The College and University Presidency:
Leadership, Organizational Contexts, and Implications for Scholarly Inquiry

Institute of Higher Education

University of Georgia

Executive Summary

The current report addresses three components of higher education leadership: definitions and theories of leadership, organizational models and frameworks, and contingent-based understandings of leaders-in-context. A working operationalization of "leadership" is then advanced to account for hierarchical position status and responsiveness and dynamism of traits and behaviors, social influence and coordination, and goal-orientation. Extant literature on college and university presidencies is discussed to illuminate the relationship between presidents and environments. Gaps underscore conceptual and methodological fragmentation, resistance to scholarly synthesis, and inherent challenges to inquiry embedded within the phenomenon of investigation. Mixed-methods and case study research strategies are offered to address limitations in the field and respond to trends, patterns, and hypotheses regarding contemporary and future college and university presidencies.

Introduction

Vast and voluminous, scholarship on college and university presidencies covers a broad range of topics yet presents a fragmented, inchoate understanding of higher education leadership. Extant research, for instance, illuminates several patterns and themes. First, one strand of literature features authors who claim to base their works on empiricism, but who infuse arguments – and creative insights – with inferences from personal experience and observation (Bogue, 2007; Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Davis & Davis, 1999; Fincher, 2003; Thwing, 1926). Second, with increasing methodological rigor, principal investigators engage contextual restraints on presidents (Cohen & March, 1986; Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership, 1984; Kerr & Gade, 1986). Third, in response to questions of diminished instrumentality, scholars seek to assess presidential impact, effectiveness, and influence on campus dynamics. Here, we find examinations of leaders' roles and priorities (Cote, 1985), leadership strategies for goal attainment (Kezar & Eckel, 2008), faculty expectations of presidential behavior (Fleming, 2010), and presidential pay (Monks, 2007; Tang, Tang, & Tang, 2000). Lastly, scholars turn attention toward the understudied and underrepresented, such as women presidents (Touchton, Shavlik, & Davis, 1993), women presidents of color firsts (Turner, 2007), African American presidents (Mishra, 2007), and community college presidents (Eddy, 2005; 2010). However, the arc of scholarship reveals three persistent gaps: (1) inherent resistance, within the phenomenon of leadership, to conceptual synthesis; (2) defiance of clear, comprehensive measurement; and (3)

inconsistent methodological choices, which capture only pieces – but not the core – of presidencies.

The paradox of prolific output amid the difficulty of studying higher education leadership resounds throughout the field. As Morrill (2007) observed, “Books on leadership flood the shelves of libraries and bookstores, and every organization searches for ways to develop the leadership skills of its members” (p. 3). With intensified “searches” for how best to lead colleges and universities, our “leadership library is growing rapidly and will soon need more shelf space” (Morrill, p. 21). Eddy (2005) noted a fascination with leaders and leadership, which dominates research agendas and makes academic presidencies “one of the most studied of administrative roles” (p. 705). Yet several critics underscore the need for substantive, rigorous work, as “much of the extant literature concerning the university presidency appears trivial at best and offensive at worst” (Dennison, 2001, p. 270). Cote (1985) summarized well the primary limitation of “trivial” and “offensive” works: “The literature offers much in the way of conjecture about the nature of the presidency but few conclusions grounded in data” (p. 664). Thus we may ask the following about researching college and university presidencies: What are the forces that inform institutional leadership? How do these factors enrich yet also create barriers to sound scholarship? In what ways, conceptually and methodologically, should scholars proceed?

With these guiding questions in mind, I structure the current report into three sections. First, I identify and address three dimensions of higher education leadership, offering and critiquing (1) definitions and theories of leadership, (2)

models and frameworks of organizational contexts, and (3) contingent-based approaches for college and university presidents and implications for operationalizing the phenomenon. Second, I discuss extant literature to highlight key scholarly contributions to our understanding of the relationship between presidents and the contexts in which they lead. Lastly, in light of ongoing conceptual and methodological gaps, I propose two strategies to advance future scholarship and respond to leadership in the new economy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004): the use of mixed-methods and case study research.

Leadership, Organizations, and Leaders-in-Context

Leadership: Definitions and Theories

A core component of that which informs college and university presidencies, the concept of leadership itself merits attention. Despite the expansiveness of literature in the field, few authors have attempted operational definitions. Fincher (2003), however, offered one perspective. He defined "administrative leadership" as "the behavior, performance, and effectiveness of individuals in positions of institutional leadership" (p. 2) and as "the encouragement, guidance, and direction of cooperative efforts in the accomplishment of common goals, policies, or priorities" (p. 14). With an emphasis on observable, measureable variables, Fincher appears to have advanced a clear, concise, and helpful notion of leadership. Yet a close consideration of his work suggests something less precise. For instance, "behavior, performance, and effectiveness" of leaders are themselves difficult to assess. Given the complexity and anarchical elements of colleges and universities as organizations, the cause-and-effect link between presidential action and institutional outcome (i.e.,

presidential effectiveness) is often assumed but, in fact, difficult to confirm (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & March, 1986). To further delineate leadership as coordinative activities aligned with accomplishment of shared common goals thus becomes problematic as well. Such challenges led Morrill (2007) to offer a simplified definition of leadership as "formal positions of authority, as exemplified by those who hold political office or carry major responsibilities in a complex organization" (p. 5). We might recognize college and university presidents as leaders because of their visible, prominent hierarchical statuses, but to limit the scope of interpretation to "formal positions of authority" excludes several other factors that contribute to – and compound – our understanding of leadership.

