Henry Ford. I expect you to come to work on time every day, works as hard as we all work, and then go home,

eat dinner, rest up, and suit up again.” His comment again provided the basis for differing expectations of faculty and staff leadership. Shawn’s experience focused, however, on ensuring the leader builds relationships with faculty and staff which I will highlight as one of the strategies below.

### **Leadership Strategies**

These experiences exposed the hierarchy on their campuses and provided some basis for leading faculty and staff differently. I will now discuss some of the strategies that deans articulated that makes leading both of these groups easier. One point of note is dean comments did not highlight ways to break down this hierarchical system but only to navigate within it. I will discuss this notion more in the discussion chapter that follows. To reiterate, the following strategies can be transposed across themes and were voiced most during the discussions about leading faculty and staff. Building empowering relationships, incentivizing work, communicating clearly in voice and writing, and being transparent in a complex environment were some relevant strategies in this area.

**Use relationships as a vehicle for leader work.** Deans reported the significance of developing nurturing relationships with faculty and staff as a strategy to encourage engagement and increase the likelihood of work completion. Hugh described an experience in which he tried to provide feedback without the basis of forming the relationship:

You gotta develop a relationship with them. As I learned actually early in my career as a department chair. I tried to give some difficult feedback to a young faculty member who I thought I was doing a favor. But, on hindsight I realized I had not developed the relationship with her in order to give that kind of feedback.

And so, I learned that in order for me to deliver constructive feedback I have to have a solid relationship with that person that they trust me to deliver that feedback.

I was intrigued about how relationships allow for the leader to deliver bad news. Shawn shared specific example of when a relationship can pay dividends:

I guess here would be an example. When you do the meeting right before you as a faculty member who is very angry about her salary. Understanding that she's not angry with me but she's angry and understanding your role is trying not to be defensive. The lawsuit is going to come against me. But try to figure out a way to provide her the information to move forward if she wants the lawsuit while still maintaining a relationship with that person because at the end of the day what matters is that relationship.

Leon also addressed the need to set aside time to develop relationships on a one-on-one level as a primary role of leadership:

But I scheduled meetings for me with all the young deans. Just one-on-one during that first semester you know I mean we have work meetings together all the time. Just trying to get to know them more on a personal level.

I wanted to explore even more the idea of setting aside institutional work to do some of the relational work he described. As I prodded for more information, Leon offered an example of always being in relationship building mode:

And so there's a parking lot between old main, the building where the English department is. I run into faculty members in the parking lot or run into faculty members at the grocery store. I ask, "Hey how's it going with so and so? What's

new? What are you teaching?” We also have initiated a number of social events for the faculty to just create more opportunities. I really think it's important the faculty in different departments get to know each other.

Dwayne offered a similar response regarding visibility as an easy way to establish relationships with faculty and staff. He expressed the relevance of getting to know individuals from the leadership platform:

Yeah, so I don't talk to my chairs as much as I'd like. I would prefer to be able to say I talked to at least one on one just informally go into their office and sit down with them. I do sometimes, but not once a week. The same with my associate dean. I would like to just stop by their office because, you know, even though I have a pretty big building it's five stories and everything. I'm on the fifth floor, I've got associate deans on the first floor. I got chairs in the middle. I do think it's important not to be sitting up in your nice office. I don't want to be sitting up here, you know, in the ivory tower so to speak and not getting around.

The notion of visibility in relationship building began to resonate with me during the interviews. Building relationships were as important as any work task. Relationships formed a foundation for true leadership work. Monica, an education dean from an urban, research institution in the Midwest insisted:

You really need to be able to build a relationship with a person. So, when I said I could go ask a lot of people here to be a mentor, but I don't always feel comfortable doing that because I don't have a really good relationship built with them.

The ability of the leader to develop nurturing relationships served as a way to maneuver through some of the faculty and staff differences on the perspective institutions. Deans maintained the stronger the relationship, the quicker projects get completed and easier situations are to manage.

**Incentivize to build morale.** Participants expressed the importance of incentivizing faculty and staff work throughout the interviews. Incentivization exposed similar challenges, such as the faculty and staff work hour differences. Moreover, incentivization was connected to how leaders help faculty and staff feel connected with the institution. Shawn described the concept of incentivizing faculty and staff:

As you move forward in administration, I try to use mostly carrots but every once in a while, I need to use some sticks. And in terms of an issue that I find is very important, higher ed doesn't often deal very well with which is a toxic work environment.

Shawn believed the worst thing a leader can do is create a work environment where staff and faculty feel disconnected and has no personal value. Incentivization sends a stronger message to faculty and staff that the leader and institution cares about them. As I pressed him for more information about how to incentivize faculty and staff tasks, he added input regarding the budgetary importance of incentivization:

And so, one of the things that deans can do particularly in the RCM budget model that you mentioned earlier is to create a pool of money for hedge funding. So, what if you're a faculty member and you are close to a big grant or you're close to a publication but you're not quite there. What you need is a little bit of time and a little bit of money and so that hedge funding can be allocated to you to get that

outcome that you're interested in. And so, you try to incentivize that and walk with a person make sure they have all the resources that they need both in terms of a network of support but also in terms of dollar as well as time to achieve the thing that we hold in common.

Shawn felt access to resources was a critical factor helping faculty and staff work together. Other deans expressed the importance of making work meaningful. Marshall emphasized how his institution rewards commitment and effort:

But often the reward for hard work in an organization is more work. You have to be conscientious of your top performers and also not diminish, particularly, your top performers. You have to be careful; we have to pay them.

The notion of reward and punishment rang true through many of the deans responses coded as incentivization. Clara also voiced concern about the challenges of working in higher education versus the private sector and faculty and staff pay as a means for leaders to incentivize work:

I guess I would say in terms of their behavior. It's not like you can fire them. We often don't have rewards to offer them because it is what it is. You don't have the opportunity to, for example, provide awards even in our institution. We can't give cash to anybody. So, you know, a lot of the tools that would normally be used in a non-academic setting are closed.

Her response exposed the need and usefulness of incentivizing faculty and staff work, which may help leaders effectively build morale and retention. The comment also opened the door to the comparison to the private sector and the fringe benefits that exist.

The comments on incentivization implied the more we can reward faculty and staff, the more we can increase positive work environments.

**Frequently speak and write clearly.** How leaders communicated to faculty and staff accentuated the need for the leader to be conscientious of the spoken and written word. The concept of communication, or as I expressed in the literature review, the communicative leader can be found in all four of the themes in this study. The disparities in faculty and staff leadership expression, however, highlighted the need to be an effective communicator. Three general challenges of communication arose during the interviews: written, spoken, and the frequency in which the leader communicates. Written communication includes communicating in written form through emails, policies, and proposals. Spoken includes how a leader delivers messages to stakeholders face-to-face, in groups, or on the stage. Frequency is how often a leader communicates to followers, such as daily and weekly – these three areas of communication form, in and of themselves, a leadership strategy. Conversely, the strategy of communication presents challenges to the leader. Before diving into the written and spoken word and frequency, I will showcase the deans experiences with the challenge of communication.

Deans communicated the challenge of stakeholders not reading or hearing the messaging from the leader as one of the primary difficulties of communication. Marshall expressed his challenges communicating with stakeholders via email:

So mass communications may get sent out to faculty, but it's very difficult. They pay very little attention to those kind of things and it's very hard to reach all of the faculty. You know, we even send email and newsletters. It's tough but it's

true with students as well. They don't read email either. Ninety percent of faculty actually bring it (the email) up and then they say, "I have never heard of this."

Elena, when asked about communication strategies was skeptical of the effectiveness of emailing faculty and staff. She asserted emailing stakeholders may be a losing proposition, "You know sending an email is not a good way to do it. More and more, I'm realizing emails can be very, very dangerous." I was curious about the use of the word "dangerous" in her response. I asked of Elena could clarify what she meant. She followed up with another example of when she communicated cuts to her department:

And it's so interesting that people nod their heads in those meetings and then when you actually come back to the department to say, "okay what are we going to eliminate or cut?" All of a sudden, you know, I'm a demon. They ask, "What's all this about?"

Elena stated these types of responses often accompany emailed notifications. Dwayne supported Elena's view on the danger of email communication, "Email can never be erased. And even what you said lives forever even if it's paraphrased or whatever. It lives forever." I asked Dwayne to follow up on this comment and wondered in what ways he saw communication as dangerous. He provided his experience of the danger of not communicating at all, "I forget and need to be reminded in the absence of information, faculty and staff, but particularly faculty, will fill the void with darkness." I was quickly realizing that email communication, or lack of communication, was a risky proposition for leaders. Helen described the situation with the technology platform as an example of the faculty and staff miscommunication:

Well, the whole thing with this technology issue is a good example. I heard, “If you would have communicated it, if you would have said this was going to come up.” It didn't even cross my mind to do it [communicate the message more openly]. So, it wasn't an intentional miscommunication, but ended up being a huge miscommunication. So, I think the trick is finding out what and how much to communicate what and to whom.

Participant responses highlighted the challenges in communicating with faculty and staff. Within these responses, a number of comments underscored the characterization of effective communication. First, participants articulated the importance of frequent, reoccurring meetings. Most of the participants had either weekly or monthly meetings with department chairs, associate deans, and colleges. These meetings were almost always face-to-face, or video based. Monica stated, “For chairpersons, I have monthly one-on-one meetings with them to find out what’s going on in their departments.” Other deans described their frequent meetings with faculty and staff as a sign of successful leadership. Second, many of the deans relied on others as part of a communication team. Helen relayed the importance of her call team:

I rely a lot on my call my team and my direct reports. My executive team I rely a lot on transmitting the message for me. And it's the same thing with my faculty advisory board for my online initiatives. They're there specifically to share my message to their colleges. And so I try and use conduits of communicators. As opposed to being the one to communicate. Especially sensitive stuff.

The deans did not feel communication was only their responsibility. They often coordinated messages through other avenues to ensure a consistent tone and message to

faculty and staff. Helen believed that important emails should always be reviewed by another person to make sure the message is clear. Third, frequent communication often included blogs and updates. Hugh prepared weekly blogs for his college:

What I do every Monday is I write up, I guess they call it nowadays a blog, and write it to the school – all the faculty and staff. I think they read it, you know, maybe some don't but at least they don't have an excuse. I do communicate with them every week. I tell them about all the things I'm doing.

Hugh used the frequency of his written and spoken word to keep faculty and staff on the same page and, as importantly, help them understand his decision-making and approaches. Lastly, the importance of communication and the reason the concept fit nicely into this theme was the relational empowerment it provided the deans to their constituents. Over and over, deans expressed the crucial act of getting to know the staff and faculty and building meaningful relationships with them. This communicative strategy built trust between the dean and those in the college. Moreover, using communication as the avenue to build relationships made the difficult decisions easier to make and communicate. Helen stated, “So I think it’s really important when you’re new to meet with them (faculty and staff) so they understand you.” That understanding, to Helen, was the foundation of her every day work. Elena articulated the importance of talking with others, especially during difficult times:

It’s important to talk and speak with each other frequently. Whether it be this way or sitting down at a table or in retreats etc., I think touching base with the team and having everybody feel that they have a voice is crucial. So, I mean I

really try to meet with and talk with people as much as possible especially if you've got some bad news to deliver in terms like budget or cuts or whatever it is. Frequent and clear written and spoken communication serve as a basis for leadership communication. Deans comments also linked clear communication to transparency. Given the number of times deans commented on transparency, it quickly became the third strategy within this theme.

**Be transparent.** The difficulty determining when to disclose information and how much to provide faculty and staff served as the final strategy under this theme. Many participants relayed the consequences of not being transparent. Robin stated, “If you don’t address it [an issue], you’re just asking for trouble.” She believed that not being transparent was one of the worst approaches a leader could take. Robin alleged without transparency, a leader cannot build trust. Leon expressed the importance of being transparent when talking about your vision:

If people are going to buy into what the organization's going to do going forward, even if their view is different than what ends up happening, everybody needs to know why what is happening is happening. I just think that builds confidence in your organization.

Elena connected the concept of transparency to her positionality, “It always surprises me. I am a very transparent person. What you see is what you get. So I prefer to go and meet with departments and explain things as transparently as possible.” Elena’s belief about transparency was similar to Robin’s; transparency leads to trust. She also felt that transparency minimizes the element of surprise when making decisions. She offered how transparency minimizes surprise in leadership:

One of the hardest things is when you're kind of told frequently by Human Resources, "don't tell them this part, just tell them that part." That that is so hard for me to do because I feel like it's unfair to keep things from folx. And I want to treat people like colleagues, and I consider myself their colleague and my job is to help them do their job the best possible way and help our students get the most success.

Overall, the dean responses highlighted the importance of transparency as an avenue to communicate vision and connect faculty and staff to a larger vision. Time and time again, deans expressed the importance of transparency in helping faculty and staff understand direction of the institution and leader. In doing so, the gap between the groups is minimized if that is the leader's intention.

### **Summary**

Interviews foregrounded the notion that public higher education is built upon an ancient hierarchical system. Second, the system is constructed in ways that predispose faculty to participatory methods of leadership. Leaders must manage and supervise based upon encouragement of the completion of tasks. Conversely, the system allows leaders to manage and supervise staff more authoritatively. Two observations were apparent after coding and categorizing the research: the deans in this study worked within this system. The leadership strategies expressed mostly by deans within this theme were relationship building to lead faculty and staff effectively, incentivizing work to connect faculty and staff to the institution (and each other), leading via spoken and written communication primes faculty and staff connection, and ensuring that communication is transparent can build trusting, safe relationships.

