

## Some Key Concepts in Leadership and Decisionmaking

- Leadership may be considered the glue that connects governance and management to ensure effectiveness in institutional actions
- Cultivating ability to understand and adopt as appropriate different approaches to leadership and decisionmaking is a goal of this course
- Leadership research is prolific but, unfortunately, inconclusive and often unscientific (see Jeffrey Pfeffer's excellent book, *Leadership BS*, for an examination of this research)
- Research in organizations beyond colleges and universities suggests:
  - leaders should open participation in decision-making when they lack needed information, when they face unstructured problems, when subordinates' acceptance is critical, when the probability of subordinate acceptance is low, and when subordinates' goals are not the same as the organizations goals
  - organizations can be "backwards running" rather than driven from the start by considered goals ... that is, behaviors predict attitudes and goals surprisingly often, rather than the reverse...
  - in professional organizations where their outright positional power can be limited, leaders can shape attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes by shaping the premises on which individuals and groups make decisions
- Consider how different theoretical traditions view leadership (rational/bureaucratic, shared governance/democratic, political, institutional/cultural, etc.)
- Normatively, people like to view leaders in higher ed as heroic, as conventional of legitimated norms and values, as deserving of esteem and honor reflecting their institutions, as broadly knowledgeable, and as powerful
- Realities are more complex, however
- Kauffman's research on presidents suggests that:
  - counter-acting predecessors' actions is a key role and concern
  - coping with the lack of time is a draining problem for presidents
  - controlling the appointment calendar is critical
  - when presidents move up from the faculty ranks, others may resent losing the leaders' former openness, making the role more difficult and creating feelings of betrayal
  - inheriting staff members makes it difficult for new presidents to succeed
  - virtually all presidents are struck by the limits on their leadership and power
  - presidents say that this is not a job anybody should take if they want to be loved
- Cohen and March's research on presidents suggests that:
  - most presidents have doubts about their power and about the precision of their understanding... the image of presidents conveys power, but in fact that perception does not always translate into actual power
  - presidents have very little time alone, averaging only about 30% at any given time of the day
  - presidents spend their time moving between entrepreneurial, administrative, and political roles
  - presidents are surprisingly appreciative of the ritual aspects of the job, which convey influence that they sometimes don't feel in substantive decision-making
  - presidents face great ambiguity as to what constitutes success
  - symbols are an effective part of presidential leadership, and can fit in with the notion of premise-setting as a path to influence in professionalized orgs.
  - encouraging foolishness in organizations, and even instituting the role of the fool, in an organization makes some sense in that fools can ask stupid questions, identify hypocrisy, question assumptions, help avoid groupthink, reject oversimplification, and in essence, say it out loud when the king has no clothes