As operational definitions are few, limited, and flawed, leadership theories, on the other hand, present nuanced frameworks for assessing styles and approaches to college and university presidencies. Based on Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (2000) and Birnbaum (1988), I offer here five core models. First, trait theory suggests inherent personality characteristics that distinguish leaders from the led. For instance, attributes such as "humor, courage, judgment, integrity, persistence, hard work, vision, and being opportunity conscious…" (Bensimon et al., p. 214) are often associated with effective presidents. Second, behavioral theory addresses what leaders do, such as "activity patterns [and] managerial roles…" (Birnbaum, p. 23). Third, power and influence theory seeks to explain how leaders use their formal position and authority within organizational status hierarchies to exert influence over processes, procedures, and, in turn, subordinates to accomplish goals. One strand, transactional leadership, suggests leaders as exclusive holders of

power, making others reliant on them; however, a second strand, social exchange theory, indicates reciprocity between leaders and the led, for college and university presidents need the support and approval of constituents and colleagues similar to that which constituents and colleagues require from presidents. Fourth, symbolic and cultural theory refers to transformational leadership, in which presidents harness organizational saga (Clark, 1972) and language, dress, events, spatial positions, and images (Tierney, 1989) to inspire collective emotional and cognitive responses, coordinated actions, and loyalty (Dill, 1982). Lastly, contingency theory indicates adaptability of leadership styles and approaches to distinct settings and environmental demands.

Leadership theories bring us closer toward yet also farther away from definitive conclusions about higher education presidencies. Each model, for instance, presents a distinct lens through which to assess specific components, though not necessarily a full, complete understanding, of leaders-in-action. The tendency, however, for overgeneralization in scholarly discussions and representations of these frameworks should raise a note of caution. As one example, Birnbaum (1988) provided numerous vignettes of different, fictitious college and university presidents who each rely on one particular style of leadership. Such simplification – and indeed generalization – may help students and nascent scholars grasp conceptual fundamentals, but also mislead budding thinkers to assume the predominance of one style and assessment of leadership to the exclusion of others. Therefore, and as I elaborate in ensuing sections of this report, the overall fluidity, inclusion of multiple theoretical perspectives, and environmental responsiveness of

contingent leadership resonates well with the volatility of higher education organizations.

Organizational Contexts: Models of Interpretation

To account for the second component of higher education leadership, I now address organizational contexts. Shaping the contingent-based strategies of college and university presidents, four models surface in the literature. Drawn largely from Birnbaum (1988) and Cohen and March (1986), I present the bureaucratic, collegial, political, and anarchical frameworks. In order to expand upon general descriptions, I then highlight differences among the models through a discussion of data, time, conflict, and decision-making, which take on distinct forms, functions, and characteristics within each paradigm. Similar to *Leadership: Definitions and Theories*, I conclude with a note of caution about overgeneralization and the implications for scholarship.

First, the bureaucratic model encapsulates organizational features such as clear channels of authority, communication, and hierarchy; expertise of leaders and overall rationality of personnel; shared and understood common goals, with actions and tasks aligned with goal accomplishment; and stringent procedural controls, rules, and protocols intended to minimize operational uncertainty and maximize technocratic efficiency. Data is utilized objectively, with as much information collected as needed. Time is experienced as ordered, linear, and directed toward goal achievement. Conflict within subunits, between personnel, and between subunits and central authority is perceived as pathological and detrimental to efficiency and productivity. Decision-making is rational – drawing upon unbiased

data, considering all possible solutions and outcomes, and selecting the best, most efficient course of action. Centralization and decentralization are of importance here, for where decisions are made within the organizational hierarchy, and at which specific levels, matters for the success of standard operating procedures and the enterprise itself.

Second, the collegial model underscores the importance of relationships, collaboration, and community. Bureaucratic features may exist, particularly for administrative tasks such as budgeting, but the dominant characteristics center on respect, inclusiveness, and interpersonal connection. Goals are shared and understood, with a clear match between institutional priorities and mission. Efficiency may be valued but is defined differently than in traditional, rational bureaucracies. Rather than presidents positioned as experts who provide optimal direction to subordinates and, in turn, to their respective schools, status hierarchies in collegial environments are instead "egalitarian and democratic, and members of the administration and faculty consider each other as equals, all of whom have the right and opportunity for discussion and influence as issues come up" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 88). The mutual contribution to "discussion and influence" could strike those outside collegial institutions as counterproductive; however, such practice confirms communal identity. Data is shared openly and, in many instances, subject to wide commentary. Time takes on saga-like fluidity and liminality (Clark, 1972), as ideals, achievements, and identities of the past converge with the present and guide the interior logic of the institution and its constituents toward the future. As process carries significance, time is distended, rather than segmented, to elicit input

from numerous participants. Conflict, similar to the bureaucratic model, is deemed pathological since the power of relationship with colleagues and institution drives loyalty, commitment, and career longevity of personnel. Decision-making is therefore collaborative and sensitive to how choices are made, who is included in such decisions, and the accomplishment of consensus. The use of institutional culture and symbolism, especially in choice opportunities, reaffirms legitimacy of decisions, decision-makers, and organizational values.

Third, the political model subverts bureaucratic and collegial understandings of organizational environments. Here, power, authority, and status are relative and change based on issues at hand rather than on formal positions within hierarchies. Coalitions form in response to particular issues, as mutual interests and goals realign according to potential benefits of involvement. Thus goals may be shared in principle and mission statement only, suggesting in daily encounters tension between personnel, subunits, and subunits and central administration. Data is subject to bias, spin, and discrepant claims, as coalition groups seek to leverage information to support their own respective interests rather than to assert objective knowledge. Time is charged and employed as manipulative tactic – for the timing of when particular issues arise reveals intentional motives and carries as much weight, if not more so than, the content of such apparent problems. Amid resource scarcity and contestation, conflict is present yet harnessed to achieve a space of optimal performance in which institutions continue to exist and constituents continue to contribute toward organizational functioning. Decision-making bestows upon participants – that is, decision-makers – power, authority, and status, and mediation,

negotiation, and compromise rather than outright consensus results with one or more groups having to make concessions. Similar to the collegial model, symbolism and cultural influence are utilized, yet within the political framework are drawn upon to sway decisions toward certain outcomes and to generate buy-in from key actors.