## **Theme 2: You Are Friends with Them One Day and Boss the Next**

Eight of the ten deans specifically noted their experiences progressing from faculty, to a department head, to the dean. For example, Elena described the process at her institution, “I started off as a department chair in an academic department. I was department chair for three years and had also done an interim year with them and that's interesting the way it works here at the college is that people from the department become chair.” Elena’s comment was indicative of many dean observations about the process of being noted as an effective, engaging professor and assuming the same for their effectiveness as leaders. All ten deans began their leadership progression in the classroom although a couple of deans had other experiences in the private sector and military. Dean responses showcased the difficulty progressing into administration differentiating themselves from the previous dean, and without adequate training in management and supervision. Responses also delineated the leadership difficulty moving from colleague to boss. Overall, navigating departmental oversight, faculty governance, and day-to-day interactions tested and concerned academic deans.

Many dean responses noted accepting a dean position but struggling being in the shadows of the previous leader. Leon was candid about faculty and staff making a comparison, “So when you come into a situation there’s someone that may look at something at you for something your predecessor did. That’s just – what strikes you as just whack.” Elena noted how faculty and staff influence the new leader to do things differently:

And that's a two-edge sword also because with a new administrator, depending on the relationship with the old administrator, you're going to hear a lot of complaining, “well the old person did it this way and we didn't like it.”

Shawn referenced how space and place impact moving from the classroom to the office, “Yet if you're not careful your office looks like the office of the other person. And all those patterns will repeat themselves. People will treat you like the other person.”

Shawn emphasized allowing new leaders to create their own “look” for their offices, “The second thing that's important is making sure they have the ability to create their own office. And I mean that quite literally – furniture, computers, software, and the like.” As I asked him further about the idea of creating space and place, Shawn shared an experience with a new associate dean:

And so I have a new associate dean and he was going to go to Ikea and get a new table for his office I said, “This is what we do. You tell me what you want, and we will get that for you.” He said, “really?” And so, we have to let people make their own home.

He then shared his experience as a new dean:

I still have models in my office and space prints on my wall. I am not the previous dean and people know it, you know, and it's. So, there's that creating your sense of home is really important to who you are formerly as a professor and now dean.

Dean responses noted progressing into a leadership position meant distancing yourself from the previous dean.

The second element of leadership progression included managing the trials of moving from being a professor and colleague to being a manager. Monica commented on the challenges progressing to leadership from the faculty with a budget example, “I’m like a lot of administrators in higher ed where you start as a faculty member. We’re not trained to be accountants in most cases maybe some people are, but we’re not accountants or anything like that.” Monica referenced the difficulty she faced when she moved from the classroom into a leadership position. Elena reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of such a progression, “I was a colleague and now I’m the boss. And that is a two-edged sword. They expect me to favor them I think although I’m not supposed to.” She laughingly added, “But at the same time they are more willing to challenge me because I was there buddy having drinks after concerts. So that has been interesting. You’re friends with them one day and the boss the next.” Dwayne noted his responsibility to help others progress into leadership positions:

So, let's give it to you explicitly and also recognize that my job as a leader is to make sure that I am giving you a pathway to the goals you want to be. So, I'm assuming that most of my chairs would love to be a dean or a college president or provost, you know, work their way up. I want to help them now get on that pathway. So, I want to both enable them to succeed in their current role and to start motivating them to keep moving forward.

Dwayne identified his role of leadership as helping others manage this common progression in higher education. Shawn shared his experience with tenure and faculty governance as associated to leadership progression:

When you're an assistant professor on tenure track, you're probably kind of glib and you're used to saying things in meetings that are kind of cocky. When you're tenured, you can't do that anymore because your positionality changes. So, it's one thing to be part of the Young Turks who say funny things when you're a full professor, but to say those things has an effect on the community in a different way. It's similar to the difference between when a member of the house says something goofy on the floor of the Senate and when the President says it at the State of the Union address. I'm not trying to sound grandiose but there's a positionality that happens.

Shawn's response exposed the positionality progressing from faculty, to a chair to the dean. The comment also resonates with the first theme of communication and the hierarchy of higher education. Overall, the deans shared stories of their leadership progression and provided a key theme in the research.

### **Leadership Strategies**

The strategies within the lecturer to leader theme embodied a leader's need to minimize the ego, become an authentic leader, and become a visionary. First, minimizing the ego and becoming a humble leader was a critical component for the deans. Second, developing authenticity helped the deans navigate the progression from colleague to boss. Deans responses reiterated their truth; the more authentic the leader, the more comfortability one feels progressing from a faculty to the dean. Lastly, being a visionary leader rounds out the strategies found in this theme. A vision seemed to help lower faculty and staff anxiety and help them know where a leader is taking them. We will now explore each of these strategies through the experiences of the deans.

**Minimize the ego.** The need for humility came up time and time again while deans discussed their progression experiences. Dean responses stressed the need to focus on principle over self whether it the betterment of the team, division, or issue. Hugh expressed his thoughts on the characteristics of great leadership and ego:

What great leaders do are they take all blame and they deflect all credit. They deflect all the credit to all the other people who deserve it. But, as the leader, they have to absorb all the blame even if they knew about or didn't know about it [a problem]. They absorbed the blame.

Hugh's comment eluded that great leaders are not narcissists and often work behind the scenes. Helen noted there was a humility in great leaders, "You have be willing to accept that others ideas might be better than yours." Clara aligned with Hugh and Helen. She explained her stance of giving the credit to others, "I don't need recognition or kudos. I don't need to take credit for everything that happens in the college. I think humility is what I'm getting at here." She also conveyed the strategy of asking for help from others, "I think everyone is willing to help each other out. But you have to be – you have to be able to ask for it. A lot of administrators frankly are just really afraid." Clara believed treasured leaders openly express weakness and ask for help. Leon echoed Clara's response, "I don't think academic leaders succeed when they take the approach that they have everything already figured it out." He provided a pertinent analogy to convey his message, "If you're the smartest person in the room, find a better room, right? And an academic leader should not be a narcissist. And now all of us – we all have self-esteem, self-regard." Elena confirmed his comments laughingly, "We have to kind of set our

egos aside and maybe put on our Kevlar.” Elena felt leaders needed thick skin. She added:

You have to be willing to be wrong. You have to. Even though you might think you have the most brilliant idea of a new major or new program. You have to be willing to go in and meet with your colleagues and have them say, “no this doesn't work for us” and to let go of your ego on some of those things and realize that the engine of the school is really the faculty and the students. Those are that's what makes things go.

Dwayne used his physical location on campus to emphasize the importance of minimizing ego:

I don't want to be sitting up here, you know, in the ivory tower so to speak and not getting around. I think I'd like to think they could share with me when they think I'm wrong but people around here are very respectful. They're always calling me dean or doctor and I'll say, “no, call me Dwayne.”

The selflessness of the leader shined throughout dean responses time and again.

Minimizing the ego was a strategy that helped the deans as they progressed from faculty, to chair, to dean.

**Be authentic.** Progressing from faculty to leadership requires the leader to have authenticity. Participants reported the importance of self-awareness to develop authenticity throughout the interviews. Shawn spent a significant portion of his interview talking about authenticity and selflessness. He underscored the importance of being the same person in and out of the classroom:

Now, nearly six years as dean, in each role I see myself as the fundamentally the same person. My job in a leadership position is to foster faculty excellence in the classroom. As you move into higher administrative posts either a staff position or someone that grows out of a faculty position it's very important that you first of all always present the same person. So, you need to do some work on yourself. You need to understand yourself and how you work in order to work with other people in that position. People need to know who you are. You get in trouble when you're one person at work and one person at home. And so if you are not a nice person at home eventually that comes to work and it will shock people that your true colors are revealed and people are just going to get out they're going to flock they're going to leave those jobs because nobody is true. People don't leave jobs. People leave bosses, right? So, when I started here, I'm the same nerd I always have been maybe even a little worse.

Marshall addressed the consequence of giving individuals the right impression of the leader, "You don't want to create false impressions, otherwise people will think you are power dumping." He added the importance of authenticity to decision making:

People need to develop a clear appreciation of your strengths and weaknesses, particularly your weaknesses. I mean most people come into positions of leadership because they have a set of strong attributes. We also need to recognize by this the very same attribute that is strong in one moment might be a problem in the next situation. The ability to make decisions and stick with them is important as a leader. But it can become a problem if you never revisit your decisions.

Marshall connected openness of leadership strengths and weaknesses as a way for faculty and staff to understand a leader's executive decisions. Clara underscored the need to be authentic in words and actions as a way to model the behavior for faculty and staff:

You know, really being able to tackle things in an authentic way and recognize that I'm not perfect. I have things that I'm trying to get better at which allows them (faculty and staff) the space to do the same thing. So, I think that's a challenge for the research that you're doing. Everybody knows the right words to say but, the question is whether or not they're actually behaving in that way.

Leon summed up Clara's take on being authentic in words and actions, "You know, I think in higher education we need to practice what we preach." Deans voiced the overall strategy of authenticity as imperative for leadership progression so faculty and staff can better understand their viewpoints and decisions.

**Create a common vision.** Progressing into a leadership position required the dean to have an honest and clear vision for faculty and staff. This vision is cumulative in essence it requires the leader to talk with faculty and staff frequently as a demonstration they were ready to lead. Deans stated not providing visionary approaches reduced the amount of confidence faculty and staff had in leadership progression. Robin spoke about vision as connected to initiative completion:

I think also not just being able to come up with good ideas and vision but also knowing how to implement those and carry those through to the end point. When you do a good job of helping others see opportunities, seek ideas, and generate those big ideas, you build confidence in your leadership ability. Following this through and thinking about how to actually make those happen is hard.

Marshall articulated the importance of supporting a vision to help faculty and staff understand perspective:

Leading is about cheerleading a vision. Leading is taking anything you do and creating a vision for the office. You want to see a vision through so others are glad that someone is doing something, and they know you want to get things done.”

Both Clara and Leon supported the notion of a vision coupled to faculty and staff as supportive to the leader. Clara underlined the importance of creating a common vision:

I think if someone doesn't have a vision of their own, they should have the willingness to gather people together and create a vision without necessarily the need to take credit for it. You know it's not about whether I've got a vision for the college or whether I've been able to build the programs. It's whether I, as a leader, can help people around me do the things that they want to do and create the vision that they want to create.

Leon reiterated, “So I would say learning how to, uh, bring people along and to listen to develop a common vision. Rather than try to develop a personal vision and impose that on everyone else.” The strategy of creating a unified vision arose throughout the interviews and connected to the theme of leadership progression. These three strategies: minimizing the ego; being authentic; and creating a common vision originated from dean experiences and their progression stories.

### **Summary**

Progressing from lecturer to leader theme, like others, were commonly shared experiences of the deans I interviewed. Even the two deans that had outside experiences

in the private sector and military, shared experiences centered much upon the progression from a faculty member to the dean. These progression stories were important in they highlighted the movement from professor to administrator within the environment of public higher education. They also showcased the perceived lack of leadership from the private sector I experienced with the deans. The strategies of minimizing the ego, becoming an authentic leader, and being a visionary helped to support the notion of progressing from lecturer to leader.

### **Theme 3: I Worry Sometimes My Associate Deans Look Too Much Like Me**

The topics of diversity and inclusion encompasses the third theme of this study. Eight of ten participants were dedicated to creating diverse and inclusive environments. I expected more comments about the racial and ethnic factors in leading diverse teams. Dean responses, however, targeted how teams use their strengths to support other team members. The concepts of individuality, community, and collaboration arose from the interviews. Strategies emphasizing a leader's dedication to inclusivity and the ability to build community ascended from the dean experiences. Generally, the deans were dedicated to the concept of diversity, but struggled to go in-depth about those experiences. I will discuss some of the factors might have contributed to the surface-level responses further in chapter 5.

The deans were passionate about the dedication to building diverse environments throughout the interviews. They commented about their dedication to diversity throughout the interviews. Shawn described his commitment to diversity as a daily occurrence:

It is a central core of your outlook. What I mean by that is, you know, those pieces are a core. Everything you do must be seen through that lens. Everything.

In a sense that's like breathing. There is no there's no way not to think that way.

Shawn believed that diversity and inclusion must be woven into every fabric of higher education. Marshall focused his response about diversity toward the current political climate:

I think it is very important that institutions have made strong commitments about diversity and inclusion despite the current political and national climate. And that's a real pickle that public institutions are in. You have to be true to your own values which includes diversity and human rights.

Marshall felt the current political climate has required higher education to take a stand on the systemic issues of racism and discrimination. Leon's response offered a similar perspective as Shawn's but focused more on the management task, "Equity and inclusion is like the budget. You just can't do something where you don't at least keep that in mind." The comments began to expose the need for leaders to always be thinking about diversity to lead effectively. Elena also focused heavily on dedication to diversity, "But it's I think it's is incredibly important. If the administrator doesn't believe in this and doesn't understand comprehensively what this means not only for faculty but for students, it really puts you at a disadvantage." Dwayne did not want to neglect the importance of diversity given his privileged background. He conveyed the ability of privileged individuals to close their eyes to the issue of diversity:

I didn't want to sweep it under the rug or downplay it. It's very important to me, but could be something one could get away without. That's not really true for two

reasons. One if you're an ethical person, just look at the data and the gap in retention and maybe enrollment and retention. Student success between underrepresented groups and not the data is almost always going to show something. And if you're going sweep it under the rug, how could you possibly ignore that and not do something about it? So, I would say your ethics would drive you to do something. The other thing is it's in our strategic goals at my institution and it's in my strategic goals. So, I actually am very, very focused on that. So, I'd be hard to ignore those too I think. They'd have to be there be a compelling case to do something. But I'm just saying there's some people who might be able to skate and focus on other things.