Lastly, the anarchical model applies most directly to higher education organizations. Outlining the theory, Cohen and March (1986) stipulated three characteristics of organized anarchies: (1) ambiguous and conflicting goals; (2) unclear technology (i.e., difficulty in calibrating and measuring inputs, processes, and outputs such as student admissions, classroom teaching, and learning); and (3) fluid member participation. In light of such features, including inherent campus political dynamics, the authors concluded that the "American college or university is a prototypic organized anarchy" and "does not know what it is doing" (p. 3). Foundational concepts such as loose coupling (Weick, 1976), administrative and professional authority (Etzioni, 1964), and professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979) further illuminate distinctive qualities of higher education institutions and inform the anarchical model. Because of loosely coupled, indirect time and space connections between – and infrequent communications among – subunits and subunits and central administration, data is imperfect, lacks comprehensiveness, and may not address the issues at hand. Time is fragmentary, as autonomous, professionalized faculty coordinate their work, effort, and attention based on external disciplinary and internal, departmental norms; however, campus administration may move in linear, bureaucratic directions. Yet time is bounded as

well, for actors in the system are limited in their persistence due to overlapping demands and tasks, and they wander in and out of choice opportunities accordingly. Conflict reflects differences in goals and political interests, but also in orientations and affiliations among cosmopolitan faculty and localized administrative personnel. Decision-making therefore becomes a garbage can in which streams of personnel, problems, and solutions are dumped and loosely coupled, often failing to resolve issues.

However, scholars criticized the organized anarchy model for its dramatic stridency and overrepresentation of only some facets of college campuses. Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley (1977) summarized these concerns well: “Some may regard ‘organized anarchy’ as an exaggerated term, suggesting more confusion and conflict than really exist in academic organizations” (p. 8). In addition, the terminology itself, as Baldridge et al. further maintained, “may also carry negative connotations to those unaware that it applies to specific organizational characteristics rather than to the entire campus community” (p. 8). Oakley (2002) noted the conceptual provocativeness of the anarchical model, but also questioned its substantive features: “In that book Cohen and March mount a sustained argument which, its admitted liveliness notwithstanding, is a good deal less convincing” (p. 19). Scholar-practitioners Bogue (2007) and Fincher (2003) revealed similar reservations, acknowledging the co-existence of rationality, stability, and consensus amid campus political conflicts.

Yet we may extend such contention, doubt, and scrutiny concerning overgeneralization to the discourse surrounding bureaucratic, collegial, and political

models as well. As Birnbaum (1988) himself demonstrated, a common pitfall of prevailing scholarship emphasizes entire institutions as solely bureaucratic, collegial, political, or anarchical. The models should not represent an enterprise in aggregate form, but rather reflect different dimensions of organizational life within single institutions. For instance, individual subunits may retain collegiality given common professional, disciplinary affiliations (Etzioni, 1964; Mintzberg, 1979) and department-specific sagas (Clark, 1972), though faculty senates might resemble garbage can processes (Birnbaum, 1989). Indeed small, private liberal arts schools, which tend to have salient features of collegiality (Birnbaum, 1988; Oakley, 2002), may have pockets of organized anarchy as featured in aspects of decision-making structures and processes. Nevertheless, when approached with a contingent-like lens apropos to fitting leadership styles within contextual demands, organizational models provide useful, critical tools. Guiding interpretation, evaluation, and reformulation of organizational norms and practices, these frameworks hold the potential to assist both scholars and leaders who seek to understand and evolve leadership and institutional functioning.

Leaders-in-Context: Aligning Leadership Theories and Organizational Models

As the third component of higher education leadership, the intersubjectivity of leader and environment – of reciprocal, mutually shaping relationships between college and university presidents and their organizational contexts – comes to the forefront of extant literature in the field. However, before I turn to examples of scholarship to illustrate themes, dynamics, and findings related to examining leaders-in-context, I present here the way in which certain leadership frameworks

and styles fit within corresponding organizational models. The demonstration of such contingency reinforces (1) the conceptual backdrop of the current report and (2) an initial, working definition of leadership that addresses how college and university presidents tailor their approaches to institutional demands and how the adaptability of leaders, in turn, is positioned to affect institutions.

In bureaucratic settings, which rely on the expertise of leaders as well as formal authority within stringent status hierarchies, trait, transactional, and behavioral leadership styles resonate. Intelligence, mastery of skill, and technical know-how distinguish college and university presidents as leaders. Use of power over subordinates within the chain of command – and direct impact over processes such as budgeting and hiring – facilitate goal accomplishment. An emphasis on what leaders do within bureaucracy, that is, the actions of presidents, becomes a tertiary way of understanding but also enacting leadership. Collegial environments, similar to bureaucratic situations, calls for transactional leadership; however, the importance of consensus, relationships, and inclusive processes suggests the need for reciprocal social exchange. Thus college and university presidents and their colleagues validate and channel shared power, authority, and influence. A trait approach becomes nuanced as well, with collegiality requiring characteristics such as "being open, building teams, and being compassionate" (Bensimon et al., 2000, p. 214). Yet symbolic and cultural leadership, including, for instance, intentional celebrations of unique historical accomplishments of institutions (Clark, 1972), responds to needs for collective meaning, purpose, and identity.

Within political contexts transactional and symbolic and cultural leadership styles are relevant but take on different articulations from what we might expect to observe in bureaucratic and collegial environments. Authority, status, and influence no longer stem solely from formal positions and reporting lines; rather, transactional approaches empower decision-makers for any given issue and those who wield informal yet instrumental influence on key actors and choice outcomes. Nevertheless, college and university presidents, though less heroic and powerful than once believed (Cohen & March, 1986; Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership, 1984; Kerr & Gade, 1986), could still exert sway over colleagues and constituents through budgeting allocations, staffing policies and procedures, and administrative accountability controls. Symbolic and cultural leadership, as secondary strategy, permits influence and, more importantly, an association between leaders and organizational successes (Pfeffer, 1977). Similarly, in anarchical contexts, college and university presidents emphasize symbolic and cultural leadership to (1) perpetuate self-status and validate the illusion of power (Cohen & March) and (2) appeal to emotional and intellectual sensibilities of colleagues and constituents (Bolman & Gallos, 2011). A trait approach applies here as well. Socialization within academe prior to ascending to presidencies offers leaders legitimacy, but also compounds self-awareness, sense-making of self in relation to environment, and inherent conservatism in attitude and action (Cohen and March; Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership; Kerr and Gade).

However, consistent with an overarching theme of this report, situating leadership styles within corresponding organizational models requires assumptions,

generalizations, and omissions. Certain contexts may demand pronounced forms of specific approaches from leaders, but not necessarily to the exclusion of all possible strategies. For instance, situations that carry a predominant political orientation seem to call, first and foremost, for transactional and symbolic and cultural leadership. Yet secondary strategies, depending on constituent needs and particularities of campus dynamics, could include trait and behavioral components such as personal resiliency and steadfastness and deliberate, repeated action (i.e., inviting opponents to join planning committees to win over adversaries) amid conflict. Such limitations notwithstanding, the presentation of how leaders interact with environments brings us toward an initial redefinition and operationalization of higher education leadership.

Here, I pose the following conceptualization: higher education leadership is a formal position within a status hierarchy, but more centrally the (1) adaptability of self in relation to shifting contexts, (2) manifestation of a spectrum of traits and behaviors accordingly, and, in turn, (3) influence over social, coordinative activities for goal accomplishment. Not a radical departure from that which Morrill (2007) and Fincher (2003) argued, I differentiate my working definition, though, in several ways. First, by "formal position," I mean the official job title as initial indication of who is leader. Second, "shifting contexts" refers to fluidity and multiplicity of environments – and accompanying demands on and implications for leaders – within and external to college and university campuses. Third, "spectrum of traits and behaviors" invokes a continuum of personal characteristics and actions, which find differing levels of expression based on who and what confronts leaders at any

given moment. Fourth, "social, coordinative activities" responds to relational (i.e., transactional) aspects of leadership in which "influence" combines instrumentality and symbolism to affect result. Lastly, "goal accomplishment" affirms the purpose of leadership as movement of self, colleagues, constituents, and institutions toward something; the "goal" may not be shared or objectively measured, but could reflect personal or coalition-based political interests and agendas – a possibility for which I accommodate through the language of the definition. Yet a question remains: does all leadership in actuality conform to such an operationalized – and perhaps idealized – schema that I have outlined? To respond to questions of applicability and relevance, we must turn toward extant literature on college and university presidents.

The President-Environment Relationship: A Review of Literature

Published in 1926, Thwing's collection of essays on the American college and university president marked one of the earliest comprehensive reflections on higher education leadership. Representative of foundational literature in the field, the author posited seemingly authoritative insights on the nature and future direction of presidencies. Describing the vulnerabilities of institutional leaders, who must address "crises of all kinds" (p. 334), Thwing wrote that the "business of being a college president is the most dangerous of all professional business" (p. 334). Here, we encounter the primary contribution – and weakness – of the work and of the genre of autobiography masked as scholarly inquiry. The personalized perspective from which Thwing wrote added power and phenomenological meaning to his warning: political interests of constituents, and the impossibility of resolving

conflicting demands, renders many college and university presidents ineffective, reactive, and constrained. However, in generalizing to all higher education presidencies, the author ignored several questions: To what other "business" did he refer in comparing higher education to similar or distinct industries? How did Thwing know – how did he study – the level of professional threat embedded in such highly visible positions, concluding that higher education leadership is "most dangerous" of all? From which anecdotes or other sources of information did he ground such a bold assertion? We must speculate answers.

Responding to the cross-generational theme of the "dangerous" (Thwing, 1926, p. 334) business of college and university presidencies, Davis and Davis (1999) explored in essay format the impact of environmental volatility on presidential tenure. The authors admitted that the "article liberally draws on the first author's personal observations and experiences gleaned from thirty years of service as a president or chancellor of four state universities or systems" (Davis & Davis, p. 120). However, rhetoric adopted throughout the piece suggested confirmed factual insights rather than tested and data-driven conclusions. As they argued the main point of their thesis, for example, Davis and Davis affirmed a link between lengthening presidential tenure and increasing presidential effectiveness. Accordingly they claimed how "frequent turnovers in the top leadership position often result in instability, loss of continuity, lack of a sense of direction, and a diminishing of self-esteem or self-confidence as an institution" (p. 125). With the "length of time in office [as] critical to the ability of presidents to be effective" (p. 128), the argument carried two implications. First, Davis and Davis spoke, perhaps,

to the first author's need to enhance his own job security. But secondly, such potential bias notwithstanding, the authors reinforced the interplay of contextual dynamics and how organizational complexities and ambiguous evaluative measures of success might inform yet also undermine presidents and the institutions that they lead.