Dwayne's privileged background afforded him the choice to either champion diversity efforts or do nothing. He clearly believed between the statistics emphasizing the importance of diversity, his personal beliefs of diversity, and the emphasis in higher education to build diverse environments, leaders must act – particularly when they act from a position of privilege.

Deans also commented on professional development opportunities focused on diversity. Helen described the way in which her institution values professional development opportunities promoting diversity from the student perspective than the overall perspective, “It's definitely a topic we talk a lot about in our meetings. Mostly in regard to students though – the inequity in the gap with retention and the success rate. Then I guess that's pretty much where it sits.” Helen had little to say about the notion of diversity. I sensed her frustration her institution had not been doing more to advocate for

diversity. Clara described the level of dedication she expected from her direct reports in regard to professional development opportunities:

These are some articles that I asked people to read and just have casual hallway conversations talking about gender bias and microaggressions and unconscious bias issues and things along those. We do safe training which is directed specifically at the LGBTQ community and trying to provide them with a signal that there is a safe place for you to go if something happens on campus.

Clara provided a specific example of diversity efforts as compared to other responses.

Many of the dean focused on the efforts their institutions were undertaking as part of the interviews. Monica echoed the commitment of her institution toward diversity training, “You know we do training all the way down to our curriculum development. We assure that we have that also as part of what we’re teaching students to be.” The dean responses incorporated institutional efforts toward diversity. A couple of the deans, as described above, began to look at their positionality with diversity and inclusion. Many responses stopped short of getting into real specifics. Many responses about diversity also arose when considering the elements of an effective team.

The other area in which the deans spent much of their time was in the concept of building diverse teams. More often, the deans spoke the best ways to build teams of individuals representing multiple cultures. Hugh stated, “I’ve tried to create teams where I don’t want people like me. I literally don’t want people like me.” He wanted individuals to question his decisions and see issues from different lenses. Hugh used the example of how Abraham Lincoln would appoint individuals to his committees from other political parties to demonstrate the importance of having faculty and staff that

disagree with you on his leadership team. Leon also emphasized the crucial nature of building diverse teams, “Well an effective team is going to have people with different experiences and different points of view on it.” This comment was common between many of the deans. I wanted more and asked Leon to elaborate a bit:

You’re going to want to ask staff members as well as faculty with different roles and different experiences. Some people who have been at the institution for most of their careers so maybe you want some new people at the table. We just want to get a variety of perspectives to just increase the likelihood of someone's going to ask that probing question at the right time.

Leon, too, wanted a team that would challenge him on decisions. Elena focused her answers toward diverse teams of age and thought:

I think it needs to be diverse in terms of age and time at the university. It's easy for those of us who've been here for a while to sit in a room and decide what should be happening. But really we need to hear those new voices the new faculty are bringing in a lot of new ideas and energies and, you know, opinions on things that we have to hear if we are going to move forward and keep us healthy.

Again, the answers demonstrated the commitment to diversity, but felt surface level as compared to some of the other responses of the deans. Monica’s comments began to get more centered upon diverse ethnicities and races but, again, stopped short of providing specifics, “I think that you have to have diverse individuals on a team who bring different perspectives to the table.” Dwayne began to get into more detail during our interview.

He spoke about his experience as a White male dean:

I worry a little bit sometimes that my associate deans look too much like me.

There's two of them and they are White males. But two of them are females and one is woman of color from a different nation. The right people are people who do not look like you, your age, your educational background, your socioeconomic statuses, and your life experiences.

He elaborated, "Time and time again research shows high performing organizations in the workplace are the ones that are most diverse and have norms that are inclusive." I began to find more specificity in dean responses as I asked some follow-up questions as I probed for additional information about diversity and inclusion. Hugh shared his experience having a leader of privilege help him progress into leadership when he described his mentor:

I mean he's a White guy. You know he didn't have to tap me on the shoulder or anything. So as a result, you know, in my case I tried to do the same. I tried to help promote people who are underrepresented. The lady who is my own administrative intern. She's not only a lady but she is Vietnamese descendant.

Hugh appreciated his mentor elevating him to a become a leader of color. He passionately believed he had the responsibility to do the same. Overall, the responses about diversity accentuated the deans dedication to diversity, and I received a few comments on their positionality regarding race and ethnicity.

### **Leadership Strategies**

The two strategies that existed within interview questions on diversity focus on the need for leaders to champion inclusivity and build diverse and supportive communities. Additionally, the emphasis on inclusivity and community allowed leaders

to bring diverse individuals together to tackle some of the highly complex issues we face within public higher education. Inclusivity, as reported by deans, included hearing from various individuals and involving them in problem-solving. Community, as stated by the deans, included developing a sense of belonging in stakeholders. These comments highlight the deans believe that faculty and staff must feel like they belong to a principle or environment which is bigger than self.

**Be inclusive.** Deans believed leaders must be inclusive. Shawn noted that inclusivity must be included in every aspect of the day-to-day workload. He explained a recent experience sending a welcome back message to faculty and staff and how, even the message, can be exclusive:

It's not a welcome back message because there are a lot of faculty and staff who didn't leave over the summer. So, by saying welcome back, you're assuming and you're sort of dismissing the staff who are here who already feel this myth. So, there's an inclusivity lens for you.

Marshall provided some depth about the absence of processes that support inclusivity.

His comment also served as a reference to the dedication to diversity:

We often get sort of distracted on identities. To be quite frank, we try to bring people off certain identities of evidence of being inclusive and be responsive to Asian and whatnot. But it's not, you know, it's not only the people per se that make the institution more diverse or being in the presence of different ethnicities or orientations that make an organization more diverse, make it more inclusive. But the absence of processes that are just inherently discriminatory.

Marshall accentuated the critical nature of institutions forcing discussion and action about diversity. Marshall's comment cemented some of those beliefs. Clara's responses were the first about leaders looking at self as a means to be more inclusive:

Creating a culture of inclusive excellence and a culture of support for everyone, regardless of their personal characteristics, are a huge component of the administrator and the staff really being able to look at themselves and recognize where they are the problem.

The response she provided opened the door to the concept of self-awareness which she felt was a large portion of the work on inclusivity. I asked her to elaborate a bit on this concept:

You know, I mean, to me, the most important lesson for any administrator has to do with themselves. Do they understand themselves? Do they understand what motivates them? Do they understand why they're doing what they're doing? Do they understand ways they behave or effect the people around them and the behavior? And so I think I would do a lot of work in that area or really trying to help them to gain an awareness and an understanding of how the way they influence and impact the people around them.

Clara and I discussed the connection between self-awareness and championing inclusivity and diversity. She responded about how stakeholders become defensiveness and our obligation to challenge institutional thinking:

In trying to address issues of inclusivity. The level of defensiveness of people that I can talk to one on one with no problems. But when you get them in a group. The dynamics just totally change they become extremely defensive.

That's a very interesting phenomenon that I've noticed and so you try and find ways to reduce defensiveness. We're also looking at some very practical things I know I'm talking a lot about the interpersonal and I do feel like that's the priority. Clara's comment noted that leaders must learn how to break down the defensiveness to champion inclusion and diversity. Leon equated equity to doing everyday activities at work:

It's crucial to everything new in higher education. We are about creating opportunities for people. We need to make sure that we are creating opportunities in as equitable manner as we can. If it's in creating new faculty position or a new program or initiative just you would think, "Okay how are we going to pay for that?" You also have to ask, "Okay, well how is everybody going to be included in this?"

Dwayne placed inclusive excellence as a portion of his personal leadership plan for his college. He warned about stakeholders ignoring the significance of inclusive excellence if the leader does not champion it, particularly in the STEM fields:

I think it can have zero effect, but it clearly should not play zero especially in STEM. In other words, I came in talking about Inclusive Excellence. I recognize that we're going to have to do things about staffing. You know, provide leadership opportunities. It was very, very important to me. But there is a lot of people who could come in and just ignore the issues because they've been ignored before, right? But that's not what I'm about. So I've done some things such as cultural resources and infrastructure. To be honest, you don't want to give lip

service to it. I think that's fine for me. I've been really trying to live it and I think I've been known for that on campus.

Dwayne's answer to this question was quite lengthy. He tried to convey that as a privileged individual he has the choice to say he is inclusive but not back it up with action. He passionately felt this was the worst approach a privileged leader to take, but also wanted to express the option that exists.

**Build community.** Participants expressed the importance of building close knit, supportive, and inclusive campus community as one strategy for leadership effectiveness. The concept of community was associated with faculty and staff feeling a sense of togetherness and belonging. Robin noted, "I think that there are some things that we have in common no matter whether our mission is land grant or private. But there is something about the large public space institutions. It's good to have depth connecting with each other." Robin linked community building to professional development opportunities. For Shawn, he linked the notion of community to leader vulnerability in order to allow others to be vulnerable and, in turn, feel safe:

You begin to describe what the archetype leader is today and they're not many of those people because often to get to where you are you have to sacrifice either the competency part or the sort of emotional part of holding communities together.

Can you have honest conversations about being vulnerable? Can you have honest conversations without taking things personally?

Shawn exposed his approach to being vulnerable as a way to increase faculty and staff belonging and understanding. Clara may have embodied the general feel of all the dean responses in her comment on community, "So there's certainly a camaraderie and a sense

of connection to each other. We are not necessarily deep into each other's personal lives, but we do share our lives with each other. The group balances strengths and weaknesses.” Elena commented on the sense of community for her staff, “So when I have like a retreat for my school, I include professional staff I include the secretaries. They're part of the family and of our school. And then they're on the front lines frequently.” Monica was the first dean to reference the word “family” when referencing team, community, inclusivity, and diversity. I asked her to elaborate on an example of what she meant. Her experience characterized the need for leaders to be on the front lines with faculty and staff. Her example referred to budget cuts and her accountability, as part of the community, to stakeholders:

You know I offered to teach a class. I didn't come in and, you know, buy all new things for my office. I scraped the bottom of the barrel in our storage room for items. So that's why I mean just lead by example. If faculty members are feeling kinds of cuts, they want to know that, you know, administrators are feeling that same kind of pressure.

Building inclusive and supportive communities was another strategy for effective leadership. Deans comments inferred effective leaders include individuals across all levels of the campus. As they recruit those individuals, they help them feel aligned with a common cause. Leaders help individuals feel connected to the community and to them by modeling the behavior they would like represented in that community.

### **Summary**

The theme of a strengths-based expression of diversity highlighted the requirement leaders be dedicated and passionate about developing diverse environments.

As accentuated in the dean responses, leaders must not see diversity as the concept we promote, as much as, how we conduct our lives. Within the everyday obligation leaders must make to diversity, the strategies of being an inclusive leader and building communities on our campuses highlight the dedication they exhibited. Though responses showed many ways these deans champion diversity, their responses only touched the surface of our responsibility and accountability to diversity and inclusion.

#### **Theme 4: Experiential Strategies Versus Straight Book Learning**

Developing leaders, whether faculty or staff, formed one of the central interview questions within this study. Nine of the ten deans responded in some way about leadership and professional development opportunities. Though they saw them as valuable, dean responses focused less on the theoretical underpinnings of leadership. What rose to the surface was the stress inducing, but empowering work of experiential learning. For the purposes of this study, I define experiential learning as actively participating leadership work which includes daily interactions, meetings, presenting and all the facets of a dean day-to-day work. In addition, experiential learning also incorporates the self-reflection and modification of learning from experiences. The importance of learning on the job or “trial by fire” highlighted the need for leaders to do the difficult work of stakeholder interaction in order to improve leadership effectiveness. Mentoring, adapting to change, and mediating conflict were the strategies that emerged within this theme. The leaders ability to manage personal and stakeholder emotion echoed throughout responses. Furthermore, this ability accentuated the need for exposing the leader to experiential learning in development programs.

Backgrounding the significance of learning by doing was participating in professional development opportunities. More than any other comment by the deans was advocating for professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. Time and again, comments emphasizing the benefits of professional development such as networking and exploring new ways to solve problems rang through. Robin commented on the relevance of gaining outside perspective from professional development conferences, “I think the more formal leadership training for administrators that I love is really something that you'd need to go to an outside group to get. You can really get away and kind of focus on relationships.” Shawn connected the opportunity of faculty development conferences with connecting faculty and staff together, “I believe very firmly that all staff and faculty positions will now require conferences. So one of my great pleasures when I was a faculty member is to go to the First Year Experience conference.” Shawn believed getting faculty to attend conferences to learn more about the student success and retention work was important in aligning his faculty with the staff that are often the front lines of the work. Clara focused heavily on professional development conferences as a way to network and help faculty and staff grow personally and professionally:

The person that's typing or answering the phone has aspirations to do something else and we are a higher education institution. It should be our job to figure out ways to approach them and help them progress. Move along what happens if they want.