As personal observation and autobiography continued to drive much of the scholarship on higher education leadership (Sontz, 1991), a tension emerged between authors who favored memoir and authors who sought increased scholarly rigor. Mirroring the foundational impulse of the field, Bogue (2007) wrote "reflective essays" (p. x) that suggested the "mean and shadow motives" (p. 56) of some constituents within institutions, but also the overall stability and consensus that leaders maintained. A creative way of describing his presidency, Bogue termed himself a "constructive pessimist" (p. 56) – one who anticipates conflict yet is optimistic as institutional leader. Fincher (2003), on the other hand, claimed to write based on administrative experience and empiricism. Because he did not employ a study to ground the work in data, Fincher nonetheless impeded our ability to discern whether his scholarly inferences and theorizing were subjective or valid, reliable research. Nevertheless, he and Bogue offered nuanced understandings of (1) the limitations inherent to generalizing findings about one president to all presidents, something "disastrous for newcomers to administrative ranks" (Fincher, p. 38) and (2) environmental and organizational constraints on leaders. However, consistent methodological weakness challenged more so than substantiated these insights. In addition, the underlying assumption of presidential importance on

campuses perpetuated a contested notion: whether presidents are in fact heroes or prisoners amid organizational complexities and ambiguities (Kerr & Gade, 1986).

Bolman and Gallos (2011), who based their book on years of their own research experience in the field but not on any one particular empirical study, aimed to account for the relationship between institutional environments and leaders. Addressing expectations of college and university presidents as "imperial figures who bestride their world like a colossus" (p. 4), the authors sought to uncover "limits of [leaders'] influence and authority" (p. 4) and how senior administrators would nevertheless achieve and thrive. Well-intentioned in message and approach, Bolman and Gallos, however, demonstrated an emerging gap in the scholarship on higher education leadership: an emphasis on self-help instruction and mass-market appeal. The overall tone and language of many of the passages belied the book's scholarly attributes, an example of which found here: "The best leaders are persistent and proactive in reflecting on their behavior and in learning from those around them" (p. 46). How might the authors' previous research and professional experience shaped such a generalizable statement? What did studies say about the phenomenon of sense-making, in which leaders construct and reconstruct their experiences of themselves, people, and environments cognitively? How do we know that such tactics had worked for all higher education leaders in all intra- and inter-institutional contexts? In minimizing the academic component of their book, which emphasized accessibility of complex ideas and themes, the authors did not provide data to legitimize sweeping claims. Thus readers must interpret inferences with caution.

Nevertheless, Bolman and Gallos (2011), similar to Bogue (2007), offered a distinct and creative vision of college and university presidents. As higher education environments tended to cast doubt on cause-and-effect outcomes of leaders and how their decisions impact institutions (Birnbaum, 1988), the authors championed symbolic leadership. “Strong symbolic leaders,” Bolman and Gallos wrote, “understand that they are always onstage, and they take advantage of every opportunity to use themselves as symbols of important values, priorities, and agendas” (pp. 118-19). Such an approach, the authors further maintained, was intended to “influence what something means and trigger deeply embedded, nonconscious [sic] associations that affect our feelings and attitudes toward it…[and that] speak to both head and heart” (pp. 111-12). Leaders may thus transcend ordinary, routinized managerial methods and, instead, engage with soul. To “manage with soul” (p. 126) suggests a potentially useful strategy for college and university presidents who could thrive within a spiritual-like dimension on campuses. Yet Bolman and Gallos’ conclusion, on the other hand, reinforced primary gaps in their work and in the overarching line of inquiry to which their text belongs. No matter how seemingly innovative, paradigmatic, and redefining the works, these and similar authors occupy an intellectual space amid the continuum of (1) empiricism and (2) personal experience-based inferences. In turn, incessant skepticism challenges and occludes, rather than celebrates and affirms, key scholarly contributions to higher education leadership.

With the second edition of their work published in 1986, Cohen and March, however, affirmed the possibility of introducing empirical strength in research on

college and university presidencies. Drawn from a dataset of interviews across 42 institutions with 41 presidents and 140 participants close to presidents (i.e., chief academic officers, secretaries, student leaders, and other unspecified colleagues), the authors advanced three seminal yet subversive findings. First, to undermine assumptions of presidential power, authority, and status, Cohen and March revealed the conservatism of leaders as reflected through incumbents' "20 to 35 years of socialization into the values of academe" (p. 25) and the correspondence of demographics, professional credentials, and disciplinary backgrounds with the salient characteristics of the communities that they led. Second, inherent but unconscious restraints within leaders, who at the same time sought and believed in self-status and importance, compounded ambiguities of and constraints stemming from organized anarchy. Lastly, presidents in the study tended to perpetuate and participate in garbage can decision-making, which challenged rational, ordered, and efficient resolutions of issues at hand. Qualitative in orientation, the authors did not provide supportive quotations or narrative passages to substantiate claims, but other methodological strategies, such as computer simulations, offered some corroboration of one primary conclusion: how leaders' self-imposed restraints seemed to reinforce environment-based limitations, which, in turn, prompted further restrictions on presidents.