For Clara, the idea of professional development conferences as a way to progress to the next level, whether that be a new job or opportunity was an important insight. She shared

an example of how the system within their state assisted with staff and faculty progression and the importance of funding such opportunities:

The System had seminars and workshops that would particularly focus on things that new deans need to know and be aware of and be concerned about. You are managing people who are smart and want to learn. They want to learn about themselves too. So let's figure out ways to help them do that. Let's figure out ways to continue their intellectual personal growth. And if the institution could support some of those things financially and just give administrators those tools, I think it would be a great thing.

Elena and Dwayne both referenced Harvard leadership opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators. Elena described her experience with those professional development programs:

They had the college send me off to the Harvard Higher Education Training Program which I did, and I enjoyed it and I also went to a wide leadership development workshop that I also attended. We meet with the upper administration pretty frequently.

Dwayne noted he would like to attend a conference like the Harvard leadership program, but the cost has prevented him from doing so. He was a bit more skeptical of the various external opportunities to leaders when the cost is too high. He referenced the increasing cost of support materials such as those from the Chronicle of Higher Education, "Do you get the Chronicle of Higher Ed every day? You read it? So they're trying to sell their products and one of them is something like, "How good presidents have gone bad or how

presidents have bitten the dust (joking).” I haven't bought it and I don't plan on buying it. I don't think those are real great lessons in leadership.”

All in all, attending professional development served as an essential foundation for experiential leadership development. Getting faculty and staff at conferences talking with colleagues, sharing stories, and learning how institutions are navigating the challenging times was an imperative step for preparing leaders. One element of the comments about professional development was the rising cost of such programs. The cost, and consequence for underrepresented leaders, is an issue I will comment upon in Chapter 5.

Another important element of leadership development focused on the experience of role-playing. Deans envisioned role-playing as the difference between knowing the path and walking the path of leadership. Hugh advocated for the importance of role-playing in leadership preparation:

I'm a big proponent of having a lot of experiential strategies versus straight, for lack of a better term, book learning. I often give the best example of where, you know, you can read case studies about an angry parent comes into your office and, you know, you read it and, “Okay, what would you do?” That's is different than actually facing an angry parent who is really in your face about something whatever the issue is and all of a sudden your blood pressure kind of goes up a little. Probably some your defense mechanisms go up versus, like I said, when you're reading the case study. Okay, I would do X Y and Z. Well it's easy to say that versus, you know, say an issue comes up on 3:30 on Friday afternoon.

Hugh stressed the need for leaders to place themselves in stressful situations to learn how to manage emotions in themselves and others. Elena also expressed the need for role-playing opportunities:

I've done some leadership work where you actually were in situations where you had to actually mediate between two people or had difficult conversations. So I would really emphasize roleplaying types of exercises. Certainly, case studies are very good for really digging into certain situations and working with colleagues and how would they have approached a situation of modeling that and talking through those issues I think is really, really important.

Elena believed, as Hugh did, that not enough leadership training focuses on the actual “doing” of leadership. Monica echoed the feelings of role-playing from the faculty perspective, “I personally think that's one of the things that's lacking in a lot of leadership training is they say, you know, you get a lot of rather difficult faculty situations but you never really get to what do you do about that.”

The concept of role-playing was an essential component to leadership development.

The last component of experiential leadership development centered on creating resources such as calendars and handbooks to help leaders navigate the institution and have the tools in hand to better lead. Elena expressed the challenges of learning to lead without such resources, “I kind of found my way, but there was no handbook, no map on how to do that.” The idea of having campus resources for leaders seemed like a basic principle for institutions. I was curious as to how she saw this principle and asked her to elaborate. She stated laughingly, “The first months of a new administrator’s life they're just learning all the acronyms for college because we know college can be complex. So,

yes that's a tool box that they need right?" Along those lines, Leon expressed the need for a checklist when meeting with new deans to help them learn about the challenges of leadership, "I think that a checklist can be developed that wouldn't be that complicated."

Monica shared her viewpoints about developing a calendar:

Yeah. Well I think something even as simple as having a, you know, call it calendar. But I mean it kind of is, you know, I mean even having something in place for me when I first started that said, "okay, every September 1st faculty have to submit annual reviews." It would be great if there was this calendar that said, "okay so this is due on September 1st." So like July 1st you should be sending out a reminder to faculty telling them that this is due September 1st and then you know an August 1st you should be preparing a committee who's going to be reviewing those things. So calendar guides us but it's the steps along the way the make the difference.

The deans referenced the importance for resources for new leaders to have at their desk or in their office to help guide them to navigate the challenges of the campus and to help them better understand the detailed work of the institution.

Professional development opportunities, experiential learning such as role-playing, and the creation of resources form our fourth and final theme. While conducting the research, I kept thinking about the leadership development opportunities I have participated in and whether they involved a role-playing element. The deans I interviewed had progressive levels of leadership experience. Most of the experiences they shared were not from what they learned during professional development. Those experiences were from work interactions with faculty and staff.

## **Leadership Strategies**

The strategies in this theme stressed mentoring, adapting, and managing. Leadership development was reported as a relational process and these three strategies fell within those processes. The importance of mentors believing in the deans when they felt alone and relying on support networks to balance work and life populated this theme. As importantly, adapting to change served as a necessity for leadership improvement. As expressed in Chapter 1, higher education is going through monumental change given some of the current social and political challenges. A leader's ability to adapt and create flexible approaches to stakeholders and problems highlighted this theme. Managing emotion encompasses the final strategy and connects directly to helping faculty and staff navigate the emotion accompanying that change. I will describe dean experiences to these three strategies.

**Mentor someone.** Deans expressed mentoring as essential for leadership development. They shared their stories of challenge and how mentoring eased the anxiety of learning to lead. Furthermore, as a strategy to prevent burnout, participants connected mentoring to support networks for work life balance. Monica's experience with progressing to the dean was a good example of mentoring:

I would say that I think the support is there if one asks for it. We don't have, that I'm aware of, sort of a systematic or structure that is in existence already. So it's not like, "hey there's a mentor." This is our mentoring program for new leaders that doesn't exist. I think that institutions should have a mentoring program for administrators. Especially if you're coming from different places you know in

different institutions even understanding the culture of a university or a particular college or just even the ins and outs of the structures.

Monica's emphasis on mentoring encapsulated many comments on the leader to mentor relationship. Even with the emphasis on mentoring, Monica cautioned about assigning mentors that do not have that relational tie, "I think even, you know, having those assigned mentors with a caveat because sometimes assigned mentors aren't really the best mentor for a particular person." Monica's comment highlighted the importance of mentors having some personal significance and relational association to the leader.

Robin's experience being a mentor tied into the other comments about learning by doing:

I have mentored a few people here already because we actually have several open deanships. We hired a series of deans right behind me and then we have a bunch of open deanships right now. My mentoring is all about on the job instantaneous learning. We check with, text, and email each other constantly. As a mentor, you want to connect them with other teams, or you want to connect them with other deans or you want to also connect them with other administrators, provosts and things like that.

Robin stayed connected to her mentees. This comment crosses themes in many ways as it demonstrated not only the frequency of communication from theme 2, but also highlighted the trial by fire mentality. Not all the deans had positive experiences with mentoring. Shawn struggled with the immediacy of leadership knowledge and lack of mentoring at his institution:

We must have relationships, so people feel capable to do the work that's in front of them with training and support and always a network of professionals as well

as mentoring. You almost have to come to a leadership position fully formed because if they don't like you, they fire you. You're almost a system or you're like an assistant coach now in the NFL. You know there's no real place for you to go and get mentoring and that's a hard thing.

He shared his institution will be moving toward more intentional leadership development programming because of leaders feeling alone and under lots of pressure, “For every new leader you're going to get a career coach and you'll do something like the leadership circle. I'm sure you're talking about those kinds of thing.” Helen focused on the relational side of mentoring in her answer, “I think you must really get to know each person that you are mentoring and that is the hard thing.” I asked her to describe what “getting to know” each person meant to her. I wanted to learn if she felt that component was about continual learning and relationships as it was for the other deans. She shared an example from a colleague she has been mentoring:

I think really getting to know each person that you're mentoring and where they want to go. And making sure that where they want to go is doable. So having a path for them and finding opportunities for them that they might not normally have. For example, I have two directors right now. One comes from a department management. I'm really teaching her the academic side of the house. Which is very, very different than a recruitment side.

Her next response brings our path back to leadership progression and elevates the relevance of mentoring, “You know, I was just lucky I came up as an associate dean, to executive associate dean, and now the dean. We have four or five new deans that are just thrown into the dean role.” Leon felt supported in his institution by the established

administrators. The provost and president have helped him with his leadership responsibilities:

As a dean, I have frequent access to both the university provost and the university president. So, the, the most central leaders of the university are people who really practice a sort of open approachable style. And so, I feel like when people ask a question I've been able to seek their advice and help when I've needed it.

Effective leadership involved participating as the mentee and mentor. Though deans did not specifically tell me who their mentor was coming into the leadership position, comments led me to believe leaders must play the leader and mentor role.

**Be adaptable and open to change.** Higher education is in the midst of fundamental change and deans commented on the relevance of accepting and using change in leadership expression. Hugh commented on the significant time of change higher education finds itself in and the importance of institutions to adapt:

And you know I think there's opportunities even in a down time like this, but it requires people to be much more creative and innovative. Doing things very differently than what we did, you know, literally. For most of my faculty, you know, they were born and raised in the 20th century and now face the 21st century which is very different. And we have to adapt to that. I think the institutions that adapt well have an opportunity. Those that don't I think what they're going to see is just kind of a continual slow decline. It's almost kind of like, you know, like you're in a rowboat and little holes keep popping up and springing water in and, you know, with the little holes. But you know eventually after about X amount of years, all of a sudden, you don't realize that boat is

sinking. And by then it's too late. And so, I think I've told people, you know, we have until 2026 until literally the cliff goes all over them on enrollments.

Hugh was worried about the future of public higher education and the inability of institutions to change to handle that future. He was the only dean to reference the enrollment decline predicted in 2026 and it scared him. I wanted to learn more about his fear so I asked Hugh to provide me an example of lack of change:

I think that my biggest challenge is trying to convince faculty and staff you know the necessity is change because we tend to be pretty comfortable in our worlds, our current roles unless there is a tornado coming and we can see it. It's hard for them to envision that. And as a result, you know, we're kind of like lagging behind the times because if you're taught the same way that your faculty taught you, you know, they certainly didn't use technology.

Hugh caution on the future of higher education and the importance of leaders accepting and utilizing change encompassed many of the other comments from the deans. Shawn addressed the strategy of being a change agent and the importance of adaptability and leadership:

Everything changes all the time, so that that would that would be I think a core piece of leadership training. Some people are able to adapt to that change and be happy and take it on as a new challenge and some people say I got to get I got to get going (leave).

Helen referenced the crucial nature of the leader accepting change:

I think it is also accepting when changes are made from a higher level. They affect you. One must try to find the positive in that. Accepting when people

either give you something or take something away that there is a reason for that and try to understand and communicate it.

I felt like the deans were referencing the need to see change as a positive and frame it in ways that empower faculty and staff. Leon also believed the ability to adapt was crucial to leadership effectiveness:

Another thing I think is crucial for leadership in higher ed, but probably across organizations is adaptability. Taking in new information and designing implementing changes to the way we operate so that we can thrive in different conditions then were in place in previous times.

All in all, the deans believed that the adaptability to the changing environment and issues was a central characteristic needed for effective leadership. Not only did effective leaders accept the change that happened all the time, they tried to not settle into monotony. The deans framed leadership as a way to move their colleges forward in times of crisis.

**Become a conflict manager.** Conflict management arose in dean responses and brought out the most emotion of all the interview questions. Two elements comprised conflict management. The first was the need to manage conflict often and openly. Accepting that difficult conversations will happen, and difficult situations are the learning environment for leaders was identified as the first step. The second component is the emotional work that almost always encompasses conflict management. More specifically, managing emotions of the leader as they manage the emotions of faculty and staff was paramount. These emotions can become heightened and leaders need to feel comfortable within those situations.

Many of the deans referenced the importance of developing the ability to manage conflict. The idea of becoming a conflict manager was a topic that came up during the research question on leadership development. Robin referenced the need for conflict management to be a routine part of leadership development, “Handling difficult conversations is high on my list (for leadership development). Conflict management, that sort of thing.” Robin did not provide any specifics, but referenced conflict management a few times within her interview. Shawn reflected his approach to framing conflict:

I think you need to embrace conflict understand it's a central part of our work life and figure out how we can have conflict in a positive way that leads to innovation rather than a destructive way where we don't feel positive about our lives.

Shawn’s response foregrounded the need to manage conflict personally and professionally. Marshall connected conflict management directly to a dean’s ability to manage people, “I see college failing these leadership positions because of their inability to manage their personal relationships. So much that they actually are not capable of doing the job of how to manage people.” Helen was the first dean to reference the association between conflict management and emotional intelligence:

I think helping people with emotional intelligence and conflict management and the soft skills are much, much harder to teach. But I think they're left out when you come to leadership programs.

Helen was not the only dean to reference emotional intelligence as a connection to conflict management. Hugh expressed the way in which emotional intelligence helps leaders prepare for the unwavering challenges they face:

As I say, you know, in any size organization, “shit happens.” It just happens and oftentimes at the most inconvenient time or the times you don't expect it. And there are times where I think having a high emotional intelligence really helps leaders versus, you know, not being prepared to deal with those situations.

Emotional intelligence, or the way in which leaders manage their emotion and the emotion in others, was an important connection to conflict management.

Taking as truth that emotional intelligence is a common leadership characteristic for conflict management, Clara shared her experience, again linking back to leadership progression with conflict management:

There are sometimes when you are more of a mediator and a conflict resolution approach is going to be better for you. When I started as Dean morale was very, very low. We had a number of conflicts that were bubbling up within specific departments between individuals. There had kind of a culture of incivility had developed where people simply were not as sensitive to how the things they said affected other people. I inherited a lot of conflict situations when I came in as Dean. Some of them have some really, really difficult. In one case it was a situation related to a very serious behavioral issue. I have a lot of experience actually having difficult conversations with people about sensitive topics. The importance of approaching those from an authentic place where you know I'm not afraid to tell somebody, “This behavior has to change because it's potentially destructive to the students for sure but it's also potentially destructive for you as an individual and for your colleagues around you.”

Elena shared her experience listening to department chairs struggle with the idea of conflict management:

I've been in administration long enough to know when I hear my chair's voice that they wish they had more practice dealing with difficult people and how to have to say no politely. Saying no and have everybody feel like they've one of those skills are things that we as academics don't often get trained in and the personnel aspects of leadership are the ones that take a lot of our time. We have to be able to have those difficult conversations.

Monica highlighted the importance of learning how to have difficult conversation in the midst of conflict go hand in hand. She speculated the inability to manage conflict prevents faculty and staff from considering moving into leadership positions:

I think also for a chairperson generally, people need a lot of help with how to deal with difficult situations, so conflict resolution in a way. You know there are lots of models out there for conflict resolution. But I guess what I've learned over the years is that you can or should ask in those difficult situations how you either get to a resolution or remove yourself from a situation if you need to do that. I personally think that that's (conflict) one of the things that keeps a lot of people out of administration because they don't want to have to deal with some of those difficult situations.

The sentiment from the deans about conflict management focused on the ability of leaders to go into conflict with a fearless approach and learn. Their experiences highlighted the need for leaders to see conflict as something positive that builds leader confidence.

## **Summary**

Within the experiential strategies versus straight book learning theme the idea of learning from doing was expressed by deans through professional development and role-playing. Strategies of mentoring, adapting, and managing conflict developed from dean responses. Leadership experiences focused on the leader's responsibility to mentoring, accepting and supporting the radical change occurring in higher education, and the difficult process of managing emotion within conflict management.

This chapter revealed the experiences of the deans and laid the foundation for the corresponding themes and strategies. The stories and reflections the deans shared with me were invaluable in how new leaders find success and learn from failure and how I can improve as a leader. That being said, in some cases I found myself with more questions than answers. For instance, certain dean comments did not rise to the level for placement into a theme or strategy but changed my view of leadership or impacted me personally. The final chapter will highlight some of the questions I uncovered and discuss some of my insights on these interviews.

**CHAPTER V**  
**DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS – SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS**  
**AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides a broad discussion of findings within the research. I will begin this chapter with a summary of the purpose of this study and research methodology. Second, I will discuss the findings of the study in three key areas: the research questions, existing literature, and theoretical framework. Outlining the implications for higher education leaders in public institutions will be the third objective. This study has some ramifications to the work of our leaders, and I will describe them in this section. Examining the limitations of this research will be the fourth objective. This study exposed some areas that warrant further investigation. I will conclude the chapter with a personal reflection. This dissertation journey has had a profound impact on my leadership perspective and skills. We will first begin with a review of the methodology and research questions.

**An Overview of Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the leadership strategies of academic affairs deans at four-year public institutions. This study sought to gain an understanding of how deans developed leadership strategies through their experiences. Specifically, I wanted to learn more about the experience of the leader that contributed to the development and use of characteristics and strategies in public higher education. By examining personal leadership journeys of each of the deans,

sought to uncover strategies and characteristics emanating from them. The objective was not to determine if the deans were effective leaders, but whether I could identify commonalities in their strategies and characteristics by hearing their stories.

Three core research questions guided this study.

1. What leadership strategies do academic deans utilize at four-year public institutions?
2. How have the experiences of deans contributed to their leadership strategies?
3. How can institutions improve the preparation and development of administrators?

These three research questions served as the foundation for the interview questions, analysis of data, and the classification of themes. I also referred to the research questions throughout every step of the research process. Now, I will connect these research questions through an analysis of the findings.

### **Analysis of Findings**

This section provides an analysis of the findings within three key areas: research questions, existing literature, and theoretical framework of Adaptive Leadership. The themes from Chapter 4 undergird these findings. First, I will outline the findings explicitly connected to the research questions. Next, I will turn attention to the existing literature and a discussion of the findings highlighting areas of overlap, such as the six leadership characteristics. Lastly, I will connect the findings to Adaptive Leadership, which served as the theoretical background of this study.

### **Findings Connected to the Research Questions**

This section discusses the findings as associated with the three core research questions. A combination of leadership expression, including both strategy and

characteristic combined with dean background, support the answers to these questions. I will provide a comprehensive overview of the finding in each question by aligning strategy, characteristics, and background to showcase some of the answers.

**Research question one.** *What leadership strategies do academic deans utilize at four-year public institutions?*

The focus of leadership strategy centers primarily on the deans and their methods of leading faculty and staff. As expected, I discovered an overabundance of strategy throughout the interviews. The first answer to this research question, however, is not simple; each of the leadership strategies the deans expressed varied based upon leadership experience and personal background. For example, the dean who possessed military expertise used strategies such as delegation and possessed an intricate understanding of power because of the military and higher education experience. The dean with private sector business experience, however, used management training principles with faculty and staff as a leadership strategy. For instance, she considered the return on investment a necessary part of decision-making. As importantly, each dean experience was rooted in the progression from the classroom to the conference room. They all possessed teaching experience and dedication for students, which opened the door to the leadership opportunity.

The second answer to the research question pinpointed the professional backgrounds of the deans to the development of leadership strategies. Deans discussed how mentors impacted their leadership expression. Whether it was a boss, a colleague, or a professor, personal stories helped develop those leadership strategies. I heard several stories about how mentors helped the deans avoid errors in communication, judgment,

and decision-making. I came to the quick conclusion dean strategy was aligned with what they learned from mentors. I found historical and relational roots to dean strategy. These roots may present further difficulty in making a change quickly in higher education leadership outcomes. If strategy and perspective are passed down over time, it may become more difficult to implement new ways of thinking and leading. Maybe part of the reason we have a difficult time changing the face of public higher education is because of the passing of leadership strategy from those mentors in another era? I will address this within the implication section.

The third answer to this research question coupled past mistakes to future successes in developing strategy. One dean shared a particularly personal story (I omitted from this dissertation to protect the dean's anonymity) that tested the limits of the leader. The dean used the experience as an opportunity to learn and communicate more effectively. I found mistakes were effective ways to develop leadership strategy. They are a useful way to develop leaders, and negative connotation to mistakes removes the effectiveness of leadership development. We, as a field, must find ways to value the mistake. The strategy the deans employed were a product of trial and error. Deans expressed challenging situations as the basis of leadership strategy development.

The final and most straightforward answer to the leadership strategy question were the specific strategies themselves, and I heard a lot of them. Part of the reason I decided to describe the strategy after the themes in Chapter 4 was to emphasize the value of these strategies. Strategies ranged from relational such as listening and consensus-building to communicative strategies such as framing, transparency, and managing a crisis. All the strategies in this study placed stakeholders at the center of leadership

expression. I found the development of leadership strategy essential to leadership, supervision, and management. In essence, the strategies became a leadership tool kit for the leaders to use with faculty and staff. For example, the strategies focusing on relationships were the most impactful. For leaders to influence individuals, the relationship was the necessity for effectiveness. In other words, the deans believed, without the relationship, other characteristics and strategies of leading became more difficult to implement. For instance, a lack of a trusting relationship with faculty and staff might make communicating with them less authentic and the tone of those efforts more negative. Furthermore, deans hired internally might have an easier time building relationships with stakeholders, while external candidates might initially struggle making those connections. As a result, the overall development of leadership strategies was imperative.

**Research question two.** *How have the experiences of deans contributed to their leadership strategies?*

The dean background played a significant role in this study. As described in the from “you are friends with them one day and boss the next” theme, all the deans I interviewed had a leadership background that was influenced by their personal and professional experiences. The deans were passionate and dedicated teachers. Because of the success in the classroom, the opportunity to lead came quickly to them. Some deans decided to move into administration because of the novelty of a new opportunity or the increased pay. Others had mentors who developed and encouraged them to move into leadership positions. Two of the deans came from business and military backgrounds, which gave them a different perspective on the role of leader. The dean in the military

had a more active leadership perspective. The lack of fear in talking about tough topics and challenging faculty and staff seemed more natural. Visibility by walking through the building and meeting with students was imperative for him. The business deans had a much more corporate look at the leadership process. They had a better understanding of the challenge of forcing faculty to change or economic perspectives of enrollment growth. I found one point to be true; each dean experience was unique. If a researcher wants to examine leadership strategy, the door to that examination opens by studying leadership background.

**Research question three.** *How can institutions improve the preparation and development of administrators?*

The leadership development question served as the most comprehensive of the three within this study. The answer to this question became apparent early in the data analysis process and had three components. First, I found an emphasis on learning to lead through interaction, and experience was more important than any conceptual and theoretical preparation. Leadership development is about getting into difficult situations and developing the skills to improve leadership, supervision, and management. Second, I found the leader to mentor connections essential. Many of the deans expressed a mentor as a contributing factor for the decision to go into leadership. Many of the mentors also served as a guide and a sense of stability during difficult times. Third, I found developing tools and resources to help a leader with strategy development, and navigation of the institution was critical. These tools ranged from manuals outlining acronyms on campuses to in-depth discussions of developing political and social capital. I also found access to these tools for leaders was where we began to separate the notion

of management and supervision from leadership. Many of the deans referenced the leadership development on their campuses focuses primarily on supervision and management. No doubt, learning to manage and supervise is essential. Nevertheless, the deans longed for leadership development from a visionary standpoint. They wanted an emphasis on leadership development as a means of seeing into the future and having specific tools to manage and supervise to get there.

I found the other answer to the leadership question centered on the balance between work and home and the emotional pressure of leadership work. One concept the deans referenced time and time again was the ability for leaders to manage their emotions in a highly stressful and demanding occupation. Does leadership take years off one's life? No easy answer exists, but I found the level of stress personally and professionally that weighed on these deans was paramount. I found leadership development programs must turn their attention to helping leaders manage emotions. To intensify this point further, I found deans felt their institutions often expected or demanded an institutional commitment, which highlighted a continual need to work. How do leaders in these demanding jobs, push back on institutions that emphasize work? I found leadership development must help leaders balance the pressure to work with the pressure to live stress-reduced and rewarding lives.

### **Findings Within Existing Literature**

Taking a comprehensive review of the existing literature and overlaying it into this study was a much easier prospect than I had initially thought. First, I will examine what Porterfield and Whitt (2016) described as historical shifts in higher education resounding "a steady drumbeat" of combustible, profoundly changing, and stressful

environment (p.11). I plan to underscore dean reactions to that environment. Second, I will connect the six leadership characteristics to dean responses. I will end this section with an overview of how dean experiences supported or rejected the notion of those characteristics.

The literature review encompassed some of the challenges varying from budget reductions to an increase in mental health concerns on public higher education. Moreover, the literature outlined the concern about the unpreparedness of leaders within higher education (Gonaim, 2016; Morris and Laipple, 2015). The deans highlighted a number of these challenges. I will outline some of these challenges in the theoretical framework section, but I found the continuing enrollment decline, budget reductions, and the current political environment of higher education brought about the most anxiety. A few comments were made about access and opportunity, performance-based funding, and increasing cost of a degree as well. I was more surprised about what did not surface during the interviews. Changing student demographics and improving student mental health had very few, if any, codes. I found the connection to leadership and challenges of mental health in higher education in the literature review, yet the topic did not surface within the interviews. Diversity was also an area where I expected more in-depth discussions related to these challenges. Instead, deans conveyed student demographic changes as a factor of difference, but none of the deans expressed the lack of students (or leaders) of color as a challenge for public higher education. Maybe the lack of urgency was because of the emphasis public higher education currently places on this challenge. All in all, dean responses supported many of the issues found in the literature review.

The second portion of this section examines the six characteristics of leadership found throughout my literature review. The six leadership characteristics were: (a) the relationship-driven leader, focusing on building nurturing relationships; (b) the communicative leader, using listening, speaking, questioning and learning to solve problems; (c) the diverse-minded leader, balancing self-reflection with the power of difference; (d) the change-oriented leader, thriving within the changing face of higher education; (e) the politically savvy leader, motivating, inspiring, and deconstructing institutional barriers to change; and (f) the virtuous leader, guiding thoughts and actions through ethical principles. Each of these leadership characteristics accounted for some level of leadership strategy. Let us examine them one at a time.

**Relational Leaders.** I found the deans in this study were relational.

Relationship-building was like vehicles of influence. The ability to build a relationship with faculty and staff included listening, trust, and follow-through. They communicated their leadership expression in relational contexts. I did not hear one strategy that did not have some emphasis on the leader to stakeholder relationship. I thought someone would talk about disconnecting a decision from the person, making decisions based away from relational connection, or placing the institution above the needs of the stakeholder, but those discussions did not occur. Instead, the deans shared experiences of relationship-building with stakeholders to shape opportunities, deliver difficult feedback, and minimize the gap between institutions and people. Even the business deans spoke mostly about relationships as a means of engaging. In summation, the relational leader was alive and well in this study. They viewed relationships as a way to preserve their legacy. The relational leader, by far, was one of the most relevant leadership characteristics. Much

like adaptive leadership theory argues leaders need to be active; I found no doubt they must be relational as well.