Already noted in this report, Cohen and March (1986) received criticism for overstating the presence of organized anarchy and garbage can decision-making on college and university campuses (Baldridge et al., 1977; Bogue, 2007; Fincher, 2003; Oakley, 2002). The skewed sample, which favored large, rich, and elite institutions,

could account for the apparent overgeneralization, as organizational features and choice opportunities tend to differ by institution type (Birnbaum, 1988). In addition, their argument that presidents themselves unknowingly reinforced self-ineffectiveness, believing in their own importance amid contrary evidence, caught the attention of the Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984) and Kerr and Gade (1986). Seeking greater depth and empirical power than Cohen and March, the Commission conducted interviews with 400 presidents and 448 presidential spouses and colleagues (i.e., faculty, trustees, and senior-level administrators), a dataset on which Kerr and Gade also based their follow-up study. The sample was expansive and added important depth and dimension to the inquiry, further seen in the range of schools included: mostly doctoral granting institutions, four-year liberal arts schools, and comprehensive colleges, but also women-led institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic serving-institutions.

More so than Cohen and March (1986), the Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984) and Kerr and Gade (1986) highlighted the poignant level of awareness that presidents had of their own acute vulnerabilities, frustrations, and challenges as higher education leaders. According to Kerr and Gade, "Presidents live, mostly, not in a world of obscurity like a Kafka novel or the Cohen-March model, but in a world of brutal clarity like a Mickey Spillane thriller" (p. 153). As the Commission found, sitting and emeritus presidents identified "unexpectedly heavy costs of the presidency to their academic careers, to their family life, to their financial situations, and to their reserves of physical and

psychological energy" and "under current conditions [they] would never do it again" (p. 4). "Current conditions" of conflicting, irreconcilable demands from constituents and organizational complexities threaten "careers," "family life," and "physical and psychological energy," yet also carry implications for tenure of incumbents. To encapsulate the gravity of its salient finding, the Commission wrote of the ever-increasing visibility – and formal and informal evaluations – of college and university presidents: "The sense of being under constant review is, for many university presidents, one of the burdens of the position – like living in Macy's window 12 hours a day" (p. 53).

To enrich further our understanding of leader-environment relationships, Kerr and Gade (1986) offered a warning: before presidents chose and enacted any particular leadership strategy, the "individual institution involved must first of all be in a leadership mode [since] only a very few presidents, by dint of character and ability, ever rise far above the potentialities of context" (p. 83). In turn, the authors presented a theory of atomistic decision-making in which "stability and [a] highly productive environment" was deemed possible even "without a strong central authority" (p. 153). Yet, similar to Cohen and March (1986) and the Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984), Kerr and Gade offered minimal hope for current and future college and university presidents: "More heroes are demanded," they concluded, "but more prisoners are created instead" (p. 157).

With the instrumentality of higher education leaders in question, Cote (1985) and Kezar and Eckel (2008) contributed toward an assessment of presidential impact, effectiveness, and influence over campus dynamics. Studying the roles

through which leaders had been thought to affect their respective institutions, Cote examined the level of agreement on presidential priorities among both trustees and presidents themselves. The proportion of presidential and trustee respondents were not provided, nor were the specific types of institutions considered, but a 91% response rate resulted in 243 participants from 129 public and private institutions in Pennsylvania. Despite limited generalizability, consensus of participant responses indicated internal roles, such as “administrator/executive,” “faculty advocate,” and “physical plant/property overseer,” as more important than external roles, such as “visionary,” “P.R. specialist/image builder,” and “fund raiser” (p. 667). Yet open-ended responses revealed that presidents spent more time on external as compared to internal duties and experienced frustration in doing so.

Focusing specifically on campus level dynamics, Kezar and Eckel (2008) examined how 27 college and university presidents from the full range of institution types utilized transactional and transformational strategies to advance diversity agendas. An elite interview method was used in which experts were identified and sampled, with qualitative analyses revealing: (1) transformational leadership (i.e., articulating a vision to appeal to the moral, intellectual sensibilities of constituents) as central during the first phase of introducing diversity agendas; (2) transactional leadership (i.e., using formal authority to influence subordinate task completion) as salient amid the second, implementation phase; and (3) transformational leadership in the third, late phase as method to solidify constituent support and follow-through. Evidence of discrepant data and cases, however, could have addressed the disaggregated influence of specific campus contexts on leadership style choices.

Nevertheless, evidence of situational leadership – the adaptability of leaders to environmental pressures – presented a critical way in which presidents could thrive in light of organized anarchy. As Kezar and Eckel concluded, "Essentially, presidents are pragmatists and use whichever approach they feel will help advance their goal, usually moving beyond personal preference or philosophy of leadership" (p. 398).

Fleming (2010) maintained a similar emphasis as Kezar and Eckel (2008) on campus-level factors and the implications for institutional leadership. Here, the author examined tacit norms that undergirded faculty expectations of presidents. Fleming thus recognized (1) faculty as holders of power and (2) faculty approval as central to legitimizing presidents and presidencies. His survey research included a sample of 59 institutions and 2,395 faculty senate members. Institutions were randomly selected within a stratification design, which led to 20 research universities (very high), 20 research universities (high), and 19 doctoral/research universities. However, the 21% response rate; inclusion of faculty senate members whose opinions could be stronger and more conservative than faculty not involved in governance; and aggregated representation of data from participants without regard to disciplinary differences all raised notes of caution in interpreting results. Nevertheless, the author found that *fiduciary irresponsibility* and *moral turpitude* mattered most to faculty participants. When a president demonstrated fiscal incompetence or negligence or displayed amoral, unethical behavior, the leader would therefore most likely lose faculty support. Fleming therefore provided some evidence of two key ways in which presidents could influence, through instrumental and symbolic actions, the tone of their respective campuses as well as their own

effectiveness in office. It would have added depth and insight to survey trustees, students, and administrative staff, who also contribute to presidential expectations. But the suggestion of presidential importance continued to resonate in follow-up essays (Braxton, 2010; Eckel & Kezar, 2011) and in literature on presidential pay.