**Communicative Leaders.** I found the deans in this study were communicative. First, unlike the relational leader, the deans had a love-hate perspective on communication. The avenues the deans used to communicate varied by faculty and staff. For instance, communication to faculty was nuanced, participative, and, at times, felt gentle. I found the communicating with faculty was different than communicating with staff. For faculty, the communication often went unheard and centered upon the notion of participation. For staff, communication was more directive and centered upon the idea of obligation. These variances in communication formed the basis for a two-level approach to communicating in which the leader must understand the differences between faculty and staff. One could argue that the communicative leader needs to communicate differently with all sorts of groups for effectiveness. I would say the argument is real. Nevertheless, as expressed in Chapter 4, the dean responses eluded to the gap between these two groups. As a result, some deans took a positive approach to communication as a leadership tool, while others saw it as a potentially dangerous tool if not conducted properly.

The second element I found in the communicative leader were the specific ways the deans communicated to faculty and staff. The strategies of visibility and transparency are good examples. I also found characteristics, such as using questions to learn, and listening was high on the list. All of these characteristics were important. The surprise for me was that visibility and transparency were high on the communicative leader list of strategies. The deans would often get out of their offices and attend events, talk with

students in the union, greet associate deans in their offices, and make small talk at the grocery store if they saw faculty or staff there. I did not find visibility much within the existing literature.

The deans were also overtly transparent with information. They did not buy into the idea that information gave them additional power over others, nor did they hold information from faculty and staff. Sure, certain situations prohibit leaders from knowing and sharing all information. Hearsay connected to personnel decisions might be a good example. These deans, nonetheless, shared as much information as they could as often as they could. I found one factor as paramount; the lack of communication was by far the worst thing a leader could do. The codes of “danger” and “minefield” were used as a response to a lack of communication and the leader. A leader must be communicative to be effective.

**Diverse-minded Leaders.** I heard this characteristic expressed throughout the interviews, but the findings were difficult to untangle. The existing literature highlighted the need for diverse leaders to think about how difference empowers higher education leader and their environments. As expressed in Chapter 4, these interviews certainly showcased some of these elements with dean dedication and passion toward the cause as most important. What I did not expect was the discussion about differences from a team perspective with empowering individuals of color on our campuses as secondary. I longed for more discussion about access and opportunity for students, building diverse environments through searches, and providing safe and welcome spaces for stakeholders. These discussions happened at a much lesser frequency in the interviews, and I found myself wondering how the participants felt on these issues.

Even though I felt the longing for more in-depth discussions on diversity, I was pleasantly surprised to find the deans emphasized community building as a way to create more diverse environments. The deans often talked about the community and belonging as elements of diversity. I found these aspects of diversity to be rewarding. I could also hear how the deans valued community ways in which the diverse-minded leader could bring faculty and staff together for a common cause.

Overall, I longed for lots of discussion on the influence and importance of diversity, including increasing opportunities for leaders of color. I expected to hear more about ways in which higher education suppresses these opportunities for faculty and staff. What I ended up with were responses showcasing individuality as a means for increasing perspectives to solve problems. I will talk more about what I did not find regarding diversity in the implications for practice.

**Change-oriented Leaders.** The existing literature identified change within higher education as commonplace, and I found this identification true throughout the interviews. As the literature supported, the deans in this study both acknowledged and adapted to change. Many of them referenced the inability of the “system” of higher education to change with the times. References to the time-consuming processes of faculty governance showcased some of that struggle. The deans believed change was something to grab ahold of and use to suppress fear and excite faculty and staff. The deans also viewed change as a prophet of what is to come. They believed enrollment declines, and societal pressure would force public institutions to change, and wanted to communicate those fears to faculty and staff as a way to improve processes and policies. The strategies of adaptability and flexibility undergirded many of the responses put forth

by the deans. Adaptability and flexibility are important for the change-oriented leader. Beyond a doubt, the deans were change-oriented leaders; I almost felt as though they were being forced into it by the challenges placed upon higher education.

**Politically-Savvy Leaders.** I found the interviews not as expressive about the politically-savvy leader. Maybe my positionality prevented the deans from feeling comfortable enough to share their insights on working to resolve problems or push initiatives through governance processes behind the scenes. A couple of the deans touched on stories of navigating power. For example, Robin offered her struggle with Human Resources, “One of the hardest things is when you’re kind of told frequently by Human Resources, “don’t tell them this part, just tell them that part.” This statement showcased Robin’s struggle to hold information as they may have unintended consequences. Furthermore, it highlighted the political nature of decision-making and the consequences of making those decisions.

Whether through support from a provost or trying to align with a politically powerful faculty member, deans described some pitfalls of the politically-savvy leader. That said, they also did not share much about how to inspire and motivate faculty. The closest I came to glean this was through incentivization. Incentivizing is essential, but increasing pay for faculty and staff is different than using words and actions to motivate them. The closest expression to motivation was a couple of dean references to the importance of family time to our work as educators. No doubt, having a space to call your own, and the ability to put home in front of work can be motivating. I will share more about my thoughts on how to incorporate family into the motivation in the personal

reflection section. Nevertheless, the deans were politically-savvy in the way they expressed their processes for problem resolution.

**Virtuous Leaders.** The virtuous leader within the literature review focused on the notion of doing what is right over wrong. What came through loud and clear was the lack of ego as a characteristic for great leaders. Leaders talked about civility, humility, and taking the blame for a situation. They believed leaders must take responsibility for things they may not even participate in to protect others. Nevertheless, the deans felt their egos were the greatest danger to their leadership effectiveness. They also believed the ego could be the most significant asset for success. I was surprised to hear as much about the ego. For that reason, I emphasized minimizing the ego as a strategy for progressing into leadership in Chapter 4. I thought about coaches and how their large egos help them make difficult decisions and to stay the course during a challenging time. Conversely, the deans expressed the relationships with family and stakeholders as a way to navigate those challenging times. I found the lack of ego as a strong characteristic for the virtuous leader in public higher education.

### **Findings Within Theoretical Framework – Adaptive Leadership**

As I conducted the interviews for this study, I continuously considered how the dean responses aligned with my theoretical framework of adaptive leadership. More specifically, I thought about the three pillars of adaptive leadership: leading as an active process; technical problems and adaptive challenges; and leadership behaviors as deans shared their experiences. My theoretical framework grounded my data analysis in a few ways. First, many of the themes and strategies within this chapter focus on leaders acting. Comments about convening meetings, sending email communication, or

managing conflict, projected the notion of actively leading. Second, one interview question asked the deans to discuss what they feel are some of the common challenges facing leaders in public higher education. Many of the responses to that question exposed technical problems and adaptive challenges within the field. The issues that arose most frequently were higher education enrollment declines, budget reductions, and the challenges of our current political environment. Lastly, were the leadership behaviors in adaptive leadership. I will identify some of the dean comments that support the ideas of getting on the balcony, identifying adaptive challenges, regulating distress, maintaining a disciplined attention, and protecting voices from below.

**Pillar 1: Active leadership.** I found leadership is an active process (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Getting involved in day-to-day processes whether they are face-to-face interactions, convening meetings or managing conflict form the first pillar of adaptive leadership. Though dean responses did not directly refer to active leadership, their experiences highlighted the need for leaders to become active in the process of leading. Viewing the themes and strategies again is an easy way to see active leadership come to life. That being stated, one comment from Helen represented a leader's call to action, particularly when addressing an emergency:

I think knowing when something is an emergency and acting is important. And acting swiftly. Especially if it's harming students or faculty instead of ignoring it or saying, "oh this is how he is you know." That doesn't seem to me as acceptable.

Helen's comment underscored the active nature of leadership. I would argue her comment articulates the type of action leaders must take on a day-to-day basis. The

question for a leader is not whether they need to be active, but whether the action has a clear or ambiguous solution. The clear or ambiguous solution is at the heart of distinguishing the technical problem and adaptive challenge.

**Pillar 2: Technical problems and adaptive challenges.** The research question, “When you think about the current “state” of higher education, what challenges do new leaders struggle to navigate?” targeted the deans to articulate some of the chronic and pervasive challenges they have faced in higher education. Deans responses highlighted the imminent enrollment decline of 2025, continual budget reductions, and lack of access and opportunity. Interestingly, the comments on these questions were accompanied by genuine worry and frustration. Emotion played a large role in many dean responses, but the answers to this question seem to bring out more emotion. For example, Leon called the challenges in public higher education minefields, “Academics today, their campuses today are minefields and man there's mines everywhere and even good leaders can do stuff and get blown up.” Leon’s comment about minefields summarized the sense of urgency and personal danger he felt leaders find themselves. Let us take a closer look at dean responses in each of these areas using our theoretical framework as a guide.

***Enrollment decline in 2025.*** Hugh identified the enrollment decline specifically. I could tell by his response he was worried and frustrated:

Basically, you know, the demographers have told us that by 2025 or 2026 we're going to have enrollment cliff because, you know, if you literally go back 18 years that was when the Great Recession occurred, and people stopped having babies. So, universities don't have that natural pipeline that we used to have. Everyone is literally trying to get a piece of the pie and it is getting smaller and

smaller [showed me his hands getting closer together]. And so we're all trying to grapple with a smaller pie.

Hugh's comment eluded to the adaptive challenge of enrollment growth. The enrollment decline encompasses issues such as competition, institutional identity, and advocating for additional monetary support for public higher education. These problems do not have clear solutions as they involve lots of factors. Helen referenced this enrollment decline and referenced the need to right size the institution:

Enrollment is always an issue and I think we're in a mindset at a few universities have changed this sort of mindset now that bigger is better. And you need to figure out what's the right size for you. And sometimes it's not big but then that means cutting programs cutting staff.

Helen's comment showcases how institutional identity and strategic enrollment planning are another set of challenges linked to the enrollment decline. The decision to right size an institution might seem straightforward, but it also sets off a chain of events which are adaptive. Dwayne also addressed the challenges with enrollment decline and competition:

But, you know, in my state, we have been basically cut in half over the last 20 years and that absolutely affects our budget. At the same time, as you know, the direct from high school cohort is going down in my state and a number of other states. So are markets getting smaller every year. We've got very highly resourced private institutions who can throw money, they have a high tuition discount rate which is so significant that they're going to woo students that I would love to attract. Even with my low tuition I can't do it. So there's a whole

bunch of things going on and will probably keep going. But there is again, there's a number of very serious factors. This is not perceived; it is reality.

Dwayne's response was fraught with frustration. I sensed, on the one hand, his lack of power to change the enrollment projection. On the other hand, I felt he had some ideas on how to attract students. The problem was recruitment is not an exact science, hence, it could be viewed as an adaptive challenge. The enrollment decline was the first and most critical challenge facing higher education.

*Continual budget reductions.* The second challenge exposed throughout the interviews was directly connected to the enrollment decline and, equally as complex, the continual cuts coming reigning on four-year public institutions. Robin maintained, "Budgets is a big one (challenge) right now. The lack of state support. How do we work with legislators and the public to highlight what we're about?" Shawn accepted his position after a budget reduction on his campus, "I come in a moment after a huge budget crisis." He lamented, "managing the budget on your campus to the politics in your state seems like a circular structure." Marshall also addressed the challenges with budget reductions:

One of the tradeoffs that we fight over are budget cuts or whatever we have to cut.

We make the cuts thinking about the least harm done to the whole organization and not necessarily to your specific department or faculty and staff you supervise.

Marshall's response centered upon not only the complex tradeoffs that occur with budget reductions, but also the faculty and staff that become part of the process. These faculty and staff serve as a significant element within the concept of adaptive leadership which I

will address more closely in the responses to the leadership behaviors. Clara also referenced the budget cuts and their impacts on morale:

The continued budget cuts and the lack of pay increases just added to morale. So when I started as dean morale was very, very low. We had a number of conflicts that were bubbling up within specific departments between individuals. A kind of a culture of incivility had developed where people simply were not as sensitive to things they said affected other people and how bitter cynicism was affecting college as a whole.

As Clara noted, budget reductions also have an impact on faculty and staff morale thus placing increasing emphasis on leadership behaviors. Monica expressed similar challenges:

Well definitely the budgetary constraints are tough. They're really tough because I think a lot of what the other challenges are led back to that because all of us have been in higher ed where, you know, money is flowing. You can do all these innovative things that we want to coach and teach. We can do all of these things and everybody is happy, and students are succeeding and then you know in those difficult budgetary times all of a sudden we can't necessarily be too innovative and we're tightening belts that go way beyond.

One could argue the budget reductions are more of a technical problem than an adaptive challenge given the solution is clear; allocate more money to public higher education and the that problem is solved. Conversely, the references to the political environment and the populous view of higher education paints a different picture. Adding more money to higher education might mean making a reduction in another area. Adding money also

means influencing politicians that higher education is worth the investment. On the surface, budget problems might seem technical, but I would argue it remains an adaptive challenge. Budget reductions was the second challenge commented on by the deans. These issues again focus more on adaptive challenges versus technical problems.

*Political Environment.* The third challenge the deans commented on was the current political environment. Even though I interviewed deans in various states, the sentiment seemed to reflect a lack of state support for public higher education. Marshall talked about the need to advocate to politicians without sacrificing our personal authenticity:

And then on a practical level there's challenges, right? People want to do more and need to be part of the culture war. We need a more effective Republican state and federal government, or we will continue to see financial trouble for our institutions. We have to balance that with what you might want to say politically and what is wise to say [laughing - because of he feels people say things to get things]. In a public forum, you know. I mean without selling out your values if that's the important thing. Right? Now you should be able to articulate your values and stand by them. But you need to be able to do it in a way that is that is also open for further viewpoints or criticism.

Marshall believed leaders can tend to sacrifice their authenticity for political support. I was curious as to whether the lack of political support was a technical problem or a symptom of the adaptive challenge that higher education is placed into. I asked Marshall to talk more about the issue:

We need to respond to the political moment, and I think it's crucial. I mean that is the thing that our university certainly has been. Take being more inclusive, more equitable. So we have to think about, "How do you create that when we need to divorce it from individual politics or policy or ideology?" And look at this from a symptomatic perspective, right? I you could say you're very bright and come from a middle-class institution. Put it this way, if we have developed processes and policies that are certainly not very supportive of the kind of people we have on our campuses, how do we develop a sense of culturally sensitivity.

Marshall's comment was relevant for me. Without a political environment to support the types of work we do in higher education; how do we champion those causes without fear of political ramification? His problem centered upon the idea that higher education institutions must resemble the political environment in which they inhabit. Yet, his frustration championed the notion of difference with our institutions leading the way. This political frontline, given the complex factors and multiple players felt like an adaptive challenge. Clara also commented on the political environment. She did so in a way that referenced the varied skills of a leader:

I don't tend to think of it as politics because I'm not, you know, behind the scenes trying to manipulate people into various things. But what I'm trying to do is gain an understanding of what people are looking for what they want. And how to best put the pieces together. So I think helping them to understand there are some times where you have to be a strong leader and you have to provide direction. There are sometimes when you are more of a mediator and a conflict resolution approach is going to be better for you. There are other times when

collaboration has been works. So really trying to help them understand what are the tools available to me and what situations do I try to apply those.

Clara's comment underscored the notion of leaders working to solve technical problems and adaptive challenges in various ways. Her comment also enlightens the notion of active leadership in this process. I wanted to learn more about how the political environment connected to other issues:

I think that gosh, I mean right now we're in such a perfect storm of problems with higher education. You know there's a lack of political support. There is job market at least in our area that is so hot that employers are telling people you don't need a degree. We will hire you before you finish. I'm hearing that more and more that employers are trying to go after students in their senior year and get them before they leave degreed.

Clara's follow-up comment signified that these challenges in higher education are indeed adaptive challenges in that the interconnect much like a spiderweb. I found myself asking if the processes we complete within specific departments of higher education are technical problems and the complex challenges are adaptive challenges. In essence, the higher one views the problem, the more adaptive it might become? This question is something I will discuss in the next chapter.

**Pillar 3: Six leadership behaviors.** Six leadership behaviors: getting on the balcony; identifying adaptive challenges; regulating distress; maintaining disciplined attention; giving work back to the people; and protecting voices from below served as the third pillar within adaptive leadership. The deans offered numerous examples that fit

within the framework of these behaviors. Responses showcased some of the strategies that fit within the adaptive leadership third pillar.

*Getting on the balcony.* The deans offered a few examples of when it is important to stepping away, reexamining our actions, and gaining perspective about challenging issues and problems (Northouse, 2019). Marshall described a situation in which his decision-making required a moment of reevaluation:

We also need to recognize the very same attribute that is strong in in one moment might be a problem in the next faculty and staff situation. The ability to make decisions and stick with them is important as a leader. But it can become a problem if you never revisit your decisions as you attempt to be participatory with them.

Marshall's comment highlights the importance of stepping away to revisit a decision that impacts faculty and staff. Clara described her experience of changing her leadership style depending on the situation:

I would try to help them understand how leadership strategies need to differ depending on the situations that you're in. And so, I mean really, it's kind of a contingency style of leadership. If you understand people you can fairly quickly understand how your behavior needs to change in response to each individual but also in response to each situation.

The flexibility Clara refers to can come from the moment of reflection and stepping away from the issue personally and professionally. Helen offered her perspective on how a leader must gain perspective through emergency versus non-emergency:

So, I think figuring out what is truly an emergency and what is not. So, I applied these rules in my life and I use them every day. And the first one is “Did anybody die?” And that helps me frame the emergency and that's it. It's not important if someone didn't die.

I asked for some clarification on how that mantra helps her to gain perspective. She provided an example of a local hospital in a collaborative program with their institution:

I think you must see the bigger picture and so, you know, if something happens in my college, I see how it affects everyone else. So, for example we have a hospital associated with us and very few people stayed in the hospital. But if I know something is going on at the hospital, I can see how that can trickle down to affect all the colleges.

Helen thinks of problems in the sense of urgency. She gains clarity by thinking about how critical an issue truly is within the grand scheme of things. These comments serve as examples of the need to step away from a situation, do some self-reflection, and gain an overarching perspective on the situation prior to acting.

***Identifying adaptive challenges.*** One of the most important actions adaptive leaders must navigate is the identification of adaptive challenges (Northouse, 2019). As noted earlier, public higher education is riddled with adaptive challenges. Some of the adaptive challenges demonstrated in pillar 2 offer good examples behind leadership thinking of adaptive challenges. Two comments pinpointed the deans attempt at identifying adaptive challenges. Clara outlined the difficulty in gaining understanding from faculty concerns:

Second to that would then be trying to help them understand the situations that they find themselves in and really digging in on a case by case basis to say, “okay, I’ve got this faculty member over here that’s creating conflict in the department. Okay, well let’s talk about that let’s figure it out. Let’s understand that faculty member’s constraints concerns whatever.” Trying to get to a point of understanding.

Figuring out the faculty member’s concerns is an adaptive challenge because of the emotional and situational factors included within them. Shawn also described a leader’s competence as means of understanding how to diagnose a problem and come to a solution:

So I think you have to be competent and you have to be competent with politics and you have to be competent with the budget and you have to be competent, um, with all those thousand decisions you make in a day. Then there’s this other scope of work that I try to get a read on and these problems can get too gooey.

Shawn’s response showcases how decision-making connects to adaptive challenge identification. One can find it challenging to make decisions when problems are complex. Leaders want to demonstrate their ability to make decisions in complex situations. Identifying adaptive challenges is the first step on deciding how to proceed with an issue or problem.

***Regulating distress.*** Adaptive leaders understand how to provide stakeholders an equilibrium of emotion. Faculty and staff struggle to balance the emotion of change. As a result, adaptive leaders help those individuals find some steadiness in a world of change. Deans provided some examples of regulating distress during the interviews.

Monica described the emotion that sometimes accompanies change and her perspective of modeling positivity:

And you know maybe some people are happiest in their miserable place, but I personally am not. And so, we talk a lot in the office about, you know, just being positive and not letting things get to you too much. Understanding that we're a service unit even though we're the you know the dean's office.

Dwayne referenced the difficulty when a leader does not manage emotion or regulate distress and the how the lack of information contributes to increased anxiety or exacerbates the problem:

I forget I need to be reminded that, in the absence of information, faculty and staff but particularly faculty will fill the void with darkness. They will sometimes get suspicious or feel rejected or not you know. And so, you need to constantly make sure there's no void that they're wondering about. So, so I think that's part of the communication the interpersonal skills and then I guess, you know, strategy. You really do have to worry about buy-in.

Dwayne's comment highlighted the connection between a leader's lack of communication and inability to regulate distress.

Another aspect of regulating distress is developing safe spaces. Some of the dean responses referred to creating those spaces for faculty and staff to talk with them.

Monica referenced that she, "keeps an open door." Elena stated many of her faculty and staff, "come over and ask questions many times." Leon emphasized the need to be available and also maintain a sense of listening as means to creating a safe space to accept feedback, even when the decision might already be made:

I think the importance of taking with people and listening to people or their decisions. Even if, as a leader, you go into a situation in the back of your mind knowing you're pretty confident you know what the ultimate decision will be. Much of the strategies and themes within this chapter highlighted the skills of listening and trust as means to manage that emotion. Regulating distress is an imperative part of the leadership process.

*Maintaining disciplined attention.* Adaptive leaders need to stay focused on the goals of a department and division, even as adaptive challenges and technical problems increase in urgency around them. Not as many responses from the deans showcased maintaining a disciplined attention. Elena described the relevance of working with all departments to keep them on the same page and help them understand the reasons things were happening, "I made a tour of all the departments and I showed them very carefully what we're talking about why are we doing this." Robin referenced the importance of leaders completing tasks as a way to maintain a disciplined attention:

It is important knowing how to implement changes and carry those through to the end point. Often you do a good job of helping leaders see opportunities and seeking ideas and generate those big ideas but then following this through and thinking about how to actually make those happen is hard. For sure actions and getting things done. I really think that one of the things that happens is that you have good ideas. You see the shiny thing out there and hearing what you got.

But it's really in the implementation where the rubber hits the road.

Clara discussed the importance of follow-through as a basis for trust so other faculty and staff know you will get things done:

Do your job with integrity. But I also have trust that you're going to do what you say you're going to do. That when you can't do what you say you're going to do. You let me know when your, oh, I guess, upfront and honest about what you can and can't get done.

These comments showcase the importance of, first, staying focused on an initiative or task. Second, the comments highlight the social capital that often occurs when a leader proves they can complete a task on time.

*Giving work back to the people.* A leader needs to be able to provide autonomy to faculty and staff to help them learn how to lead and to provide a sense of ownership of their work. Deans referenced the need to give work to the individuals they supervised. Robin outright acknowledge an effective leader, “trusts faculty and staff to do their job.” I asked her to elaborate a bit about where that acknowledgement originated:

Trust in your people and have respect for their expertise. I think far too often as universities we tend to have unbelievably smart people with a lot of expertise reside within our walls, but we tend to say "oh let's go look for a consultant somewhere else and let's find that system from some vendor or something like that." I think we need more respect for the expertise that's already present inside of our institutions.

Marshall commented on how power needs to transpose from the leader to the follower, “People are willing to make things work. You can give people the power.” I asked him to elaborate a bit about the concept of power as it pertained to delegation:

It is very important for them to reinforce my leadership by making their own decisions. We get together to make decisions together. Sometimes they are the

decisions I initially wanted to make. To make an argument to me. I can then make a decision knowing it came from the team. Let them make decisions that are in their power to make. The more they own the process and willing to work harder to achieve goals.

Leon stated echoed Marshall's comment about the work coming from the people empowering the leader:

I think an academic leader that is trying to force things all the time is creating more challenges for himself or herself down the road. You want faculty to remain vibrant and engaged. And if you just ignore them, they're going to become demoralized and, and then you're not going to get good ideas flowing.

These comments showed how a leader must engage followers to have them feel included in projects and initiatives. The involvement allows them to take ownership in the initiative. Giving the work back to the people is a way for the leader to build team and belonging in the followers.

***Protect voices from below.*** Another important element of leadership is using their positionality to project voices of followers that do not have the platform. Moreover, leaders must utilize their power in ways that either empower others or allow them to speak truth to power without repercussions. Elena talked about how she tried to help her followers feel more like colleagues:

And so, I really feel like their advocate and their colleague rather than their boss. And I try to convey that I'm much as I said earlier, I'm not sure once you put the label on they feel comfortable. And I'm not a big power person. I don't I don't like to be that person.

Marshall expressed his intent of eliminating his sense of power as dean, “Get rid of it and your identity needs to be equal to or no power with faculty and staff. Now let's make sure other voices are heard and factors of equity discussion that leads to some increase in equity great.” Many of the comments from the I worry sometimes my associated deans look too much like me theme showcased protecting those underrepresented voices in our public universities. These additional comments add onto many of the comments found within this chapter.

Adaptive Leadership is only one of many theoretical perspectives on leadership. Other leadership theories that espouse trait, behavioral, and situational variables would also provide a backdrop to this study had I selected them. Adaptive Leadership, for me, provided an applicable approach that tackles the problems which require action, the solution exists, and getting to the solution is key. Leadership work encompassing management, in many ways, is a channel for finding the resolution of the technical problem. Adaptive Leadership also incorporates many of the adaptive challenges expressed in this dissertation, such as enrollment issues, the hierarchical nature of public higher education, and the changing student demographics and corresponding difficulties such as mental health, food insecurity, and other factors. We now turn our attention to the implications for leaders in public higher education.

### **Implications for Leaders in Higher Education**

This study revealed a few implications for new leaders in higher education. First, is the importance of developing leaders less from a theoretical and book-oriented perspective and more from an experiential perspective. The emphasis on role-playing versus conceptual study came up throughout the interviews and had implications,

particularly for public higher education. As noted in Chapter 4, dean responses highlighted the need for leaders to possess the increased emotional intelligence to navigate contentious situations. As importantly, forcing new leaders into challenging situations helps to balance the emotional baggage that often comes along with leadership expression. Further research should examine the pervasiveness of leadership development programs that highlight the management of emotion and the situational circumstances leaders in public higher education find themselves navigating.