Tang et al. (2000) and Monks (2007) evolved the line of inquiry to consider how – and according to which organizational factors – presidents were rewarded. As the first study in the field to address the dependent variables of presidential salaries, benefits, and total compensation, Tang et al. analyzed Chronicle of Higher Education and college guidebook data from 1993 for 190 private colleges and universities. Independent variables consisted of total organizational expenditures and revenues, the presence of professional schools, academic reputation and ranking, and the size of student enrollment and faculty. A sample taken mostly from private, elite, and selective schools limited generalizability, but key findings revealed evidence of (1) the relationship between increases in institutional growth and ranking and increases in presidential pay, benefits, and total compensation and (2) the relationship between increases in expenditures and revenues and increases in presidential pay, benefits, and total compensation. Monks replicated the Tang et al. study, using Chronicle of Higher Education data for 166 participant institutions over 2001 to 2002 and 2002 to 2003. However, including both public and private institutions in his study, Monks revealed that source of institutional control was likely to contribute to pay differentials. Private school presidents, for instance, earned nearly 50% more – that is, over $200,000 more – than their public school counterparts. Caution, though, is required in interpreting the results of Tang et al.

and Monks given limitations of cross-sectional data and contested underlying assumptions of presidential instrumentality. Nonetheless, these scholars advanced foundational understandings of organizational contexts and presidential compensatory practices, something currently under heightened scrutiny amid financial exigency (Eckel & Kezar, 2011).

With the majority of scholarship focusing on male presidents, however, Touchton et al. (1993) initiated a strand of scholarship on understudied and underrepresented institutional leaders. In their seminal study of women higher education leaders, the authors surveyed 230 participants, an 88% response rate, at two-year and four-year public and private co-educational and all-women institutions. According to study results: (1) 80% of respondents claimed being treated differently and discriminated against within their institutions; (2) 94% of respondents identified advocacy for women on their campuses as important to their roles as leaders; (3) women presidents were more likely than male presidents to hold doctoral degrees; and (4) women presidents were less likely than male presidents to have their own families. Apparent differences between men and women presidents thus found expression in regard to professional experiences, barriers to advancement, social justice orientations of their work, levels of credentialing, and existence of supportive familial networks. Yet qualitative data could have explained how women encountered and negotiated gender differentials. Though not as comprehensive in methodology or scope as similar endeavors such as the Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984), Touchton et al.

nevertheless provided an important foundation to launch further studies on women presidents.

Turner (2007) followed suit, examining through qualitative inquiry the lives and careers of three women of color firsts. Each president – a Mexican American, American Indian, and Asian American – illuminated her respective journey to the presidency and her experience of leading an institution that served underrepresented student populations. Triangulation strengthened the data and its representation, with in-depth personal interviews, document analyses, and site observations. Salient themes included the importance of family and early childhood experiences, relationships with professional mentors, strategies to overcome initial barriers to advancement, and collaborative and social justice-oriented advocacy for women of color administrators and students on their respective campuses. Additional findings – such as the cultural matches between presidents and their institutions – resonated with extant literature that focused on white, male college presidents (Cohen & March, 1986). Such personal-environmental alignment seemed to speak to overarching, isomorphic forces within higher education, which impacted presidential searches and leadership of incumbents.

Adding to the nascent literature on ethnic and racial differences in pathways to college and university presidencies, Mishra (2007) examined how long it took African American presidents to reach their positions. To underscore group contrasts by institution type, she compared African American presidents at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with African American presidents at Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) and sampled 72 participants

from HBCUs and 22 participants from TWIs. To maintain objectivity, the author collected publically available biographical data and assessed relationships between personal and professional characteristics (the independent variables) and length of time to office (the dependent variable). Chi-square tests revealed connections but not necessarily the direction of relationships between factors such as age, marital status, gender, faculty and prior administrative experience, and career trajectory (i.e., length of time to office). Yet the most compelling findings revealed that on average African American presidents at TWIs were older by 10 years, served longer in their positions, and held doctoral degrees at rates higher than African American presidents at HBCUs. Thus evidence suggested that African American leaders at TWIs, similar to women presidents (Touchton et al., 1993), required a higher level of credentials and seniority as compared to their counterparts at HBCUs. Underscoring potential barriers to career advancement for African American higher education professionals, the quantitative focus here excluded how presidents of color navigated and survived institutional – and seemingly discriminatory – realities.

Despite the importance of findings on gender and racial and ethnic dimensions of college and university presidents and higher education organizations, scholars continued to focus on leaders at four-year public and private institutions. In response, Eddy (2005; 2010) turned scholarly attention toward the community college sector. Faced with intensified budget cuts, crises, and issues different from those at other institution types, community college presidents, according to Eddy, shouldered an added pressure of acting "to help campus members create meaning during periods of uncertainty" (2005, p. 706). The author interviewed presidents,

faculty, staff, and administrators at nine community colleges and used the same dataset for two complementary studies. In 2005, she examined sense-making. Here, presidential participants were liminal and learning-oriented in how they reflected on the past, tailored leadership styles to present circumstances, and envisioned and anticipated the future. Eddy subsequently identified in 2010 how presidents in her study expressed constructions of their leadership to constituents. She found four verbal and non-verbal communication styles that participants had utilized: talking the frame, walking the frame, writing the frame, and symbolizing the frame. In addition, three frames surfaced in the data: visionary framing (i.e., focusing on the future), step-by-step framing (i.e., outlining the steps required to execute a plan), and connective framing (i.e., employing a collegial, collaborative approach). Though her works lacked triangulation, Eddy nevertheless advanced insightful descriptions of how some community college presidents interpreted, wrestled with, and responded to heightened sets of institutional challenges.