The emotional tax leaders pay leads me to the second implication for public higher education leaders; research should begin to focus on the emotional cost of leading. Academic deans in this study discussed the difficulty of balancing home and work. Too often, our discussions turned into the pressure of increasing work time and minimizing family time. This sacrifice may originate in the massive amount of work on leaders plates combined with the burden of navigating enrollment and budget hazards. How do we better help our leaders balance work and home responsibilities? An even more critical question must answer how we begin to turn away from the ideal worker norm in higher education. As our recruitment pressures mount and enrollment declines, leaders in public higher education must learn how to disconnect from work or face the physiological impacts of leadership.

A third important implication for higher education leaders is the examination of the difference a hierarchy has upon faculty and staff. The idea of tenure, shared governance, and the long history of the academy has an impact on the preparation of the leader. Interview questions about how deans lead faculty and staff showcased a significant difference in managing and supervising staff and faculty. Though I

understand the difference in obligations between faculty and staff, I wondered how much each group understands the other. Do staff understand the requirements placed upon faculty regarding teaching load and research? Do faculty understand the administrative pressure placed upon staff to grow enrollment and retain students? For example, I wondered how many programs exist on our campuses that educate staff about such issues. Moreover, I found this hierarchy exists. We need to consider how we begin to break it down, particularly if mentors and others pass these ideals of class and status down over time.

Fourth, a further examination should focus on the impact of business approaches and corporatization have within public institutions of higher education and leadership. More and more, higher education leaders see the effects of corporate leadership strategies. Look no further than at institutions such as Arizona State, Western Governors, and Southern New Hampshire University as examples of how business approaches and new ways of thinking are changing the face of higher education. These nimble institutions are working to provide opportunities and access to students and deliver a veer from the positions locked in traditional academe. Further research should examine such approaches and connections to corporatizations. One could argue that corporatist methods are just what traditional higher education needs at this time.

Fifth, leaders need to understand their positionality in the leadership role. Race, ethnicity, and gender were not discussed in the depth that I expected. Furthermore, I found myself thinking about the discrepancy of our attention to diversity within public institutions and the lack of depth in responses from deans. One dean, Shawn, expressed,

what I felt, was the most specific response to the diversity interview question. He focused on the role of women in leadership positions:

And in that context, women have a very difficult role to play because of the way we ascribe gender to that leadership question. So, you can take like Hillary Clinton when she cried on the campaign trail. That's a really important moment. She is probably the most competent political leader of our generation. If you look at what she did and yet people think she was not emotional enough. So, when she showed emotion, she's too emotional. So, women have a really hard I think because of the way we treat gender norms.

I longed for more discussions that centered upon specific groups of individuals, such as women and leaders of color. One dean of color expressed the importance of being the same person at home as at work. This authenticity is often easier for privileged individuals. Research must assess ways privileged leaders have an easier time maintaining authenticity juxtaposed to minoritized leaders who find themselves changing their appearances and approaches to fit into the established systems of higher education. Moreover, further research must assess the positionality and the accountability of privileged leaders championing diversity with institution type. Whether public or private, leaders support or push back against those systems. Further research should focus on those dichotomies.

Finding solutions to complex problems provides the sixth implication to leaders. Leaders must explore new ways to solve increasingly complex problems. From an adaptive leadership perspective, how does the magnitude or urgency of the problem dictate whether something is technical or adaptive? For instance, a chancellor may see

the lack of transfer students tied to an institutional identity, which is a broad, expensive, and complex issue in higher education. From an Enrollment Services staff perspective, the lack of transfer students might tie to processes and policies such as getting credit evaluation to prospective students or eliminating a transfer fee. These varying perspectives require leaders to solve problems in innovative and entrepreneurial ways. Further research should focus on those problems and leadership approaches in viewing and solving them.

### **Limitations**

I found a few limitations while conducting the research. The first limitation highlighted the notion of leadership presence. Because the interviews were one-on-one audio and video, and I did not observe the deans in action, it was difficult to assess whether they had leadership presence. The only assessment of leadership presence occurred in the verbal responses the deans used to answer the questions, responses to challenging problems, and references to how they led faculty and staff. I characterized some of the deans having “leadership speak.” I define leadership speak as a way of communicating verbally with minimal discourse markers, such as um or you know. Others spoke with confidence and certainty, which made me feel like I could learn so much from them. I found it challenging, however, to assess what those experiences meant to me and wondered about the impact leadership presence had on the strategies in this study. In other words, would high leadership presence have more impact on the leadership strategy? Leader presence did not appear in any of the codes for this study, and I struggled to measure the impact.

Second, much of the research in the literature highlighted conceptual approaches to leading. This notion of theoretical learning was one of the most significant dissatisfiers to the deans. They valued conceptual knowledge but believed practicing leadership skills and strategies was lacking. Because the experiences of the deans were grounded in conceptual backgrounds, I struggled to connect their leadership development experiences to the study outside of professional development opportunities. The stories they did share about challenging interactions and problems were so rewarding. I longed for more of them.

Third, little research incorporated the impact of mental health on leadership thought and action. The deans shared experiences and stories, but never disclosed challenges with depression and anxiety, for instance, on their ability to lead. I could tell, in some of their reflections, they were having a difficult time managing the emotion in their jobs. Furthermore, I sensed the emotion spilled over into their personal lives. I thought back to my counseling training about how we need to care for ourselves before we can care for others. I wondered about this aspect for the deans I interviewed. I missed this opportunity in my research. Further research must examine the impact of mental health on leaders in public higher education.

Fourth, I did not research the impact of leadership expression in private, community, and technical college institutions. Many of the challenges public higher education faces are relatable across institution types. Do academic deans in these institutions feel the same pressures? Do they possess or qualify the same leadership strategies? Does a hierarchy exist between faculty and staff in other institutions? I

wonder if we would find similar or different outcomes in other institutions. This study, and its findings, could be replicated across institution types.

Fifth, the lack of information about participant salary is also a limitation of this study. Salary as it pertains to job satisfaction and commitment to the position is a factor I did not consider. In essence, one could argue deans paid more might express their leadership differently than those underpaid. Since I did not ask for salary information, determining the level of commitment and job satisfaction was challenging to assess. This lack of information is, therefore, a limitation of the study. Including salary information may provide some depth to the interviews and the challenges leaders face.

Lastly, tied to increasing research in all institution types, I did not assess leadership expression across leader positions. In essence, would the strategies and concerns of the academic deans in this study transpose across leadership levels? Do the findings in this study apply to presidents, chancellors, directors, and coordinators? Do these leaders feel the same pressures at similar levels, or do they vary by office of the leader? Would a director of academic advising have differing strategies from a vice-chancellor or president? Finding answers to these questions may strengthen leadership development programs and find ways to unify institutions of higher education in eliminating equity gaps. This study was the tip of the iceberg regarding the impact of leadership expression across positions.

### **Personal Reflection - Conclusion**

When I decided to pursue a doctorate, I knew my topic was leadership. My journey began as a first-generation, low income student, and then progressed from community mental health to higher education. This journey, combined with my time

with these deans, taught me lots about my leadership strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, they taught me I have not been doing a great job balancing my personal and professional anxieties. I conclude with a reflection on my journey and what I have learned throughout this study. My first lesson centers on the value of leadership practice and mistake-making. I reflected on my decisions to hold information because I was uncertain whether I should share it. I thought about emails I had sent where stakeholders misconstrued the tone. I considered my own ability to motivate and comfort stakeholders. The result of these insights has changed my approach to leadership. I am not perfect, and my leadership strengths were born from missteps. My leadership is like a blank slate in which I etch my legacy. I will make mistakes, but the more I practice, the more beautiful the picture becomes to others. Not everyone will like the picture, but etching guided by this study increases the likelihood of success.

Second, much like the academic deans in this study, I kept thinking about the mentors who impacted my life. I think about those individuals who noticed the leader in me well before I considered moving into administration. I think about the mentors I leaned on in times of conflict when I questioned my ability to persist. I think about the mentors who encouraged me to attend college, who helped me gain entrance into graduate school, who taught me how to help others in the mental health field, and who emphasized my strengths as a director for academic advising.

Third, I continue to examine my positionality as a White, privileged man, and my accountability as a leader. I began to think about what it has meant to me as a first-generation low-income student and how those qualities impact my leadership approaches. For example, as I dove deeper into leadership, I explored leadership development

programs and noticed some of the outrageous cost to attendees. How do leaders from lower socio-economic statuses have access to the same leadership experiences?

Advocating for leadership development opportunities for underrepresented leaders is imperative to me moving forward. Fourth, I thought about my anxiety and challenges in managing emotions and the physiological implications of leadership work. After conducting this study, I argue leadership work is primarily relational and emotional. I think about how the challenges in public higher education and the day-to-day leadership interaction will impact my health. I often wonder how the pressures of putting work before home will impact my life. My need to place work over life ends with this dissertation, even though I understand the courage I must have in breaking down barriers in a society that emphasizes the workplace. I continue to have concerns about the pressure within higher education and the inability of institutions to champion the work-life balance.

Fifth, I reflected lots about the environment of public higher education and the complexity in change, given the intense competition for students. The institutions where these deans worked were similar to mine. They had relatively slow governance processes, faculty that resembled more of independent contractors than public teachers. I am unsure how I feel about this issue. On the one hand, I think the beauty of academe lies in the cultural milieu in which I work. On the other hand, I worry about the changing face in higher education and how leadership work slows the process of change. I also struggled with how leadership development programs help leaders manage this environment. Each institution is different in its constructs, and each of the constructs is interpreted differently by faculty and staff.

As I type these final paragraphs of the dissertation, I cannot help but feel thankful to have had the opportunity to interact with such passionate and caring academic deans. Furthermore, I find it extremely rewarding to have been able to sit back and soak in their experiences and perspectives. I also realize that this study touches the very top of the pyramid of research on leadership. I am confident that the leadership characteristics and strategies exposed in the study leave clues for success. I also remain passionate about public higher education and to the continual struggle faced by leaders, faculty, staff, and students. I often think about the experience that a community, private, or technical college may provide to my leadership development. I stay committed to public higher education because of the dedication to opportunity and access. These principles form a core of my personal, historical background.

In conclusion, the core research questions of this study highlighted the need for public institutions in higher education to emphasize leadership development as an active process. Even more, leadership must provide support, resources, and opportunities for new leaders to develop ways to improve leadership, supervision, and management as separate constructs. I am thankful for having had the chance to dive into leadership. I continue to be passionate about this topic, and my research will not stop with this study. I plan to continue learning and researching leadership within higher education. I have an obligation to the field and those leaders that work each day to champion student persistence and retention incessantly. At the heart of my leadership lies the journey of a first-generation, low-income college student given the chance to earn a college degree. The student I was back then and all of my personal and professional experiences since make me the leader I am today.

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APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Please answer the following questions prior to the interview session. These answers will be necessary to better understand your leadership role. Thank you.

1. Gender?
2. Race? (Planning on Having Pull Down Options)
3. Ethnicity? (Planning on Having Pull Down Options)
4. How many years of leadership experience do you possess in higher education?
5. What is the total enrollment of your institution?
6. How many individuals are under your supervision?
7. How many departments or divisions do you oversee?
8. What is the size of the budget you manage?

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Suppose the university tasked you with developing a leadership program for new administrators, what participant characteristics would you develop?
  - a) What leadership strategies would you develop?
2. Tell me about your experience leading faculty.
  - a) Experience leading staff
3. Suppose the university asked you to mentor a new administrator, what essential lessons would they need to learn?
4. When you think about the current “state” of higher education, what challenges do new leaders struggle to navigate?
5. How would you describe an effective team in higher education?
6. How would you describe the support for new upper-level administrators (directors, deans, provosts)?
  - a) What support would you like to see?
7. What role does equity, inclusivity, and social justice play in leadership development for new administrators?
8. Tell me about your experience communicating faculty as supervisees and within departments/divisions.
  - a) Communicating with staff as supervisees and within departments/divisions.
9. What do you feel are the most important characteristics (provide a definition) needed for new leaders in higher education?

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

## Informed Consent

**Protocol Title:** Leadership Characteristics, Strategies, and Institutional Change Within Four-Year Public Universities: A Phenomenological Study

**Principal Investigator:** Darrel Renier

• ***Purpose and Procedure***

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the leadership strategies of academic affairs deans at four-year public universities.

My participation will involve the completion of a demographic survey and a 60-minute video recorded interview.

The total time requirement is two hours including the time to complete the demographic survey, the interview, and potential follow up questions to clarify any responses (member checking).

• ***Potential Risks***

Risks are relatively negligible.

I may experience negative thoughts or feelings about leadership experiences or environmental factors such as increasing cost of education, student access, lack of resources facing administrators.

• ***Rights & Confidentiality***

My participation is voluntary. I can withdraw or refuse to answer any question without consequences at any time.

The results of this study may be published in scientific literature or presented at professional meetings using pseudonyms for participants and research sites.

All information will be kept confidential. My data will NOT be linked with personally identifiable information. All recordings and transcripts will be stored on my personal computer and password protected.

• ***Possible benefits***

I may provide perspective about ways leaders express leadership skills, strategies, and characteristics while navigating a changing time in higher education. Results of this study may contribute to improved preparation of higher education administrators.

Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to Darrel Renier (920 217-0019), the principal investigator, or the study advisor Dr. Adele Lozano, Department of Student Affairs Administration, UW-L (608-785-6871). Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the UW-La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (608- 785-8044 or [irb@uwlax.edu](mailto:irb@uwlax.edu)).

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_