Summary, Conclusion, and Directions for Research and Practice

In this report I have first and foremost delineated the three core facets of higher education leadership. I have addressed definitions and theories of leadership, organizational models and frameworks, and contingent forms of leadership as situated within and adapted to differing contexts. Establishing the fluidity of how leaders respond to environments within and external to their respective campuses, I have, in turn, operationalized "leadership" to account for hierarchical position, responsive traits and behaviors, social and coordinative influence, and goal achievement. To illuminate further the relationship between leaders and contexts, I

have then drawn upon extant literature. However, conceptual and methodological fragmentation – in addition to the inherent challenge of studying college and university presidencies – underscores a statement from the Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984): "*The only truthful generalization about colleges and universities in America that can be made without exception is that no truthful generalization can be made without exception except for this generalization*" (p. xi, italics in the original).

With calls for contextual sensitivity in scholarship, we may ask the following question, which has in part framed the current report: how should scholars proceed, then, in examining higher education presidents, organizational influences, and leaders-in-context? Mixed-methods and case study research presents compelling frameworks. In mixed-methods work, sequential explanatory or exploratory designs allow for rigor, feasibility, comprehensiveness, and compensation for limitations in each respective quantitative and qualitative paradigm (Creswell, 2009). The sequential facet indicates separate phases of data collection, with the explanatory model beginning with quantitative information and analysis and then leading into qualitative inquiry. An exploratory design, on the other hand, suggests a qualitative investigation to impact the type of quantitative data considered. Whether explanatory or exploratory, statistical analyses hold the potential to reveal important trends, patterns, and relationships in regard to presidents and their environments. Yet qualitative data deepens the inquiry, ascribing meaning and detail to organizational contexts and therefore explaining intervening variables that inform leadership.

Included in mixed-methods research designs or anchored solely in qualitative inquiries, case studies are well suited to address the topic. As case studies provide "an in-depth description of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40) and focus on "holistic description and explanation" (Merriam, p. 43), scholars may thus account for intervening, environmental factors in relation to presidential leadership. Narrative detail and thick description (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley, 2008) contributes to understanding the phenomenon under investigation, but also to achieving credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Toma, 2006). In addition, the use of multiple and discrepant cases – of approaching saturation – positions research toward a form of generalizability, something termed "transferability" (Merriam, p. 222). According to Merriam:

> Every study, every case, every situation is theoretically an example of something else. The general lies in the particular; that is, what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to similar situations subsequently encountered. (p. 225)

With the potential to yield insights relevant to many college and university campuses and personnel, only readers, however, may determine such applicability. Nevertheless, when case studies are embedded in mixed-methods approaches, research that also incorporates quantitative dimensions, the dataset and its representation gains empirical strength and conceptual fullness.

As contemporary presidencies and pathways to higher education leadership shift and conform toward the new economy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), mixed-methods and case study strategies are further positioned to capture emergent, complex, and modern-day forces. The most recent data on college and university presidents, for instance, suggest several trends. According to Eckel and Kezar

(2011), who drew upon American Council on Education (ACE) data from 2006 (as the 2011 data was not yet released), the percentage of women presidents grew from 16.5% in 1986 to 23% in 2006. In addition, the percentage of presidents of color grew from six percent in 1986 to 14% in 2006. Consistent with trends over time (Cohen & March, 1986; Touchton et al., 1993), the majority of college and university presidents continued to hold doctorates – and in fields such as education and higher education, the humanities, and the social sciences. Yet since 1986, the percentage of presidents who had previously held faculty positions declined from 75% to 70%, signaling a subtle change in presidential pathways. Chief academic officers (CAOs) still represented the largest pool of rising college and university presidents, with 31% of leaders having served as CAOs. However, Eckel and Kezar noted that when ACE surveyed all sitting CAOs for the 2006 report, less than one-third indicated interest in ascending to presidencies. Who will lead us, then, amid intensified financial exigency and organizational circumstances (Zusman, 2005)? And how might scholars address higher education leadership in the Twenty-First Century?

First, I hypothesize that percentages of women presidents and presidents of color will continue to rise. As Eckel and Kezar (2011) noted, the increasing social, relational realities of presidencies may position some women leaders better than men, for women, the authors maintained, have been associated with greater tendencies than men toward collaboration, relationship-building, shared power, and team approaches. Second, amid changing student and institutional landscapes, attributed to increases in access and shifts in demography (Zusman, 2005) and the diversification of mass higher education systems (Hearn, 1997), I hypothesize an

increase in presidents of color. I align my prediction with scholarship on consistent matches over time between presidents and the institutions that they lead (Cohen & March, 1986; Touchton et al., 1993) and between presidents and the student populations that their schools tend to serve (Mishra, 2007; Turner, 2007). Third, I hypothesize an increase in the number of presidents who will arrive in office from positions and industries outside of education, which totaled 13% in 2006. With college and university presidencies tailored, more so than ever before, to "augment, expand, and enhance opportunities for faculty and staff to become academic capitalists" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 325), background experience and proven success in fields such as finance and law (with an emphasis on patents, technology transfer, and copyright) will enhance job candidate competitiveness and, ultimately, leadership of the "academic capitalism knowledge/learning regime" (Slaughter & Rhoades, p. 305). Lastly, to study and account for confounding variables, which stem from federal, state, institutional, and campus levels, I again advocate for mixed-methods work in particular – for its pragmatism, utility, and scholarly richness and soundness.

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